

3.13 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Housing regarding the failure to address concerns raised within the Whitehead Report Summary Document:

Before I address the Assistant Minister, I wonder could he satisfy my curiosity as to why I am addressing the Assistant Minister and not the Minister concerned?

The Bailiff:

No. Ask your question, please, Deputy.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

In any case in his answer I am sure he will refer to it. Will the Minister advise why his 2010 Business Plan fails to address the concerns raised in sections 6.1 and 6.2 of the Whitehead Report summary document, particularly regarding the shortfall in maintenance funding, the gaps in the research into household numbers, tenure requirements and unmet housing needs among the low income groups and the decline in the scale of the social sector and state when he will address these issues?

Deputy S. Power (Assistant Minister for Housing - rapporteur):

I run the risk of going into too much detail here, both on the Whitehead Report and ...

The Bailiff:

Please do not. [Laughter]

Deputy S. Power:

I am prefacing my answer, Sir, by pleasing you by saying that I will draw the Deputy's attention to page 26 of the housing section of the Business Plan which says in relation to Whitehead: "Recommendations will be brought forward as a result of Whitehead to look at changes to rent levels and structures, including a mechanism for regular rent reviews and changes to the management and operation of the States-owned social rental stock and any changes to facilitate the implementation of a regulatory function." That includes some of the areas that the Deputy has referred to. I have to also say to the Assembly and to the Deputy that the *Review of Social Housing* is a consultation document that is still out at the moment and will be out until 5th March 2010. At the conclusion of this process my Minister will consider all of the submissions and feedback and will draw up a document for consideration by this Assembly. That includes the future size of social rented stock, whether access to social housing should be extended to meet the needs of those who do not presently qualify, social housing rents, regulation and indeed the future management of States-owned social housing stock.

[12:30]

3.13.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I note that the Minister does not answer the question. He does not say when he will address these issues. In particular, he avoids mentioning the fundamental issue which is the shortfall in funding for maintenance and refurbishment which is a chronic problem. It does not matter if he consults until the cows come home about the 5 options he is presenting to the public. If he has not got the funding right, none of those will work. When will he address and will he come to this House seeking additional funding to put right the chronic underfunding that his Minister has allowed to take place over the last decade?

Deputy S. Power:

I rise in tremor to reply to that. **[Laughter]** I have to remind the Deputy that we are out to consultation at the moment and the public have expressed a lot of views with regard to the Whitehead review. The Housing Department has been very surprised with the amount of feedback that has come into the department and I cannot really go into any detail with regards to that until that consultation period is over. However, Deputy Southern makes a number of allegations about the lack of maintenance funding that the Housing Department has not been able to disburse. I have a very short list here. It is going to take about one minute. The projects that are ...

The Bailiff:

No, I am sorry. That is too long. We have a large number of questions. **[Laughter]**

Deputy S. Power:

The Deputy makes allegations about lack of maintenance. In the last year and a half the Cedars, Ann Court demolition, La Grande Pièce, Le Marais low rise, Le Squez demolished, the new Le Squez regeneration masterplan and the La Carriere refurbishment and Clos de Quennevais, we have spent £27.61 million. There are another £15.5 million in work in progress including Clos de Roncier, Salisbury Crescent and Le Geyt. Sir, I could go down but I can see I am irritating you so I had better shut up.

3.13.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Supplementary, if I may. These are not my allegations. They are the findings of the Whitehead Report; £5 million of chronic underfunding that needs to be put right. When is he going to address that essential issue?

Deputy S. Power:

I have just accounted for £50 million and there is another £50 million in the pipeline which will include a number of other estates. So by the time we get to the end of 2011, beginning of 2012 the Housing Department will be committed to spending about £100 million on the renovation, repair and construction of new social rented housing. I think in any fiscal period this is a significant amount of money.

3.13.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Assistant Minister agree that until we address the speculative nature of the housing market in the private sector we will just be fiddling at the edges and will be increasing the chasm between those who can afford to buy in Jersey and those who cannot?

Deputy S. Power:

I am not really sure if that falls into my responsibility in social rented housing.

The Bailiff:

I think it arises out of the question.

Deputy M. Tadier:

I can explain. I believe it does because I think until we solve the issue we are going to be forcing people to be more dependent on the States, forcing more people into social housing. What we need to be doing - I would ask the Assistant Minister if he agrees -

is to be letting people help themselves so they can afford to buy and not rely on the public sector, which will fall in his responsibilities.

The Bailiff:

I am sorry, Deputy. I do not think that arises out of the question.

3.13.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Assistant Minister admit there is substantial funding for what he has talked about, this £100 million has come from sales of stock and that during recessionary times demand for social rental housing is likely to go up rather than down?

Deputy S. Power:

That is not true. The returns from the sale of social rental housing does not compare to the amount of money that the Housing Department has to spend in future on social rental housing. Might I also add that the alignment of housing stock is a very significant exercise that the department is undertaking at the moment in lieu of the Housing Needs Survey of a year ago, the new Jersey Annual Social Survey and indeed what Professor Christine Whitehead has summarised for us. So there is a huge difference between what we have to spend and what has been produced by the sale of 105 houses to date. That produced less than £30 million.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

I thank the Minister for his answers and I will pick them over.