



Environment, Housing and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel

Quarterly Hearing

Witness: The Minister for Children and Housing

Tuesday, 5th February 2019

Panel:

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

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

Deputy K.F. Morel of St. Lawrence

Witnesses:

The Minister for Children and Housing

Assistant Director, Social Policy - Strategic Policy, Performance and Population

Group Director, Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment

Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population

[11:27]

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

Right. Good morning everyone and welcome to the Environment, Housing and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel, to the quarterly hearing for the Minister for Children and Housing. Can I start off by introducing ourselves, for the record? Namely:

Deputy K.F. Morel of St. Lawrence:

Deputy Kirsten Morel, member of the panel.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Mike Jackson, chairman of the panel.

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

Sadie Le Sueur-Rennard on the panel.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Sam Mézec, Minister for Housing.

Assistant Director, Social Policy - Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

Richard Jouault, Assistant Director, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population.

Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

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

Group Director, Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment:

Andrew Scate, Group Director for Regulation and Growth, Housing and Environment.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Thank you very much and welcome also to the members of the public and the media who are here this morning. So I am going to start off by asking the Minister what growth bids do you anticipate making for the new Medium Term Financial Plan?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

We have a meeting, I think it is on Thursday, for the Government Plan and that has only relatively recently been organised so I do not quite know at this point what the context of that meeting is going to be. At this point I cannot say exactly what growth bids, if any, from the Housing side we will be making because the way that we operate, or certainly I operate as a Minister, I do not particularly have that much resource at my disposal. It is more a case of when we are spending money it will be to do with a report or a review or something that is coming out. A lot of the work that we will be doing over the next year will be going through the Housing Policy Development Board, which will be both myself and the Chief Minister taking the political lead on that. I am meeting the Chief Minister first thing tomorrow morning, 9.00 a.m., to discuss that Housing Policy Development Board to hopefully get the terms of reference finally officially signed off on. The most substantial pieces of work that we do I anticipate will be work that goes through that Housing Policy Development Board.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Can I ask if you are satisfied with that?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

In what sense?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Clearly there always has to be growth otherwise things stand still. Do you feel that procedure is sufficient to give you the growth of the department?

[11:30]

The Minister for Children and Housing:

It is a strange ministry, the Housing ministry, in that as opposed to what the situation was a few years ago, the Housing Department does not really exist in that format anymore and it does not own a lot, it has all been transferred to Andium Homes. So when it comes to the important things like investing in our housing stock, like getting ready to build more homes, that goes through Andium and the Treasury. I am not the landlord as previous Ministers for Housing may have been so in terms of what big spends we will be undertaking it is not quite like the Health Department, for example, which has hundreds of millions that it has got to deal with. It is a strange ministry and some have said that it is a sort of skeleton ministry compared to what it used to be but I am not dissatisfied with that. I think there is probably work that could be done to revise some of the changes that were made over the last few years in terms of separating the Minister for Housing from some of the in-depth goings on for housing matters in the Island but I am not dissatisfied with that situation at the moment.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Are you satisfied, from a policy perspective, that if you think more homes need to be built that you are able to direct Andium in the way that you want them to do that? Obviously if they are operating as an arm's length organisation and you are operating as someone trying to create policy and ensure that we have enough homes for Islanders; are you satisfied with that linkage between your wishes and desires for more homes and their ability to deliver?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

That is a good question and I have found since I have become the Minister for Housing that my relationship with Andium I have been very satisfied with. I think that we have got a very good relationship

and when there have been issues which have been, let us say, politically contentious I have been able to stand up for my Housing mandate without having my hands tied behind my back politically because of other Ministers' ambitions. I have been able to work with Andium on that to get the information we need to put out there for States Members and to make my views known and clear what I wish to happen. When there have been things that have frustrated me it has not come from my relationship with Andium. That being said, I do not think it would be right to say we formed Andium 4 or 5 years ago therefore we never need to consider what the relationship between Andium and the States is. I do think it is something that, over the next couple of years, we can take a look at and say: "Right, does any of this need some tweaking? Are there certain things that the Minister for Housing could or should have more of a say in, to do with some practical things that they deliver, even though they are arm's length?" So I think that discussion will happen. As at this point, I have been very happy with that relationship and have not felt that any of my ambitions have been stifled because of that.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Clearly there are resource challenges in governments generally. What is your perception of resource challenges at the moment with regard to housing?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

With regard to housing, I have no particular concerns because of the reasons that I have said, that delivery of most of our housing ambitions is dealt with through the arm's length bodies who have their own financial arrangements with the States. From a housing perspective, I do not particularly have concerns about that. My concerns are very much on the children's side for resourcing where there are some problems. When it comes to my concerns, and I do have concerns about budgets, it is more on that side than the housing side.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

You would say with the One Government project and the merging of departments, if you like, the resource implication on housing, as it was, has really disappeared.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

It has not been a big issue. I think what requires more thinking is how Housing sits in that framework because it is strange how it has developed since the previous Housing Department existed where the Strategic Housing Unit exists in the Chief Minister's Department. Now we are moving to the Growth, Housing and Environment; so how that will sit will require some thinking and perhaps, a couple of years into it, some re-evaluation of whether it has worked as well as it could do.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Have you any particular thoughts on that?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I am satisfied right now. It is just a case of this is new territory for Jersey as a whole and so we hope it succeeds and wish it to succeed but it will not succeed unless people are asking the tough questions and doing the right thing when difficulties emerge. We are still relatively towards the start of that journey and I have found, as Minister for Housing, I have been able to do the things that I have needed to do. I have not had any problems, I think, with communication with different departments. I have a weekly meeting with all of my Housing people, so Andy, Jack and Richard come to that and others pop in when they are needed for agenda items. I have never struggled to have access to the people I have needed to when an issue has come up, even if it is something that may have more to do with another department. The obvious example there is Environmental Health, which does the enforcement work on minimum housing standards; that is obviously something that I am very passionate about and is certainly a policy issue that the Minister for Housing is interested in and wants to see succeed and develop. When issues have arisen to do with that I have had access to everyone I have needed to easily and there have never been any difficulties with that.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

We will see. Anyway, the Affordable Housing Gateway is obviously an important instrument for Islanders to be able to gain access to housing. We believe a report was meant to have been published on the Affordable Housing Gateway and we are wondering when it is going to be published.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Yes, good question. Where are we with that?

Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

It will be published by March. We are going through the final findings and recommendations at the moment. There is nothing, I do not think, contentious in there, it purely is just the administration making sure that everything is factually correct in signing that off with the stakeholders involved. The panel can have a copy of that as soon as possible.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

We understood that was meant to be published last July. Why the delay?

Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

I am not sure.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

If there is nothing in there which is of any controversy or anything.

Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

I think that the work has just taken ... the stakeholder involvement; there were a lot of stakeholders involved who had opinions. The gentlemen who was of course working on it, Dr. Tim Brown, has taken time to meet the stakeholders, do additional work, carry out additional meetings. So it has taken some time to get sign-off and within a departmental resource unfortunately it just takes time to do that. The Minister has seen a copy and I am confident that he will have the final copy within the next week or so to make public.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Can I just add to that? We had a similar issue with the Objective Assessment of Housing Needs report where that was meant to have come out significantly earlier ...

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Yes, this is a theme.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Indeed, you are right, it is a theme. These reports are legacy issues for me having been initiated by the previous Minister for Housing, and as a new Minister I am asking that question as well of myself, you know: can we do things to speed this process up? Or, if the problem is not that they are not being done quick enough then maybe we were too optimistic with our deadlines. We have to be a bit more realistic about that in future so people are not at the edge of their seats waiting for something, as was the case with the Objective Assessment of Housing Needs report where people who were in the business of providing homes were quite keen to have that and that delay was very frustrating for them. That is something we need to improve so people's expectations are set where they need to be.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Given the delay in the Affordable Housing Gateway coming through, do you think the figures will be accurate?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I have no reason to doubt that they will be.

Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

There will not be any figures, as such, in the Gateway Review. The Gateway Review is purely about policies and procedures and how the Gateway operates. For instance, granting criteria around issues such as opening up the waiting list to single persons and couples under the age of 50 and how we would support vulnerable households to access social housing. Those sorts of policy issues where we thought it was time to review in light of the relationship with Andium and the Housing Trusts, and the Housing Gateway sitting in customer local services and just making sure that process works effectively in the interests of clients.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Do you think the eligibility criteria will end up masking the demand for social rented homes in any way? It can cover these things up.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

The simple answer to that is yes, it does do that. I will be 100 per cent honest and say since becoming the Minister for Housing it is dealing with people who are clearly in housing need and to require support to be adequately housed that I found to be the most frustrating, and sometimes upsetting, part of the job because there are lots of people who are inadequately housed, who ought to be adequately housed in a caring and wealthy society like Jersey, but who are not. It is one of the 2 problems we face there. Firstly, it is that we do not have the supply to help make these people's lives easier by dealing with their situations quicker and you cannot magic properties out of thin air to help people like that. The second is that our criteria are narrow enough that there are people I am encountering who common sense dictates that this is somebody who could do with help but they do not tick this box or that box, and how can we justify widening the criteria when there are already so many people on the list. I made no bones about this, this is a far from ideal situation that we are in and it is one that will require, not just the Minister for Housing but the whole Government and the whole States Assembly to ask some tough questions about where we go with this. The report on the Housing Gateway will, I hope, shine some light on some of those issues to enable us to make the right decisions there.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Would you like to retain, shall we say, the discretion for the Minister for Housing to be able to use his judgment in a dire case, shall we say, and there is a process?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Yes, absolutely. I have done that a small number of times since being Minister when people have come forward who have been in a type of situation where it is clear that their circumstances are so unique and particular that whatever set of criteria you could come up with simply would not be able to accommodate them; and we have been able to help them out there. Sometimes that has been a case of not necessarily putting them on the Housing Gateway but bumping them up a band because their need is more desperate than things would seem. I think that is right, that can be a difficult power to have because, firstly, you do not want to set precedents that are not going to be helpful in future. You want to make sure that there is an evidence base for you making a particular decision regarding moving somebody around on the Housing Gateway. Every time I do it, it highlights to me the wider problems there are with everybody on the Housing Gateway. Lots of people are in need and we are not able to deal with those situations as quickly as we ought to.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

Do you think it would help if we had an immigration policy?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

It would. Firstly, that would help with pretty much everything that the Island is trying to do, whether that is building a new hospital or whatever, so I completely agree with that. In the context of the Objective Assessment of Housing Needs report, that is going to have to be considered alongside a population policy because that helps us work out what types of properties we would need based on the demographics as they are; so whether that is 3 beds, 2 beds, whether it is registered accommodation, whether it is first-time buyers, et cetera. The one thing that the Objective Assessment of Housing Needs report showed was that, irrespective of what population policy we have, the future need for social housing is broadly the same. It fluctuates from, I think, 890 to 920 in that 10-year period because to get into social housing you have to have housing qualifications. So when you have got here you have to do your 10 years anyway. In terms of how we deal with that, it is less important. But it is important, in terms of people's ability in the rest of the housing market, to be in the right types of homes; so they move out of the wrong types of homes and somebody else can then move into it. It is important but that has highlighted to me the importance of getting our social housing supply right irrespective of what the immigration policy ends up being.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

What kind of role do you see for the Government deciding what is a right type of home and a wrong type of home for an individual or their family?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

That is a philosophical question to some degree. I am not somebody who believes that people should be turfed out of their homes because they are over-occupying or ... sorry, under-occupying or whatever, it is just not what I believe is the right thing to do. I think people should have freedom to build a life for themselves to the most degree possible. But I think it is right that where there are situations where people could be persuaded to have a different type of home arrangement but are not able to, because of the situation they find themselves in, then I think the Government could and should play a role in incentivising particular things.

[11:45]

I will give one example of somebody who I know very well, who happens to be my mother, who is desperate to downsize. She lives in a home with 2 bedrooms that do not get used; would like to downsize and every time she looks into doing it she does the maths and realises that it is just not worth it because of the equity in the property. That is a piece of work that the Housing Policy Development Board will do to look at what sorts of incentives we can have there. The other one that is perhaps a bit more controversial, and some people have a different philosophical view to me on this, is that - and I said this in my manifesto - I do think it is right that where people have properties that are empty for a substantial period of time, without good personal reason, then I do think it is right that there should be a tax or something of that nature on it to disincentivise people from hoarding properties that could be best used with other opportunities; because I do not think that affects people's home lives because we are talking about their investments not the home they live in. Some people take a different view. Some people say: "Well, if I own 50 properties I should be allowed to keep them all empty if I want to." I take a different view on that.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Do you think there are many of those?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Probably not a huge amount and probably not an amount to make all of our problems go away. The latest statistics we have on that are too old, so they are from 2011 when the last census was, and that said there were 3,000 empty properties. Many of them would have been empty for perfectly good reasons, so in between tenants or in the process of being renovated or whatever and there is no sense in penalising people doing that. In my discussions with the Chief Minister, we have said that we want to do a bit of work to establish, to a greater degree of certainty, what proportion of those properties cannot really be justified to be empty and what we can do to at least do something. We can do nothing and not help the problem at all or at least try and do something.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Do you think it would be realistically policeable?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Yes, I think so. I think, if you came up with the right criteria. One suggestion that has been made - and I am not saying this is a done deal or anything - has been to do it through a Parish rates system. That is one way of looking at it. Maybe we look at another way instead. But I do not see why not, as long as we get our criteria right on it. For example, there would have to be a time limit, you know, if a property is empty for a month it is probably not that reasonable to stick a tax on it. At that point we would have to decide what the banding would be and how to do that.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Going back to the idea of deciding what is an appropriate or inappropriate home for people to occupy. Do you think, in Jersey, take perhaps a retired couple who are in a 4 or 5-bedroom home. While a flat, in theory, an apartment would suit their accommodation needs, the lack of a garden or something like this might not suit their lifestyle needs. At the moment I think we pretty much leave it to the market to decide what is available. Do you think the market is working in that way effectively in Jersey to ensure that people are getting the types of homes they want, particularly when we are asking them to change from where they are to where, from a matter of policy, we want them to move?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

No, is the short answer to that. There has to be a balance. If people want to have a spare bedroom, for, you know, they might have kids who live in Australia who want to come over for Christmas and need somewhere to stay, that sort of thing. I do not think it is right to penalise people in that situation. I think it is fair to say, at least from anecdotal evidence, that there are people who do want to downsize and do not mind losing the garden as long as they have got maybe a balcony or something like that, and parking, who would like to but do not because the market conditions are not right for them to do that, to get a decent benefit from doing that. Purely anecdotally, from interacting with people in that situation, it is clearly not working for them when they would like to do something that, in the grand scheme of things, would be helpful. So there is a balance to be struck. I have said I do not believe in turfing people out of their homes, I do not believe in penalising people for simply making a choice that may be right for them but it is about making things easier. To connect that with one issue in social housing, there are people who are in accommodation where they have a spare bedroom, for example, that they probably do not need but who do not want to downsize because their contract for the place they are living in at the moment is older than the 90 per cent market rate rule which means they are paying less for it than

they would if they then downsized; so if they went from a 3 bedroom to a 2 bedroom they could end up paying more. In terms of enabling people to have the best chance of being in the right properties for them that is really unhelpful.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

Yes.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Talking about the 90 per cent market rate; when looking at Andium Homes, are you able to tell us what percentage of rentals are below 90 per cent market rate at the moment?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Yes, I have got it in front of me. I can give you some statistics if that would be helpful.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Yes, go for it.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

So the average rents charged across all of their properties is 79 per cent of market rate; 40 per cent of their current tenancies are charged at 90 per cent of market rate with the rest charged at different rates.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Cool. Do you know what additional income Andium would get if all of them were at 90 per cent?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I am sure that could be worked out. It is £6.8 million, okay.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Is that on top of where they are?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Where is that? Here we are, okay. If all alternatives were charged at 90 per cent Andium Homes would see an additional £6.8 million per year.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I am really interested though, how do they decide the market rate; where do they pull their market rate from? So the 100 per cent number, so to speak, how do they assess that?

Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

So that is worked out on poorer properties with estate agents, and it is various size, et cetera, you know. The values of properties, that is worked on poorer properties and then that would be reflected in the rents so going up ...

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Do you have a written methodology that we could read where you could see their holdings?

Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

I could certainly ask Andium Homes if they can provide that information.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Yes, if they could that would be useful to know what the pool is; how many are involved; where they come from, all these sorts of things. Really important. The reason I ask is because immediately before you walked in here I was just double-checking Andium Homes' website, and one-bedroom flats were well in excess of £900 in the centre of town. Two-bedroom flats were well over £1,100. These are not social housing figures, if you ask me, and I just wondered if you might like to comment on what you think about the rent levels that Andium charge even though they are 90 per cent below market rent.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

One of the difficulties that we have making the comparison is that the quality of Andium properties is really good and the quality of a lot of private sector properties is really bad. So you may have equivalent properties in terms of numbers of bedrooms or square footage but the benefits of being in an Andium property are not just reflected in the property itself. There is the service you get when you have got problems or difficulties, or if something breaks, you need an emergency plumber out or something like that. The extra service you get from Andium can be substantially better than what you might get in the private sector where you might have a landlord who does not live in the Island who, you know, you have got an emergency but it will take a while to get through to them and that sort of thing.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

But do you not think that is part of the point of having Andium Homes or social housing in general, is that it is not meant to necessarily be about rating the value on quality because they are meant to be

delivering a certain level of quality full stop? It is about providing financially available housing to Islanders.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

That is right and that is why I think it is weird to compare social housing with the private sector for a rental calculation. I think it is impractical as well because is it not the point of social housing to be affordable?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

So why are you answering to me about quality? That is what I do not understand. Why are you giving me an answer about quality when we should be talking about price full stop? The price is what matters the quality is secondary.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I think you might have misunderstood the point I was making. I am agreeing with what I think is underpinning your question. I am an opponent of the 90 per cent market rate policy. I have been from the very start; I voted against it, it was in my manifesto to move to get rid of it or to move to something that is more sensible. That, for me, comes from 2 places: one of it is the issue to do with quality because I do not think you can compare the 2 and that is right that you do not compare the 2. Secondly, I do not think it is a sensible calculation policy to base what is a Government subsidised service by what is happening in the private sector when we have little control of what the private sector sets. So, if the market rate of a private sector property, for whatever reason, shoots up next year, what if we do not have the budget to afford it? It is not a sensible way of doing it. So I would like eventually to move to a system that is not based on that because I do not think it is the right system. I understand why it was introduced because social housing had been neglected for a long time in the Island; the quality of the properties did need to be improved and supply needs to be improved and a lot of good work has been done in the meantime to do that. But I think we need to have a discussion about moving away from that, to have a different model. But that model, I think it should still be one that enables them to continue to invest in their properties, to continue to build more. So to come up with a viable funding mechanism will not happen overnight. That will need an in-depth discussion, not just with the providers but with the Minister for Treasury and Resources, with the Minister for Social Security and getting people around the table to deliver that.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

How far down the road of a review of this 90 per cent policy are you?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Not very because that is stated to be a piece of work that will be done by the Housing Policy Development Board. As I said earlier, I am meeting the Chief Minister tomorrow morning to sign off the terms of reference on that and then when that goes ahead, I am saying that I want that to be one of the top pieces of work that it does in its early days. So, I cannot be more helpful and offer you a timeline for that because I do not know what it will be at this point.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

According to others it will be earlier than you will deliver it.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Indeed, and so I hope that I can endeavour to not do that this time around. I am just being more realistic about it, partly because there are a lot of people living in social housing. Not all of them, but some of them, are quite vulnerable in their situations and I do not want false hopes in people's minds. I want to be realistic and I want them to know that we are genuinely trying to make their lives easier and do the right thing. So, I, 100 per cent, take on board the comments you made earlier and I will endeavour to be as realistic about this as possible.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

We were talking earlier about the situation that many pensioners find themselves in whereby they will be paying a rent, which will go up by a certain amount and their pension will go up by a certain amount; perhaps there is an imbalance and that cannot be a sensible process really. Have you any thoughts about how pensioners, in the sort of states whereby they may not have savings, would be treated?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

The basic principle is that people's lives should be getting better not worse, year in, year out. I think that is the basic promise that a government should make to its people, that it tries to make their lives better not worse. The Strategic Plan had, as one of our priorities, improving the standard of living and reducing income inequality. That discussion specifically about how pensioners feature into this will need to be thought of with the Minister for Social Security to make sure the numbers do add up at the end of it. But you will struggle to find anyone who thinks pensioners should be worse off because of their rental situation.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

But they are.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Indeed, yes.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

They really need a fair deal.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Yes, and not just them, other groups as well.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

I know but the pensioners have taken a hard knock because these are people who have worked all their lives, and because they have a property they are being penalised for it. They would be better off having nothing in the first place then they would be taken care of. But if they have a pension that goes up and they are living in a Gateway or an Andium home, that would be taken off them because it goes into their rent. So theoretically they are still where they were maybe the year before that and the year before that. Nothing has happened. But the food has gone up, electricity has gone up; everything that these people need to survive has gone up except their pension.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Yes. I voted against the Medium Term Financial Plan that delivered that policy and I voted in support of Deputy Southern's proposition to stop that from happening, and I regret that the majority of the Assembly of the day did not join us in that.

[12:00]

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Just moving down in age a little bit. Someone has raised concerns about some residences being marketed where there is a minimum age requirement to purchase the property. For example, over-50s where there is perhaps no medical benefit for elderly people or on-site services, et cetera. Do you think that is discriminatory towards prospective purchasers below the prescribed age?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I think that is a difficult question because there are different views on what makes a good community to live in, you know, how mixed it is in terms of demographics and income levels or whatever. I have also had this discussion, I think, with you. I will address this on the basis of age, as you are saying, but just to also bring in the issue of people who are buying properties that have to have a Parish connection to

there, which initially I was uneasy with as well. I have, I think, grown to be more easy with it on the basis that the numbers add up and that people are being housed who need it. As long as that is not detracting our efforts from delivering on other schemes that are able to help people who are in need. How you decide whether your efforts in one area are detracting from another, I do not know but I would not like to see a situation where we suddenly devoted years of effort and time to producing schemes purely for X, Y and Z category of people and neglecting A, B and C. So, I am not particularly uneasy about that having a place in what housing we are providing so long as it does not become a dominant thing that detracts from other schemes.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Is it legal to designate a development for a certain age group, do you know?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

It must be.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Never assume that.

Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

This is one of the issues about, say the Minister wishes to prevent landlords, for instance, from not accepting children in rental properties. Now, there is a specific carve out at the moment in discrimination law in relation to housing to deal with this over-55s accommodation issue that you are mentioning. So there will be a consultation upon the whole issue in 2020 as part of the Children's Legislation Plan and no doubt the issue of the age restrictions on accommodation generally will come up as part of that. I think, Andy, it is an Island Plan as much as a policy, is it not?

Group Director, Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment:

Yes. So when the States has previously zoned land it has, on occasion, zoned land specifically for over-55s. As a result, the Planning decision has followed that; there has been a legal agreement that follows that as well restricting age to over-55 unless the Minister agrees otherwise. So, yes, it is sort of backed up by legal agreement but ultimately with a States decision. That, I think, generally has been how the States has felt more comfortable zoning land for over-55s, that there was a perceived need previously. So it has been particular to that zoning decision.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Do you think that is the correct age? I remember thinking over the years that it could be construed as being too young and opening the market too much to give the benefit to those age groups who are trying to target the pensioners, who will be 65 and perhaps older.

Group Director, Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment:

All I can say is have a comment on it. On the conversations we get whenever we have an over-55s conversation, literally, I want to say, 8 out of 10 people say: "That is awfully young" and the people making the decisions tend to be thinking: "I am in that age bracket or very close to it." Yes, it does feel young in terms of if it is meant to be retirement housing. Clearly people are working longer than that now.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Given that I am biased, Minister, what do you think?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Well, I am just thinking that both my parents are 55 and just their household circumstances and what they are doing with their lives, they are doing things on a day-to-day basis that are quite different from people who are retired. So, maybe there is a discussion to be had there but I will be honest and say it is not amazingly high up on my list of priorities.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

With your Children's hat on for a second as well partly, do you think it is kind of strange that we set aside areas where essentially children are not allowed, you know, creating communities without children in them; is that not a strange thing to do in itself?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Potentially. Lots of grandparents will like having their grandchildren around to stay, whether it is while parents are at work or coming over for holidays or whatever. So, I would hope that that is happening and children are allowed there and can go and visit.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Well, they are allowed, I think; they are just not allowed to stay.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Yes. Is that necessarily the case though? I mean there are grandparents who, for whatever reason, will have legal responsibility for their grandkids who, presumably, would have them live with them in that

circumstance so it would not be totally out of the question for that to happen. If this is being delivered though as part of helping older people move out of what was a family home into a retired couple's home so a family can then move into their old home, is there a greater good argument there? Maybe.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Well there may be. But the question is perhaps philosophical again as to why we are keeping children and old people apart. I think it is a strange thing to do.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Moving on to public health and rented dwellings.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

Yes. We understand that the Minister for the Environment still has to go out to public consultation for the Public Health and Safety Licensing Regulations, which was expected to happen in December. Any idea how far we are with that? I know we are only February, just.

Group Director, Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment:

I can answer that. I am hoping that this afternoon we would get an authorisation to get the regulations out for consultation and then we can engage with this Scrutiny Panel in fairly short order after that. So, we are about a month or so behind where we anticipated really. There have been a few tweaks to some of the law drafting but they are written. So they are now with the Minister for the Environment ready to get signed off so we can release those and progress that.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

I know we have all been busy over Christmas period and the New Year but do you not think this should have been prioritised and come out when we were promised?

Group Director, Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment:

I agree. I think some our law drafting resource is very stretched because of other things such as Brexit and all of that, and we have had a little delay getting it signed off through the other side of the department. So I can agree with you, yes, ideally we want to get that in ...

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

So you are having something this afternoon?

Group Director, Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment:

Hopefully we are getting that agreed this afternoon so we can then release for public consultation.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

Watch this space; as they say.

Group Director, Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment:

Yes, again, I support the Minister for Housing, we need to get the regulations through the scrutiny process to understand how these are going to work in detail, and then so we can start regulating standards.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I guess that will be this scrutiny process as well.

Group Director, Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment:

Yes, it will be the same panel.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Looking at the objective assessment of the Housing Needs Report, your thoughts; but also do you have any kind of policy aims or strategies to meet the projected demand for homes as laid out in that report?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

The report was commissioned by my predecessor and I think the point of it was to inform the next Island Plan period. That will not just be me involved in that; that will be heavily the Minister for the Environment and department and eventually the whole Assembly as well having their say in that. That ties into the population policy as well because the report provides us with projections and alternative migration scenarios. Right now we cannot tell you which of these scenarios is the most likely. We have got projections based on what is currently happening and projections based on what the previous Council of Ministers proposed before the election and then was withdrawn. So we have decisions to make on what our population policy looks like, but that will not be a decision for me alone to make. I said in my manifesto that we were broadly supportive of what the previous Council of Ministers put together, that was then withdrawn, so what will be put together by the Population Policy Development Board I cannot predict at this stage but it all comes into it. In identifying the right sites for housing in that Island Plan we are just going to have to try and be clever about it. Bear in mind all of the information we have got, what we understand about the demographics of the Island and where they are going, and try to make the right decision, try to include people in the process who have got the expertise and know a bit about building homes and providing in that way. So that is going to be a very difficult piece of work and one

which all of us are going to spend a lot more hours awake thinking about and focusing on than we might do other subjects.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

You must have been very pleased when we eventually got Ann Court through. During that discussion we were also promised a lot of ... not exactly hot air, but we were promised all sorts of other sites that could accommodate this house and that house and this number of houses. Do you find that is lip service? You must be very glad that at least we got Ann Court through.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I tell you what, I slept very well on Tuesday night last week. I think I fell asleep the moment my head hit the pillow. I was delighted with that result because of all of the issues we have been talking about in this hearing; there are people who are in housing need, that was an opportunity within a couple of years to be dealing with some of that need. I was delighted with that, and when discussions were being had about: "Well if you are not to have Ann Court, we can talk about this site, we can talk about that site" my response to that was always: "I do not want those sites instead of, I want them as well because they are not alternative opportunities to provide for people, they are additional opportunities to provide for people." But some of the discussions and some of the sites that were being spoken of were, I think, a bit more complicated than simply: "You can have that." For example a site that was brought up was the Le Bas Centre site, a cracking site, would be a great opportunity for some homes there, but there are agencies operating out of that facility right now who would need to be helped and sorted for going somewhere else that met their needs too because they are providing good work in our community and we do not want to infringe on their ability to do that. So I think that of sites that are being talked about at the moment each of them is a potential good opportunity, but with every site there are problems you have to consider and sometimes that can lead to a delay. Sometimes something crops up that you were not expecting that you have got to try and deal with and try to make the right decision, not just for the housing development you are trying to deal with but for other agencies or community in the area as well. So in a sense I am very pleased that was brought up in the debate because we still won and now we have discussions that have started about all these other sites that we can say: "Great, let us continue this discussion about this." So I think that was helpful in the end.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

How important is it, in your perspective, that once decisions are made to put housing here or put housing there that we stick to those decisions and do not go back and revisit them? How important is it from a certainty perspective in making policy and in delivering homes?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

The thing is that with a lot of these sites there are probably brilliant alternative uses for them that are not housing, and I can completely understand why some people may look at a site and have a different vision for it than the rest of us. There comes a point where if you do not commit to doing something then nothing will end up happening or you delay things further and further. I think 10 years is a bit of a stretch at that point to start delaying things. That being said, Deputy, you could change the word “housing” for the word “hospital” and we could have this discussion in a very different context there. There is a balance to be struck between meeting people’s needs, coming up with a good scheme and not letting it get disrupted, but we also want to make sure we are doing the right thing for the public. So I do not think it is right to say we can never have a second look at something, but if we are to do so I think there should be a degree of coherence and mutual understanding from people with different aspirations of why we are having that second look. I do not think that existed properly with the Ann Court site but I understand why that debate will be happening on the hospital; I think that is a different thing there so I ...

Deputy K.F. Morel:

No, we are only talking about housing here.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Sure, but it is a similar point of principle; how far down the road do you get before you start disrupting things. There comes a point where you have got to stick to your decision.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Going back to Ann Court, how many homes will be delivered there?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

165; 130 of them one bedroom, 165 2-bedroom.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Is there any thought as to how those will be allocated in terms of the age demographic?

[12:15]

The Minister for Children and Housing:

This is to be dealt with through the Housing Gateway; I am not aware of any specific allocations for age. I think it will purely be Housing Gateway.

Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

No, from my understanding there is no restriction, the site will be a mixture of single persons, so presumably over-50s, and 2-bedroom properties would be families; so a mixture of demographics there.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

Sorry, could I just pick you up on that? Did you say single for the over-55s? So what happens to the younger generation, because not everybody is married and everybody wants to get out of where you are, so are you not considering anybody youngish to have a one bedroom?

Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

It will be within the existing Gateway policy, so there is presently a restriction for the over-50s, so that is what the Minister is saying, that we need to open up the Gateway criteria. But there is a rationing of social housing at the moment because of the need and that is rationed to over-50s. As more supply comes online I believe the Minister will want to review the criteria and open it up to single persons and couples who are under the age of 50; but you cannot do that without the supply coming online so that makes schemes such as Ann Court extremely important.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

So that is another problem we are going to have later on because, as I say, not everybody has a partner or not everybody is over 55, but everybody would like to have a roof over their head that they can call theirs.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Yes, and that is why it is so important to get on with this because if we can deal with the applications that are already on the Housing Gateway we can then justify opening the criteria and allowing more people. It is difficult to make that argument when there are 870 or thereabouts applications, to say: "We will widen the criteria and have loads of people in competing for the same properties" whereas if we can get this done that makes a significant dent in our waiting list which will mean we can then have that discussion about opening up and saying more people can apply for this. It puts us in a good position in the future to address the need that people who do not fit that criteria right now have.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

Yes, it kind of puts you in a difficult position as well, Minister, because you are also looking after children and when youngsters reach a certain age - if they are in care - then: "Excuse me but you are too old" so they are thrown out, so they have nowhere to go. So if we do not have accommodation or something

we can offer them ... I mean, I do not wish to put you over a barrel now but it is putting you, as looking after both groups, in a very awkward position I feel anyway.

Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

Sorry, just on the specific point of care leave, they will be accommodated within social housing's part of the pathway for them leaving care through supported housing. So vulnerable people coming out of the care environment, there is a supported housing group which is operated by Andium and they will be offered accommodation. There is loads of successful examples there, so that specific group, vulnerable groups, will be offered accommodation. People with serious medical conditions, disabilities, they are within the existing criteria. It is really just single persons and couples who do not have any specific needs at this time who are not catered for, but I think the intention is to open up the waiting list as more supply comes online. Clearly those are income support households, they are in the private sector at the moment, you are giving funding to private sector landlords who are potentially not providing the best quality of accommodation. There would be more benefit of those individuals being within social housing stock rather than in the private sector.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

Well you have got Ann Court, and Summerland seems to be flattened and it does not seem to be moving, but I do not know whether it is ... it may even be settled; I keep cows, I do not keep people. How many homes are you expecting to have into that and how many more properties are you expecting to be able to build this year?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

So I have this somewhere.

Assistant Director, Social Policy – Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

There is another 781 supply between 2019 and 2020.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

Where are you hoping to put those? Do we know what has happened at Summerland? As I say, it seems to have gone a bit quiet. Are you just waiting for it to settle?

Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

Summerland's completion within quarter 3 2020; they are on site, enabling works have been completed and Andium are on site now developing, so quarter 3 2020 is when the expected delivery date is.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

How many homes are we going to have there?

Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

That is 82 homes, that is 7 first-time buyer properties and 75 social rentals. I have got the figures there.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

So you have first-time buyers going on there?

Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

Yes, that is Andium's intention at the moment.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

Lovely.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Can I ask, Minister, do you liaise with Andium to understand their choice of construction techniques; whether they look into research to speed up, use new techniques, new ways of building which can speed up the supply and potentially also lower the cost, and also potentially increase the environmental performance? Are these things that you discuss with Andium at all?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

The short answer to that is I have not had a discussion along those lines with Andium yet. It sounds to be a discussion that is certainly worth having. I know that those broad subjects are of particular interest to the Chief Minister and is going to be one work stream that the Housing Policy Development Board will be looking at; not just for social housing but for other housing as well. If we are able to build decent quality homes that are more environmentally friendly and everything then that should be open to all providers as well.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Speed as well.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Yes, indeed. That is a work stream that the Policy Development Board will look at but it is not a discussion that I have personally had with Andium.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Just picking up on that, in terms of speed and cost of course one can bring the whole thing down but then we will end up with shorter-lived housing. In terms of quality we are building, I would like to think, for the longer term. Are we cognisant of the fact that making them too cheap is not going to satisfy that requirement?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

It does not make any sense at all to build homes that will be falling apart in less than a generation; what is the point?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Yes, indeed.

Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

It is probably a conversation that would be worth having with Andium because I know there is a lot of good work that goes on in terms of contract management and trying to find new, innovative techniques for building homes. Clearly with Brexit, with issues of cost they are trying to get the best value for money and looking at new construction techniques. We have met with the Andium board with the Minister a number of times where this has been sort of discussed and raised as an issue, and I know that there is a lot of work going on there.

Group Director, Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment:

Yes, certainly from a building standards and building bylaws perspective we are having more conversations around emerging technologies, fundamentally driven by environmental performance because of the need to move away from bricks and mortar effectively to different technologies to meet different environmental and energy efficiency targets. So you can meet these targets through bricks and mortar but they tend to have bigger walls because you have to put more insulation in them, but we are seeing more sort of system build or panel build properties come forward now. Andium have looked at this in certain sites already; I think Belle Vue was built with a degree of some panels and different technologies down there for instance. But, yes, it is an increasing area where to meet the standards we are going to need to look at different technologies. That does have an implication for speed because frankly a lot of things you can assemble them slightly differently on site.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Yes, we would not want to fall foul of the public health rented dwelling regulations, would we?

Assistant Director, Social Policy – Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

I should add that all homes are built to lifetime home standards, so that encourages people to age in place and that all Andium Homes will be achieving decent home standards by 2020 as 100 per cent of the stock.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Can I just take you away from Andium? At the last quarterly hearing we asked what plans you had to work with the smaller housing trusts to assist them with delivering new homes, and you suggested you are working with Property Holdings to identify suitable sites. Is there any progress on that?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

No decisions have formally been made that I have signed off on to allocate particular sites. I made a point of saying to Jersey Homes Trust that I will meet with their leadership as frequently as possible to keep up to date on things. I met their chairman just a few weeks ago and I am going to their trustees meeting later this month I think; I have got something in the diary anyway to be going to meet them. But no specific sites allocated from my part so far.

Assistant Director, Social Policy – Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

They will deliver 191 additional homes over the next 2 years across the Housing Trusts so that is quite a significant build out.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

Troy Court is coming back, is it not?

Assistant Director, Social Policy – Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

Troy Court phases 1 & 2, yes.

Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

I think one of the issues with the trusts is that they are small trusts, they have limited capacity, so what they are doing at the moment ... so for instance, Les Vaux is doing Troy and Valley Court, which is a substantial development for them. C.T.J. (Christians Together in Jersey) Housing Trust is doing the new Minden Place development as well. I think they are in the market for looking at new developments but obviously they are concentrating on what they are doing at the moment because that affects their financial position, the cost of sites and various things like that. But I think that we do have a good relationship with the trusts. Certainly I think it is moving them into niche areas, so for instance C.T.J. is very much focused on the issue of supporting homelessness, they have a relationship with Shelter Trust

developing specific accommodation for them. Naturally where there are specific needs and where their strengths lie as trusts of trying to work in partnership with other organisations in the third sector, so again like Shelter Trust and those types of demands.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Do you have much oversight as Minister for Housing of the activities of the trusts? I am thinking particularly pricing again, because I have heard that some of the new developments you mentioned are priced so high that existing tenants being asked to move cannot afford it.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I do not have much involvement in that. I am aware of one particular example that I believe we are looking into - that may be what you are alluding to - where concerns have been raised about one thing though, yes.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Yes, but from a statutory perspective you do not have any oversight of the other housing trusts outside Andium, or any links to them particularly?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

No, they have their own arrangements which they ... I know the Jersey Homes Trust try to mirror what we have with Andium, but they choose to do that.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Do they ever take any money from the Government at all through income support cheques, if you like, or housing benefit cheques; do they receive anything from Government?

Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

There are arrangements in place for development so, for example, with regards to their loans, they are supported by the States of Jersey. There are various ...

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Do you mean underwriting?

Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

Yes, and so for example the College Gardens development J.H.T. (Jersey Housing Trust) have just recently completed. So there are various financial arrangements in which the States will support them.

In terms of the Minister's oversight of the trusts, other than those sort of funding agreements there is no statutory oversight of the work of the trusts. We did attempt to introduce a social housing regulator last year; those proposals were rejected by the States. So the Minister has a working relationship with the trusts but there are no statutory powers to control or have oversight of what they are doing.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Would you be able to provide us with a list of those funding arrangements?

Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

I certainly can.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Just going on to the various developments which are going on - Andy, maybe you would know - has the building industry got the capacity to deal with these multitudinous developments without getting overheated?

Group Director, Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment:

I would say probably not if I had to quickly answer. We have got an industry that is very busy. I think what we do see is work is staggered to meet the resources available. Clearly, we have the pressure for population and labour to arrive in the Island, so I think it is very fair stretched at the moment from the smallest job all the way through to some of the biggest jobs. So I think we cannot service all of that through the resources we currently have on-Island.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

The problem with that is it increases cost when there is a greater demand.

Group Director, Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment:

That is right and we hear people waiting a long, long time for small jobs on domestic properties, all the way through to ... obviously the industry wants to be able to deliver against the bigger jobs. But, yes, we saw a contraction in the construction industry post-recession and now some of that is springing back again. There is a lot of demand there so I think we are at capacity.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Do you think that will affect delivery of the proposals that are coming forward?

Group Director, Regulation, Growth, Housing and Environment:

I think we will see different forms of ... well, how do we deliver; either technologies can help deliver timescales, so you can build more but with a shorter timescale, or we will see imported contractors working in partnership with local companies. We have seen that, for instance, on the Horizon development; we have got a French contractor working in partnership with S.o.J.D.C. (States of Jersey Development Company) down there. So I think we will see probably a bit of both of those.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Maybe this is a question for the Minister; do you think that will be politically acceptable from a Housing point of view?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I have only very, very briefly discussed this with the chairman of Andium and have not had a more in-depth discussion about what that would like, what the agreements would be or whatever. So from my perspective it would depend entirely on the circumstances for each contract, but I have only very, very briefly had the start of a discussion on that and that was not recently. So nothing has been proposed to me since then.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Any other questions? Well I think that concludes this quarterly hearing, Minister. Thank you for attending and giving full and frank answers to the questions.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Thank you for having us.

[12:30]