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#### **4.6 DEPUTY S.Y. MÉZEC OF THE MINISTER FOR HOUSING REGARDING MEASURES TO HELP ADDRESS THE HOUSING SHORTAGE BY REDUCING THE NUMBER OF VACANT PROPERTIES:**

What measures, if any, will the Minister be proposing to help address the housing shortage by reducing the number of vacant properties?

##### **Deputy A.E. Pryke of Trinity (The Minister for Housing):**

Members will be aware that I have been working on a new housing strategy framework. I am pleased to say that will be launched next week. Making the best use of our existing stock is the key element to this plan. Under this framework we will be exploring quality measures that may bring empty homes back into the market. However, the evidence shows that empty properties will not solve our housing issues. For example, many are simply between tenants, for sale, or being renovated. First and foremost, therefore, I would urge Members to support efforts to increase the supply of new and better housing in line with the framework.

[10:30]

##### **4.6.1 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Could I ask the Minister specifically what plans she is looking at, at the moment, to make sure that properties which already exist but which are vacant - most of which are vacant for good reasons, but some which are vacant when they perhaps need not be vacant - what plans is she looking at to get those back on to the market when the report we have seen from Scrutiny shows that if just 2 per cent were put back on the market that would be 900 homes.

##### **The Deputy of Trinity:**

Yes, the number of vacant homes stands at just over 3,000 but 29 per cent are between tenants so it is still looking at a very small number. This is the work that will be set in the policy and for the forthcoming years we will be working with Treasury and the Comité des Connétables. As I understand it, in the Scrutiny report it does suggest ways of using the rates system so that is why it is important to involve the Comité des Connétables.

##### **4.6.2 Deputy M. Tadier:**

Again the Minister misses the point that it is not relevant so much the reasons for which properties remain vacant rather than the period of time for which they remain vacant. It may be that a property is in between tenants but if they have been in between tenants for 4 years then that is clearly not an acceptable use of a scarce resource in the Jersey context. Will the Minister make a commitment to rather than give that pat answer, which she has been giving for the last couple of years, give a commitment to look at it holistically, because every vacant property that we can fill in Jersey is one home that does not need to be built in a land mass which is finite and getting more and more crowded.

##### **The Deputy of Trinity:**

Yes, every home is important but it will not overnight and in the future change the needs of more housing supply. As I said, it is a complex issue and I offered to meet with Deputy Tadier when he asked this question back in February and that offer still stands today.

##### **4.6.3 Deputy M. Tadier:**

The Minister knows full well that I have accepted that meeting and since then we have had meetings and we have had meetings on Scrutiny, but the point remains, will she be proactive in this area and say we do need to make sure that vacant properties are used in Jersey - and by all means we do need to build new properties, no doubt - but make sure we use the ones that are existing already. It is a simple request.

**The Deputy of Trinity:**

I just thought I had offered that, but perhaps I need to do it again. That offer is still open. Every house that we bring, whether it is vacant or we build, is supply that is urgently needed. As I said, it is in the strategic framework.

**4.6.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Since the Minister is convinced that empty properties will not solve the housing shortage can she inform Members whether Andium Homes is meeting the targets set for it in the Housing Transformation Plan for either new builds or for refurbishments?

**The Deputy of Trinity:**

That is another question. Andium Homes have set out their business plan, which has been made public, and as we know the decision by this Assembly 2 weeks' ago did not quite meet up to the business plan. At the moment - and we are keeping a good eye on the amount of supply that comes on to the market - and the supply that not only Andium Homes build but also other social housing trusts.

**4.6.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Will the Minister agree to bring to the House documentation outlining the targets that were set for Andium Homes and their achievement so far, a progress report in other words?

**The Deputy of Trinity:**

Yes, I can do that, but the business plan, if I remember rightly was published at the time, and if I remember rightly - but I might be corrected - it was in the annual report that they brought out just before the beginning of the summer.

**4.6.6 Deputy S.M. Brée of St. Clement:**

It is a very interesting concept talking about vacant properties. There are many reasons why a property may be vacant, I was wondering if the Minister could advise what in-depth studies have been done to establish the reasons for the various properties not being occupied at present?

**The Deputy of Trinity:**

The only in-depth - and that is why I put in the strategic framework as an action to do - is just taken from the 2011 Census, and the reasons for vacancies were as follows: 29 per cent of the 3,000 were between tenants, 23 per cent were either second homes or holiday homes, and that includes the self-catering for the tourist industry; 18 per cent were properties being built or renovated; 10 per cent were for sale; 6 per cent were residents deceased; 5 per cent were residents in care home; and 3 per cent were owners away for a long time. As you can see there is a multitude of different reasons and that is why it could be a complex issue.

**4.6.7 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Could the Minister indicate what consideration, if any, she has given to the recommendation from the Scrutiny Panel and their adviser who have suggested that it should be considered introducing either an empty property tax or a higher rate of Parish rates for properties which remain vacant for a long period of time, in order to encourage the landlords to put them back on the market?

**The Deputy of Trinity:**

I will within the next couple of weeks be issuing a response to that, but when I was at the Scrutiny Panel it is something that I mentioned, and it is in the housing framework of which States Members had a briefing the week of the Island Games, if I remember rightly, and it does mention that in there as well.