

4.4 Deputy A.E. Jeune of St. Brelade of the Minister for Housing regarding waiting and transfer list figures:

Would the Minister please explain how the waiting and transfer list figures which he provided to Members by email on 30th September 2010 were calculated?

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

Members hopefully will remember the figures I sent on 30th September. The housing waiting and transfer list figures that were provided to Members were produced and calculated from the Housing Department's database. We run all our figures from waiting and transfer list statistics as close to the first day of each month as is practicable, and these statistics record the number of live applications on both the waiting and transfer lists. When applications are received by the department, the applicants are interviewed and their housing needs assessed. Applicants on both lists are grouped according to their best bed size need; that is not the size of the bed, that is the number of beds that needs to be accommodated. Each applicant will have a primary application reason, and this is recorded in the system which holds the application itself. There are a whole range of other reasons that we take into account. As of yesterday, on the urgent and homeless and hardship cases, our waiting lists are as follows: there is a total of 432 applicants in this area; 11 have applied because of evictions from other landlords; 283 have applied because of financial hardship; 6 have applied because of homelessness; 34 have applied because of moderate medical needs and 58 applicants have applied because of urgent medical needs, and the final group of 40 is for what we would regard as overcrowding.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Supplementary?

4.4.1 Deputy A.E. Jeune:

I thank the Minister for his reply, but looking at what was provided to us, where it is given as percentage increase and the like, it is very much about statistics. It really does not tell us a huge amount, because I did a different calculation using the same figures and came up with a completely different percentage. Does the Minister accept that for applications under homelessness and financial grounds, the growth in 2010 is less than that of 2009, yet his figures are showing an increase in the percentage?

Deputy S. Power:

Within the scope of an oral question, it is really difficult to get into a short debate on how statistics are applied. What I suggest I do for the Deputy is provide an explanation of how we arrived at the percentages on our figures, rather than doing this on a spat for spat, point by point basis with the Deputy. I can give a detailed explanation of our statistical analysis if the Deputy will so wish.

4.4.2 Deputy J.A. Martin:

I am not quite sure; I think I now understand where Deputy Jeune is coming from. Would the Minister for Housing not agree, though, that if we are getting statistics, we have 432, and 283 of them are financial reasons, and the Deputy may not understand that when you cannot pay £2,000 a month rent, you need to pay a housing rent of maybe £1,100, and all these families are people. Would the Minister for Housing agree to talk about statistics just to probably prove a point that one Ministry is not doing something is really quite a cheap shot?

Deputy S. Power:

I do not fully understand Deputy Martin's point. Deputy Jeune asked a specific question as to how we calculated waiting and transfer figures, as based on my stats table of 30th September. I am of course aware of financial hardship across our clients, our customers, our tenants and we have detailed information as to how their needs are prioritised and how we assess the waiting list based on the points that we apply to those. The Housing Department and the officers deal with this waiting list as best they can.

4.4.3 Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

Picking up on the same point as Deputy Martin, the 283 for financial needs, could the Minister explain how rigorous the means testing is and the rise of somebody being in financial need, and does he expect this pattern to grow substantially in the next 12 months?

Deputy S. Power:

The cases that apply for housing under financial hardship meet fairly strict criteria and, indeed, the Minister for Housing and the Minister for Social Security work together on this. At the moment, over 70 per cent of our tenants are on income support, which gives an indication of the waiting and the accommodation that we provide for our tenants. In terms of accuracy, appropriateness and everything else, I am fairly sure that our systems that do assess the waiting for financial hardship applications are fairly robust.

The Deputy Bailiff:

One supplementary, Deputy Jeune.

4.4.4 Deputy A.E. Jeune:

Would the Minister, therefore, consider that the years of residency required are at a correct level, and that some people choose to go into the private rental sector in the knowledge that the rental will be higher than the rental component of income support that they are in receipt of?

Deputy S. Power:

The actual length of residency in the Island is not relevant, as long as they are residentially qualified. I am not quite sure as to the relevancy of the remainder of the question, unless I have missed something, unless the Deputy would like to rephrase it?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Do you wish to rephrase it, as a final, final supplementary, Deputy?

Deputy A.E. Jeune:

The point is in his email ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

The question.

4.4.5 Deputy A.E. Jeune:

Sorry, the Minister said in his email that a number of people were forced to pay high rents and what I am saying is some people to choose to remain in private rental,

knowing that it will cost them more perhaps than the income support component for rental. In respect of the residency years, if we keep lowering the residency years, it would mean that more people can go on to the register sooner.

Deputy S. Power:

I do not agree with that at all, and I will tell the Assembly why. I have just rerun an analysis of those people who qualified when the residential qualification period went from 12 years to 11 years, and in the period from January 2009 to July 2010 there were over 300 people who have qualified, 309 families who have qualified in a period ranging from 11 years to 35 years who chose to stay in the non-qualified sector. So there are people that simply do not want to come into the H sector.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Thank you. I would like to go back briefly to Deputy Higgins' question a moment ago, not to reopen why the question as put in to the Bailiff for approval was changed - because I simply do not know the answer to that - but because some of the questions which have been put in the States, both today and on other occasions when I have been presiding, do tend to indicate that Members have not concentrated on Standing Order 10, which deals with the contents of the question, and it may just be useful to remind Members of that now: "A question shall relate to one issue only. A question addressed to a Member of the States upon a public matter for which the Member has an official responsibility must either seek information on the matter or ask for official action with regard to it. A question shall not be framed primarily so as to convey information rather than to seek it or to convey a particular point of view. A question shall not contain arguments, inferences, imputations, allegations or opinions." Now, there are other matters that flow from that, but if I may say so from the Chair, there are many occasions where Members - and this is not aimed particularly at Deputy Higgins, it is of general application - do not concentrate on those restrictions on question time which are in Standing Orders, as the purpose is to obtain information, ask for official action and not to have a debate on the subject of the question. Now we come to question 5, which Deputy Tadier is to ask of the Minister for Economic Development.