

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND HOUSING
BY DEPUTY M.R. HIGGINS OF ST. HELIER
QUESTION SUBMITTED ON MONDAY 25th JANUARY 2021
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON MONDAY 1st FEBRUARY 2021**

Question

Will the Minister state –

- (a) the number of people currently waiting for housing on the Housing Gateway and the number of houses / apartments expected to come on stream in the next 3 months;
- (b) the number of properties currently vacant due to housing movement (such as the gap between one tenant leaving and another taking their place) and the average vacancy period over the last 2 years;
- (c) the number of people his department has advised to ‘sofa surf’ or to live in a hotel, if any;
- (d) the number of people currently estimated to be ‘sofa surfing’ or having to live in a hotel;
- (e) the number of people estimated to be homeless or sleeping rough in the Island or intermittently in housing shelters;
- (f) the daily capacity of housing shelters and their actual occupancy; and
- (g) how many people have been evicted since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and what steps, if any, the Government is taking to prevent people being evicted during this period?

Answer

- (a) There are currently 945 active rental applications on the Housing Gateway across all bands.

Andium Homes will deliver 138 new homes over the next three months: -

36 affordable sales to Band 5 purchasers
102 rental homes

Les Vaux Housing have no new stock coming on stream in the next 3 months.

Brunel Management have no new stock coming online this year.

- (b) Andium Homes and the Housing Trusts manage their housing stock and re-let to applicants on the Housing Gateway as soon as a suitable property becomes available. The number of properties void varies from day-to-day.

At the time of drafting this response, Andium Homes had 12 “non-standard” void properties undergoing extensive works with contractors, 13 x “standard voids” undergoing standard void works with contractors and 9 x voids which are ready to let, pending viewing and signup. The average vacancy period between tenancies has been 24.5 days. This figure is higher than usual given the limited void turnaround during the lockdown period in 2020 when moves were not permitted. Average for 2019 was 18 days, average for 2020 was 31 days.

At the time of drafting Les Vaux have one 2 bed flat available due to housing movement and conducting viewings, they expect it to be let shortly. Their average vacancy period over the last years is 0.2%.

Brunel confirmed that their average re-let time is 18 days – the effects of Covid have increased the turn around times.

- (c) Officers never advise customers to sofa-surf. Given the number of applicants registered on the waiting list, officers may ask a customer to consider all their available housing options, including staying with family or friends provided it is safe to do so; alternative private rented accommodation; and other temporary accommodation options. This is always suggested as a short-term, temporary measure whilst the applicant looks for long term accommodation, including being offered social housing.
- (d) The Housing Gateway currently has 56 active applications where a customer is deemed to be “homeless”. This categorisation means that they do not have rights to their current accommodation, which could, therefore, mean the person is under an eviction order or living in temporary accommodation such as a hotel or “sofa-surfing”. Sofa-surfing and the use of hotels **are not** considered to be “policy alternatives” to preventing evictions. However, an officer may suggest these as an alternative to resolve emergency housing situations. These would only ever be for a short-term measure. When cases involve children for instance recommendations to reside in a hotel or with a family member would be suggested over homelessness. The use of hotels puts a roof over people’s heads and supports their health, safety and welfare.
- (e) The Gateway currently has 56 applicants; we only hold records of customers who have applied to the Gateway.

The Shelter Trust has capacity for 124 residents. Presently, the Shelter accommodates approximately 115 per night and supports a further 14 individuals through outreach, including hotels and guest houses.

The number of rough sleepers is not currently known. Efforts have been made over the years to address entrenched rough sleeping, although there continue to be sporadic cases of people sleeping rough.

- (f) As of 15 January, Shelter Trust slept **115 people** across 8 Trust sites.

A **further 14** people are being supported via Outreach, 9 of whom are located in hotels.

A **further 5** people are community based

Further updated stats are pending and will be shared upon receipt.

- (g) Evictions did not take place in Jersey from 10 April - 30 September 2020 as a result of the emergency COVID-19 legislation introduced by the Government. The legislation lapsed on 30 September 2020 and no additional action is being taken to prevent evictions.

The Court directed guidance on evictions continues to apply. The Government has published this guidance online, which is there to ensure that tenants and landlords know their rights and responsibilities. For example, there is a requirement by landlords to ensure that they have engaged with tenants to try and exhaust all avenues that fall short of eviction prior to approaching the Court. The Courts have the power to ensure that all evictions are lawful.

Since September:

- 16 evictions have been lodged with the court.
- 14 of which related to non-payment of rent and/or Anti-Social Behaviour.

- 12 of these cases resulted in eviction, 4 cases have been adjourned.
- 5 of these cases were private tenancy agreements and 11 were through Social housing providers.
- The Social Housing providers have confirmed that none of the eviction cases relate to arrears accrued through Covid.

Since March 2020, The Gateway have received 60 applications from customers who have been given notice from their landlord. Only a handful of customers have received court eviction notices, the rest have been letters from landlords. Out of the 60 applications 27 have been housed through the gateway.