

4.14 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North of the Minister for Housing regarding waiting times on the Housing Gateway (OQ.214/2025)

Further to his answer to Written Question 334/2025, will the Minister provide details on what plans, if any, he has to ensure that the 56 families with children in band 1 of the Housing Gateway are not left waiting indefinitely for secure housing? Will he commit to establishing measurable targets for reducing waiting times on the Gateway?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier South (The Minister for Housing):

The 56 families in band 1 on the Gateway will not be left waiting indefinitely for secure housing. Most of those 56 are already in social housing, so while their housing may not be appropriate or adequate, it can at least be secure. A third of them are looking to downsize; 70 per cent of them have had an offer made to them at some point but for whatever reason it has not been able to be accepted; and 20 per cent of those are families who have specific needs, which of course will take longer to be able to assist them with. Any family that is in an insecure housing situation should be receiving support from the Housing Advice Service to help them establish a pathway to a permanent home. In respect of the general suggestion of targets on waiting times, the tangible measures that we are taking now will be reducing waiting times. That comes in the investment that there has been in the last 5 years in the Housing Advice Service, which works directly with people to help them into permanent homes. Andium has recently scrapped the choice-based letting system, which enables them greater discretion to be able to find appropriate homes to directly offer those who are waiting for them and who need them. All of this happens with the backdrop of the much greater supply of family-sized homes that has been a great focus for me during my tenure. I can say that since Le Grand Douet opened on the former Mayfair site, that everybody on band 1 of the Gateway, except for those with specific needs for whom that site would not be appropriate, has been made an offer of housing. I take the political view that I would prefer to use the limited resources I have to enact tangible policies that we know will have an impact rather than to divert those to create new bureaucratic processes.

4.14.1 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:

While the new development time pipeline is really welcome and I understand that the Minister recognises many families cannot wait 4 years, what interim measures ... or can the Minister confirm that children will not continue to go into hotels? We currently have 15 families in hotels with children. Are they continuing to stay there and for how long?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Since that question answer was published, it is now 11 that are being housed in hotels, but I should say to the Deputy that they are not put in hotels because of a shortage of social housing or because of any kind of long-term difficulty in finding those homes. Those are only ever used for dynamic situations where it is a very temporary stopgap because of something that has happened. That might be a discharge from hospital or that might be an immediate case of homelessness where a set of keys for a new social rental home cannot be immediately found on the spot but may take a few days. That is always a very dynamic situation and not a long-term situation to mask some kind of shortage in social housing.

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

I note from the answer to the written question referred to in this question that 37 of those 56 families are single-parent households. Can the Minister respond to how those families are being prioritised, given that single-parent families pose disproportionate impacts in other areas?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Every household situation will be unique and I cannot speak to every single one of those cases that the Deputy has raised. I can refer back to the figures that I gave previously, which is that some of those will likely be those who are looking to downsize, in which case their housing is secure for the time being. It would just be more appropriate for them to be living elsewhere and then that frees up a chain for another family to move up who may well be one of the other 56 on there. With the opening of Le Grand Douet site, many of those will have received offers recently. As I said, as every household situation is unique, I would perhaps need to give a bit more thought if there are any of those cases that are requiring extra support, but we do now have a Housing Advice Service, that did not exist 5 years ago, that is in a much better position to offer that support than we were in a place previously.

4.14.3 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

If the central issue is one of supply, would the Minister consider asking Andium to look at purchasing some of the many properties that are currently on the open market to help deal with the supply issue?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I think that is a very good idea. We have done this recently where, working closely with the Minister for Social Security, we were able to work with Andium to enable them to purchase homes on the open market to help meet a specific need in housing that they were not able to meet within the rest of their stock. We need a diversity of homes. A block of flats is not appropriate for every single household makeup, so we have some precedent very recently of doing that and I am absolutely openminded to doing more of that, definitely. We just need to work out a scheme and work out funding to make it happen.

4.14.4 Deputy I. Gardiner:

The second part of the answer. Does the Minister accept that without clear waiting time targets Islanders cannot hold Government to account on progress? I understand that it is complex but would the Minister consider at least publishing indicative benchmarks to show how progress is made?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I can consider that and I am at the moment looking at whether the updates that we provide on Gateway statistics could be made richer and provide more detail in the picture of how things are, but that is something I can do. I do reiterate the point I made previously that I am the kind of politician who prefers to focus on tangible actions that we know will make a difference. It is always going to be the case that when you provide blanket statistics that cover lots of very unique situations you will not necessarily get a great picture of what is actually happening. That can end up being diversionary, so I prefer the strategy that I have at this moment.