

3.9 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Housing regarding the waiting list for applicants to the Housing Gateway, who are pregnant:

Will the Minister justify to Members why applicants to the Housing Gateway who are pregnant are not placed on the waiting list at the appropriate level until their pregnancy reaches the seventh month and does he not consider that discriminates against these applicants?

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

The Housing Gateway allocations criteria are so that applicants who have the greatest need for social housing are given priority on the waiting list in the fairest order. This is done by noting that many people in need of social housing have different reasons for needing that social housing. Being pregnant in itself is not a reason to need social housing; being pregnant and in need of better accommodation is. There is a whole host of factors which we must consider for all applicants. Given that the waiting list at the moment has 863 applicants presently on the highest priority band, I have to ensure that it is done in the fairest order. Deputy Southern asked me this question in Questions without notice 2 weeks ago and I said that I thought that it was time to perhaps review that policy and, given that the policy extends back to 1990, I have already initiated a review of this policy. That does not necessarily mean that it will change but the review of the policy means that we will be looking at the most appropriate way to support people - ladies that are pregnant in gaining social housing - if it is appropriate to do so.

3.9.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is the Minister aware that the date of first application stays with the applicant when they move from Band 2, not quite extreme urgency, to Band 1 which is extreme urgency, and that date which you first are accepted on to the list sticks with you and that this in itself discriminates against those who are pregnant?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

This policy is no different to somebody who is disabled or a family that suddenly finds themselves homeless; that same date policy exists. But, as I have said, I am prepared to review this: not only prepared to; I have already started doing that.

3.9.2 Deputy S. Power:

I wonder if the Minister is able to give the Assembly an indication of the number of applications he has within the department at the moment for accommodation for women who are pregnant, who are either up to 7 months or are on his various lists?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I do not have that information but I am more than happy to distribute it later.

3.9.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Given the fact that women will know for up to 9 months beforehand that they are pregnant and that the department will know that there will be a need in many cases for these to be housed, why are they not simply put on the list earlier than 2 months before? Is the real reason because the Minister wants to keep the lists as short as possible?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I do not think anyone can accuse me of trying to keep the list short. I use the fact that the list is as high as it is to justify the fact that we need more social housing and the whole of the

Housing Transformation Programme is based on the fact that we have this waiting list on a very tight criteria.

[15:30]

That said, there are lots of people waiting to be adequately housed in social housing for numerous different reasons. I am prepared to look at the appropriateness of pregnant ladies but it is not the fact that they are pregnant that entitles them to access social housing, they have to be pregnant and in inadequate housing or other circumstances. There are lots of disabled people also on the waiting list waiting to be housed.

3.9.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

Is there not a difference? A disabled person does not necessarily know 9 months before they become disabled that they are going to become disabled whereas a pregnant woman usually does know that. Would it not give the department more time to prepare and more time to source appropriate accommodation for all of these people in need if they were simply to put the individuals on the list earlier rather than 2 months before the delivery date, when often women and families have got other great considerations on their mind?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

As I said, I am prepared to look at the policy as to whether the 2 months is right. But being pregnant in itself does not, as I keep saying, entitle people to access social housing, it is a whole host of different reasons and there may be, when we look at this policy, other things that we can do to support ladies who need that support other than just straightforward social housing.

3.9.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

If it is the case, as I have heard in the past from Housing staff, that the reason for the delay is that the person might lose their baby, is the Minister aware that there is only a 7 in 100 chance of miscarriage when you are pregnant and that 85 per cent of miscarriages occur in the first 3 months; there is only 1 in 100 chance of miscarrying the child? Protecting themselves in that way as a department, or as Andium Homes, is not justified.

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

The Deputy may well be right but when we are looking at the allocation of homes we are looking at the needs, the size of the family and the suitability of the accommodation being allocated or, conversely, the unsuitability of the accommodation that the person is in. It is a whole host of factors and that applies across all the needy of the Island, not just pregnant women.

3.9.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:

If I may - final supplementary - comparing 2 eligible people, one of whom is pregnant and one of whom has a disability, the person with a disability will get put on the list straightaway and the person who is pregnant will get told to come back, let us say, in 3 months' time when you are 7 months pregnant. Is that not discrimination?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I do not believe it is discrimination but, as I have already said, and I said 2 weeks ago, we are looking at this policy just to make sure that it is current and fit for purpose today. It was formed in 1990 and it is right to look at it again.