

3.8 Deputy M.R. Higgins of St. Helier of the Minister for Housing regarding the impact of the recession on demands for social housing:

Could the Minister advise the Assembly how many people, since the onset of the recession in Jersey, have been housed, or are currently waiting to be housed by his department, as a result of having been made redundant and/or losing their houses due to repossession by banks or other home lenders?

Deputy S. Power of St. Brelade (The Minister for Housing):

This is not an easy question to answer. When exactly Jersey entered the recession... the answer is probably one that the Minister for Treasury and Resources and myself might agree or disagree on, but certainly it slowed down in the beginning of 2009. As I mentioned, in the last Assembly sitting, the Population Office and the Minister for Housing has noticed a 60 per cent drop in the number of (j) purchase applications, consequentially we have also seen a 43 per cent rise in the number of applications for housing on the grounds of homelessness or financial hardship in the last 12 months. The trend seems to be continuing with 151 similar applications having been made so far this year, which are new. I can confirm to the Deputy - I will confirm these figures in writing - we have a current waiting list of 305 for one-bedroom units; 335 for 2-bedroom; 155 for 3-bedroom and another 102 for other types of accommodation. The current average waiting time for a one-bedroom need is 14 months; for a 2-bedroom need is 12 months; and for a 3-bedroom need is over 13 months. With regard to the methodology of repossessing property, the Housing Department does not deal with this as a matter of course, because we are a social rented provider, but normally my understanding is that the banks will allow people to move out or to move on without forcing a sale but will allow a certain period of time for it to be done. But we do not have any accurate data on that.

3.8.1 Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier:

43 per cent is a stark very high rise. I wonder what work... and it was an amendment when income support was brought in. How much work has the Minister for Housing done with Social Security to look at the circumstances of the person, it may be a marriage break-up, it may be a redundancy.

[10:15]

At the moment income support will not cover ... the amendment brought by the panel was 6 months... it was a year, I was told afterwards it might have got 6 months. But I am now meeting constituents whose mortgage was about £500 or £600 a month for their family home and Social Security will not meet that, not even for a short period of time, and they are covering over £1,000 when they have moved them out, and making the Minister for Housing's list. Will he endeavour to work with Social Security and look at this 43 per cent of people, probably 20 per cent of that, given a bit of time, could pay the money back and stay in their own homes.

Deputy S. Power:

I will try. The housing component of income support is, I think, around £30 million a year. That is broken down between the Housing Department, the trusts and the private rental sector, an area I have some concern on. The department is currently revisiting everyone, every single person, on our waiting list and transfer list to reassess their housing needs. This is a large piece of work, and it will take some time to complete. This will provide an opportunity to look afresh at household

composition and financial means. If the Deputy is interested in seeing this, I will circulate that report once it is done. I can also confirm to the Assembly that my Assistant Minister, the Constable of St. John, is now actively working with the housing trusts and the Parishes in creating a combined waiting list, which will be far more accurate than any system we have ever had before, and we will have very accurate information when the result of that work is done. So there is a lot of work going on. We do have regular meetings with the Social Security Department, very regular meetings. We will summarise that in a report in due course.

3.8.2 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Deputy Higgins asked a question to the Minister for Housing to see or to extrapolate how many people had approached the Minister for Housing as a direct result of being made redundant or having their house repossessed due to the downturn. The Minister for Housing has said this morning that it is difficult to identify from his waiting lists how many of those people are on the waiting list because of that eventuality. Given that the Minister must have cognisance of the economic climate before bringing for approval reductions in qualification periods, is it not now time to ensure that his department has cognisance of economic factors before they consider policy objectives?

Deputy S. Power:

Both in my time as an Assistant Minister, and in my time now as the Minister for Housing, we always take into account economic factors to do with any review of the qualification period being reduced. It has sat at 11 years, since January 2009. It is being reviewed at the moment and we would not be able to make a decision on that unless we thought it was appropriate. I hope that gives the Deputy some comfort.

3.8.3 Deputy A.E. Jeune:

The figures the Minister gives for those on waiting lists - for example waiting for a one-bedroom accommodation - does that include persons already housed in States accommodation or housing trust properties who want to downsize?

Deputy S. Power:

It does not include people who are in trust property but we do have a transfer list, which is included in that. On the specific one-bedroom need, of the 305 I mentioned, 155 are on the waiting list and 150 are on the transfer list.

3.8.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

What discussion has the Minister had at Council of Ministers level over the potential for redundancies in the public sector, which are pencilled-in for the comprehensive spending review stage 2, and has he put in to discussions at Council of Ministers level the potential impact upon house repossessions?

Deputy S. Power:

I am not quite sure what the overall level of expected redundancies will be in relation to this question. It has been discussed at the Council of Ministers, and I have given the Council of Ministers my indication as to how many voluntary redundancies there might be in my department. It has been as simple as that. I cannot remember the second part of the question.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

That the issue is not just voluntary redundancies, which are in place at the moment, but redundancies *per se*. There may be 400, there may be 600 coming, through the second stage of the comprehensive spending review, what impact will that have on his department?

Deputy S. Power:

It will increase my waiting lists and that is why it is so important that sites like Ann Court, which at the moment is a temporary car park, are brought forward and redeveloped as soon as possible. I will have increased waiting lists. It could go from nearly 900 now, it could double in the next 2 years. I do not know, I simply cannot answer the Deputy's question.

3.8.5 Senator T.J. Le Main:

Would the Minister confirm there is much concern from elderly people in need of more appropriate accommodation to suit their needs, and the lack of progress in finding land and sites to build new sheltered or lifetime homes to accommodate these people who are serving a lifetime of misery at the moment?

Deputy S. Power:

Contrary to the impression given in last week's *J.E.P. (Jersey Evening Post)* there is an overwhelming need for an increase in accommodation for the over-55s and old age pensioners. I can break down the statistics with my own department. There are people at the moment who have paid tax and social security all their lives on this Island who are not adequately housed, and it is my department's wish to house these as quickly as we can. But I do add the warning that we have increased and growing waiting lists.

The Bailiff:

We are drifting off the question a little, I think. I saw Deputy Martin, the Deputy of Grouville and then Deputy Higgins to wind-up.

3.8.6 Deputy J.A. Martin:

I thank the Minister for his comprehensive reply, except he did not answer the part about proper discussions with Social Security, about keeping people in their own homes for a short time and they will be able to pay back the money, so I hope that work is ongoing. Secondly, would the Minister not confirm the people on the transfer list for one-bedrooms are not coming in from redundancies but they do not choose to downsize, as Deputy Jeune has said, they have to downsize because they are prisoners in a 2-bedroom flat, probably on the third floor, and they cannot get in or out, and the criteria has to be met to go on the transfer list for a one-bedroom?

Deputy S. Power:

The Deputy is right. We have to, as a department, force people to move because we need ... on those transfer lists we need people to move from a one to a 2 because of an increase, or people to move from 3 to a 2 to a one, and as Professor Whitehead said in the review of Jersey's social housing, it is, in some ways, a very inequitable system. But it is the only system we have got. If we were not to move people our waiting lists would be even higher. With regard to people who get into financial trouble as a result of losing a position, they come to Social Security first... and I did not avoid the question. Social Security is doing a lot of work in this area, and we work in tandem with Social Security to house these people as best we can.

3.8.7 Deputy C.F. Labey of Grouville:

The Minister described an overwhelming need for the over-55s. Would he like to describe exactly what criteria he is using for this need and what criteria there is in putting people, assessing people to be put on the waiting lists?

Deputy S. Power:

We do not put people on the waiting list. The people put themselves on the waiting list. The Constable of St. John and I share surgeries at Age Concern and Communicare twice a month, and I can say with absolutely consistency in the last 4½ years I have been doing these surgeries, the greatest number of people who visit me at Age Concern and Communicare are elderly. It has been a consistent demand for housing over the last 4½ years, and I am prepared to produce the figures and the waiting lists and by age analysis.

3.8.8 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Although the Minister has touched on these, just for the avoidance of doubt, can he explain that if someone is made homeless what his department will do to house them, considering the waiting list he is talking about, and equally if people are made redundant and have their homes repossessed, what steps can be given to house them, or are they left on the street?

Deputy S. Power:

If somebody becomes unemployed and becomes financially distressed, the first point of contact with the department is the Allocations Team. The Allocations Team meet at Social Security, I think it is very regularly, almost twice a month - maybe 4 times a month - and then we assess the need financially. They then go on a waiting list. The waiting list is broken-down between urgent need, high need, moderate need, and so on, and we assess them on that basis.

3.8.9 Deputy G.P. Southern:

May I ask the Minister to circulate his initial answer to Members?

Deputy S. Power:

I will circulate the figures and the statistics to all States Members.