

22.01.18

8 Deputy J.H. Perchard of the Minister for Housing and Communities regarding Islanders considered homeless (OQ.17/2022)

Will the Minister advise the Assembly how many Islanders were considered homeless, according to the Government's current categorisation, as at the end of 2021, specifying how many were in the age brackets of 16 to 24, 25 to 39, 40 to 64 and 65 and above?

Deputy R. Labey of St. Helier (The Minister for Housing and Communities):

The current situation as of yesterday is that we have 2 Islanders who we would classify as roofless. There is capacity in our facilities for temporary accommodation. The Housing Advice Service has been running since July and in that time it dealt with 53 referrals, all of whom were offered accommodation. The Shelter Trust currently is looking after 101 clients. As I say, they do still have capacity. Of those, approximately 20 per cent are between the ages of 17 and 25 and the rest are above that age. I know that is not exactly in the way that the Deputy wanted that information. I do not have that in that format but I hope that is helpful.

Deputy J.H. Perchard:

Yes, Sir.

The Bailiff:

You have gone quiet, Deputy, we cannot hear you. Deputy Perchard, are you able to hear us? I think someone has touched the machine at the back or something and we seem to have gone ... We cannot hear Deputy Perchard here. I think we can hear you now, Deputy. If you would like to ask your supplemental question.

3.8.1 Deputy J.H. Perchard:

Would the Minister be happy to provide those numbers in those brackets or in some form of age bracket that I have outlined? Is this a decrease in the number of people who are considered homeless since 2018? I think the reported number was 346. If it is a decrease, could the Minister outline what has happened between 2018 and now as a result of that decrease in number, which is obviously a positive thing?

Deputy R. Labey:

That was before my time, so I am not sure about that. It is very difficult to provide the statistics in a way that the Deputy wants because it is so fluid. But we have just been holding on since the creation of the Housing Advice Service. We have partnered up with Homeless Link, U.K., who are the equivalent agency in the U.K. and they have been monitoring how we are progressing in moving forward the homelessness strategy. Their audit, effectively, their report and recommendations are going to be with us, I think, this week imminently. It is very possible and we anticipate there might be the suggestion and how we do it, to gather that information in the way that the Deputy is suggesting, and I will update her on that. It is an aspirational thing and it is something we should move towards. But it has got to be done carefully so that the statistics do paint an accurate picture. The housing strategy and our housing critical support team and the Housing Advice Service is all part of that. The extra funding that we have made available is all helping to try to tackle the homelessness issue. It is very important that we remember "homeless" is a very broad term. We divide it up into 4 categories; roofless, houseless, insecure or inadequate accommodation.

3.8.2 Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Does the Minister have any understanding of a breakdown for the current numbers of homeless people in the Island that he is aware of for their reasoning for being homeless, in that how many of them are there because they have had a problem with employment or how many are there because there is not suitable permanent accommodation elsewhere for them? Does he have an understanding of the reasons why some of those people have faced homelessness?

Deputy R. Labey:

No, I do not have an accurate breakdown of that. I can certainly do some more investigations on that. I think it is important to remember that while it is not as simple as offering somebody accommodation sometimes for some of our clients; that is not going to assist them because they have trouble living independently, that is an issue. What the strategy is all about is finding a pathway out of that and continued support and help.

3.8.3 Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Just on that, does the Minister think that there is at the moment an adequate supply of emergency or temporary housing? He did mention Shelter Trust having capacity, which is good to hear, but does he think that there is any scope for assisting and providing more emergency or temporary housing through some of the stock that is currently owned in one shape or form by the States of Jersey that is not having a lot done with it right now?

Deputy R. Labey:

Yes, and that is coming down the line. In fact the new women-only shelter will open next month, we hope. It is a little bit delayed because of COVID. The Women's Refuge is moving, courtesy of Andium Homes, and that will increase in size - I think double in size - and release the building that they are in now; that is the Women's Refuge. We are increasing capacity but we generally find at the moment that we are okay.

3.8.4 Deputy R.J. Ward:

The Minister mentioned 4 categories of homelessness, I was going to ask how they were categorised. Can I ask the Minister with regards those who are in inappropriate accommodation and is there enough information, given that we do not have any sort of register or a licensing system for landlords, for families living in inadequate accommodation, such as sleeping in the lounge while children have the one bedroom that they have? How big an issue does the Minister see this?

Deputy R. Labey:

It is really difficult to quantify because a lot of those issues are hidden issues and do not come to our attention until very often individuals will refer themselves to the Housing Advice Service or very often various agencies will do it on their behalf, and then we can start to collect those figures. I think that is important to do and that is what the Housing Advice Service will be doing; keeping that data on what the prevalent problems are. We should be able to release that information on an annual basis.

3.8.5 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Is it not very difficult to have a strategy to address issues when we do not have that information? Does this not really point to a desperate need for a more licensed approach to housing and homes and accommodation for individuals and families in Jersey?

Deputy R. Labey:

I support the registration of landlords. As the Deputy will probably remember, we are redrafting the entire Residential Tenancy Law. I have just issued instructions for the law drafting of that. In the R.T.L. (Residential Tenancy Law) we are going to include the provision of a register and build it into that law.

3.8.6 Senator T.A. Vallois:

I would like to seek clarity from the Minister on Deputy Perchard's original question. In his categorisation he referred to rooflessness, homelessness and inadequate housing. His answer to the original question was about roofless the number of 2, but the actual question was with regards to homeless. Does the Minister have that particular number?

Deputy R. Labey:

When people use the term "homeless" it is generally in relation to people who are roofless and sleeping rough. In fact we are doing well on that in Jersey in terms of identifying those people, helping them, taking them to G.P.s (general practitioners), taking them to our agencies, trying to get them a pathway into accommodation. Some are offered accommodation but for their own reasons do not take that up but we still look after them and we are in touch with all of them. The other categories ... so that is rooflessness. The others are being houseless, in insecure accommodation or in inadequate accommodation. I gave you the statistics for how many people we are temporarily housing at the moment. As the work of the Housing Advice Service continues, we will continue to gather and note the data.

3.8.7 Senator T.A. Vallois:

I appreciate the clarification from the Minister. I just wonder whether the Minister could advise, without having any form of expensive consultants or forms of other huge reviews that we tend to initiate, what is the Minister's view on appropriate data analysis around the types of numbers and considering it against the Gateway that we have in place with regards to what used to be referred to as social housing, I would suggest that that is not necessarily what we have any longer since the 2013 decision?

Deputy R. Labey:

We do not need to bring in expensive consultants on work in terms of the Housing Advice Service, the critical support team, the homelessness strategy because all of that is being consistently monitored by our partner charity, Homeless Link, U.K.

[14:30]

As I say, their report will be with me imminently, I think this week, with their report and recommendations on how we keep improving, how we use the data, how we gather the data and that is going to be a very definite plus and something we definitely want to do.

3.8.8 Deputy J.H. Perchard:

The Minister in one of his earlier answers stated that about 20 per cent of the current number of homeless people in the younger age bracket are identified - it was the 16 to 24 - meaning some of them are school leavers. What are the most common risks to this age group that exist that might make it more or less likely that they would end up homeless at the ages of 16 to 24?

Deputy R. Labey:

I would not like to speculate on that. There are many different reasons why people, young people as well, find themselves in that kind of circumstance. I think what would be helpful for Members is if I got our Housing Advice team and the critical support leader to update everybody on how we are progressing, and I will organise that briefing. Because I think it would be good for Members to hear from these fantastic officers who are really dedicated and doing superb work in this area.