

2014.09.09

3.9 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade of the Minister for Housing regarding the compliance of social housing in the Island with the U.K. decent homes standard:

Further to the findings of the 2009 Review of Social Housing in Jersey (Whitehead Report), which found that 27 per cent of social housing in the Island would not meet the U.K. decent homes standard, will the Minister now provide an up-to-date estimate of what this figure would be, and in the absence of such a figure, explain what mechanism is being used to assess progress or otherwise in this regard?

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

At the end of last year the percentage of homes, this is Andium Homes, failing to meet the decent homes standard has fallen to 25 per cent. I look forward to reporting a much more significant reduction over the coming year now that we have the Housing Transformation Programme in place. £6 million has been invested in maintenance this year, £62 million will be placed over the next 5 years. This investment will bring enormous benefits to the ordinary Islanders. It will be closely monitored with the 2014 performance against the decent homes standards which is due at the end of this year.

3.9.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

Thank you for the Minister confirming the figures which I already had understood to be correct which corresponds to 1,157 homes which are currently falling below standard in the Island. Will the Minister confirm that despite this quarter of his homes not meeting decent standards that rents for these homes have nonetheless gone up? Does he think that that is the correct way to proceed and should not the rent increases have waited until the decent standards had been met?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

We have to get this into context. Some homes did not meet the decent homes standard because they were in very poor structural condition. Those are the ones that we have tackled first and I could keep you busy for 15 minutes with the long list of achievements that Andium Homes have achieved since I have been the Minister for Housing but I will not do that. What I will say is that some homes fail to meet the decent homes standard merely because we have not yet replaced the bathroom or the kitchen and yet the bathroom and the kitchen are currently in reasonable working order. We have a proper programme; I am not embarrassed by it. I think that Andium Homes have done an excellent job. Since I have been Minister we have been driving-up standards. To answer the Deputy's question about rents, I had to tackle a long-term problem where this Assembly had not had the courage to put the rents where it needed to be.

Deputy C.F. Labey of Grouville:

Sorry, I knocked my microphone by mistake, Sir. [Members: Oh!]

3.9.2 Deputy T.A. Vallois:

Could the Minister advise whether a policy on decent homes standard has been put together for Andium Homes and whether that has been informed to all tenants?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

Tenants are regularly advised by newsletter on what we are doing. We have also contact with the Tenants Forum so tenants are aware of what is going on. Most tenants are aware of the

programme that we have in place. I am very comfortable about the communications that we have in place from Andium and the contact that we have with our tenants.

Deputy T.A. Vallois:

Sorry, I was asking about the policy of decent homes and whether every tenant knows exactly what the decent homes policy is?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I do not know.

3.9.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is it not the case that the Minister and Andium Homes would be much better able to deliver its programme much more rapidly if it was allowed to use all of its rental revenue and not maintain the return to Treasury which caused so many problems over the last 20 years?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

It is not the case. What has caused the problem over the years is the subsidy of rental by keeping rentals low instead of supporting people that needed access to social housing by Social Security. We did that by keeping rents low and failing to carry out the maintenance. Now tenants pay the correct rent and if they need support, they get that support from Social Security. That is wholly right. To answer the Deputy's question which he always asks me about the contribution, the payment that we make to the Minister for Treasury and Resources ... the Treasury Department, not directly to the Minister, we have to live in the real world. When you look at the billion pounds worth of assets, we are paying a very small payment to Treasury for the use of those assets. If in an ideal world we could do away with it... we have just been talking about the income deficit, where are we going to take that £27 million from? Are we going to take it away from Social Security or should we take it from Health? Or what about Education, let us take it from there. No, we have to live in the real world and I am in that world.

3.9.4 Deputy J.H. Young:

I thank the Minister for his programme. Obviously it is vitally important to bring all our homes up to decent standards. Could he tell us: in advancing his programme is he able to give priority to the particular needs of the elderly and housebound who spend the majority of their time in those buildings? To have to live in unsatisfactory circumstances is really a big problem for them. Is he able to give priority to that group in his programme?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I thought we had done that in lots of cases, for example, The Cedars and the La Collette high rise where the lifts used to go to every other floor which meant if there was a problem with that lift the people on the floors in between could not get access. As part of our programme then we have put another lift in and that does every floor now. We have 2 lifts doing every floor: that helps with people.

[11:00]

Of course, there will be some areas where we still have work to do but the Deputy knows we are working very, very hard to do that. I could read out the list but I will not take up 15 minutes of question time doing so.

3.9.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

The Minister talks about living in the real world. Does he acknowledge that there are tenants whose real world is that they have been living in substandard accommodation for decades where their rent has been misappropriated by the Treasury because it should have been going back into reparations but it has been going into subsidising the taxpayer rather than doing that and that their reality is living in what the Minister has just confirmed exists in Jersey, very poor structural conditions? Yet they have had in the last couple of months a rent increase and seen no increase in the living standards of their properties which are possibly in some cases uninhabitable and do not even merit paying rents in the first place.

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

No, I do not acknowledge that and we do not have any uninhabitable properties in Andium. I just cannot comprehend the same picture that the Deputy sees. The picture I see when I go round are tenants in good-standard accommodation. Some of that accommodation does need to be brought up to modern insulation standards. Some of that accommodation is far better than many of the elderly are living in in their own homes because they cannot afford to insulate it so I am very proud of the work that we are doing at Andium. I want to help everybody achieve a decent homes standard in Jersey whether they own their own home or whether Andium owns the home.

Deputy M. Tadier:

I invite the Minister to come round with me this week and I will show him those conditions very clearly.