4.8 Deputy L.D. Carpenter of St. Helier Central of the Minister for Housing regarding Andium home exchanges and refusals of housing offers. (OQ.116/2026)

Further to Oral Question 96/2026 and his subsequent correction of 22nd October 2026, regarding Andium home exchanges and refusals of housing offers, will the Minister advise whether he intends to review Gateway priority rules for applicants who accept an available home while awaiting a more suitable property, and consider reinstating a general home exchange scheme, and if not, why not?

Deputy M.R. Ferey of St. Saviour (The Minister for Housing):

I thank the Deputy for the question. It is important that Gateway applicants' housing needs are assessed accurately and consistently from the outset. Social housing providers then seek to make offers of accommodation that are appropriate to the assessed needs, including any relevant medical welfare or support requirements. Where concerns arise that an assessment or allocation does not properly reflect an applicant's housing need, these matters can be raised with the Gateway and the relevant social housing provider for review. While I am aware of concerns regarding applicants accepting accommodation that does not fully meet their housing needs while awaiting a more suitable property, such cases are uncommon and it remains rare for applicants to be offered accommodation that does not meet their assessed housing need.

[10:45]

Formal home exchange schemes have not operated for several years, having been found to be costly and impractical to administer, while also bypassing important housing needs assessment and safeguarding processes. I remain satisfied that the Gateway is the best means of ensuring that housing need is assessed fairly and consistently. I have therefore no plans to review Gateway priority rules or reinstate a general home exchange scheme. My priority is to ensure that housing need is assessed fairly, that social housing is allocated effectively, and that those with the greatest housing need continue to be appropriately prioritised.

4.8.1 Deputy L.D. Carpenter:

Given that the Minister's initial answers to the Assembly were unfortunately inaccurate, what checks has he introduced to ensure that Members and applicants receive accurate information going forward.

Deputy M.R. Ferey:

I immediately emailed all States Members to advise of that slightly incorrect information, but this is about communication, this is about making sure that we are properly describing, first, that housing need has to be based on a proper assessment. That includes medical need, so we have written to G.P.s (general practitioners) to advise that when an application goes through their G.P. to highlight a particular medical need, that is based on a proper diagnosis and a proper medical opinion. The other thing that I am currently doing is I am reassessing the numbers of people on the Gateway, with a view to cleansing the data to make sure that everyone who is on those particular bands still have a need for housing accommodation and that we have their up-to-date contact details. So we will end up with better data and probably slightly less people that we are communicating with, effectively.

4.8.2 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

One of the criticisms of the term "choice-based letting system" that I picked up from constituents in St. Brelade over my 18 years is that the "choice" part is perhaps put there for little more than a little bit of humour, and choice is a fundamental problem for those in social housing. Does the Minister accept that place-making is part of the Bridging Island Plan and that community is fundamentally important to those in Jersey, and that if somebody has grown up or spent their time living in, for example, Georgetown, Longueville, Red Houses, Les Quennevais, that they should not simply be asked to accept a choice of one, 2 or 3 that might be in St. Helier somewhere - another part of the Island - and that the ability to remain in the communities that they have grown up in, where their family or their social network is, is both important for them and their mental wellbeing?

Deputy M.R. Ferey:

I do recognise that people will like to continue to reside in the communities where they were brought up or become accustomed to living. The fact is the housing stock is precious and housing needs vary by individual, so what we can do is we can make sure that the property which is offered meets that housing need. What we are unable to do is promise that that property will be in a particular Parish or in a particular district. That is purely because there is a certain amount of pressure on the Gateway to make sure that it delivers, and when properties come up through the different social housing providers, we are unable to offer people a particular Parish or a particular district that they will end up residing in.

4.8.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Minister think there needs to be a joined-up approach from Andium in terms of their policy and their outcomes? Because if you have a scenario - and it is exactly the case in St. Brelade - where they are selling off key social housing infrastructure to first-time buyers and not building or making any other rented accommodation available, necessarily that means there will be fewer rental properties in St. Brelade than perhaps in the west of the Island, so it gives those renters less choice. He has used the word "cleansing", and I hesitate to use this, but that we could be sleepwalking into a form of social cleansing that is going on, whereby a gentrification of one area comes at the cost of concentrating social housing in other areas, and we lose that balance that people have grown up in and we lose exactly that communal balance that makes Jersey a special place currently.

Deputy M.R. Ferey:

No, I do not recognise that. Ultimately, people who purchase homes that were originally for rental are residing in that Parish. They might aspire to purchase a property in that Parish, so it is 2 different parts of the market. Of course Andium in particular want to service both those parts of the market. It benefits one part of the community, and it is not necessarily over another part of the community, it is the way that Andium have developed their housing structure.

4.8.4 Deputy C.S. Alves of St. Helier Central:

In his initial answers to Deputy Carpenter's questions, he mentioned - and throughout - assessing housing needs and welfare requirements. Is the Minister confident that these assessments are done fairly and properly?

Deputy M.R. Ferey:

I have regular catch-ups with the Gateway team, not least because when there are specific cases that come across my desk that I need to have more information on, and my experience of the team has been that they are always professional, they are always looking to fulfil people's proper unmet needs. I guess the slight difficulty of course is it is what is need against aspirations, and just occasionally people will want a property in a specific location or of a particular type. We do not have that luxury of being able to necessarily segment it by those particular requests, but what we are able to do is offer people properties that meet their assessed housing need, which has been properly and professionally assessed and communicated with the individual.

4.8.5 Deputy C.S. Alves:

I have dealt with cases where I have had to step in to stop evictions of vulnerable people in the past and I have found ... well, first of all, that is not my place to do really, but I have had to advocate for certain vulnerable individuals. My concern stems from the actual assessment requirements. I understand that G.P.s' submissions are extremely important. However, they are not the only and single-most important contribution. I think it is really important that any assessment requirements incorporate other contributions from maybe other interested parties or other parties that are supporting individuals. So I would like to ask the Minister, is he open to looking into what exactly the assessment requirements involve and what weighting is given to the different contributions that are required throughout this assessment and how welfare is measured?

Deputy M.R. Ferey:

Yes, I will look as widely as we possibly can, but we still do need to prioritise, and the fundamental question is, how many bedrooms does that person or that family require? The second thing is, is there a safeguarding issue, is there a medical need and how do we best fulfil those criteria? Of course we can drill down as far as we possibly can within the stock that we have got, but there are proper processes that the Gateway team work against to make sure that people get the proper property which is allocated to them, according to their assessed needs.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

I am not sure my question was answered. I asked if the Minister was open to looking into what an assessment involves and maybe revisiting that.

The Bailiff:

Yes. Could you respond to that part of the question?

Deputy M.R. Ferey:

Yes, absolutely. I am always open to making the process better and looking at the criteria that we currently use.

The Bailiff:

A final question from Deputy Gleave and Deputy Wilson before the final one from Deputy Carpenter.

4.8.6 Deputy S.J. Gleave of St. Helier South:

I recognise that, as Deputies, we tend to hear from those experiencing problems with their housing, which may give us a bit of a skewed perspective, so I welcome your assurance that cases are rare where their needs are not met. But how are you measuring that and what evidence supports that assessment to give us further reassurance?

Deputy M.R. Ferey:

The assessments are carried out by the Gateway team. They keep that data, I have access to that data, but of course the tale of the tape is the Gateway numbers themselves. What we do know is the numbers of people on the Gateway, if nothing else, they are about the same numbers as the number of properties that turn over, particularly from Andium and other social housing providers, each year. But Andium, in particular, have got a strong building programme of over 300 properties coming onstream into next year and the year after. What we do know is pressure on the Gateway will dramatically reduce in the coming years, but we always need to keep it under review.

4.8.7 Deputy S.J. Gleave:

I welcome any data that you can share in terms of the actual recording of where needs are not met, which I think is the bit that was slightly missed there, but would you consider systematically recording and analysing the reoccurring issues so that we can learn from those individual cases and ensure those findings help shape the future housing requirements and we make sure that those findings go through to the briefs for our social housing providers?

Deputy M.R. Ferey:

I think where we can anonymise that data and turn it just into pure numbers of unmet need and what part of that need that was unmet, how can we improve that, of course we would be open to looking into that.

4.8.8 Deputy K.M. Wilson of St. Clement:

I just want to thank the Gateway for the work that they do, but I was speaking to a constituent last week who says that she has been on band 1 for 3 years. I wondered whether the Minister, given what he has just said about the assessment of need and the fact that you take into consideration issues like safety and medical need, he would look at those who have been on the Gateway at band 1 for over 12 months to see how they can be prioritised.

Deputy M.R. Ferey:

Band 1 will also include transfers, not just people who desperately need to have accommodation, so I would imagine anyone who has been on for that particular length of time would be a transfer. Now, that does not

mean that they are not living in unsuitable accommodation, but they are not at risk of becoming homeless. So what I would say to the Deputy is if she would like to forward me that case, I will absolutely look at it as an individual.

4.8.9 Deputy K.M. Wilson:

I am grateful for the Minister's response on that. He did mention transfers, and one of the issues that I have, also picked up from constituents, is that they are living in inappropriate accommodation for their needs and have themselves identified an alternative where the transfer could happen. Could he perhaps look at why the barriers to internal transfer are still a problem for residents occupying properties that are not meeting their needs?

Deputy M.R. Ferey:

It is something that I do hear about regularly, where someone knows of a property that is coming up. Of course, what people do not know is who is next on the Gateway, how much work that property needs to be carried out in between the new tenants taking possession of it. So the problems are multifaceted and they are perhaps not as easy as they appear on the outside, but absolutely, I will keep that under review, and if we need to make changes, then I absolutely will.