

2018.09.11

15 Deputy K.G. Pamplin of the Minister for Children and Housing regarding the decision of Andium Homes not to sign up to the landlords' accreditation scheme: [OQ.123/2018]

Will the Minister explain why Andium Homes has not signed up to the landlords' accreditation scheme (Rent Safe)? Will he work to ensure that it does sign up for this voluntary scheme? If so, will he provide a date for when this can be achieved?

Senator S.Y. Mézec (The Minister for Children and Housing):

I thank the Deputy for this question. My broad principle is that I want the highest standards to be applied throughout all sectors of housing providers in the Island. That includes the minimum standards that are hopefully being approved by the States later today. I am aware that Andium Homes properties are scheduled to be 97 per cent compliant with the Decent Homes Standard by the end of this year and 100 per cent complaint by 2020. It makes sense for there to be some form of uniformity across the board and I suppose, in an ideal world, I would like Andium Homes to take part in the same processes that other landlords are having to as well. Where there is a difficulty at this point that I would like to see resolved before formally asking Andium Homes to sign up with Rent Safe is that they are concerned that because of the fee that they would have to pay to the Environment Department as part of this scheme that they would, in their estimate, be having to pay £500,000 a year, which is on top of the £28 million a year that they return to the States, as is currently the case. I would like to be absolutely certain that where money is moving from a States-owned company back to the States, only to end up back with the States-owned company again in some form or another that there be a better arrangement and one that does not risk holding back some of the important renovation and building works that Andium Homes are undertaking. I have said that broadly speaking this is something that I want look into, the arrangement with the States for how money is shifted round. In principle, I think it is the right direction to go, but I want to make sure that it will not have an adverse effect on tenants inadvertently.

4.15.1 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Curious with the symmetry of the previous question here about Andium Homes. I quote the Director of Environmental Health who says: "The quality of our home has a direct effect on our health, mental well-being and our pocket." A badly insulated 2-bedroom flat can cost £600 per month to heat. So I am curious about the question of money, the fee. Could we put a figure on somebody's mental health and well-being? We can see the benefits of signing up, but I welcome his comment.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Sorry, I am not sure I heard a question in there, but what I would say is that Andium Homes within the next 2 years will have 100 per cent Decent Homes Standard, so I do not think it is necessarily a question of the quality of property that Andium Homes' tenants are living in. I think it is more the arrangement that they would have with the States where fees are going in one direction then ending up going in another direction again. I absolutely agree wholeheartedly with the principle of this, but I just think we need a practical solution to make sure that nobody is worse off at the end of it inadvertently.

4.15.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Minister agree that while there might be an issue of affordability - and that is largely due to a policy invented by the previous Assembly - of Andium's properties, the quality of Andium Homes is

less of a problem compared to that of the private sector? Does he agree that given the very high level of attainment already in terms of the Decent Homes Standard that there should be some kind of recognition of where that sits on the Rent Safe Scheme? It may well be that automatically Andium Properties, which are deemed to have met the Decent Homes Standard, should automatically also be accredited on the Rent Safe Scheme without necessarily needing for them to sign up to it, because they have already achieved it.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

What the Deputy is suggesting makes perfect sense, although this would be something that I would have to have discussions with the Minister for the Environment to make sure that we could do that properly.

[11:15]

4.15.3 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Again, I would just like to draw attention - because I know this is something we are going to be looking into later in the day - to the point of my original question of providing a date when he feels like this could be achieved by the terms he suggested by totally agreeing with him on the terms of the money and back and forth. Does he have, in his mindset, as Deputy Tadier was suggesting, that there could be a way to get them on quicker?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

That is a good question. There are discussions that are happening right now about finding a better solution to the rental arrangement in our social housing providers. This is not something I have stipulated should be included in that. I might be concerned that if we did ask for that to be included it might delay achieving progress on the rental policy. I know he wants me to suggest a date for it, but I am afraid I just cannot do that at the moment.