

2.2 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Housing regarding the Housing White paper (R.47/2012):

In order to permit informed consultation on his Housing White Paper (R.47/2012), will the Minister release to Members the full figures and calculations that underpin the figures on pages 20 to 22 to include the numbers of units of accommodation of different types currently having rents below the 90 per cent fair rent mark and those which relate to the stock value and borrowing capacity outlined on page 14 and elsewhere?

Deputy A.K.F. Green of St. Helier (The Minister for Housing):

The quick answer to that is yes, I will. I confirm I will be releasing these figures to Members as part of the consultation programme.

2.2.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

In particular, will the Minister make reference to the figures on page 14 which suggest that £148 million of borrowing will produce 368 new homes which is a cost of £400,000 per accommodation unit and surely if those are accurate figures, these are a very high cost to build?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

The figures are accurate but they are not in the right context and that is not the fault of the Deputy because he has not seen the figures. He is right that we will be borrowing £148 million. There are net 368 new homes but we are building 592 new homes because we have to demolish some that are substandard. In other words, there are 224 being demolished and replaced. Of course, within those figures, there is a substantial sum for the renovation of existing properties which needs to be spent, gets our stock up to standard, but does not provide any new accommodation.

2.2.2 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

While I am on my high horse about people not answering questions, could the Minister for Housing just advise us why he cannot publish the figures now rather than wait until after a consultation period which is about 3 months?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I did not say I was going to wait until after the consultation period. I said I was going to release them as part of the consultation period and I intend to get those figures out to Members and on the website within 14 days.

2.2.3 Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré of St. Lawrence:

A 2-part question. My very brief read of what has been sent to States Members seems to indicate that the full business case for the whole transformation is being developed; that is the implication - i.e. it has not been concluded. There are 2 parts in there. Number one is can the Minister release it at some point to States Members and number 2 is if it has not been completed, why have you issued the White Paper in this instance?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I am not ready to yet release the full business case although I am prepared to release the figures that Deputy Southern has asked for. I have gone out to consultation to get people's views on the general direction and then I will finalise my full business case and bring it as a report and proposition to this House.

2.2.4 Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Surely on a portfolio of at least £500 million, the financials are an inherent and implicit and essential part of the consultation?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

Absolutely, but we might find that we need to do it differently. We may need less, we may need more; it depends on the consultation period. I know what I want but I want to see what other people are saying.

Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

We need to have the information in order to be able to advise the Minister as to whether what he is doing is the right thing or not.

2.2.5 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

Is the Minister aware that the plans to increase rents up to 90 per cent of the fair rent mark, or indeed 90 per cent of what probably is the market rates for many people is not very popular among the public and those in social housing and that it is perceived that they will not be able to afford it? Will the Minister take this into account and drop this completely morally bankrupt policy?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I look forward to receiving people's comments in the consultation process but I will stress that those on income support will be fully protected and I have some concerns for those who are what I call just above the line, and for that reason we will be means testing people and offering a transitional arrangement which could be up to 10 years if need be. So I am aware of the difficulties of people but many tenants will find their budgets improve if their rent goes up a little and their homes are properly insulated. For example, Pomme D'Or Farm, to give one example there. We had a very cold snap. Members there were paying in addition to the heating provided by Housing £50 a week and the bedrooms were still only 5 degrees Celsius. That £50 a week will not be necessary when we have insulated and put proper systems in so life will be much better for our tenants.

[10:00]

The Bailiff:

Can I just clarify; it is a question about publication, not about housing policy at this stage.

2.2.6 Deputy M. Tadier:

In the light of that, I was going to ask whether or not the Minister accepts that rather than putting the rents up by 90 per cent as one of the options in the White Paper policy consultation, whether it might not be better to abandon that policy, given the fact that there are long waiting lists for people who are in need? I will give an example: mental patients who are staying in guesthouses.

The Bailiff:

I think, Deputy, that is moving too far away from the original question.

Deputy M. Tadier:

But would the Minister answer the first part?

The Bailiff:

No because I think it is moving too far away from the original question.

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

Can I just correct one thing? I am not putting rents up 90 per cent. I am putting them up to 90 per cent of market value.

Deputy M. Tadier:

I accept that correction.

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

I do not know if this will be allowed but I will try. [Laughter] Just to go back to the releasing... these figures in the White Paper are based on some professor who came over - again with taxpayers' money - and has done a lot of work. My question is we need to see the figures because we are told in a written question today that there are at least 434 people between the ages of 45 and over 65 paying top rent. Now, I do not know if those top rents are being paid for properties that are substandard and that makes a big difference. If the Minister really thinks he is going to get this White Paper through, he really should let States Members have all the information up front. If the business case stacks-up, he should release it.

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I am happy to release the figures that Deputy Southern has asked for. I know that he would like me to release the Wilcox Report. I am not in a position to do that at the moment because that is still policy under formation and I am working with other Ministers on that and I am sorry, I am not in a position to do that at the moment.

2.2.8 Deputy J.G. Reed of St. Ouen:

What sureties can the Minister for Housing give that increasing rents to 90 per cent of market value will not have the effect of inflating private sector rental values?

The Bailiff:

That sounds very much like a question about housing policy rather than the publication of the information, Deputy. Deputy Pitman?

2.2.9 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I hope this is not too wide of the mark. Is not one of the reasons that States Members should be able to see all these figures because the concern for Members who do support the Minister is that this could have the exact opposite effect of what he is trying to do and even lead to increased homelessness. Is that a concern and a reason to get these figures out to us?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

As I have said I have agreed already to provide the calculations based in the White Paper. I cannot see what the problem is.

2.2.10 Deputy G.P. Southern:

It does relate to release of information. Will the Minister first account for ring-fencing £24.5 million for Treasury purposes in the documents? Will he enable States tenants to account for the £3.5 million he is taking off them in raised rents? Why although he says the Wilcox report is still policy in formation, does he say it remained in draft form and there is no intent to progress Professor Wilcox's work further? Surely it is completed and he can release it.

The Bailiff:

The first 2 were about substantive housing policy.

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

The money that goes to Treasury, if you are happy that I answer that, is substantially the equivalent of the rent rebate scheme. We send that money to Treasury and it makes its way to Social Security in the form of the rent component, in the main. With regard to the Wilcox report, it is still in draft form, it is still work in progress and I am not prepared to release it.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Why then ...?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I will correct that then. As far as my department is concerned, we have done our work with that and we do not intend to pursue it any further.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Do I have to ask the Minister for Health and Social Services?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Sir, can I just ask you for a point of clarification, to push my luck a little bit? I vaguely remember when we re-wrote the Standing Orders for answers to oral questions, I thought I remembered that when somebody brought something up in the answer which widened the first part, the supplementaries were allowed on that. I have noticed over the last few weeks you have gone back very tight to where we were about 5 years ago. I stand to be corrected, Sir, but I am asking you. Thank you.

The Bailiff:

Yes, I would not dream of taking us back to where we were 5 years ago. **[Laughter]** The Standing Order says it has to arise out of the question. This question is about publication of the report. If one then turns it into a question about housing policy, it is really a very different question. So, we come next to a question which Deputy Pitman will ask for the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture.