



# Environment, Housing and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel

## Quarterly Hearing

### Witness: The Minister for Children and Housing

Tuesday, 30th October 2018

**Panel:**

Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade (Chairman)

Connétable J.E. Le Maistre of Grouville (Vice-Chairman)

Connétable S.A. Le Sueur-Rennard of St. Saviour

**Witnesses:**

The Minister for Children and Housing

Director General, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population

Group Director - Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment

Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population

[11:32]

**Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade (Chairman):**

Good morning, everyone. We will just go around the room quickly and introduce ourselves for the record. I am Mike Jackson, Constable of St. Brelade, chairman of the Environment, Housing and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel.

**Connétable J.E. Le Maistre of Grouville:**

John Le Maistre, Constable of Grouville, vice-chairman of the panel.

**Connétable S.A. Le Sueur-Rennard of St. Saviour:**

Sadie Le Sueur-Rennard, Constable of St. Saviour, panel member.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Senator Sam Mézec, Minister for Children and Housing.

**Director General, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

Tom Walker, Director General for Strategic Policy, Performance and Population.

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

Jack Norris, Policy Principal for Strategic Policy, Performance and Population.

**Group Director - Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment**

Andy Scate, I am the Group Director for Regulation for Growth, Housing and Environment.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Lovely. Thanks very much. We will go straight into asking, Minister, what your strategic policies over the next 4 months are.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

It is going to be busy, that is for sure. We have the debate coming up on the Strategic Policy. One of the headline figures of that is reducing income equality and improving the standard of living. I was particularly keen for that to be one of the headlines of the Strategic Plan. This message of working to improve people's lives, their standard of living, is something really worth focusing on. It is inevitable that housing is going to be a huge part of that. We had the income distribution survey a few years ago, which showed that it was the cost of housing that was the single biggest contributing factor for causing relative poverty. We know that a third of people are living in rental stress, so addressing those issues is not going to be particularly easy, but that is where our focus has to be. Some of the things that I am keen to see progress in that period: I would like to look at improving the legal protection that there is for private and social sector tenants. There is some stuff going on in the U.K. (United Kingdom) with regards to letting agent fees. I am keen to investigate the appropriateness of whether some of that regulation that they are looking to bring there, could be applicable in Jersey. When I was a constituency representative in St. Helier, we would regularly get people coming to me who had had issues with letting agent fees that were not really appropriate. That is something I would like to look at, because that would give people peace of mind and help in the affordability of setting up a home, when you are moving somewhere new. Towards the end of this year we should have terms of reference for the Housing Policy Development Board. This was something that was spoken of in the election campaign by quite a few people, including the former Chief Minister, the new Chief Minister and myself, where we accept that some of the real big issues for housing in the Island are not things we can wave a magic wand and have done quickly.

Affordability of housing, how do you deal with that when an important part of dealing with that is about supply? That means we have to find places. We have to find places. We have to know what type of houses are going to be built there and how that is addressing the need that we can safely predict X number of years into the future. Setting up that Policy Development Board, which will look at these issues, will take whatever expert advice and witnesses it needs to to help put these policies together. One of the things that I am keen for that to do is to look at the 90 per cent market rate rule for charging rent in social properties. I have been on record for a very long time saying I am uncomfortable with and would like there to be a new arrangement so that social housing in the Island is not based on the 90 per cent rule, which does not really exist anywhere else in the world. One final point to add to that is we will also be looking at key worker accommodation. We have already done a little bit here recently with Convent Court. This crosses over with my Children's portfolio, where we have had it made abundantly clear to us that housing is something key workers coming to the Island struggle with. Obviously, there are all sorts of restrictions we need to have to control population, but looking at what we can do for those people who we desperately need to come and work in our public services. While they are here, if they can be happy and have good lives, we obviously want to support that as well. Yes, a lot to be getting on with.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

You have just had a review of the Affordable Housing Gateway; what was the outcome of it?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

That is right. Did we get a version of that in the last few days?

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

The full report is imminent. It is going to be prepared and provided to the Minister this week. We are due it from Dr. Tim Brown, who is heading up the review. There has been a draft executive summary, which has provided some initial findings and recommendations about policy changes and change of procedures that might be made, which the Minister has seen. The full report will be released as soon as possible.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

You cannot share those with us this morning?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

No, not this morning, but we are happy to do that as soon as we can. If you want a briefing on that then that would certainly be the right thing to do. Some of the areas that it has looked at, for example, the income threshold and whether that is right and how cost of living gets more expensive. We know over the last 10 years people's incomes have not been rising above the rate of inflation, to give very

real terms, improving their spending power. Looking at the position of single men in the Gateway as well, when I think there are undoubtedly some people who, for whatever reason, do not tick the right boxes to have what you would hope would be a common-sense approach. But we cannot just say the rule is common sense; we do have to have rules about criteria and making sure we are supporting those who are most in need. There are probably some gaps there that we ought to be looking at. As we said, when we are ready to do that we are more than happy to share that briefing, and that will inform the work we do with reforming the Housing Gateway over the next year.

**The Connétable of St. Saviour:**

You have touched on one of the questions I was going to ask, about the single not seeming to qualify for accommodation. Are you going to lower the age limit to 50, so that everybody gets a chance? I know it is very difficult, because you do not have homes to put people in. We have this thing, slightly like your children's thing, that when they reach 17 or 18 they are thrown out into the world and nobody seems to care. We now have you in place on both accounts. Youngsters who need some sort of support, but they cannot have a home because they are single. It is a vicious circle. How are you going to try and get them through that one?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

That is a really good question. When we are talking about care-experienced young people that is getting to something that is very close to my heart, which is about what we do as corporate parents. I did not move out of my mum's house until I was 24, until I was ready to do that.

**The Connétable of St. Saviour:**

You were lucky.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Indeed, yes. Lots of young people will stay even longer at their parents' homes. Parents do not just throw away all of their obligations to their children when they become adults at age 18. It goes on for longer than that. For care-experienced people that is particularly difficult when their family circumstances might not be right for that. We need a wider culture change, as a government, that looks at young people. We say: "We are your corporate parents." That word "corporate" might be a little bit unfriendly, but the word "parent" means you are to show unconditional love to young people. If they are not related to you, we should still have their best interests at heart. That is the philosophical place I am coming from on this. In terms of what guarantee I can give you specifically on the older age limit. I cannot give you that guarantee just yet, until we have considered it and formally decided whether we are going to accept a recommendation in its entirety or alter it somehow.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

One of the points to make is it is fairly well-known that men between 45 and 55 are a quite susceptible age-group, where they might have a breakdown in relationship or for whatever reason. Those individuals can find themselves in fairly dire straits. I just wondered if there had been any consideration of that particular group?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

In terms of that specific group, are we touching on the homelessness issue here, because I know you want to ask about that as well?

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Possibly, yes. We can talk about that later, but it also comes into this as a question of opening up this Affordable Gateway really to allow those people to have a taste of if there were to be availability.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

That is why this issue is difficult, because we only have a finite amount of homes that we can offer people. We are in a good position, in that the number of people that are on the Housing Gateway list is significantly lower than where it was 4 or 5 years ago. That presents us with quite a good opportunity to look at the stock and say: "Right, what is the most appropriate use of particular categories or property?" A single man is not going to want a 4-bedroom house, for example. Looking at those numbers and working out where we can have a bit of leeway. It is going to be difficult, whether it is single men or any other type of person, there are people out there who are in need. What I do not want to do is say we are going to do everything we can to support this group of people and then end up forgetting another group of people, who may be just as vulnerable or just as in need. So this is incredibly difficult. The States as a whole, over the next few years ... the Island Plan is coming up at some point soon. We are going to have to ask ourselves tough questions about what sorts of properties we are building, where they are being built and who should be eligible to live in them.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

The housing need assessment is about to come out. Will that give you an indication of what the future requirements will be?

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

That will establish figures for housing climates between 2021 and 2030 across all categories of tenure. That includes social rented and affordable purchase. So that will put a figure on what we need to develop in those areas of Andium Homes and housing trusts. Yes, that would feed into then the groups which are presently excluded from the Housing Gateway, such as your single persons,

those under the age of 50, and your couples under the age of 50 who do not have children. Those are presently excluded and there are potential options to expand the criteria to include them, especially with the new supply coming online. There are 1,000 new units due by 2020. The Gateway figures are falling. That gives you the opportunity to think about these areas such as key workers, the groups we have previously mentioned, other groups, such as the vulnerably housed individuals, medical conditions, et cetera. But that is a whole area of work that will come out of the Gateway review.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

What feeds your demographics? Where does the information come from in terms of the individual groups and the numbers?

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

That would be modelling through Statistics Jersey. They have very helpful models that they can predict, based on the 2011 census. They can take that point in 2011 and forecast that for years ahead. That will probably be a specific discussion with the Statistics Department, but it is the population modelling they use.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Would you expect effusions to the 2021 census to lead from that?

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

What population do they go by?

**The Connétable of St. Saviour:**

Yes, we do not have a strategy.

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

In terms of the Objective Assessment of Housing Need?

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Well, if you are assessing the housing needs from 2021 to 2030 you will need to know what the projected population is going to be.

**The Connétable of St. Saviour:**

It makes the Minister's life very difficult if we do not have a clue.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Yes, it certainly does.

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

The Objective Assessment of Housing Need has various scenarios. So there is the plus-325, which is in the existing Island Plan.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Plus-325, that is households?

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

Yes, it is. Then there is plus-1,000, which reflects current trends. There is also an in between plus-750. So it goes across various scenarios, which will allow you to see what the impact would be of various populations scenarios on housing.

[11:45]

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

You mentioned the Gateway figures coming down. Can you put some figures on it?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Yes. In 2013 there were 1,360 applicants in the August of that year. When this was printed off there were 830. So that is quite a good chunk that has been reduced there.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

That is all people seeking rentable accommodation. Have you got figures for people for affordable to buy housing?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

It is 1,000 at the moment.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

What was that before, because that has come up a lot, I believe?

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

That has gone up considerably. That was around 200 back in about 2013. I can get you the exact figures if you want them, but it has gone up considerably.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

If you add the other 2 together, the figures are roughly the same for the amount of houses required.

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

Yes, there has been a switch from affordable rentals to affordable purchase, in terms of what people are requiring. I think that is the change in economic circumstances.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Do you think it is cultural? If you go to the Continent or other places there is a tendency to rent more than purchase. Is it a Jersey thing or an English thing?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

The rental market does look different here to other places. There are more what you might call small time landlords here, people that only own one or 2 properties, whereas in places like Germany they have big housing providers that own a lot more properties. It looks different here. It should not be surprising that the number of people wanting to get on an affordable purchase scheme has gone up, purely because the scheme is really good. The quality of the homes are really good, lots of them are in very nice places. You look at the buildings going up and you just know that they are going to be really nice communities there; Langtry Gardens, for example, in St. Saviour. It is not surprising that they are desirable.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

It is not surprising, but I was just making the point that the demand for housing, although the type of housing is different inasmuch as it is now affordable to buy and has increased in popularity, the shortfall in houses is the same now as it was before.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Sure. In terms of the cultural question that you have asked there, what I would like to see over the next few years is for those for whom either owning a home is not going to be an option or it could be an option ... but I want people who are renting to know that they are safe renting; that their futures are secure, they do not have to worry about being evicted unfairly or that the social housing options are as good as they can possibly be and the homes are as good quality. So as Minister for Children and Housing, my philosophy is not really pushing in one direction or the other. I do not necessarily want to say we should be an Island where everybody can own their own home or an Island where everybody should rent. People's circumstances are different and people have different aspirations. But whatever those aspirations, I want you to know that we are doing what we can to support you. That means when we look at the increase in those who are seeking affordable purchase we are going to have to look at that very carefully. That will be something that will feed into the Island Plan debate as we identify sites. The States-owning Andium, we obviously have to assist them in looking



where there are decent land transfers that can be made or sites that can be freed up. They are really keen to pursue that. Some of those could potentially end up being difficult discussions, because there will be people competing for land sites for different things. You know me well enough to know that my focus would certainly be on affordable. I have been disappointed in previous years when the focus has been on unaffordable housing, especially my age when I look at a lot of my friends who cannot afford to purchase anything.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Can I suggest to you that the reason why a demand for affordable to buy housing has gone up is because there is more knowledge among members of the general public that you might be able to buy an affordable house. Would you agree that the Housing Gateway is not particularly well advertised? Inasmuch as there will be a lot of people out there your age who will not realise that they should put their name on the affordable to buy housing list. They do not know that that is an option. There are no houses now because there is a big waiting list, but possibly in the future if they knew that they might get an opportunity to buy their own affordable house that that list of 1,000 names would be even greater.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

I do not know really. Whatever I would be telling you would be anecdotal about what I know from having spoken to people. I certainly know that there are some people who have no idea of its existence. There are a lot who do, because lot of these sites have been very high profile. De La Mare has been quite high profile; lots of demand for that.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

There are only 6 houses of the 28.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Yes.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

As Constable of Grouville I get people who phone me and say: "Are you doing anything about affordable to buy housing?" I will say: "Make sure you get on the list." A lot of them did not really know the list existed. Should you be pushing harder to promote the Gateway, even though you do not have the houses, to really know what the demand is?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

If you think that there is more that we can do to advertise it then that is certainly something we will take on board. What would upset me though is when people end up getting very disappointed when

time and time again they are not allocated a proposition. That is something I get in my inbox, a lot, people who have been on the waiting for a long time who are not adequately housed where they are, but it is not meeting what their long-term aspiration may be.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

As I understand it, when you have affordable sites they tend to be 80 per cent affordable to rent or 20 per cent affordable to buy. Yet it will appear now that your waiting lists are almost on parity. Maybe that should be more flexible. The De La Mare had only 6 affordable to buy, but if half of them had been affordable to buy you would have satisfied a lot more people.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Yes. It is an interesting point. It is just part of that wider discussion we are going to have, because there are still lots of people on the rented Gateway as well.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Yes.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

There are people on that list who are particularly vulnerable. What I do not want to do is to say, we will change that 80:20 formula and then end up in 3 years' time struggling to house people who are on the rented side. It is something you have to be very, very careful about.

**Group Director - Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment**

If I could add on the mixture of that policy, in the current Island Plan, you are right, it is 80:20. Prior to that we had a 55:45 split, I cannot remember the exact split. Whenever we get into a debate around zoning land, it is also directly linked to the Assembly wanting to know exactly what it is zoning the land for. Therefore, as a result of that, it would be a lot easier for a zoning to be a flexible zoning, depending on the need of the time. It could just be zoned for affordable homes and then the ultimate delivery on site could be more purchase product, it could be more rented product, depending on how the market is flexing. All I can say is in the previous 2 iterations of the Island Plan, whenever we get into an Assembly conversation, discussion or debate on those zoning policies it often gets really honed down into real specifics. States Members want to know exactly what it is being zoned for. It is a bit of live debate. It would make sense to have flexible zoning policies to say: "Yes, we have identified a site, it is for affordable homes and then depending on housing needs of the day, when it is developed, that would indicate what mix is built on site. We would need more flexible planning policies to do that.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

That is a problem in itself. As I understand at homes trusts, of which there are half a dozen, apart from Andium there are another 4, for them it is better to have affordable to rent from the business point of view. If you had left it open-ended, the De La Mare site, for example, would not have had those 6 affordable to buy if the homes trusts were doing the whole thing. So it is problematic.

**Group Director - Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment**

Yes. I would say the best route would be that we have a flexible planning policy and then the Strategic Housing Unit would then inform what the needs are of the day. The difficulties would be when a housing site is transacted and the landowner sells it on to a developer and there is a fixed price in mind. It would need to be done under a contract to allow better flexibility on the ultimate value of the site. That would be a way forward. The Island Plan at the moment is quite specific. It is 80:20 and nothing else. It would make a lot more sense to be a lot more flexible on those policies.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

The St. Peter's affordable homes development was turned down, what is the next event? Is that dead in the water?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

It is not dead in the water. I know that there are those in St. Peter who are very keen to continue pursuing this. I think it is fair to say that there are differences in perspectives from those on the housing side and those on the planning side on this. The scheme that was put together looked like a great scheme. Lots of people were very passionate about it. What is the best way to describe the next steps on this?

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

I think it feeds through that having the evidence there from the Objective Assessment of Housing Need saying what types of home you need. Then going back to part of the Island Plan process about: is that the best site for a new development? We cannot dispute that there is demand out there for new first-time buyer homes. The Parish is very keen, as are a lot of Parishes, of developing their own first-time buyer developments. It helps the vitality of the community. It helps get young people to stay. The aim is very laudable. However, it has to be within a bigger planning debate, in terms of the Island Plan. That is where the O.A.H.N.R. (Objective Assessment of Housing Need Report) numbers will be through and then we can start make decision of whether: is that site the best site for new homes, should other sites be considered? That is the general gist of it, Andy, is it not?

**Group Director - Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment**

That is right. The inquiry on that site specifically looked at all the published stuff at the time, the published data at the time, the published needs. While there was a big argument saying this was out of date, the inspector looking said: "Well, that is what is published. Therefore, that is what I have to use." The objective needs assessment will certainly help bolster the new and up-to-date figures as to what our needs are in the Island. There is always going to be a debate about where do you build these houses then. We have as many people saying through the planning process: "Protect the countryside" as there are as many people saying: "No, I want to use the countryside to provide affordable homes." It is a 50:50 split every single time. Zoning land makes it easier. Zoning the land for an application makes it a lot easier, because the States Assembly will pass judgment on it then we are all very clear as to what is happening. An application coming in without the support of the land being zoned makes it very difficult in the planning process, because it is contrary to all of the policies that the Assembly has agreed to protect the countryside. Zoning land is a more sensible route forward, because it makes the decision a lot easier when an application comes in. I have no doubt it will be a lively States Assembly debate again on the next iteration of the Island Plan around what our housing needs are and where do we think we are meeting them. Do we think we should be building in the countryside or do we have enough land that has already been previously developed and we can recycle more of that back again? We certainly do have a lot of previously used land that we could put more homes on, but it is a live debate. The best route forward for that side has got to be with a policy backing through an Island Plan zoning, I would say.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

It does seem to have put the cart before the horse, in that an awful lot of work went into it in drawing up the scheme, just to arrive at the buffers when it came to rezoning. I think what you are saying is do the zoning first.

**Group Director - Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment**

Yes, I guess we are dealing with what ifs. If the Objective Assessment of Housing Need, certainly within maybe 12 months ahead and earlier and we had not done that work, would it have been a different answer if the inspector felt there was a real compelling needs argument? It possibly could have got overcome. There are some other issues on that site. It is agricultural land. It is being actively farmed at the moment and used for the farm next door. So there were some other issues around: is that the best site? Again, an Island Plan zoning process would iron most of that out, because it would look at a lot of sites across the Island.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

That is a planning issue. From a housing point of view, will we need to build on some countryside in the next Island Plan in order to fulfil the need?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Or we can build skyscrapers in St. Helier. It is a debate for the community to have. I do not want to say we are only going to build on countryside or we are only going to build higher up in St. Helier. It is a decision for us as an entire community to make. I certainly would not want to impose on particular community groups spread across the Island when there are areas that have particular need or land that may have a better use as something else. I do not believe the Government should impose one or the other. There should be a wider discussion with the whole community on it.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

I am not sure they are going to ask: are we going to build in St. Helier and build taller or are we going to have to build in the countryside?

[12:00]

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Or a combination. There are obviously desires for some specific sites to be built on that are currently countryside. As a community we may look at that and say: "Okay, fair enough." That is fine we will go with that. That will probably happen. I do not want to be the Minister who actively pursues destroying vast swathes of countryside across the Island, because it is part of what makes the Island special. Even for those of us who live in town, we want nice countryside to go out and visit when we are not working as well. It is about getting a balance. That is never ever going to be an easy discussion to have.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

The St. Peter's project was, I assume, for people with St. Peter's connections. Do you have a problem with that?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

I was more suspicious of it earlier on, in that I wanted absolute guarantees that when we are putting States' support into housing projects that we are getting the absolute best value for money from it and we addressing the most important need. To me, there was a question of: are those who are most in need the same people who are most in need and have a connection to that particular part of the Island? That was an angle I was not necessarily that comfortable with. However, with the St. Peter scheme they have actively worked with the Gateway on that and I am comfortable with that as a solution. Rather than saying we will give States' support for a housing development and then you go and completely independently come up with your own criteria, I am not particularly happy with that. When they have worked with the Gateway, as they have, I know that there are good sets

of criteria in the Gateway that when applied with the extra caveat saying “and have some sort of connection to this part of the Island”, then I am comfortable with that.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Are there some set rules that dictate who would be able to live in those properties?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Yes, it was based on the Housing Gateway criteria, but with the added St. Peter connection. So the rules that would apply to another purchase scheme, it is the same rules, but with the extra St. Peter element to it, rather than it being a completely independent set of rules.

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

We established an income criteria around savings deposits. The assessment is whether somebody could afford to purchase without assistance in the open market. If they could not they would be eligible for one of the schemes. Then you add in the additional St. Peter’s connection and work the Parish have done around that. We assessed the applications and we are confident that the ones that were brought forward for that one could not afford a property in the open market without some form of assistance. There was due diligence done on those applications at the same at the Parish carried out the work on the connections.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Technically speaking there was not any government money going into it; it was Andium money going into it.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

We still have to sign that off, do we not? Does the Treasury do that?

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

Yes, it would have been rezoned land as well, so the government assistance to bring forward the rezoned lands for the purpose of affordable housing. Again, there is some ...

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

It was not government money, it was Andium money, which obviously is government owned, but it is autonomous.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Yes. There was another Parish scheme where, I think it was the Minister for Treasury and Resources, ultimately signed off loan money to do that, but was required to consult with the Minister

for Children and Housing. When I was consulted with, I asked to go meet those who were in charge of putting the scheme together, because I had questions on the allocation scheme. When we got answers to those questions I was satisfied and then said: "Yes, I am happy to go ahead with this." Whereas, without those answers I may not have been happy, but I did get those answers, so it was fine.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Sorry, if I am hogging it, but as a Constable, all the other Constables are the same, approvals in rural Parish, I do not think we can supply affordable housing without going into the countryside. How do I go about doing that, if necessary?

**Group Director - Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment**

I think you are right. We will still have pressure moving forward into the next situation of the Island Plan for what I would call sort of local Parish housing as well as wider housing. I think each, especially the rural Parishes, there will certainly be a need to increase the vitality and viability to keep Parishes functioning frankly. There is a policy in the current Island Plan, which effectively says to Parishes: "You can come forward with Parish housing schemes, subject to a Parish plan." Work with the Parish. Work with the community. Sign off on the Parish plan and then it can go forward as a potential site under Policy H5 in the current Island Plan.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

That is what St. Peter did effectively, is it not?

**Group Director - Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment**

Yes. While it was a Parish plan, it was not formally signed off. When it got to the inquiry stage, the Parish plan had not formally been signed off at that point by a Parish Assembly. So there were some question marks placed around the status of the Parish plan, so to speak. It had not been formally agreed by a Parish Assembly. I live in St. Peter and I certainly appreciate there were some anti-feeling against this as well as positive feeling against it. That did not play well to the inquiry itself. The advice generally, to any Parish, is to go through a Parish plan process, to look at a variety of sites within the Parish envelope, which could meet the benefit of the Parish centre. That could lead to a rezoning within the Island Plan or it could lead to a planning application within the system. The Parish plan is the most important bits with some housing needs assessment behind it as well.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

I must declare, as a farmer the last thing I like is building on greenfield sites.

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

The other element of that is to consider whether it is first-time buyer properties you should be building or whether it should be downsizing properties for people who are under-occupying larger properties. If you look at the 2011 census, about 42 or 47 per cent of people are under-occupying the properties by 2 or more bedrooms. That is not efficient use of housing stock. That is one of the problems that needs to be tackled. Obviously, we need to consider options for helping people to downsize if they want to. That is an emotional issue. They have an attachment to their homes. Having conversations like: "Is that the right size of home for you? Can we offer you opportunities within the Parish, within your community to downsize to a more appropriate-sized home?" That is what some of the Parishes want to do to open up stock, where they have large properties which are maybe not maintained as best they could be and open them up to parishioners who want a 3-bedroom home or 4-bedroom home and offer, say, 2-bedroom opportunities for some of the older population to down-size into. It is a difficult conversation, because obviously you have to release the amount of equity which makes that worthwhile. The difference between a 2-bedroomed cottage and a 3-bedroomed home in the present day is not large and so it might not be worth people doing that. Again, we can have that conversation and think of what schemes, which comes out of policy development which is as a result of the Objective Assessment of Housing Need.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

It would be possible though, if you did a similar scheme to the first-home buyer. So somebody downsizes from a 4-bedroom house on the coast to a 2-bedroom house that was affordable. In which case, Andium get some of the equity. That would work financially. The problem is now if you buy a 2-bedroom house on the open market you are right you are not going to release a lot of capital. So you would need to have a scheme where the house that was being moved to was far more affordable than an open market house.

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

Yes, it is an option and it is a conversation to have with Andium. When we start developing policy in this area, certainly making the most efficient use of housing stock is as important as building new housing stock. It is a sort of balance between the 2 of them. Dealing with issues like vacant homes and making sure people are in the right size of homes to what they need.

**The Connétable of St. Saviour:**

It touches on what I am going to ask next. The question I had was how are you going to stimulate the field for first-time buyers. We have touched that quite exhaustingly in the beginning. I do not think you have, but I have some housing estates in my Parish. A lot of those are being sold off. I cannot understand why the States are selling off their properties when they are looking to house people. Grasett Park is one of those. I have had quite a few come through and I think to myself: this belongs to the States and they are trying to house people and yet here they are selling off. It



kind of touches what Jack was saying; it is their home and they do not want to move from it. Even if they are down to one child it has still been their home. I do not know whether we feel sorry for them, so we are letting them buy the property, but to me you are in a States place and if you need to downsize to let a family occupy the place then you have to downsize. But to sell it off seems to me to be really wrong.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

I was questioned on the floor of the Assembly by Deputy Southern about this. I said that it was a policy I wanted to review. It is a policy that has been inherited by previous governments that have made this decision. For all the reasons that you have given, I want to examine whether this is the right thing to do, because there are lots of families out there in the Island who, for their own family, are doing the right thing. They are keeping hold of an asset that is worth a lot, not just financially, but for whatever sentimental value and memories they have, but is not necessarily the best use of the properties when there are other families who are really struggling. I accept that that is quite an emotional thing to have that discussion on, but we do need to have that discussion. For the Housing Policy Development Board that will be formed later this year, that is one of the things that it is going to be looking at, because we do not want to push anyone into hardship. I certainly do not want to do that. However, we know that there are lots of people in the Island who are substantially over-occupying their homes. The reason lots of them are not moving out or downsizing is perfectly rational, because they will not be that much better off. Why would you move out if you are not that much better off? So we have to look at schemes that we can create to make it worth their while, so that they will still have an excellent quality of life, still live in a great property and be comfortable.

**The Connétable of St. Saviour:**

Are you telling us that you are not thinking of selling off the family silver?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

This will not surprise you, but I am philosophically uncomfortable with government doing that. Deputy Southern asked me about this in the States. Philosophically, I come from a similar place to him. If any property is to be sold off there has to be a very good evidence-base explaining why it should be done and I want to examine it, because it is something I have been uncomfortable with.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Going back to trying to get people to move, how can you incentivise people to move, taking into account the emotional side and long-term attachment to the properties? Are there already tools available?

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

There are a number of elements to this. We have just previously spoken about encouraging people to own their own home. The scheme that is being talked about at Grasett Park is the Andium Homebuy scheme. Andium will be selling off properties to first-time buyers who are on Gateway. Now, the Minister has expressed that he is uncomfortable with that, but it is no different really to the first-time buyer homes that are being sold at Samarès Nurseries. But I think there is a whole question the Minister wants to ask: the emphasis that is put on purchase as opposed to social rental. That is a conversation which is going on at the moment. In terms of the use of the stock, making sure there is no under-occupation, if someone is on income support and they are over-occupying their property, then their income support breaks will be cut down to the number of bedrooms they need. So there is an incentive there that they have to downsize to a more appropriate sized property. There are situations within social housing, as an impact of the rent policy. The Minister is reviewing the 90 per cent rent policy we want to tackle. It is where it is not worth somebody downsizing if they are in a 3-bedroom property, yet they are paying a much-reduced rent to the open market and they would be no better off downsizing to a 2-bed or a one-bed, because it just would not be worth their while, because they are not on income support and their rent is potentially lower in a 3-bed than in a 2-bed. That is an unfortunate impact of the policy. We do not know the extent of it and it only really relates to people who are not on income support. But it is something that needs to be tackled, because it is not an efficient use of housing stock. The other elements of course; there is the emotional angle, that people have lived in those communities. By taking those individuals out of communities, for example, they might be older households who do not have children anymore, yet they provide an influence in the community, having an older person among children. They might take care of the children. Taking people out of communities is always a very difficult argument. But they are different policies or principles there, you want to make efficient use of stock. Equally you want to create strong communities. It is a very delicate issue.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Challenging.

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

Challenging, yes.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Can I take you on to how do you intend to work in collaboration with social housing providers, such as Andium and the smaller trusts, to help them deliver more social rented homes? Do you have plans to move that on?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

We need to identify sites for them that are appropriate. Property Holdings, we are in conversation with them. Do you want to speak about that?

[12:15]

**Group Director - Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment**

As part of the whole argument about supply, as the States of Jersey owns a substantial amount of land, there is a lot of public ownership in that. I think it is right that we know we are vacating a number of sites in St. Helier, as part of our wider plans for office modernisation, for instance. Those sites invariably end up in different uses, whether that is residential use or another form of use. It is right that the first assumption is we have a property plan with an assessment of what properties are going to be coming available into the wider market. I think it is right that we look at our own assets to see if we can meet the demands that government on the other hand is being asked to meet as well. It is an equation we need to that assessment with.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Going to site selection, we see within the Parishes, what I describe as pocket developments, of 4, 6, 8 houses, which are usually squeezed into a small plot. They then get marketed on the open market for a couple of million pounds or something like that. You just feel that these sorts of sites are really ideal for either first-time buyers or sheltered housing. What is the policy? It may be a planning policy issue. Those plans do not seem to be going towards those particular needs.

**Group Director - Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment**

Again, it comes back down to the current planning policies. We have had an approach of zoning in new land, basically countryside for affordable homes. We have not effectively done any zonings within the urban area so if land is within the urban area, within the built-up area, at the moment it is subject to ... frankly anything could be built on it in terms of category B or category A housing.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Do you think that could be influenced in any way towards ...

**Group Director – Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment:**

We could, as part of the new Island Plan, look at zoning within the built-up area for affordable housing. I think invariably those sort of sites go for category B housing because the values are higher and the landowner will want to maximise the return. So, unless Government intervenes by zoning it for something else I think invariably the market dictates it goes to private housing.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

But in a way those particular pockets are the mill of the community where there is a need for first-time buyer or sheltered housing. Would you agree that the policy should be tipped in its favour?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Yes, is the short answer to that. I said, at the beginning of this hearing, my philosophical outlook is that I want a much greater focus on affordable purchase and I have been disappointed, and I have said so publicly, so I am not saying anything new here. But I have been disappointed when I have seen prime sites previously end up going to luxury apartments when there could have been a better use in supporting a greater number of people in the Island, if it were affordable. So, philosophically, that is where I come from but we are a democracy and obviously there are decisions that would have to be made by the entire Council of Ministers. But my position is we focus on that much more.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Staying with the trust: are you happy with the performance of the trusts that have been set up for a few years now?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Absolutely, yes. We have had some good meetings and been informed about the ongoing work they have got going on. I think there is some good work to be seen in Minden Place development. I walk past that every day several times, often, and Troy Court which was going to be done up in the next few years, which desperately needs to be done up. When I was a constituency representative I used to go down there frequently and I know that that is desperately needed, so I am very pleased that they are doing their part there. I do not think we get many complaints at all about how we operate with them I think we have got a good relationship.

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

Yes, and I think in terms of the trust, the objectives, certainly in housing need, will provide a figure for homes that are needed over the next 10-year period. That then starts the conversation about how do we deliver those homes. One of the issues the trusts come across and so does Andium Homes, is the cost of land, access to land, having the resources to deliver those homes. The trusts are very small they can only take on so much loan funding. So there is a real capacity issue there. There are issues around the cost of building homes. They have increased significantly because of Brexit, issues around there, the costs of materials and bringing those in; issues of bringing workers in to work on these sites. So there are real issues of resources and capacity and finance. I think that when we have the ... release the checks of setting the housing need, that we will then start to consider what are the barriers; where do we need to make changes; are there issues around planning policy that we need to consider; how do we get the trusts and Andium to build the homes we need.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Given that there has been considerable publicity with regard to the salaries paid to officers in Andium, what is your view on that?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

I am absolutely delighted that it is a matter for the Minister for Treasury and Resources as opposed to something decided by the Minister for Children and Housing. Those sorts of governance issues do not fall under what the Minister for Children and Housing does, that is the Minister for Treasury and Resources that looks at that. But I was asked this in the States and it will not surprise anybody who knows anything about my political outlook that I obviously was not particularly happy with it.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Is there any intention to change regulations for social housing in any further way than it is already?

**Group Director – Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment:**

Yes. In terms of the main change in regulation of housing coming forward is around private sector rented housing as opposed to social housing. Social housing can sign up, though, in the same scheme, effectively into the rent-safe scheme; so we have got a rent-safe scheme which is across the industry in terms of effectively housing quality. So we have had a number of social housing providers already sign up and Andium, I think, are close to signing up as well with their properties. So that gives a star rating for prospective tenants to know what they are getting into effectively. We are not so much worried about the social side of the market, I think the main regulations are aimed at the private sector rental side of the market in terms of the quality for other rentals. So that is the main change around regulation of housing quality that will be coming forward. Minimum standards will be agreed later this year and then effectively the licensing scheme for that piece of legislation will be coming in. We need to give landlords enough time to prepare so the current working date is September 2019 for full licensing to be in place for private sector rental dwellings. However, a lot of the social landlords have already signed up to a better home standard, which automatically meets a lot of the minimum standards in any case.

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

There were the social housing regulations brought forward in February this year by the previous Minister for Housing. Those proposals to introduce an independent regulator of social housing were rejected by the Assembly so that would have gone a bit beyond. But I think what Andy's saying in terms of ... because of rent safe and allowing accreditation and licensing, is around standard properties; doing additional things around rent policy, around how you help supported housing, around security tenure which is specific to social housing providers also in terms of their finance and

governance arrangements, which are not covered but which could be covered separately by social housing regulation. Obviously, those proposals were rejected and I think it is for the Minister to now consider whether he wishes to pursue further regulation of social housing.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

You mentioned 90 per cent market rent policy. Are you currently reviewing it or will you be reviewing it?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

This will be reviewed by the Housing Policy Development Board. This was something that I said throughout the election, it was a priority for me, and I think there is agreement across the board really that when this Housing Policy Development Board is put together we will absolutely look at this. The difficulty with it, and this is why it is something that cannot just be done overnight, is that in Andium Homes we have a body that is making substantial improvements to the housing stock in the Island and building new properties. All of that costs money and that money has to come from somewhere. I said at the foundation of Andium Homes that I was not comfortable with it coming from a 90 per cent market rate policy but any changes to that policy, now that it is in operation and has been for some time now, we will have to have a discussion with the Treasury about how we better finance that. What is the more appropriate model to base your rents policy on and how do we implement that in a way that does not inhibit Andium Homes' ability to continue to improve and expand its housing stock. That is why the Policy Development Board will not just be reporting back to me, or at least that is ... the thinking we are looking at at the moment is that it should also be reporting back to the Minister for Treasury and Resources as well because she will be fundamental in whatever the new policy ends up being.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

What is wrong with that policy?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

The 90 per cent policy? Philosophically, I would have said is it really social housing if you are charging 90 per cent of the market rate. Is there anywhere in the world that builds its social housing policy on 90 per cent of market rate, and what impact does that end up having on what the market rate is. I am just uncomfortable about charging a rent level when we already have private sector rents which are very, very high. To base it on that I find philosophically very difficult.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

But surely if you are subsidising rent then you would need to reduce income support because part of the income support element is to provide the affordable rent.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Yes, and I think there is a question, which is that the best use ... firstly, not everybody will get income support and, secondly, is that the best use when you have money in one pot, so the income support pot, that then goes to social housing providers. Andium returns £28 million a year to the Treasury, so that then goes back to the Treasury and then the Treasury supports the income support budget with supplementation. So money is just going round in circles that way. Is that a good way of doing things?

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Before we had this policy did we not have a problem that there were some people who could afford market rent or 90 per cent of market rent but their rents were being subsidised?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Yes. I do not think there is anything wrong with saying that people who are capable of affording rents at a certain level, that if they can be supported in the private sector then that is something ... that there is nothing wrong with that either. My focus is in social ...

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

What I was saying was that before, people who could well afford to pay 90 per cent of market rental in competitive rents but were not doing so. So you were subsidising people who did not need subsidising. Whereas with the income support system, which is means tested, anybody who needs help will get help with their rent. So everybody who needs help will get help with that 90 per cent, so I am not quite sure ... people who do not get income support do not need it.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Yes, but just because you are not on income support does not mean you are not in some sort of need. Certainly as a constituency representative in the last 4 years, I have known of people who, for whatever reason, have not ticked the right box, have not been eligible for support that they quite obviously needed. Different family circumstances are unique and they may not receive the full support because one person in their family might work but it is a zero-hours contract or this, this and that. So I do not think this is a perfect policy. I take your point that those who are more than capable of affording should not necessarily get that support but I do not think the answer is a 90 per cent market rate. Nowhere else in the world has pursued this and so I think there are better solutions. I appreciate some people will have different opinions on that.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

It is not really an opinion; I am just trying to ... I cannot see ... the logic of it seems to be that if you are on income support you will have your rent paid up to 90 per cent of the thing. If you are not on income support I do not see why you would need that subsidised rent.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

But there are some people who are on different categories of benefits, not just income support, but some will get long-term incapacity allowance or some will get ...

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Everybody who needs it will get income support or a rental element will be in income support; so, everybody who needs it.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Yes. I am aware of lots of people who do not get their full rent paid by income support and have to supplement it by their other benefits. I have helped people, when I was a constituency representative, who were supplementing it with their long-term incapacity allowance, for example. Each situation is unique and I believe some injustices arise from that.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

So the income support system is wrong, not the 90 per cent?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

We are going to have that discussion, absolutely. There are absolutely rules in the benefit system that I would like to see changed and improved. Obviously, that is a discussion I would have to have with the Minister for Social Security but I think this provides a good opportunity to have that discussion. At this point I am not dictating what the alternative will look like. I am not saying it is a simple ...

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

It would seem to me, logically it would be more simple to sort out the income support system and to take away this, which would seem to be fairly sensible. It is 90 per cent, anybody who needs it will be getting income support. If the income support system is wrong that is a different question, it is not the housing policy that is wrong.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Okay, yes.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**



I am asking you.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

We will have that discussion as part of it, yes.

[12:30]

**The Connétable of St. Saviour:**

We have already touched on it but I would like to know: there is no incentive, is there really, for anybody to downsize their property because when they go into a new property their rent is going to be a hike. It is not going to be what they have been paying because new properties ... even if they are moved and they do not want to move they have to pay the higher rent. Do you not think you could do something or could you say: "We are going to be putting you ..." I know the property may have been renovated and may be much nicer and more modern to what they are leaving but you are making them pay for that. So they might as well stay where they are and not pay the extra. Can you see the logic that there is no incentive to want to move? Can you not try and do something to encourage them to move so they can free up 3 or 4 bedrooms in a home? But if they are going to have to pay a fortune because they have got an extra slap of paint on the walls and a posh front door, it is not going to make them want to move, is it?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Absolutely, and this goes to what I said before, that a lot of those families who are in that situation are acting completely rationally. Why would you downsize if you are going to be worse off? It does not make sense. But when people are acting in their own interests there is a wider community interest and the job of the government is to take a macroeconomic view on these things. I completely agree, and that touches on what Jack said before that this is going to be part of that wider discussion on the 90 per cent rate. Is it right that people would be worse off from downsizing? Of course that cannot be right, it is a peculiarity of the system that we have entered up now, and now is the time to look at it, now that it has been in operation for years, and say: "What better options are there and how can we incentivise those people?" And, most importantly, do not make people worse off by doing the right thing. That is an absurdity that people can be worse off by doing the right thing and we have to get to grips with that.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

It boils down to the fact it has almost got to be done financially. Maybe that is where an alteration of the 90 per cent could come in.

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

I think at the moment for income support households there is an incentive to downsize because their income support rate, as I said, the housing component is capped at the bedroom need. So if you are in a 3-bedroom house and they are a couple in their 50s then the property they may need is a one-bed or a 2-bed so they have to downsize because their rent would be capped. For households who do not receive income support there might not be that incentive and that is one of the effects in the rent policy that we need to work out. There are issues around security of tenure there, they have historic leases, which are very difficult to break and quite rightly because they have been one of the benefits of social housing having that security of tenure. So if you have a legal agreement in place then it is very difficult to make people downsize. So there is an incentive for people to downsize whether that is offering a lower rate through changes to the rates policy, that says: "You will have a break" or something like that. But I think that is what will come through policy development to incentivise it where it has a perverse impact on households.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Does the department communicate with tenants on a regular basis where there is a perceived need for them to move into different accommodation?

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

That is an operational issue for Andium Homes and the trusts. They do have conversations and Andium recently moved to a fixed-term tenancy so they will allow those conversations to be had at 5, 10-year periods when properties might sell or when children move out to have a conversation about: "Is this suitable for your needs? What can we do to help you downsize?" So there is a bit more flexibility there than just having continuous rolling tenancies where you cannot really ask them to leave, just to have that fixed-term tenancy that allows conversations to begin. That is not saying people have to downsize but it is just saying that there is a bit more focus on making the best use of the housing stock.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Just a little aside on that, and our colleague Deputy Morel will ask the question in the States about this deposit arrangement, or should I say pre-payment arrangement, and I seem to recall you said you were going to look into that and I just wondered if you had had any further thoughts.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Andium Homes does not take deposits. What they can do is where a tenant who, for a particular reason, at the beginning of their tenancy moving into an Andium Homes property for the first time, is not in a position to be paying full rent, may have had a difficult life up until that point or have had difficult circumstances and are now going into Andium Homes. Andium is able to be very flexible about this and say: "There can be a longer-term view to getting you up to the point where your rent

is at the right level.” That flexibility is obviously not available automatically in the private sector. I do not know how the other social housing providers deal with that fact.

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

I think the specific issue is still with rent in advance; that needs to change. It is very common practice too, for a landlord to charge rent in advance, to take the first month’s rent up front. The income support system, as it is, is not set up to work on that basis. But I mean all it does is that the accounts would show in arrears but in actual fact income support will go in. Andium accepts that and the account then goes into credit once all the income support has gone in. It was for just changing their practice. I can certainly provide you with more information but it should not leave any tenants in a worse position, it is purely just for how they are charging rents in advance and how they operate.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Right. I am going to swing over to key worker accommodation, which you alluded to earlier. Clearly we have been told that part of the hospital development, part of that estate, is going over to key ... are there any other proposed areas where that may take place?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Good question. Do we have specific sites we are looking at for more of that?

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

I think that the Convent Court, the Limes, a couple of years ago, dealt with a very specific issue of decanting the future hospital. That is all in train. There is a wider piece of work now which is going on around key worker policy; what you define as a key worker. It might include education, you know, health workers and the types of products you can offer them whether it is ownership, whether it is rental and then on the back of that having a proper key worker policy you could start to look at sites. But I am sure there are opportunities with new sites coming forward. We have seen the Gateway figures forward; there is an opportunity, as we have said previously, to consider where there might be opportunities to increase provision for key workers. But as for specific sites, that is not really considered yet and that is a longer-term ambitious part of the policy development.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

It is a perception, maybe just my perception, that what is being proposed at the moment is accommodation to perhaps a lower standard that would suit others; is that the case?

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

Convent Court has just been refurbished. It is a very good standard. All the health workers are going into very good quality accommodation. Yes, it is certainly part of Andium's refurbished project they meet the decent homes standards so there is no difference in quality.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

What sort of terms would you expect key workers to be on, do you know, is it short-term or is it dependent on their employment?

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

This is one of the problems because there is a whole different range of contract arrangements. Some will be short-term provisions some will be longer-term provision, it is about having the right products available for them in terms of what they are doing. You know, junior doctors come in for whatever period of time, a short period of time. There might then be people who come here and settle as families and you might want to open up ownership products for them to encourage them to settle and have a more long-term view. But I think that is all policy under development at the moment.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

That policy would be developed by the Housing Department, would it?

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

Yes.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

We have a homeless problem here. What can be done to help that?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

I will be completely open about this. This homelessness and my encountering of people who have either been homeless or have been facing homelessness has been the most upsetting part of becoming the Minister for Children and Housing. I have had people speak to me who have been incredibly worried because they can see homelessness is on the horizon for them, for whatever reason, if it is financial troubles, but they know they are getting to that point. We have encountered some instances where homelessness has been imminent for people in our community and that has been very upsetting. In those circumstances we do what we can to engage with all of the different agencies that are able to provide support, so whether that is the homelessness charities, whether it is Andium Homes, whether it is parts of the Housing Department, for example, to do what we can to get people into stable accommodation as soon as possible when they are facing those difficult situations. There have been some instances where there have been particularly difficult cases but

because we have been on top of it we have been able to find them solutions. I know Andium were particularly helpful recently. But what I have found difficult has been when people's housing needs are going to change, for whatever reason coming up, and the sign that a place is waiting for them just is not there; they get within those days of their tenancy ending and are incredibly worried that they are going to be made homeless and do not know what to do. That is something I have found very difficult. So what I have decided is that I want to put together a homelessness strategy. I want that to be a priority moving forward because I think, as a community in an affluent Island, it is not right that people should become homeless without adequate support. You know, as a community we are capable of providing that so I would like to bring all of those stakeholders around a table. We have begun doing that with the Minister for Health and Social Services and the Minister for Social Security and with the homelessness charities as well to say, right, where are the gaps in service provision; where are departments not necessarily communicating among each other as well as they could be. Sometimes that means involving the Health Department because some people end up in those situations because of health difficulties and what can we do to address that. We have also decided that we will not just be looking at those who are at risk of sleeping on the street but also those who have accommodation that is so insecure that they do fulfil a definition of homelessness as well; if people are sofa surfing, for example, and do not have secure accommodation. So, I make that one of my top missions. I want the States of Jersey to have a decent homelessness strategy and we are in the early stages of getting stakeholders around a table to work out what exactly we have got to do to fulfil that.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Have you got an idea of scale of this; how many people are you talking about that are worried about where they are going to be sleeping in a week's time?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

It is difficult to answer that because where exactly is that line between having what is stable accommodation or what is just a casual arrangement that you are happy with? You know, there are people that are quite happy living with friends temporarily for a bit; know that they are safe, know that that is okay and will be on their feet soon enough. There are also those that are put in that situation completely against their will and despair because of it. So, in terms of the scale I do not think we really know.

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

That is one of the issues in terms of data. I mean homelessness is complex because homelessness is just not rooflessness, you know, it is not just people on the streets. Arguably there are people in the Gateway round one at the moment. Two hundred and thirty-two people could be classed as homeless because they have got insecure conditions; their lease is coming to an end so they are

going to have to leave that property; they could be living with families and friends. So although they have got a roof over their heads, they have not got secure accommodation. I think it comes down to what your definition of secure accommodation is. So within that there would be a wide variety of housing needs of people who just need to access a home through the Gateway. They have got no needs it is just that they need to find a suitable home. Families with children is one of the ones that comes across who just need to get a 3-bedroom home. They are on the waiting list with no other issues. You then come down to people who have very complex needs. Not having a roof over your head is just a symptom of a wider problem; there could be medical needs, they could be ex-offenders, there could be various drug and alcohol problems that come with that. It is about having the right sort of package around that person. Sometimes it is not just having the accommodation it is about having the right supports and services, making sure that person can sustain a tenancy rather than just being put in a property to fail and have rent arrears, cause anti-social problems. It has got to be all services coming together to support that person otherwise they are just going to be homeless again. So that is kind of where we are coming from, working with shelters, having a whole sort of strategic approach to homelessness and then making sure the right people are around the table working together.

**The Connétable of St. Saviour:**

Jack, you mentioned families and children. Have you ever had to separate children from parents because they were homeless temporarily?

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

I expect there are occasions in the Gateway where that has happened. The Gateway will work with housing providers if there is a really urgent case where those sorts of situations arise, and there are various certain situations that arise. You know, there could be people sleeping in cars, that type of thing, and services will be involved safeguarding, et cetera, to support those individuals but we work very closely with Andium to make sure that those situations are minimised and those people can find accommodation as soon as possible. With the limited stock available that does cause challenges. But we do know the urgent cases and those are identified and we work with the likes of Andium Trust to house them as soon as possible.

[12:45]

**The Connétable of St. Saviour:**

Thank you.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Well, that probably takes us into vacant homes to clear, to what can be done about returning vacant homes to an active housing market.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Again, this is something that we will look at with the Housing Policy Development Board. There has been talk previously about giving Parishes flexibility over rates on properties which are unoccupied for no good reason. But that can probably be quite difficult to define; what is no good reason. If your property is in between tenants because it is being renovated well, you know, that is a good thing. But then if that renovation is going on for a very, very long time and not properly being dealt with then perhaps some sort of incentive to speed things up. If people are deliberately not putting properties on the market because they are waiting for conditions in the market to change so that they get a better return, that is, again, perfectly rational for them to do that but not in the wider interests of the community. So, that is one option that is financial but again this is something that the policy development board will look at over the next year.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

So you do not really know of any particular levers, you have not identified any particular levers, how you might ...

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

There are none that we are actively pursuing at this moment because we want the wider discussion and mostly because we want to make sure that we are effective at this, because it is not completely clear exactly what the situation with vacant properties in the Island is. The most up-to-date statistics we have are from 2011; that is the last census. But then they said there were 3,000 residential properties that were vacant, which is a large amount; that is a 70 per cent vacancy rate. The previous iteration of this Scrutiny Panel did a report on that which identified that if that were reduced by 2 per cent that would be 2 years of housing supply that would be back on the market. I anticipate that this is not going to be a panacea for our housing problems and that if we can do some work to get a proportion of these properties back on the market, that has got to be a good thing, that has got to be helpful. But there are probably going to be a reasonable amount of properties that are empty for perfectly good reasons and it would not be right for us to intervene and punish people for keeping those vacant when they might be vacant for decent reasons. But we do need to investigate it because I do think people will find that 3,000 figure quite shocking in a small Island like Jersey. It is just difficult when the statistics are not as up to date as we might like them to be at this stage of trying to do something, and that is why, at this point, we are not committing exactly to what those measures will be. We will want to engage with the community and advisers to work out what is practically the best way of dealing with this without unfairly treating people who are not doing anything wrong.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Given that there are some people who are asset rich but cash poor, do you think there is mileage in exploring that area and perhaps contributing in terms of finance to developing properties that would receive far more units of accommodation than they already have?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Yes. That is something that we do intend to have. That is in our notes.

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

I think in looking at policy options it is a carrot and stick approach. You have these grants or loan funding to property owners to help them bring the property up to the decent standards for people to live in or for them to sell onwards. There are options where a social housing provider will take over a vacant property, put it into a good condition and let it out to a social housing tenant for a period of time and the owner will then get a return on that, so that is sort of the incentives. There is also your stick approach which is where you can levy additional taxation after, say, if a property has been sitting vacant for 6 months or more where there is no genuine reason for it to be sitting vacant and charged additional tax, because if it can sit vacant then obviously there is no financial incentive for the owner to bring it back into occupation. But there are a variety of reasons and we are not entirely sure on the numbers. So, as the Minister has said, it is probably not going to be the solution to all the problems but as a principle, if you have got vacant homes and you are going to be building new homes, you have got to make the best use of the stock you have got already.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Perhaps another question for the 2021 census.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Can I ask you a question about the development board? When is that likely to be set up?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

So, we have had discussions on what we want it to look like because I think when it was spoken of during the election campaign, I think there were different visions of what this body would look like, who would serve on it, and those decisions have been made on that.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

When you say "we" who is we?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**



I have spoken to officers in social policy on this, I have spoken to Jack about it. I have not yet had a direct conversation with the Chief Minister on it but I know that it is on his to do list as well and I want to have that discussion with him soon. I think December is when we were looking at ...

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

The draft terms of reference for the board will be going to the Council of Ministers on 12th December and that is alongside the objectives as in the report as well.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Who will sit on this board?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

That has not been decided yet.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Who will decide who sits on the board?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Well, ultimately, the Council of Ministers if we decide to agree on the terms of reference as they are presented to us.

**The Connétable of St. Saviour:**

What kind of calibre of people are you looking for?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

The best hopefully. I do not really know how to answer that. It may be that we decide, in the first X number of months, that we are going to look at this topic and therefore we will want to engage advisers who have got expertise in that area, and then in a few months' time we might move on to the next topic and advisers may be different at that point.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

A number of the questions you have answered: "The development board will be looking at this." What is the timescale of all these things? I mean when will they be reporting back on the 90 per cent rental, for example?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

It obviously depends on what the Council of Ministers decides on this. We still have to have that discussion. I appreciate it is not a great answer.

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

There are draft terms of reference being prepared at the moment, which is why the Minister agreed that these issues need to be considered. There is a lot to do with that. We are considering the membership, we have the areas we want to consider; at the moment it is looking at sort of a whole system view of housing and making sure that we have got X number of homes to deliver over the next 10-year period. What are the policy mechanisms, looking at owner occupation, looking at social rents, private rents, looking at the main actors; it all coming together to have sort of a whole system review of how the housing market and how do you create a sustainable and affordable housing system in Jersey. There are some huge issues there and I think that is what we are trying to cover at the moment. So it is probably maybe a larger policy board than might have been envisaged but those are the discussions that we need to have with the Council.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Will you be chairing the board?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

That has not been decided yet. If the Council of Ministers wanted me to chair it then obviously I would. I think that is what I envisaged doing early on.

**Director General, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

As you know, Scrutiny have asked questions about the board and how it will work so we are quite keen to get the governance right. Of course the Policy Development Board will be providing advice to the Minister. So while you might think initially that it might be the best solution for the Minister to chair it, we are just ...

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

I am not thinking anything ...

**Director General, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

No, but there is an assumption that perhaps Ministers might chair policy development boards. Of course, there is an equal argument that says that the Ministers should participate but there might need to be a separate chair because the Minister will be receiving the advice from the board. Because ultimately, the Minister has to be responsible for policy, they cannot outsource that to a policy development board and the board is there to generate policy, thought, options and expertise for the Minister then to consider and decide upon. But, as Jack said and the Minister is intimating, this is probably one of the more significant pieces of work that a policy development board will have to do and it is an area where we have to get the right expertise at the right time into the board, and

the board will need to phase its work because there are a lot of big issues here as we have explored today. So it is an area where I think we would like to get it right; to get the right set-up for the board, to get the right expertise and to get the right support to make sure that it delivers what the Minister needs it to deliver in this area over the next year or so.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Membership of the board will be by invitation?

**Director General, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

The general approach to policy development boards is, as the Minister has intimated, a discussion with the Council of Ministers and ultimately a decision made effectively jointly by the Minister for Children and Housing and the Chief Minister as to the composition of the Policy Development Board.

**The Connétable of St. Saviour:**

Could I just ask the Minister, do you not think that if we had an immigration strategy it would help enormously? Do you not feel sometimes that you are at the start of a dark tunnel and there is no light at the end? Because this is a never ending ... how long is a piece of string. You know, people keep coming and everybody wants accommodation and, at the end of the day, we do not know how many people are coming until they come on the list and they need accommodation and then we do not have it.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

There is always light at the end of the tunnel. I am an optimist I believe things get better. The short answer to that is yes, I have found it very frustrating, including in the previous term not having a proper population policy in place. It is the most difficult issue facing the Island, it affects literally everything the government does, not just housing but it affects education, it affects ...

**The Connétable of St. Saviour:**

Yes, everything.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

... public services, everything. What I do support is the new Chief Minister's position to re-examine this area rather than simply going with what the previous Council of Ministers had suggested but had not got round, in the last term, to getting the States decision on. I do think it is right that the new elected Assembly takes a look at it rather than inheriting something from the previous one that I said very loudly at the time I did not think did a great job on it. So, yes, it is a source of intense frustration that we do not have a population policy in place and it does make these things very difficult. The objective assessment of housing needs report has had to model different scenarios as opposed to

knowing with certainty this is the population policy we are going to have for the next 10 years or whatever. So, the short answer to that is absolutely yes, it is a great frustration.

**The Connétable of St. Saviour:**

Because education, schooling, everything depends on population, does it not?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Absolutely and this is about what sort of Island we are. We want to be an Island where everybody who lives here is adequately housed and can live happy and decent lives. That is a very difficult science to get right and make sure all of the ends meet up properly.

**The Connétable of St. Saviour:**

And yet, they keep coming knowing what we have got.

**Director General, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

You might recall that the other area that the Chief Minister committed to establishing a policy development board in is around migration policy. So that was part of his election pledge to the Assembly when the Assembly elected him as Chief Minister. So, there will also be a policy development board for migration and one of the things that we need to get right are the linkages between a migration policy development board, looking at the work that it is looking at, and a housing policy development board so that Constable Taylor, with his hat on as chair of the Housing and Work Advisory Group, is getting joined up advice on migration alongside the Minister for Children and Housing on housing.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Back to the old committee days really, is it not?

**The Connétable of St. Saviour:**

Almost.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

It is "One Government", that is what it is.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Indeed.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

So it is talking to each other much better than we have previously, which is something we need.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Can I just go back to numbers again? Sheltered housing which is defined as all sorts of things whether it is over 55, I think it should be more towards over-70s, to be honest. How do those numbers or demand numbers compare with first time buyer numbers?

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

I do not have anything on that with me.

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

My understanding of sheltered housing is it is managed through Parishes more, so in terms of waiting. We do have the lists in terms of people over age 55 who require accommodation so we would imagine them going into certain Andium developments for over-55s. As for specific shelter developments we are not aware of the figures there.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Have you considered another bracket? Fifty-five covers a significant number of people but narrowing it down to, shall we say, 70-plus, I mean in our Parish we have an old residential home where people will go probably after 80. But there is that band between, shall we say, 70 and 80 plus, it could be even older these days, who are almost unprovided for and their needs are much less than perhaps 55 to 70.

[13:00]

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:**

Yes. It is an interesting area because the ageing population is obviously a big issue and we will see that feeding through in the housing figures. What you are seeing in the U.K. at the moment is a move towards extra care. Extra care housing is why there is an element, however small, there is a small element of need and support for assistance, whether it just be putting on your socks in the morning through to full-on care environments and having independent living for people to the extent that they require. That is an interesting sort of policy area we could deliver over here. Really, it needs to be thought of, in the whole, as part of an ageing society policy, et cetera. So, there are various not just your typical sheltered housing because that is, I think, in terms of just having a warden on site, that is one element of but people might need more intensive care. So it is an interesting area. I cannot say we have considered it in much detail because there are so many specific needs at the moment given medical compensations, disabilities, ex-offenders, homeless people. So, the elderly patient population is just another ...

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

I suppose the reason for my question is that I see it as a method to release housing to other sectors, perhaps younger groups of people. Anything else?

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

No.

**The Connétable of St. Saviour:**

I do not have anything on housing but I would like to ask you about environment.

**Group Director – Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment:**

Yes.

**The Connétable of St. Saviour:**

Could you be so kind as to look into what is happening above Grands Vaux Reservoir, please?

**Group Director – Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment:**

Okay.

**The Connétable of St. Saviour:**

Because that was agricultural ground and it has been absolutely raped and murdered. So if you could have a look because it is also in a water catchment area, and as it is in my Parish I would be very grateful.

**Group Director – Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment:**

I can take that forward.

**The Connétable of St. Saviour:**

Thank you very much.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Well, Minister and officers, thank you very much for your attendance this morning and we look forward to seeing you again perhaps in 3 months' time.

**The Minister for Children and Housing:**

Thank you very much.

[13:02]

