

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR HOUSING
BY DEPUTY M. TADIER OF ST. BRELADE
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 26th JUNE 2012**

Question

What percentage of private rental accommodation in the Island does the Minister believe would not meet the Department's own 'acceptable standard' benchmark?

Are the standards of private rental units monitored in any meaningful way and is this an area of concern for the Minister?

What steps, if any, is the Housing Department taking to look into accommodation in the private sector which does not 'meet the grade'?

Answer

Some Members will be aware that when they approved the establishment of the Population Office (P.25/2005) they made the first of a number of changes which altered the responsibilities and remit of the Housing Department. These changes continued with the creation of Jersey Property Holdings (P.93/2005) and the transfer of the Rent Abatement and Rent Rebate Schemes to Social Security as part of the Income Support Scheme. The consequence of those changes is that the Housing Department has halved in staff numbers and is now just a social landlord which concerns itself with the management of 4,500 social homes providing accommodation and support services for around 13,000 people, some of whom represent the most vulnerable in our society. There are just 44 staff at the Department and as we have learned from the work undertaken on my Housing Transformation Programme this represents an extremely lean organisation with as few as 50% of the staff one might see in other jurisdictions.

It is precisely because of this unclear responsibility and the Department's much narrower remit that I am proposing that it be transformed into a wholly States-owned Housing Association so that it can further enhance its focus on the provision of landlord services to tenants. All of the existing homes and all of the staff other than two specialist staff working on the Affordable Housing Gateway will transfer to the new Association on the same terms and conditions which they presently enjoy as States employees. This will ensure continuity of service for tenants.

What all this clearly demonstrates is that the Housing Department does not have any responsibility for overseeing the standards of homes in the private rented sector and it has never had that responsibility. However, standards are enforced to some degree by the Minister for Health & Social Services' Health Protection Unit when a complaint is made in relation to a danger to public health. In relation to Registered Lodging Houses the Population Office provides a full registration and inspection regime. I am aware that the Minister for Health & Social Services is developing proposals to introduce new legislation on housing standards to enhance the health protection provisions which would apply across all housing tenures.

In the "Achieving Decent Homes" White Paper I am proposing the establishment of a Strategic Housing Unit who will produce for the first time a much needed Housing Strategy for the Island. This will ensure that clear accountability and direction for housing policy matters across

government is introduced and that matters such as the condition of private sector properties can be appropriately addressed. Notably, the Jersey Annual Social Survey 2009 indicated that 7% of those in the residentially qualified private rental sector, considered the state of repair of their home to be “Poor” and the Strategic Housing Unit will need to consider measures to tackle this.