

2016.12.12

1 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade of the Minister for Social Security regarding the Income Support housing component for households waiting to downsize in the social rented sector: [9760]

Will the Minister advise what the current policy is that is applied to the housing component for households who are under-occupying and waiting to downsize in the social rented sector?

Deputy S.J. Pinel of St. Clement (The Minister for Social Security):

I have previously answered this question from the Deputy in greater detail as one part of written question 8648. To summarise, the income support rental accommodation component is designed to help towards the reasonable rental costs faced by low income households. The household receives an accommodation component at a level according to the size and type of the property that is appropriate to its members. In cases where the household occupies a property that is larger than it needs income support restricts the amount of accommodation component that is paid. Obviously there will be situations where a household cannot predict that there will be an empty bedroom, for example, because a family member leaves home. In this situation the accommodation component is maintained to allow the household time to downsize to an appropriately sized property. Households on the social housing transfer list will continue to be supported at the full accommodation component while they await a suitable property to move into. It is very important to have a mechanism that encourages households to free-up social housing properties that are too large for their needs. Jersey has a limited social housing stock and it would not be right for the taxpayer to continue to fully support a household that chooses not to move when there are families in urgent need of properties with additional bedrooms.

3.1.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

I thank the Minister for the clarification. Could the Minister confirm whether she believes that the relationship and communication between her department and the social housing providers, in particular, Andium, is good and whether there is any room for improvement, specifically in regard to this issue of people who are waiting to be transferred to downsize?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

As Minister for Social Security, I am not in a position to comment on Andium's waiting lists. However I can say that the relocation of the housing Gateway staff to the Social Security building has helped to improve service in this area.

3.1.2 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier:

Can the Minister for Social Security clarify for Members what would happen if a tenant applies to downsize but no suitable accommodation is available and therefore could stay on the list for some considerable time?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

People who are on the waiting list for a new social housing property are not treated as under-occupying and are paid the accommodation component at the higher rate until a new property is available. This can be paid for up to a year or until 3 reasonable offers of new housing have been turned down.

3.1.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

She is saying then that the cap on rental component will be enforced after a year, is that the case? If so, could the Minister inform Members how many households this sanction currently applies to?

[14:45]

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

I cannot inform the Deputy how many households it applies to but, yes, it would be, as I answered in my previous question, that it would be for up to a year. There is always, as with everything in income support, exceptions to this. If there are no properties available then of course we would not be capping the accommodation component.

3.1.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

Would the Minister look into the issue of how many individuals in this situation there are that are waiting more than a year and may find themselves in a situation where they find the housing component is capped, just to make sure. Because ultimately it is the constituency representatives who, one way or another, pick up these workloads, and in the interests of fairness and efficiency for everyone involved that may be useful.

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

As with every income support claim they are all very individual and fluctuate considerably with people moving in and out of income support. So somebody may be on the waiting list for 11 months and 3 weeks and then suddenly find the accommodation that they require. So it is very difficult at any particular time to pinpoint a number such as that.