

2025.08.09

3.16 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North of the Minister for Housing regarding emergency accommodation in Jersey (OQ.198/2025):

Will the Minister confirm whether emergency accommodation in Jersey is currently only provided by charitable organisations such as the Shelter Trust and the Women's Refuge and will he also advise whether it is his assessment that the current provision meets the existing and future needs of vulnerable Islanders?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec (The Minister for Housing):

Andium Homes and the Housing Advice Service do not themselves directly manage emergency accommodation, all that is provided for in Jersey is provided and managed by charitable organisations. There are around 200 bed spaces provided there but a very significant proportion of that is in facilities which are indirectly owned by the Government through Andium Homes, who provide them to those charities in order to provide that service from them. The question on meeting existing and future needs is an interesting question because, of course, the ideal scenario is that future need is mitigated as much as possible. I am confident that the work of the Housing Advice Service and Andium in engaging with those charities is, right now, probably at the best level that it has ever been before and their communication is much better than it had been in the past, and their ability to be present with those organisations to help build pathways for residents there to go into permanent accommodation is the best that it has ever been. I am also assured that when you get the odd incident where the provision that is available either is not suitable or accessible to a particular person or household because their needs are particularly unique, because of the directions provided by myself and the Minister for Social Security, our teams are instructed to do whatever they can in that moment as an emergency, if necessary, to make sure that those people are not left on the street and will be left with a roof above their head, one way or another, through that service.

3.16.1 Deputy I. Gardiner:

Thank you, Minister, for creating the map of co-ordinated approach. I am sure that the Minister is aware that last week after leaving second emergency accommodation, charity accommodation for a government-provided hotel, a single mother with her daughter was refused check-in and ended up sitting on the bench in the Millennium Park at 9 o'clock at night. Even though a solution was found for them, does the Minister believe this demonstrates a safe and co-ordinated system of emergency housing provision? What immediate steps will he take following this incident so that no family in crisis is ever again left on the bench in Millennium Park.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I am obviously not going to go into the private details of a case like that, as no Minister should on the floor of this Assembly, other than to say that there is substantially more to it than that. I am grateful to the Deputy for acknowledging in the framing of her question that a solution was provided in this case.

3.16.2 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:

I wonder whether the Minister would be kind enough to explain the scale of emergency accommodation required, while never wanting to deal with any public or constituency matters. I have been dealing with one case in which the individual concerned was not able to get any accommodation at all and was going to be homeless for 6 weeks unless an intervention was made, which was not available.

[16:00]

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Again, for that specific example, I would want to know more about the facts to be able to offer a more concrete answer to that. But generally speaking there is capacity within the bed spaces that are provided by the charities in Jersey, and my department is constantly in dialogue with those people to try to assist them into permanent housing because obviously the best solution is to bypass emergency housing

altogether and go straight into a permanent home in which to be safe and secure. But the instruction from myself and the Minister for Social Security is that when an emergency case arises and there is a risk of street homelessness, that they are instructed to engage immediately to prevent that from happening. That can involve various things, including paying for a hotel, and that will simply be signed off so that will not be an immediate barrier there through bureaucracy or anything like that. Obviously that is not the ideal scenario but they are instructed to do that to make sure that that does not happen. But that does require good communication so that we know who these people are, know where they are and can contact them to enable that kind of solution, and often that can be quite difficult.

3.16.3 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:

I welcome the Minister's issues about personal details and I will take up the case with him, but I wonder whether or not he would be prepared to explain to the Assembly at some point the scale of individuals who are unable to find accommodation because of the current state of the private sector rental market. I was horrified with this particular incident, and it is not an isolated one. I understand the challenges that he has but I wonder if Members could be alerted to the scale of issues that we are having with individuals that are simply unable to be housed, Andium doing their best and we obviously celebrate the fact the O.B.E. (Order of the British Empire) was given to the former chief executive, but there is more to do.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Indeed. On that final point, very well deserved because of the transformation that has enabled us to do so much better work that happened under his leadership. Of course, I would give Deputy Ozouf the undertaking to do that and perhaps we can talk offline about the detail that he would want included in that. The 2 points I would make is that we are now working with those charities to collect data in a way that we were not previously, and that does help give some useful insights and some evidence to some of the things we probably suspected already. He talks about accessing private accommodation, obviously the issue of housing qualifications is a huge part of that and that is a big part of the feedback that I get that finding pathways to permanent housing can often be very difficult because of that. That is an important angle in the conversation.

3.16.4 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

Does the Minister agree that Islanders who are homeless or at risk of homelessness should have a clear statutory right to accommodation, as per the U.K.?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Yes, I do believe that and I would like us to get to that position. That will be a piece of legislation that will need to be drawn up at some point in order to do that. But I do not think that that is something that in terms of a law could be commenced immediately because we would have to first make sure that we have the infrastructure in place within our public services and other service providers to make sure that when we provide a statutory right to be housed that we know how we will deliver that. I think as soon as we get to a point where we are confident that we can enact such a right, then I would want us to legislate and go in that direction most definitely.

3.16.5 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

I welcome the Minister's answer to that question. Maybe the Minister could give a bit more detail on what kind of infrastructure he would see needs to be put in place ahead of any statutory rights to accommodation and what kind of timeline that would look like.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

It is a difficult question to answer. We know that there are places ... I think in the U.K. there is some kind of statutory right along the lines that the Deputy is referring to. But in reality, it is often not provided for by local authorities because of the difficulties they have. Even though it exists, in reality it is not too much benefit to those who would need it. The things that we would have to think about would be what duties there are on public services for what they do when they encounter somebody who meets a statutory definition of homelessness? That would not exclusively be the housing part of the

Employment, Social Security and Housing Department. It would be all departments. It could be the health service that someone's first interaction is with when they are facing homelessness. We would have to work out how that duty is followed by all public services and what they have to initiate as a result of it and who they contact. Those pathways would have to be clear so that everybody knows what their duty is and how they fulfil it when such a thing is made law.

3.16.6 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

Is a family's status either for 5 years' residency for income support purposes and benefits or 10 years for housing residency a consideration when it comes to emergency accommodation? Does that pose any problems in what the Minister is aspiring to do for this area?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I do not think it is necessarily an issue for accessing emergency accommodation in that if somebody presents themselves who does not have those rights, then some allowances will be made for it. Much of the bed spaces in the charitable sector will not exclusively be for people with entitled status. I know the Minister for Social Security would make funding available, if necessary, to help somebody, even if they did not have their years in Jersey otherwise. The difficulty that it can lead to if somebody does not have their housing qualifications is that their options for a pathway into permanent housing then become more limited. Because as it currently stands, they would not be entitled to social housing and their access to private rental housing would be limited as well. That does often pose difficulties for people in those situations and it makes it harder for my team to map out a pathway for them.

3.16.7 Deputy M. Tadier:

I suppose the question might arise reasonably from a member of the public is: how long would one expect emergency accommodation to be paid for somebody who does not have 5 years' status in the Island? Would consideration, for example, of whether that person has children with them or not also play into that decision?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

The Deputy phrased that as a question a member of the public might ask. What was the question Deputy Tadier was asking, just to have an informed answer?

Deputy M. Tadier:

It is the same question essentially. In the provision of emergency accommodation, i.e. whether it is paid for by this Minister or signed off by the Minister for Social Security as a discretionary payment, what consideration is given to somebody's residential status in that and, ultimately, in how much support they will be given for seeking either emergency or proper housing in the longer term?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

It is a very difficult question to answer, and I think I would want to give more thought to it before giving an answer off the top of my head. I would want to look at what we have done in circumstances where that might have been relevant previously. But, as I said, the instruction is that we are to do everything we can to ensure that nobody ends up sleeping on the street because of an emergency housing situation. That would be based on who they are and what help we can offer them. We would not just leave someone out in the dark because they did not have particular status.

3.16.8 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour:

The Minister published at the end of last year I believe a policy response report in relation to recommendation 59 of the V.A.W.G. (Violence Against Women and Girls) report, which relates to this issue. Could the Minister please update the Assembly as to the progress of the completion of the recommendations within that report?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Is she referring to the follow-on accommodation recommendations? Indeed, I met very recently with the C.E.O. (chief executive officer) of Freeda (Free from Domestic Abuse) to talk about this. It is one

of those things where if something is follow-on accommodation, but it is a decent and nice home, you would want that to be permanent accommodation and so you are not putting a family through upheaval. When I met with the C.E.O. we discussed some potential options that could be available through Andium Homes because of Andium's building programme, which some of this is contingent on and building up capacity in that, that gives us the freedom to provide some kinds of access that we have not done previously that might not be a very standard social housing application. Then I also met last week with the C.E.O. of Andium to talk about some of that capacity and what we might do with that. But there are some options there and we want to think a bit more about how we initiate those. I look forward to being able to do so when we are in a position to do so, but the conversations are definitely happening.

3.16.9 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I thank the Minister for his answer. At the end of the report that we are talking about he states that: "A funding stream will need to be identified to fulfil the recommendations of that report." Was a business case submitted as part of the Government Plan? Will there be funding in the Government Plan to see this through, so that follow-on accommodation can be made available?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

No, there has not been a business case for this Government Budget coming up. There are elements of this that do not necessarily need to have business cases for funding through this mechanism to deliver. Because much of Andium's finances are independent of the Government Budget. There are things within their capacity that if they are able to deliver they would not feature in a Government Budget in that way. If that ends up being a preferred option it would not go through that formal process.

3.16.10 Deputy I. Gardiner:

The Minister indicated in his answer there are several steps that need to be taken if you go towards the statutory. There are several steps needed to be taken to address Deputy Doublet. A question, would the Minister commit to one, 2 or 3 steps that he will take until the end of this term to progress on the homelessness matters?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I think I have already outlined many of those. A big part of that is developing more capacity within our social housing sector; that is ongoing. Something we are doing literally every day. We are, through the Housing Advice Service, constantly improving the communication and services that they are able to provide. It was not that long ago that such a service did not exist but now we have a team of specialists who are now physically going to the homelessness charities, meeting with people directly and trying to find bespoke pathways for them that did not exist previously. We have been working on expanding that ever since. There are steps that are underway that we can witness already.