



# Environment, Housing and Infrastructure Scrutiny

## Panel

### Quarterly Hearing

## Witness: The Minister for Housing and Communities

Tuesday, 21st September 2021

#### **Panel:**

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

Deputy S.G. Luce of St. Martin

Deputy G.J. Truscott of St. Brelade

#### **Witnesses:**

Deputy R. Labey of St. Helier, The Minister for Housing and Communities

Mr. T. Millar, Senior Policy Officer, Housing

Ms. D. Reeve, Interim Head of Housing Strategy and Regeneration

Mr. S. Skelton, Group Director, Strategy and Innovation

[14:33]

#### **Connétable J.E. Le Maistre of Grouville (Vice-Chair):**

Welcome, everybody, to the Environment, Housing and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel, quarterly hearing with the Minister for Housing and Communities. Before I start I would like to register the apologies of our chair, Mike Jackson, the Constable of St. Brelade, and Deputy Inna Gardiner who are away on States business, and Constable Sadie Le Sueur-Rennard. I will now introduce myself. I am John Le Maistre, the Constable of Grouville, vice-chair of the panel. If I could ask people taking part in the meeting if they can, and connectivity allows, to turn their cameras on when they speak. I

would like to invite the other 2 members of my panel to introduce themselves and then perhaps the Minister and his team would do the same.

**Deputy S.G. Luce of St. Martin:**

Deputy Steve Luce, Deputy of St. Martin.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott of St. Brelade:**

Deputy Graham Truscott of St. Brelade, panel member.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I am Deputy Russell Labey, the Minister for Housing and Communities. With me I have 3 officers. Starting with Tim, would you mind introducing yourselves?

**Senior Policy Officer, Housing:**

Tim Millar, senior policy officer in Housing.

**Interim Head of Housing Strategy and Regeneration:**

Debbie Reeve, I am the interim head of housing strategy and regeneration.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I think we have Steve here was well.

**Group Director, Strategy and Innovation:**

Yes, good afternoon, I am Steve Skeleton. I am the group director of strategy and innovation.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Thank you. Thank you, Minister, for joining us today. I will start off by asking you questions about the Housing Advice Service. The Housing Advice Service was launched at the end of July, we believe, could you briefly outline what the uptake of the service has been since its launch and what aspects of the service have been accessed the most?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Very good questions. It is up and running and it is very busy. We want people to know that this housing advice service is for any kind of problem that people are experiencing or foresee experiencing. It is very important, as with anything, if we can catch a problem early we might be able to stop that problem from happening. It is accessible by housing advice at gov.je, so housingadvice - all one word - @gov.je. There is a telephone number as well, I think. It is busy. I had a meeting with ... I group these all together, the Housing Advice Service, the Critical Support

Unit and the homelessness strategy and the response to that. Three officers met with me yesterday on how it is going, and it is going well and they are busy of course. I was going to suggest ... I left it too late unfortunately to invite one of them to come in on this meeting but I would very happily set up a meeting with you at your convenience with the team. It can be a public hearing, absolutely no problem. So you can get straight from the horse's mouth how it is operating. Tim might know a little bit more about the detail than I do.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

My next question was to ask what the tangible benefits are of the new service and can you provide examples of how it is benefiting the community?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I do not have examples yet but the benefit is to direct people and their complaint or their problem or the issue they might foresee exactly to the right quarters and to give them advice on that. Tim, you can probably flush it out more than me.

**Senior Policy Officer, Housing:**

If it helps, I was recently in touch with the operational team in C.L.S. (Community and Local Services) and they have given me some headlines with the service that I would like to run through with you, if that is okay? It is very busy as the Minister has said. Some of the headlines ... they are seeing face-to-face meetings, or what they call emergency drop-ins; that is about 3 cases per day so they are able to have a triage function for these more vulnerable customers. So that is up and running. It really helps those who do not have access to a phone or the internet. They have listened to feedback and they are given that face-to-face service as well. They are getting lots of phone calls on the systems, maybe about 15 a day, they are tracking what the homeless figures are on-Island or those people that are about to become homeless and those people that are about to become homeless who do not have qualifications. So they are covering the metrics in those kind of things. They have a total number of cases at the moment of 67. Those 67 are those that they deem to be the most vulnerable or in a critical situation. What they are trying to do at the moment is what they describe as assertive outreach. They are reaching out to the providers of sheltered accommodation on the Island, to the probation service, domestic abuse support, Salvation Army. They are talking about the service and trying to build those relationships with those organisations and the idea is that they will expand and diversify this reach and also set up a different emergency triage function at their La Motte Street headquarters. I just thought I would offer that to give you a sense of what the service is doing to those people who are most vulnerable. Also the website is there, it is functional and is not just for the critical cases, but that is a one-stop shop for everybody on the Island who just needs from the most mundane of housing queries to be answered; it is there for them. I will stop there and take questions.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

It is the panel's understanding that a dedicated housing support specialist officer has been appointed to support the community through the service. Can you briefly summarise the support that is being provided through this dedicated role?

**Senior Policy Officer, Housing:**

Minister, do you want me to take that?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, please.

**Senior Policy Officer, Housing:**

Yes, we have a very knowledgeable individual who is in place. Someone who has worked on the Affordable Housing Gateway for a number of years. She is very across all the issues to do with housing. That critical care officer has always been intended to give a more one-to-one service for someone who is vulnerable. There are lots of services, there are lots of systems, it can be quite a complex environment to work your way around if you are vulnerable and that critical support officer is there to help people to take them on their journey around the various services and make sure they are being seen by the right people. It is a one-to-one service in that they will manage the person, the vulnerable person, the case, and try to support them all the stages through until they get to independent living at the end of that journey. It is fair to say that it is very early days on that service. That is the direction of travel that we want to get to. That adviser is part of the wider critical support team so she can call on lots of expertise and resource in the wider C.L.S. team in fulfilling those functions.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

The housing support specialist officer would include the development, as we understand it, of personalised action plans to address specific needs and to co-ordinate various services. Considering what you said about how busy they are and development of personalised services has the potential to be resource heavy - probably this is a question to the Minister really - do you anticipate further resourcing in terms of staffing being required to support the service going forward?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

This is critical. It is really, really important. We will see how it goes and if it needs further resources I would definitely support that and secure it for them.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

If there are further appointments required, how will you fund that?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I do not know whether Steve can help me on that one. Can I get back to you on that, Constable?

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Sure, yes. If we go on to the homeless strategy. The panel is aware that the U.K. (United Kingdom) based charity Homeless Link has partnered with the Government to review and develop a more robust service specifically to Jersey for tackling homelessness. Could you briefly update us on the progress of this work, please?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, it is excellent. Homeless Link have been doing this for some time in the U.K. Homeless Link is the equivalent of what we are trying to set up in Jersey. We have gone to them for help and advice and they have been on Island with our team. They have started doing a series of workshops with all those involved with homelessness in Jersey and those workshops are going extremely well. In fact, people have stopped me in the street saying they have been taking part in them and it was very informative and helpful. They are helping us with all the players involved with all the charities and the government agencies to make sure that we have the right strategy in place in terms of homelessness. Shall I take you through the most recent headlines, I suppose, on the homelessness strategy? Would that be helpful?

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Yes, that would be useful to see how we are doing with regard to how many people are homeless. I know it is a difficult definition because there are people that are couch-sleeping, or whatever they call it. Technically they are homeless but I think probably the most vulnerable are those who are sleeping outside. I do not know if you can update us on whatever figures you have.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I think the latest figure from yesterday was 20 officially homeless but not all of those are sleeping rough; some are. Okay, so the current challenges at the moment, all homeless ...

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

How does that compare with this time last year or, say, 2 or 3 years ago?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I do not have that information. It might become clear as I run through the challenges as of now. All homeless providers on the Island have been at almost full capacity, with the Sanctuary Trust

currently accommodating 24 people, Shelter 114 people and the Jersey Association for Youth and Friendship 26 people. Women's Refuge are currently full to capacity having seen a quieter start to the year. B. and B. (Bed and Breakfast) accommodation is a challenge. They are currently full to capacity and are reluctant to accommodate when organisations contact them. Further pressure has been added with people arriving on the Island for a short break, testing positive for COVID-19 and then having to find accommodation to isolate. A number of lodging houses have or are being sold, causing difficulty for those without 5-year residency. However, some landlords are looking to invest in new and refurbished accommodation. The cost of a private rental has increased and it is now difficult to find accommodation in line with income support funding bands. Property prices continue to rise and there is considerable political interest and pressure around this issue. The Island Plan and developments such as South Hill and waterfront, of course ...

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Sorry to interrupt, I think we may come on to that later. I want to just stick on the homeless if we can at the moment because we are time-restrained. I was quite shocked to hear, and I do not think it is the first time that the Women's Refuge is full; clearly there must be some vulnerable people that need the sort of support that the refuge would give.

[14:45]

What have you put in place for an overflow for people who are in desperate need, and they will be in desperate need if they need the Women's Refuge?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

We have the critical support team and they are in touch with every one of them. They visit them regularly. We have this fantastic scheme where they have G.P.s (general practitioners) available to them, they have COVID testing and vaccination available to them and the critical support team are in touch with every single one of them.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

What happens if they need the Refuge and it is full, where do they go?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

They find them somewhere. It is unusual, it is the first time in my tenure I have noticed a period where all the beds in Shelter are full. Normally there are around 2 dozen available beds around the various shelters. Up until very recently, we were able to say that nobody in Jersey needs to sleep out in the open, sleep rough, because we do have beds available. Of course for some people they just do not want to make that move into a shelter for their own reasons, but we are at capacity now.

I think the telling there is the COVID thing and having to find emergency rooms for people because they have tested positive when they arrived here.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

What I was getting at - and maybe you are probably right - but I understood that the Women's Refuge was primarily for people who were suffering domestic abuse and that we know is more prevalent, very sadly, during these COVID times. One would hate to think that somebody did not have somewhere safe to go if they needed to. The homeless people are obviously extremely important and vulnerable as well, but vulnerable women in abusive relationships need somewhere to go and with the Refuge full where will they be going?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

We have got an extra facility now; it is part of the shelter but it is a women's-only shelter and that comes online in a matter of weeks. So that is a new government-funded shelter for women only and I think that is going to help.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Can you confirm that if somebody found themselves in need of leaving a home because of domestic abuse there would be somewhere for them to go today?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes. The team work very closely together; the critical support team, the Housing Advisory Service, they work very closely together to find people accommodation. It might be temporary but they find them a roof over their heads.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Going on to the Affordable Housing Gateway, a recent article in the media has conveyed that the eligibility criteria for housing could be contributing to homelessness in some cases. In your view, are people who should be eligible for social housing falling through the gaps as a result of the current Affordable Housing Gateway eligibility criteria?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

We are looking at the eligibility. We would like to widen the eligibility. At the moment the Gateway for socially-rented housing is really for senior people, those with children or those who have health issues. Of course we would like to widen the Gateway. Work is being done on that which has not yet come to my desk - I think Tim can help me with that - but, yes, this is also a product of the high cost of housing in the Island. We have just seen another spike for the fourth year running and we are taking action to immediately and urgently but thoroughly examine what we can do as a

Government to intervene, and as soon as possible. Of course supply is vital and we are not taking our foot off the accelerator in terms of supply, and that we have focused on majorly and supply will be coming through. It is going to get a little bit easier next year. There are a dozen or so developments that will start coming online so we will be able to dent that waiting list.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Is consideration being given for how the Affordable Housing Gateway could be improved in respect of the prioritisation of applications for homes?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Well it is being improved all the time. I had a meeting with the team yesterday, they want to keep it structured in terms of it is effectively a waiting list of a few bands - critical and others - it is sometimes for one reason or another people jump the queue. That is really distressing for those who have been in the queue for a long time and we want to try and eliminate that and make sure we are keeping people in their right order. Obviously sometimes it is because the right bed-sized unit is not available; that is a natural way for people to jump the queue. But generally a story in the press or somebody shouting aloud as being able to jump the queue is unfair on other people.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

With the current priorities there are some people who may be on the list but they are never going to get to the top of it; families with children always get to the top of the thing - quite rightly - but there is not the availability; how can you put that right?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

That is supply and that is what we are doing as fast as we can. COVID slowed things up a little bit with the building but we have got coming online the Sacré Coeur development near the ambulance station, we have got the La Collette low rise. There is a full list of stuff that is coming online. Shortly after that the hotels will come online. So there is hope. There are going to be a lot of units coming through towards next year and the end of 2023 and we will be able to dent that waiting list.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Let me go on to a different subject: the assisted purchase scheme. The panel's understanding is that from 30th September the process for Islanders wishing to purchase a home with financial assistance from the Government will be managed by Andium Homes instead of the Affordable Housing Gateway. Could you briefly summarise the rationale for this change and any tangible benefits of the change for the community?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**



With their Homebuy scheme Andium have got lenders, they have got lawyers, they have got conveyancers, they have got all the experience they need to facilitate the Homebuy scheme so it made sense to transfer band 5 of the Gateway; those people who are on a list and want to buy a house with help from Government. So that is being transferred; I have transferred it to Andium Homes. We have contacted all those that were on the existing list and so they have all been written to and we have asked them all to let us know if they want to continue on the list or if their circumstances have changed, if they want to move on to a different list or they want to come off. Thus far only about 50 per cent have replied. I have moved the deadline to register from the 24<sup>th</sup> - so it was going to be on Friday - I have moved that now to 1st October, a little bit more time. But I would please encourage people if you want to stay on the Gateway for assisted purchase housing, please fill in the form, get in touch and register so that we know where we are. There will be an opportunity once that is collated and we know where we are. With those who were already on the list there will be a portal. There will be an opportunity for anybody to apply to go on to the list in future, probably through a website. But we are trying to get those 2,000 that were on the list before, we want to know your status and please let us know if you want to come off the list and if you want to stay on it. As I say, now the new deadline for that is 1st October.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Is there a danger that some people may think they are still on the list because they have not changed? I appreciate you have written to them but letters can be lost, people can forget.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, we have put out some press releases. There has been some coverage about it. We are doing a final push now; I think there is a press release just about ready to go just to explain that we are extending the deadline. Look, those people who want to go on that list, we want that list to be open to them to go on it but it is a sensible thing to sort out the status of the existing list first before new people come on. If somebody has obviously missed it there is no way that people are going to be prevented from going on to that waiting list; they will be allowed on.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Do you see any challenges for this change for the transfer to Andium Homes?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

No, I think it is a really positive and sensible thing. Andium are all geared up for it, they have their Homebuy scheme, which has to be 10 per cent under market value, plus a deferred payment of up to 25 per cent so effectively it is a purchase of a house 35 per cent below market value.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Thank you. I will now ask Deputy Luce to ask some questions.

**The Deputy of St. Martin:**

If I could move, Minister, over to the subject of the Health and Safety (Rented Dwellings) Law, which we struggled with in the Assembly recently. As you know, it was rejected by the Assembly. Are you disappointed that the Minister for the Environment is not going to come back with any further propositions in this regard during the rest of his term of office?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Has he said that he is definitely not going to come back with something? I am disappointed that we did not get it through the last time. My feeling is that I did some work with the Minister for the Environment; I thought we were reaching a good compromise that would finally get through the Assembly. It is causing me a little difficulty because with this talk of a landlord registry there has been a spike in some landlords disposing of their property, that means that people have been displaced, it has meant the waiting list for socially-rented housing has gone up because of that. Obviously it has been in the public gaze for the last 2 years, this business of trying to get the landlord registry through. Some people do not like the idea of it but the most telling comment I thought in the last debate was from the Constable of St. Ouen who owns a lodging house and so consequently is subject to the sort of thing we are saying every landlord should be subject to, the odd spot-check and the ability for tenants to go somewhere to say: "I want you to take a look at this; I think I am being badly treated" or what have you.

**The Deputy of St. Martin:**

Was there a particular theme communicated to you from landlords or tenants which they were concerned about in proposition P.33 that went to the States?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, I have quite a lot of correspondence. It is a piece of work that falls under the Minister for the Environment but there is an overlap with the Minister for Housing and Communities. The most common theme from landlords was that it was overly bureaucratic, it was red tape, it was Government interfering and causing grief for landlords. The one that came through last was pretty mild I thought, and my office deals with people who are unfortunately in this Island - it should not be happening - who are not being looked after, shall I put it that way, in an acceptable way.

**The Deputy of St. Martin:**

Could I go to the subject of tenants who are worried about complaining to their landlords about substandard accommodation because of their fear of eviction and exploitation? It has been suggested that tenants require better education and protection.

[15:00]

Is this something that you might be able to offer a solution to or do you think it is something which needs to be done more generally?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I would say a couple of things on that subject. The Jersey Landlords' Association, in all the discussions I have had with them ... and I know they have been a thorn in the side of this legislation coming through but I am very impressed with that organisation in terms of the training schemes, the advice services they give to landlords. They seem to be really on the ball and really keen to ensure that all the landlords in their association ... pretty certain they are. The trouble is, I cannot remember how many but they only represent around 25 or 30 per cent of all the landlords in the Island. This is a worry if people are in substandard accommodation and fear they have got no one to go to, to complain or to try and have it sorted out for starters, and then they fear the reprisals after that. Now, we have funding in place which comes onstream I think at the very beginning of next year and we have a priority to have some kind of rent officer function that replaces the Rent Tribunal of old, which petered out a decade or 2 ago. I have instructed officers to scope if it looks like we cannot make progress on that as soon as I would like and have it in place at the beginning of the year. We can, under the existing legislation, reconvene the Rent Tribunal and if I have to I will do that, just as a stopgap until such time as we have got something in place. I want to accelerate, I want to make sure that the money we have got for that function does happen. If there is any kind of delay, if we are concerned about law drafting or any logistics that will delay it, I have asked for it to be scoped, that we bring the Rent Tribunal back, even if it is just for a couple of months or 3 or 4 or 5 until that function is there.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

I think Deputy Truscott wants to ask a supplementary question.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

No, Chair, that was way back and I think it was regarding resources and you asked the question but thank you anyway.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

I beg your pardon. Sorry, I had not spotted it.

**The Deputy of St. Martin:**

It is good, it has given the Minister an opportunity to rehydrate, which is vitally important. Minister, I am grateful for that answer but do you think one of the things we could also do would be to come up with a standard contract. Are you aware that a standard contract exists, one that tenants can sort of almost print off and know that it will cover them for all eventualities?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

There is one, and it is the one that is recommended by the Citizens Advice Bureau. If a landlord or a tenant goes to the Citizens Advice Bureau they will advise to use the standard tenancy agreement. That standard tenancy agreement has benefits for both sides. Tim, come in with more detail on it, if you want. But what we want to do is we want to encourage the use of those standard tenancy agreements. We want a widespread use of that because there are safeguards in there for both parties.

**The Deputy of St. Martin:**

Could I just ask before we go to the detail: do you know any or are you aware where landlords are permitted to enter accommodation without prior 24-hour notice warning or is that something in that agreement?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, they are doing it all the time, the bad landlords. It is really poor practice for a landlord to think they have 24/7 right of entry into somebody's home. Of course, if it was on fire they have right of entry. But the decent thing to do is to give the tenants sufficient notice or make an appointment with them before you go marching through the property. That is the sort of thing that is covered by a standard tenancy agreement. It is the sort of practice that, unfortunately, we do hear about and which is absolutely out of order.

**The Deputy of St. Martin:**

Maybe if we could just go to Tim for a few more details on that before I move on to another part of the questioning. Are you there, Tim?

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Sorry, Steve, I think that question might have been missed, will you repeat it?

**The Deputy of St. Martin:**

I just wanted to go back to Tim and have a little bit more detail about the contracts before I move on to another subsection.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

The standard tenancy agreement.

**The Deputy of St. Martin:**

Yes.

**Senior Policy Officer, Housing:**

Yes. From our perspective we are aware that obviously there is a standard tenancy agreement, as the Minister has said. It is recommended by C.A.B. (Citizens Advice Bureau). I always think there is a piece about guidance and making sure that tenants know their rights and know where they can go to get information. I think there is an issue where tenants do not know what a landlord can and cannot do. There is, potentially, a piece, certainly around the Housing Advice Service, but we can try and get that guidance up front and centre. But the standard tenancy agreement, obviously when someone is taking out an agreement or a contract for a property they need to make sure that they are really happy with what it says and that they understand it and that they understand things like prescribed rent increases, and so on and so forth. What I do not have any sight or understanding of is just the percentage of tenants in Jersey who are governed by an S.T.A. (standard tenancy agreement). There is a piece of work that we probably need to understand what the uptake is across the Island because I personally am not aware of it.

**The Deputy of St. Martin:**

Thank you for that and maybe I could go back to the Minister with a question, to ask his views on registration schemes versus licensing schemes. Minister, could you just tell us whether you feel that a registration scheme could be structured in such a way as to protect tenants in the way they feel they need protection?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

With a licence scheme, of course, if you are endowing people with a licence to rent property it follows that you can also remove their licence to rent property. If you get a habitual offender in terms of somebody who is not treating tenants in the way that they should be and this is recurring, you have got the ability to say: "No, I am sorry, we are not licensing you any longer to do this anymore." It is the ultimate.

**The Deputy of St. Martin:**

We could just have a registration scheme, Minister, where if a landlord's property was not up to scratch, then we have the ability to remove the property from the list and the law will say that you cannot rent a property unless it appears on the list.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, and that is what we were trying to do, I thought, with the piece of work that was going to come forward, had the Deputy Ward proposition not been successful; that is what I was working on with the Minister for the Environment and Planning. Then we had the debate, I think I am right in this timeline with Deputy Ward's proposition, so that had to inform what came forward. It was too much for a slim majority of the Assembly.

**The Deputy of St. Martin:**

All right, thank you. The chair has got a question.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Is the Minister aware that the Landlords' Association have proposed a registration scheme which was much more simple but would probably achieve everything that we want to achieve, a scheme that in my view was probably highly likely to be accepted by the States because there is an understanding that something needs to be done? It was just that the Dwellings Law that was put forward was too cumbersome and too expensive and there might be a simpler and easier way to do it; are you aware of the scheme they had put forward?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, I am aware of that scheme. I will take a closer look at it. Because it would be disappointing, would it not, if we went through a whole 4 years and we have identified a problem and if we have not been able to put the mechanism through that would solve the problem, so I will take another look at that.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Thank you.

**The Deputy of St. Martin:**

Minister, we hear anecdotally that landlords are selling properties. Do you feel some of that is because of the potential for a licensing or registration scheme? It is certainly my view that substandard property needs to be either upgraded or removed from the market, so I do not make any views on that. But what are your views on the landlords currently and the selling of too, which normally would be rented out?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes. We have seen an estate agent's report increase in landlords disposing of rental properties, we have seen an increase in that. Unfortunately, when you are selling property like that you generally want to sell it without any occupants in it because you could probably get a higher price. We have

seen people displaced and I think that is reflected in the waiting list for socially-rented housing increase.

**The Deputy of St. Martin:**

Okay, thank you. Before we move on to gazumping, I just want to talk very briefly about your other role, which is the Minister for Communities. Do you have any statistics available to show how people's health and well-being is in relation to the quality of the accommodation they live in?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

You have hit the nail right on the head. We are in a situation where we have got, again, a hike in house prices for the fourth year running. Since 2017, it spiked in 2018, 2019, 2020 and again in August 2021, my watch. The problem is of course that wage growth has in no way kept pace with the house prices going up. We are into problem territory. Firstly, it further dashes the hopes of those Jersey families, people here who want to get desperately on a housing ladder and start their families, et cetera. It is going to mean that more of that group of people will think: "I will never be able to buy a house in Jersey." The problems you are talking about do occur. I do not know if the data is available but it is a fact that when families are living in houses that they can find and they can afford, rather than the houses that meets their needs as a family, then you get problems with health, with education, social problems manifests itself; it is a common trend unfortunately. Also, of course, the housing prices are affecting Jersey's competitiveness, affecting the ability to bring in those key workers that we do need to bring in. Alarm bells should be ringing and they certainly are on my watch. I have spent the summer in anticipation of this latest spike which came out in August and in response to it; scoping with my team, interventions that Government could make to try to afford fairly urgent remedy. We have produced a paper on that. I was insistent that we go to the Council of Ministers as soon as possible, and that occurred a couple of weeks ago, where I led a discussion of all the options or many of the options; we are still looking at all the options. I wanted to steer from them whether they would give me a green light to scope the options to intervene or whether they would say: "No, these are red lines and we do not want anybody to touch them" and that is what has happened. The scoping process now is happening and I hope to return as soon as possible before Christmas with any kind of interventions that could take the heat out of the market. What is absolutely vital of course is to scope the intended consequences that you are after but also absolutely thoroughly the unintended consequences. We all know how volatile the housing market can be. We have to be careful but we are looking at sensible ... when I first took office it was relatively easy to stop the sale of property by share transfer because you needed a licence for it and we just had to stop the licences. We stopped that and stopped the foreign money coming in. There are other areas where I want to look at to see if we can make some quick fixes too, even if it is temporary, just for the time being. I think Government is alert to it and so we should be.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

We cannot hear you ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I have finished. Can you hear me now?

[15:15]

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Yes, I can hear you, Russell, but I think Deputy Luce may be struggling with his connectivity.

**The Deputy of St. Martin:**

Yes. Before I move off that, Minister, can I just ask one final question, which is I know it will seem not like a priority because you have got so many priorities on your desk but will you try to or attempt to get more statistical data on the health and well-being and that sort of side of things under your remit?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, absolutely. Tim might correct me. Do we know if we have got that kind of data, Tim, around?

**Senior Policy Officer, Housing:**

I am not aware of it, Minister, but we will revert ...

**The Deputy of St. Martin:**

Yes, okay, thank you. Minister, could I move over to gazumping and we know that it has been around for a while? You recently advised that there were no specific plans to address the issue but are you aware of any changes that have been made since the start of your term to improve the situation? It is certainly something which continues to upset people at times.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

It does and I have heard from people who have been gazumped. One couple or friends of mine, it happened 3 times in the space of 6 months and this is literally on the steps on Friday of the Royal Court. Another gentleman wrote to me recently about his really unfortunate episode with the gazumping. I think the regulation of estate agents, which the Jersey Estate Agents' Association is calling for and has been calling for, for a long time, I suspect that comes under Economic Development, not me. I know that the regulation of Jersey architects and the subject of gazumping has been the subject of various committees. The last one definitely filed a report, I think it was in 2013 or 2014 because former Deputy Andrew Lewis got on to me and said: "We did that work and



we just stopped short of regulating estate agents and trying to prevent gazumping.” The issue is that it is not a contract and it has been through the Royal Court and the dissolution is, potentially, to have some form of pre-court contract that is stickable to. I am not sure if that requires a change in Jersey law; it possibly does. But I will just finish by saying this, that when I spoke to the head of the Jersey Estate Agents’ Association in this room quite early on when I took this job, and he is fantastic and a very knowledgeable guy, and he was with a lady estate agent too and he said: “In my 30-year career I have had maybe one or 2 gazumping incidents. If you have a properly qualified estate agent it should not be happening.” That is why I back the Jersey estate agents and their call for regulation in the industry.

**The Deputy of St. Martin:**

Okay, thank you, Minister. You will note of course that the other Scrutiny Panel that I sit on are doing a review into estate agents, potentially, and that I am sure will be an issue. I am sure you would also agree with me that the current market trends are more likely to see people gazumped because literally house prices are moving on a weekly basis by quite significant amounts of money.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, absolutely. I was so pleased to read of that initiative and I wish you all the best with it. I think it is really important.

**The Deputy of St. Martin:**

Yes. I guess that it is not really a question, it is just asking for you to agree with me. I think we will also think that maybe some sort of proper pre-sale agreement, there is going to have to be some sort of compulsion to do that. We can only encourage people to take out these agreements on both sides, although I realise at the moment for the vendor it is quite an attractive proposition not to have a pre-sale agreement because of the speed the housing prices are moving. But I am sure you would have a final view on that before I hand over to Deputy Truscott.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Yes, before you do, Steve, my understanding, and I know somebody who works in conveyancing, and gazumping has happened quite recently because prices are rising so fast. It is probably one of those pieces of legislation that is looked at in the situation when the house market is going up and then obviously it is always peaks and troughs. When the trough comes it is all forgotten about. Really now I think something needs to be done, would you agree that we really do need to ... you have said most of the work has been done in the past, so it is probably not that difficult a task and that we should really bite the bullet and make sure in the future when we have one of the peaks of housing price rises that we have something in place to avoid it. There is definitely a cost to a

potential purchaser, they may have a survey done, they will have legal fees and then the rug is pulled from under them and that really is not fair.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, dreadful. I have been explaining to you about the urgent work we are doing on possible Government interventions with regards to the soaring house prices again and a further spike this year. It is not just the Minister for Housing and Communities, the Minister for Treasury and Resources has levers that could be applied. It is very, very important that Treasury are involved too and also the Minister for the Environment. It is across those 3 Ministers and possibly more. The whole of Government has got to be aware of the housing crisis, and I think they are.

**The Deputy of St. Martin:**

Thank you, Minister. I just apologise again for my connectivity this afternoon but I will hand back over to Deputy Truscott, who is going to start off with some questions about Les Quennevais Park Flats.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Yes, I will. But just before I do, and it is a point to make insomuch as, yes, we are currently in a buoyant market but there are times where the market is not quite so buoyant. Very often people will be on the Royal Court steps and being asked to take £50,000 less. I think it is important to get once a price has been agreed, that that is the price, as I say, whether it is gazumping up or beating somebody down on a price. I think something has got to be put in place so once the price is agreed that is it and, hopefully, the Minister agrees.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I do and it surely is not beyond us to find some mechanism, some device legally, a pre-contract that can stick.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Yes, get a good lawyer, I think, that is probably the answer.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I think a good estate agent in the first place.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Estate agent, absolutely.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I have said to people when they have come to me, I said: "Just check that your estate agent is a member of the Jersey Estate Agents' Association" because that is an extra safeguard.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Absolutely. Thank you, Minister. Moving on to the Les Quennevais Park Flats Loan Scheme, we will just touch this briefly but, Minister, considering the revised scheme was adopted by the States Assembly on 23rd July, could you please update us regarding the position of the loan scheme for the Les Quennevais Park Flats and the suitability of the amended scheme in respect of the residents?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Okay, of course, Deputy. The latest information I have is that 22 expressions of interest for the loans have been received, 16 have progressed to loan application, only 3 further applications included in the 16 were received after the Assembly's adoption of the amendment. It is looking likely that all loans will be approved. Treasury is assessing against the criteria now. Loans will be granted in line with the timeline for development to be provided by the management company. A loan provision is subject to completion of loan agreements which are drafted. That is what I have on the latest of those.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

That is good news, thank you very much. Just there was talk during the debate that there were certain individuals that would, nevertheless, regardless of what was being offered, still struggle. Are you aware of anybody in that position?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I am not. Essentially, it is a private matter, Deputy, but I have done what I thought was right in providing this facility but other than that it is a private matter. But, no, that has gone quiet for a while.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

That is good. Just to finalise one on this: when do you anticipate the repair work to commence?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I do not know that but I will get that to you, I will get that information. I would not like to guess. I am sure they want to do it as quickly as possible.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

I think there was somebody, a builder waiting in the wings, effectively, to start work.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

There was.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

There was indeed, so we look forward to the commencement of that work.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, we were desperately keen to hang on to that contractor as well; I hope that has happened.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Great. Moving on, Housing Policy Development Board and Housing Action Plan, Minister, could you please update us regarding any progress made in respect of the implementation of the Housing Action Plan?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes. The Housing partnership that we talked about, getting the industry together, our first meeting of that happens on 29th September. I really would like to introduce you to Deborah Reeve, our interim appointment to head up the new unit that we promised to spark the action plan and it is now up and running with Deborah as the team leader. She has come to us from the Isle of Man, so it could not be more perfect. The team is the Housing Strategy and Regeneration Unit. It is going to look at what is coming down the pipeline and whether we are meeting the demand and managing the demand right, plus a lot of other things. Debbie, would you like to just introduce yourself to the Scrutiny Panel and tell them what you have found so far?

**Interim Head of Housing Strategy and Regeneration:**

Thank you, Minister. Hi, lovely to be here. Yes, this is only my third week, so it is Tuesday of the third week so we are doing well. Lots of similarities with other offshore jurisdictions and lots of similar challenges, which is helpful because I think having some experience of different areas does assist. But in terms of the action plan, just to pick up on what you said, Minister, yes, we have got the first Strategic Housing Partnership Board scheduled for 29th September. It should be a really good meeting, I think. We will be having a presentation there on methods of modern construction, just to give some flavour and also in terms of the audience. While it is non-political it is about having the key players in the room to make those feedback to Government really where they see some improvements could be made. Because, ultimately, yes, obviously we are a Government and we are in charge but not all of the problems can we solve on our own. It is around developing that partnership with the industry that is out there. Anything in particular you wanted to talk about, let me know.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

No, that is great. Thank you, Minister, you have answered questions A and B that I had lined up. But you also mentioned that the team would play an integral part in working across government departments, the industry and the community is required to identify housing needs and to progress and prioritise areas of work in the most efficient way. Has the benefit of the team been evidenced yet or is it really too early days?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Carry on, Deborah.

**Interim Head of Housing Strategy and Regeneration:**

Yes, I will do. Obviously 2 weeks into the post there is no team, there is just me. I think clearly from the work that I have done so far there is a need for a central co-ordination point in Government and I think this is what the team will do. We have just gone out for advert - the closing date was only last week - for some expressions of interest for individuals to join. The key areas I think we need to be building up are the data, let us start having some evidence-based decision making and policy making. Again, just sitting in this Scrutiny hearing is helpful because I am getting a flavour of the type of things that have been told to me over the last couple weeks are clearly quite common. I think we need to get the data and the facts behind it so that we can start to build around and come forward with some solutions to the problems and the challenges that we face. Yes, I think the team will be good. I suspect that it will probably be early spring next year before the team is fully fledged and in a position to move forward as a team. But obviously we are doing quite a lot of work in the background before we get that far, hence the partnership board and other matters that we are dealing with at the moment.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Thank you for that. I am sure you would agree by basing the team within the Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department it was anticipated that work could be better aligned with the planning policy team to facilitate joined-up planning and housing policies. Although it is early days, how is the structure working and is it improving the representation of the housing sector in plans in the way that it was envisaged?

**Interim Head of Housing Strategy and Regeneration:**

Again, Minister, do you want me to take that for you?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, please do.

**Interim Head of Housing Strategy and Regeneration:**

Yes, it has been, as I say, 2 weeks in, so from my perspective I sit adjacent to the planning policy team. It has been particularly helpful because they have done the Island bridging plan and obviously I have been involved in some of the office discussions around the inspectors; the public inspectors kind of come over and discuss it. I suspect that I will be one of the witnesses when we have those discussions probably in November now when the inspectors are on-Island. I think it is important for Government to have a central strategic focus for housing because sometimes when you are delivering the operational end you tend to lose sight of the long-term strategy with regard to population profile needs, et cetera. I think this is where it will pay dividends to have a team within the central section to be able to make sure those dots are joined up.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

It is a significant piece of work and I am sure resourcing, like everything in Government, is going to be a factor going forward.

[15:30]

Do you feel that the resourcing will be in place to achieve what you are looking to achieve?

**Interim Head of Housing Strategy and Regeneration:**

Again, Minister, do you want me to take that?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes.

**Interim Head of Housing Strategy and Regeneration:**

Yes. There has been some funding made available for the team and I think, realistically, the work that I will be doing between now and probably the end of the year will determine how that team is structured going forward. Obviously there will be a business case supporting that whatever is needed to take that team forward and start that work in earnest.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

That is great, thank you. During our hearing in June, Minister, you noted that although you had accepted the majority of the recommendations of the Housing Policy Development Board report, that it did not provide these policies for the recommended changes and that you would be researching the themes in order to develop the policies. Could you outline any progress regarding the active research being undertaken regarding the themes of the Housing Policy Development Board report and the outcomes of that research?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes. It is all in train, Deputy, and that is going to be evident as we get further down this year and into the start of next year. One obvious one is the social rents review, which is being undertaken. It is making progress but it is difficult, it is a challenging work. Then of course things come along like that latest house price index, and we have to divert slightly to take account of that, and suddenly a new priority springs up. But I think we are pretty much on course and obviously we are seeing action on the whole political, the defining of the Minister for Housing and Communities, defining it as a role, making sure that now with Deborah and myself we have a relationship across all the providers, all the arm's length bodies. We are meeting Ports of Jersey because I hear that they have got development proposals. If that development involves housing or accommodation, Deborah and I need to know about it really at conception rather than birth. It is changing the culture so that we across Government know what is going on and can help fashion it and shape it to meet the needs.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Yes. As you say, it is a very dynamic market at the moment. Have any themes been prioritised or discarded as a result of the outcomes from your research?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

In terms of possible interventions or just in general?

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

In general and possibly interventions, if that helps, yes.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes. You could say we want to reduce the amount of people eligible to buy a house and change the goalposts for those that have been here 10 years or about to, and I think that would be absolutely cruel and really unfair. I am pleased to say that while I have to look at all options, the Council of Ministers were in agreement with me that that just ... if somebody is at 9 years and 6 months and they are about to get to that threshold, I think it would be really monstrous to change the goalposts. Look, we could say for those arriving tomorrow you might have to do 15 years before you buy a house; that is something we could look at because we should be looking 20, 30 years down the line. It is not something I am proposing right now but I would rather do it that way than penalise people, I think, unfairly, in other words. That is one of the ones we have ruled out but not very much else, we are just working through everything that we can with urgency but really thoroughly so that we can see if we can bring some interventions in just to help.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

I am sure you agree, like me, that this Assembly has another 7 months, possibly 6 months to run. What is the timeline for this work and when could the States Assembly expect to see policies being brought forward for debate as a result of this work stream?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I hope that they would appear before Christmas but probably getting them debated in that time is a big ask. I think it is important for Government to signal that they are on the case of this issue and doing what they can across departments to see if we cannot halt these galloping house prices. We will do it as soon as we can but we have got to do it methodically and check the unintended consequences, as well as the intended consequences.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

For many it is a desperate situation, I am sure we would agree. But when could the community expect to see some tangible benefits as a result of this work stream?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Do not forget that for this most recent workstream, as I say, some of this stuff can be done with regulation, some of it is Treasury-related, so not everything has to come before the Assembly; probably most of it will. But we will bring it as and when we can. We are working on it and I hope people are relieved to hear that. We are determined to do everything and anything that we can, as a Government, sensibly to see if we can turn this around.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Minister, during our last hearing you mentioned that it was your intention to gather key stakeholders in respect of housing, the delivery of housing and housing providers in one room to learn from each other and to discuss how to best approach Jersey's housing challenges. You mentioned, including industry, construction, as well as community, and scheduling 2 or 3 meetings per year. You anticipated that the first meeting would be held in July at the earliest; has this taken place yet and, if not, when would the first meeting be held?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

No, I pulled the plug on July because it was too ambitious and I wanted to give people more notice. The first meeting, Deborah has now taken charge of it, and the first meeting will be on Friday week, on 29th September and the invites have gone out. We have had a very, very positive response from those who have been invited. I think it used to be called a housing forum, we are calling it a housing partnership and I am getting a really good response. We will start with this list - which I think is not published but we will let you have it - of participants. It will be for an afternoon, getting together



round a table informally and we will structure it. But I want to develop a relationship; myself and Deborah want to develop a relationship with all the key players by putting them in the room. I want them to also have an opportunity to get things off their chest that they are worried what Government is not doing, where we are not listening, where we are not acting. If this is frustrating any sector of the industry, then this is their opportunity to come and tell me face-to-face. I am going to ensure that in this session they have their opportunity to state whatever, they will speak whatever truth they want to on to Government; I think that is really important. Then, conversely, where we have got directives that we want to impart to the industry, clear directives, that will be a way for me to deliver those directives and explain why. If we have not invited somebody we should have, if people read about it in the *J.E.P. (Jersey Evening Post)* and say: "I should have been at that housing partnership", please get in touch with us and we will give you an invite for the next one. I think it is a really positive move and I am looking forward to it starting.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

That is great. John Le Maistre, you have a question, Connétable?

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

No, sorry, I do not think, no, that was before ...

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

That was earlier. Moving on and we are going to the release or transfer of government sites. Minister, are there any plans underway to enable a more expedient release or transfer of underutilised government-owned sites for the delivery of affordable homes?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, let us remember that we all voted in the Assembly for Deputy Gardiner's proposition to make the Rouge Bouillon thing a priority. I am not saying that it should not be a priority, I am just saying that no priority should take precedence over the housing priority, which has always got to be there. If you want to add another priority that is fine, but we should not do this with housing. I am not in too much of a bother about that because they are working very, very fast on the Rouge Bouillon solution, either it expanding or it moving. They are working fast to do that, so I do not think it is going to hold things up. I have made a pledge, I do not think any other Minister for Housing has made the same pledge, that I will get more government sites released or at least notice of them going to housing or housing providers by the end of this year and I intend to stick to that.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Absolutely but how do you envisage championing the release and transfer of suitable sites to housing providers - Andium Homes and others - and facilitate a faster delivery of affordable homes?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I sort of champion it every day, I am like a broken record. I hope that my colleagues in Government and also the long-suffering officers with the difficult job in Property Holdings, I hope they see me as a champion, rather than a nuisance. But I am vocal about it and I am applying the pressure and we are going to get some results. We are going to get more government sites released earlier for housing, so that our housing pipeline stretches further into the future and Deborah can manage the demand better.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Yes. I see Constable Le Maistre, I will just ask this one and then hand you over to him for a question. But what might be holding back the quick release of government sites in your view? What is that holding back that release?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

You have a situation where this is the story of it, you need government officers, that becomes a priority; you need a hospital, that becomes a priority. Obviously Property Holdings do not want to be left in a situation where they cannot facilitate other priorities and so there has been a hold up with the hospital. Other potential alternatives have to be there in reserve until that has got its planning permission but we have uncertainty on that now and the government building. I think things are going to move better but there are other people in the queue for this but I think that I made it a priority that is recognised.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Okay. Constable Le Maistre, question, please.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Yes, thank you. The Minister was slightly critical of the proposition to designate the Rouge Bouillon site for a school but at least we now know what it is going to be. Why can we not do this for the other sites? St. Saviour's Hospital, as I take as an example, one has assumed that is going to be housing, why do we not just designate it for housing?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I think that is very close, Constable. The short answer to that in terms of St. Saviour's Hospital is what if Overdale went wrong, Warwick Farm went wrong, we have to have a reserve in place. I am guessing that they would not want to commit. The other thing is there is still occupation in St. Saviour's Hospital, so that has to be sorted out, the decanting of that.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

The percentage of the building or that property on the right-hand side of the road as you go towards St. Martin, there is some occupation but it is very limited and I am sure it could be moved.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

The other thing I am trying to establish in the culture is to say, yes, but we must have an idea of when it is going to be decanted. Is it going to be S.o.J.D.C. (States of Jersey Development Company) that are going to take charge of this one? Is it going to be Andium and S.o.J.D.C.? Let us let the provider know as soon as we can. The planning is difficult on this Island because everybody has a neighbour. The more time they have to get the plans right, so when it is decanted they can get a spade in the ground, and that is the way we should be going and I am hoping the culture will change to accommodate that.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

The decision not to go ahead with the original hospital project has delayed everything else because we have not finalised the Overdale site as the site as yet.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

But do not forget the original hospital idea on Gloucester Street got refused planning permission twice. I think it would be madness to continue with that. As you know, I brought a proposition to jettison Gloucester Street ...

[15:45]

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

That project not going ahead has stopped other projects, such as St. Saviour's Hospital, and there are other sites as well. It has caused a logjam, which is not helping the housing situation.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Any hospital project, wherever it is, is going to cause a log jam until it has got planning permission. The log jam is a little bit less because this looks very much more certain now. What if it went belly-up and they released any alternative sites that had already been progressed? They have to be sensible and I understand that. However, there are lots of sites, small ones and medium-sized ones, and we want to get those for housing. I want to be able to say that by the end of this year.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Thank you.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Minister, we are aware that a strategic housing partnership is being set up, as well as a strategic housing and regeneration team. Are you able to provide us with specifics as how the 2 will pursue site assembly and land promotion, particularly of government-owned sites?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Does anybody from my team want to jump in on that one?

**Group Director, Strategy and Innovation:**

I will have to give a general answer, and Debbie is with us as well, who will have some views I am sure. We have obviously talked about the strategic housing team and its formation. We have talked about the housing partnership already, so I will not reprise those issues. I think the benefits, we started to sketch out the benefits of having the strategic housing team in a strategic policy and planning function and those do relate to planning policy but they also relate to the interface we have with the Government Plan and to the Government Plan establishing the capital programme and interface it into the Corporate Asset Management Board. The Corporate Asset Management Board reports it to the Regeneration Steering Group. Debbie and I will be responsible for supporting the Regeneration Steering Group in an enhanced way. The ground is laid, I think, for these threads to be woven together. The exact processes we will use to do that I think will be developed as we shape the team. The exact structure of the team where best to use the results available which they are working through. As Debbie quite rightly pointed out, we need to do more on data and on understanding the actual delivery pipeline and the marketplace. Equally, there are things we need to do to review our decision-making system. I anticipate the P.A.C. (Public Accounts Committee) estate management review will be helpful in that place as well. Then the final point, I guess, in particular around land, is around investment, essentially, so we have the Island Plan, which can release land, which can zone land, but there may be a question about whether, as the years progress and accommodating development well in the built environ becomes more difficult, where the Government may need to have more resources available to acquire land in order, as you quite rightly say, to assemble sites in a more strategic way. Like I say, the team coming together is in the right place. It has got access to the political decision making around sites and the States have got access to capital funding discussions, it has got access to planning policy discussions. We just need to now put that team in place and then identify the actual processes that we will use to make those things come to light. I do not know if Debbie wants to add any more at this stage.

**Interim Head of Housing Strategy and Regeneration:**

I will, if you do not mind, Steve. Obviously from my perspective hitting the ground running, I have already started to meet with colleagues in I.H.E. (Infrastructure, Housing and Environment) and the estate side, just to talk around the actual government's potential spare sites but obviously it is

whether a hospital or whether it is a school, whether it is housing and obviously some of those sites are still in use and will be for some time. But if we can come out of the sort of tail end of this with a list of sites that are earmarked and identified and are working towards as part of a strategic forward plan for the next 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 20 years, then at least it is nailed down. There is not so much shifting and we have got the ability to build our capital programme or Andium's capital programme or whatever, whatever the provider is, around those sites. That work has already started off informally and I have been meeting, as I say, with senior colleagues in other departments to take that forward.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Deputy Luce wants to ask a question I think.

**The Deputy of St. Martin:**

Thank you. I just want to ask the Minister a question about key worker accommodation. I am not going to get into a great discussion but he will know my views on this Government's inability to make decisions about locations of major infrastructure projects; I think it has been a disaster from start to finish. But is he not really, really upset that the Cyril Le Marquand site identified for key worker accommodation is going back to an office 3 years after we walked out of that site? I just cannot believe it and that site should really be released. Almost as bad as the housing crisis, our inability to house our key workers in anything approaching the sort of level of accommodation that we should be offering them.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I do agree with a lot of what you said. I am ambivalent about the Cyril Le Marquand thing. I think that made sense in terms of the current building. I think Westaway Court is very close to being handed over and that seems ideal for key worker accommodation, in these massive refurb in the same way that the Hue Court flats have been refurbished for key worker accommodation. I think we should be looking at whether some of our key workers, if they wanted to, could also be on assisted-purchase schemes, so that they were able to kind of invest in the Island. We are finding it difficult to retain staff in children's care, which is a worry, with case officers changing throughout a child's life with alarming rapidity. I think key workers, it is a priority, it is talked about a lot and we need to deliver on those.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Continuing on that theme, in your view, Minister, who would be best placed to deliver affordable housing for key workers and how could the delivery be facilitated by Government?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I think it should come under the providers, S.o.J.D.C. maybe, they are a bit commercial but I think when you have the Health Department - who should be running a hospital - also running a housing provision, estate management in terms of domestic units, it is not right. Similarly, the prison governor wants to get on assisting her prisoners, not looking after property. It should come under one roof, all of the key worker accommodation.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Yes. There is a question here: what is your view on widening the Affordable Housing Gateway to include key workers?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I am in favour but we need to get the supply in.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Thank you, Minister. What consideration is being given to how joined-up working between Andium Homes, Jersey Property Holdings and the Government can be improved for a more timely delivery of affordable homes?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Andium do have a lot on their plate right now but they are hungry for more. I am, as you know, championing Andium and I am really, really determined that they should get more government sites, and they should be signalled as early as possible and that has been my mantra since I started. I think this all comes back down to the work that Debbie and Steve and I have been doing in defining the housing ministry in a new way and in a way in which it has not been since the Housing Department upped and left and became Andium Homes, and Debbie's new unit is going to be crucial to this. We need to get people back into the habit of realising that we have a Minister for Housing and Communities, it is not a department but we have a housing government unit, and that come and talk to us and we need to know what you are doing. We need to manage the demand and we need to increase the supply. We have got to do the catch-up from the 2,000; it should have been built in the last decade and have not but we are confident we are going to do that. When I leave office on 22nd June I think I will have made a difference, I am hoping, inside Government in terms of the housing function being taken seriously again and having a very obvious role and defined role, as well as outside, in the Island with more sites being made over for the delivery, important supply of our houses that we desperately need.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Yes. You will be pleased to hear, Minister, we are on the last leg, the last 3 questions. Bridging Island Plan: Housing and Communities, Minister, at our previous you noted that you had not yet had

the opportunity to provide input regarding the Island Plan, however, anticipated that you were due to commence work with the Minister for the Environment on how the proposed rezoned sites could be utilised. Could you update us as to the progress in that regard, please?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes. I got very excited that I was called in for a meeting with Planning and Environment and it was basically to bring me up to scratch and to tell me that they did not need me yet; sometime down the line. I got a briefing about the site selection, et cetera, and the work they had to do. Then the summer happened and I am waiting for the call.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Okay, a work in progress. Could you briefly outline the work being undertaken by the Strategic Housing and Regeneration team, which is feeding into the bridging Island Plan?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

That is Deborah Reeve and you have heard from her. Is there anything more you want to hear from her in terms of that?

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Maybe Deborah's input at this stage, I mean she is the new kid on the block, so to speak.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes.

**Interim Head of Housing Strategy and Regeneration:**

Thank you. I like the idea of being a kid. Sorry, would you repeat the question? Just repeat the question again.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Briefly outline the work being undertaken by the Strategic Housing and Regeneration team, which is feeding into the bridging Island Plan.

**Interim Head of Housing Strategy and Regeneration:**

I am working with my colleague, who is literally sat across the way from me in the office. We were talking only just yesterday around being available for the public inspectors ... planning inspectors' hearing later in November this year. Again, looking at all the sites, looking at the input from Housing on those sites, et cetera, et cetera, to help make sure that that plan is fit for purpose moving forward.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Right and that is good, thank you. Finally, Minister, several amendments have been brought by States Members in respect of the bridging Island Plan, what is your view regarding the amendments which impact on your remit of the Housing and Communities?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

It is always difficult, is it not, when we are talking about taking greenfields? I know it is painful for you, Deputy Truscott, because of your history with me on the Planning Committee and I know we are both aligned. But I think as long as we make excellent use of them, I think some good sites have been identified, that the Grouville field looks right for me where it is for development. Similarly, the St. Ouen's one that is in the Island Plan., I am not so keen on the one that the Parish also want in addition to that but the one they want is an odd-shaped field and it seems right. I have difficulty justifying the removal of pasture, which is so important for the survival of the Jersey cow. Those fields in north St. Helier I worry about because if the cattle farmer says: "I need this pasture for my cows" and not only that but it links nicely and they have only got to go down a little lane, there is connectivity with the pasture. They are probably not going to want to take them across the Grande Route de St. Jean. There is a field over there, it is called Warwick Farm. I would have preferred to build houses there and leave the pasture alone, but that is my personal thing coming in. I have to fight for the space we need for the houses we need to build and that is what I am engaged in doing.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Finally, there is a question coming in from Deputy Luce.

**The Deputy of St. Martin:**

Minister, one of the last questions, when you speak about greenfields and I could not agree with you more, the last thing we should be doing is building on greenfields. Having said that, we may need to because housing is in crisis. But my question is this: is it right that people who have been given special dispensation to build greenhouses in greenfields many, many years ago now leave those sites in absolute disrepair while we have a housing crisis, which means we are looking to build on genuinely good agricultural land while we have these greenhouse sites left abandoned for decades?

[16:00]

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

No, I think it is terrible. I would take action, I would set up a scheme where we basically say to the owners: "We need you to remove that, it is dangerous and somebody is going to get very badly injured in one of those glasshouses one of these days, and I hope it is not a child. We need you to make it safe. We need you to remove it and we need you to return that land to agricultural condition",



which I am given to believe is possible. With the machinery now it takes all the glass or what have you out. There is a potential for some of those sites to accommodate housing. There are some sites which would be absolutely not right to put housing in, even one house. I think that if the landowner does not want to do that we should say: "Okay, we will do it for you, we will take care of that and we will rent out the field to anyone who wants it. Once we have covered our costs you can have it back again."

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

I think we have one question left, Minister, and I appreciate the time is up but if you can spare us 5 minutes. I think you have got one or 2 questions left, Deputy Truscott.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

No, I think I have pretty much finished there, to be honest with you, Chair.

**The Connétable of Grouville:**

Lovely, thank you. Minister, I thank you and your team. We have got through a lot of questions. We did not think we would quite get through them all but you, as always, are very succinct and direct, which is always good and makes for a much more efficient meeting. Thank you and your team for coming today and I declare this hearing finished.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Thank you so much, Connétable, it was a pleasure. Thank you, panel.

[16:02]