

2016.05.24

### **3.8 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding residential properties held by Jersey Property Holdings:**

How many residential properties are currently held by Jersey Property Holdings and what use are States departments currently making of them?

#### **Deputy E.J. Noel (The Minister for Infrastructure):**

A very simple question but again this answer would be better addressed by a written response, however the Deputy has insisted that an oral question and answer be provided. I can confirm that excluding incorporated bodies, the public has freehold and leasehold interests in some 209 residential properties which are held on the balance sheet of Jersey Property Holdings and on the relevant Special Funds, such as the Le Seilleur Trust. In the time available to provide the answer it is not possible to list all of the uses that these properties serve. However, the properties can be classified by departments as follows: Community and Constitutional Affairs, 20; Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture, 3; Education, 15; Health and Social Services, 95; Infrastructure, 3; the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, 7; under Jersey Property Holdings freehold interests in 99-year leaseholds, 52. So these are properties such as the apartments at Les Quennevais which are unoccupied. Properties let to Health and Social Services clients, 10; properties let to third parties and self-accommodation, 4; totalling the 209.

#### **3.8.1 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Supplementary. Could the Minister possibly try to confirm whether all of these properties meet what are soon to be our minimum housing standard requirements and how many of these properties are currently left empty, not being used for residential purposes?

#### **Deputy E.J. Noel:**

I can quite happily confirm that some of these properties do not comply with our standards. In particular, we have 12 properties that are being refurbished and are currently empty because of that refurbishment and we have a further 6 properties that are in the process of being void, 4 of those 6 are in the process of being re-let and 2 are properties that are in curtilages of schools and therefore it is more challenging to find suitable tenants because of the locations of those properties.

#### **3.8.2 Deputy A.D. Lewis:**

I wonder if the Minister could advise us that if that many properties are rented out, what yields are they bringing in and when were they last valued.

#### **Deputy E.J. Noel:**

The Deputy has already asked that question about the valuation. They were valued at the end of 2015, as he well knows. With regard to the yield I will have to get that information from my department and forward it to all Members.

#### **3.8.3 Deputy J.A. Hilton:**

Would the Minister be surprised to hear that Brighton College attached to Rouge Bouillon School on the school has been empty for 2½ years. It is a 2-bedroom property and taken into consideration the chronic housing shortage being experienced by the people of Jersey that that is a shameful waste of a property.

#### **Deputy E.J. Noel:**

I have to agree with Deputy Hilton there. That is one of the 2 properties that are on my list that are void but because of where it is, it is within the curtilage of the school, it is difficult to find suitable tenants where we are 100 per cent certain that they are suitable to be in close proximity to children at school time.

#### **3.8.4 Deputy J.A. Hilton:**

Supplementary. I do believe there is a process of C.R.B. checks (Criminal Record Bureau) and also I would like to know whether the property has been offered to any staff member at the school. Presumably, because they are staff members, they have all been checked. If it is the case that it is going to be let sometime in the future to somebody outside of the education system, surely some sort of barrier could be physically put up so that it is completely separate from the playground.

#### **Deputy E.J. Noel:**

I can share the frustrations with Deputy Hilton. We are working very closely with Education and the school to get those 2 particular properties resolved and to get them occupied.

#### **3.8.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Nice to be asking a Minister and not an Assistant Minister. Can the Minister give us a categorical assurance that we shall not see a return of the bad old days, that there will not, in the M.T.F.P. (Medium Term Financial Plan) 2 plans, be a reduction in the maintenance budget for Property Holdings' properties?

#### **Deputy E.J. Noel:**

Obviously the Deputy has not read the M.T.F.P.2 detail for 2016 because that is exactly what we are doing in some areas. We are concentrating on essential maintenance. Those that are in the residential sector we are keeping to a reasonable standard. I have mentioned that we have got 12 properties that need to be refurbished. We are advising that those properties are properties that form part of the Special Fund. We are advising the trustees of those funds that many of those properties should be disposed of.

#### **3.8.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

If I may, I am trying to refer to the next stage of the plan, 2017 onwards. I do not know what we call that. Is that M.T.F.P.2 plus or son of M.T.F.P.2? What is the nomenclature? What is the answer for 2017, 2018 and 2019?

#### **Deputy E.J. Noel:**

I do not know that answer yet because it has not been debated by this Assembly. It is due to be debated in September.

#### **Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Does the Minister have anything under consideration?

#### **The Deputy Bailiff:**

I am sorry, Deputy. That is a supplementary on a supplementary on a supplementary.

#### **3.8.7 Deputy M.R. Higgins:**

Will the Minister undertake to supply in writing to Members details of the 200-and-whatever-it-is properties that he mentioned, giving details of whether they are one-bedroom to 5-bedroomed houses and also whether they have a swimming pool?

**Deputy E.J. Noel:**

I am happy to do so. As I said, this question really should have been a written question with a written answer where we can provide that sort of detail. I can tell the Deputy now that I am sure that some do have a swimming pool because some of the properties that were left to the States did have such facilities and we do rent in properties for consultants at the hospital, members of our Armed Forces, *et cetera*, that do have these facilities. For example, it includes Government House in this list so there will be some properties that do have such facilities.

**3.8.8 Deputy M.R. Higgins:**

Supplementary. In fact in addition to the information I have asked for from the Minister will he also provide the annual rental details for these properties as well so we can compare those to the public sector?

**Deputy E.J. Noel:**

Obviously the Deputy did not hear my answer to Deputy Andrew Lewis. I said I would already provide that.

**3.8.9 Deputy M. Tadier:**

I will ask Deputy Southern's supplementary. Could the Minister state whether the budget maintenance grant for Property Holdings in future M.T.F.P.s, i.e. 2017, 2018 and the year 2019, envisages a reduction in that maintenance grant for Property Holdings?

**Deputy E.J. Noel:**

We have not lodged the M.T.F.P. addendum yet, yet alone debated it. So when we do I will be able to answer that more fully. What I hope to be able to do is reduce the stock of surplus properties that we no longer need and that will reduce our maintenance bill.

**3.8.10 Deputy M. Tadier:**

So the Minister said he is not able to answer the question that I did not ask him, so will he consider answering the question that I did ask him, which is to do with consideration. What consideration and planning is currently happening or has happened to reduce the budget for maintenance in his department for the future M.T.F.P. in the years, 2017 to 2019?

**Deputy E.J. Noel:**

I have already said, we hope to be able to dispose of those properties that we no longer need. It is very difficult to get property disposals past this Assembly: it has proved tricky in the past, and we only have a property a few metres outside this building that we tried to dispose of and we were stopped from doing so. That building does still require maintenance. If we could dispose of such buildings we would save money on maintenance.

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

I raise a point of order. We are constantly told that questions must be relevant and be related to the original question yet Ministers stand up ... this Minister, time and time again making no attempt to even answer the question and answering a different question. Can I just raise that as a point and if it is not something ...

[10:45]

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

What ruling do you need from the Chair on this?

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

That Ministers, in fact all Members, should act in a way that is open and transparent and honest and I do not think these kind of answers that we are getting from the Minister fulfil that.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

Deputy, you are not making the allegation that you are not having honest answers, are you, because if there is then I am going to have to direct you ...

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

I am making the suggestion that the Minister is not living up to the Code of Conduct for Ministers, if not for all States Members. I am not sure if that is something you need to rule on.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

Well, Deputy, that is not a point of order. That will be a matter for you to raise under the normal processes but it is not a point of order for me to rule on.

**3.8.11 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Following on from the question asked by Deputy Hilton, what consideration, if any, has been given to allowing some of the properties which have been vacant for an extended period of time to be allowed to be used for the Housing Gateway so we can have people moving into these properties rather than being put on a waiting list that lasts an inordinate amount of time? Finally, would he be prepared to circulate the breakdown he has of these properties in an email to all States Members?

**Deputy E.J. Noel:**

I have already confirmed that the information requested will be circulated to States Members. With regard to the 2 educational properties that are inside the schools, we do not sit on our laurels and we are actively involved with the schools and with Education to try and find a solution to their concerns and a solution to our requirement to have these properties occupied and to receive a rental on them.