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Simon Burgess  
Independent Chair  
Jersey Homelessness Strategic Board  
**BY EMAIL**

21 March 2024

Dear Simon

### **Jersey homelessness**

Thank you for your letter dated 27 February 2024.

You asked me for detailed responses to questions on various homelessness issues, which I will answer in the order of your letter.

#### **1. Homelessness Strategy**

I am committed to implementing the recommendations of the Jersey Homelessness Strategy, and the actions outlined in the [Ministerial Response](#) (2021) to the strategy. The Government of Jersey (“GOJ”) has already taken important steps towards implementing the strategy, including:

- The publication of a definition of homelessness in October 2022 ([R.138/2022](#)), which provides a common language for homelessness in Jersey.
- The establishment of a Housing Advice Service (“HAS”) in 2020, which supports individuals who are homeless or at risk of experiencing homelessness to access suitable accommodation and support. The role of the HAS continues to expand and further officer resources will be made available to support its work in 2024.
- Andium Homes has an ambitious plan to deliver 3,000 new homes by 2030, which will enable more Islanders to access social housing. In recent months, we have seen new developments such as Edinburgh House and Cyril Le Marquand Court come online.
- The eligibility criteria for social housing was revised in April 2022, which reduced the age limit for applicants without children from 50 to 40 years old. The [‘Roadmap for improving access to social housing’](#) was published by the former Minister for Housing in July 2023, which sets out actions to expand access to social housing. As part of my commitment to delivering the roadmap, I am pleased to confirm that I recently announced that the age at which households can access social housing will continue to be lowered, with households aged between 30 and 35 now able to access social housing with effect from 13 March<sup>1</sup>. In addition, the maximum household income thresholds will be increased to better reflect the housing needs of Islanders. I plan to lower the age further to 25 later in the year.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.je/News/2024/Pages/MinisterForHousingAnnouncesChangesToEligibilityForSocialHousing.aspx>

There remains significant work to do in order to address the causes of homelessness in Jersey, to embed system changes and deliver accommodation and services that support Islanders who are homeless or at risk of experiencing homelessness. I believe that the actions taken so far provide a strong basis to continue our progress towards implementing the strategy.

The actions taken by government form a major part of addressing homelessness. However, the successful delivery of the strategy requires partnership and collaboration between government, homeless accommodation and service providers, and social housing providers. I, therefore, look forward to working with the Homelessness Cluster, and directly with individual organisations, to review the strategy and agree an updated work programme in light of experience implementing the strategy to date.

## **2. Definition of homelessness**

I fully support the definition of homelessness. The definition provides a comprehensive typology of homelessness in Jersey, covering four categories of homelessness and 13 sub-categories. I believe that the definition is important – it helps to inform policy and service delivery and create awareness about the scale and nature of homelessness in Jersey.

In describing the definition of homelessness as “informal” in the States Assembly on 30 January 2024, I was referring to the position that the definition is not yet statutory, but rather a Ministerial policy position. I recognise that the definition underwent detailed consideration amongst members of the Homelessness Cluster, and that it reflects the views of stakeholders. It is not my intention to make any changes to the definition; I believe it is robust and I would only ever consider making changes as informed by evidence and directed through engagement with stakeholders.

I am supportive of a statutory definition of homelessness. However, I believe that any legislation would, in principle, need to make provision for some form of government assistance – whether that is to provide advice and support, co-ordinate services, or secure accommodation for Islanders who meet the definition. In order to get to a position where we can pass effective legislation which serves a clear and direct purpose in reducing homelessness in Jersey, my priority is to improve the scope and resourcing of the Housing Advice Service, as well as developing appropriate pathways with other agencies and government departments.

I believe that focusing on these actions lays the groundwork for legislation and will put us in a much stronger position to formalise arrangements for homelessness. I wish to consider this matter in more detail at the next Homelessness Cluster meeting so that we can begin to consider what statutory provision might look like; review best practice in other jurisdictions; and consider the expectations that it might place on different agencies involved in delivering homeless services. This will, accordingly, inform consideration of a potential timetable to design and implement legislation.

## **3. Evidence the nature and scale of homelessness**

I am grateful for the work undertaken by homeless accommodation providers to collect data on homelessness. Data collection is important for understanding the extent and nature of homelessness in Jersey, providing an evidence-base to inform policy development and service design.

Homelessness is difficult to quantify – and many households experiencing homelessness might not come into contact with services nor recognise their situation as homelessness, for example,

sofa-surfing. It is also important that we have confidence in the data, ensuring that it is accurate, consistent, relevant and up-to-date so that we can make conclusions about the evidence.

I am, however, committed to improving data collection, and to strengthening information on the profile of households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Firstly, the Housing Advice Service has begun to publish a quarterly report, which provides data on the Islanders who have contacted the service and their needs. Secondly, I am pleased to confirm my intention to review homelessness data collection across government and partner organisations, which is aligned with the categories of homelessness outlined in the [definition of homelessness](#). This work will include:

- identifying gaps in data about homelessness;
- strengthening the coordination of data across government and partner organisations; and
- developing and implementing a new homelessness data collection system.

I plan to discuss the review with the Homelessness Cluster at the next meeting. I anticipate that the review will begin imminently and be completed by Q3 2024. The review will be informed through significant engagement with stakeholders to understand data requirements and develop options for a new homelessness data system.

#### **4. Homelessness accommodation providers: data**

I am, again, grateful for the work undertaken by homeless accommodation providers to collect and publish data on homelessness in Jersey. As I have stated already, data collection is important for understanding the extent and nature of homelessness in Jersey, providing an evidence-base to inform policy development and service design, and to ensure that we focus on the aspects of homelessness where the greatest challenges are identified – for example, as a result of domestic violence; children and young people; and living in safe and insecure accommodation.

The publication of data is also a powerful way of raising greater awareness amongst Islanders about homelessness in Jersey. Many people do not know the extent or nature of homelessness in the Island, which is a barrier to making positive change. I am, therefore, supportive of the work of the Homelessness Cluster in engaging with Islanders about homelessness, including initiatives such as World Homeless Day that improve knowledge and draw attention to the needs of those experiencing homelessness.

#### **5. Quarterly meetings**

I am wholeheartedly committed to meeting regularly with representatives of the sector and I attend the Homelessness Cluster meetings where possible.

Following the Cluster meeting on 23 February, I believe that it is important to consider the appropriate structure and governance arrangements for meetings, ensuring that there is regular dialogue between the Cluster and Ministers, including myself, the Minister for Health and Social Services, the Minister for Home Affairs, and the Minister for Social Security, where there are clear links to homelessness prevention, and the provision of homelessness services.

I can also confirm that I have set up quarterly meetings with the Homelessness Strategic Board, and I look forward to our meeting in June.

#### **6. Housing pathway for most vulnerable**

I am committed to considering options to increase accommodation provision for households with complex and multiple needs, and the type of bespoke accommodation and support arrangements required in these situations. A number of homelessness accommodation providers do provide longer-term accommodation and support, recognising that individuals may require varying degrees of support to prepare to live independently, and to sustain independent living over time. This highlights the importance of establishing a range of accommodation and support options, as well as pathways for individuals to access suitable accommodation.

This is an issue that I would wish to consider further with the Homelessness Cluster as part of its review of the Homelessness Strategy in order to identify the potential needs and gaps in relation to current service provision, and how GOJ might work collaboratively with other organisations to make available appropriate accommodation and support arrangements.

### **7. Gateway**

A key aspect of addressing homelessness and resolving our housing crisis is to ensure that all Islanders who need it are supported into affordable housing. As a result of the excellent work of Andium Homes and the housing trusts in delivering more homes, we are in the fortunate position of being able to expand the eligibility for social housing to even more Islanders.

I have already announced changes to make it easier for younger people without children to qualify for social housing in Jersey. The age at which an applicant can access social housing has been lowered from 35 to 30 with effect from Wednesday 13 March. In addition, maximum annual income thresholds for applicants who require a one-bed home will be increased to £38,818 for single applicants and to £52,462 for joint applicants. I plan to lower the age further to 25 later in the year. As I have noted already, this is in accordance with the [‘Roadmap for improving access to social housing in Jersey.’](#)

As you highlight in your letter, there is need to better promote access to social housing. I am committed to delivering ongoing improvements to how we communicate with people who can benefit from access to social housing; those who may need additional support to access housing that better meets their needs; and to ensure that we stay in contact with Islanders who have self-declared as being in housing need. We will also improve communication with Income Support claimants to ensure the eligibility criteria for access to social housing, and its associated benefits, are understood.

The Housing Advice Service is also working closely with voluntary and community organisations – who provide an advocacy and support role for some of the most vulnerable households in Jersey – to ensure that they are aware of their housing options. The work of the Homelessness Cluster is essential to strengthen these links between GOJ, social housing providers and the voluntary and community sector to ensure that those who are in housing need, and at risk of experiencing homelessness, receive appropriate and timely advice and support to access accommodation.

### **8. Government supporting charities**

The voluntary and community sector makes an immense contribution to the provision of accommodation and support for Islanders who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The organisations provide a range of safe and secure accommodation, including emergency shelters through to supported and semi-independent housing, helping Islanders experiencing the many different forms of homelessness. Alongside accommodation, staff and volunteers work

closely with individuals to build trustful, supportive and respectful relationships, working with them to understand their needs and ambitions, and to access sustainable long-term accommodation.

At present, the Shelter Trust and Freeda receive grant funding from government. These grants provide immense support in tackling and preventing homelessness, and I intend to continue working closely with these organisations, and others, to understand their funding requirements, ensuring they have access to sustainable, long-term funding, which enables them to meet the needs of their clients, and to consider options to expand their accommodation and services.

## **9. Mental health illnesses and homelessness**

You may be aware that the Mental Health Strategic Partnership Board has committed to focusing on homelessness. This detailed work commenced in February, and I expect to receive an update on their progress later this month. I would be happy to provide an update to you as soon as I can.

## **10. Residential Tenancy Law (“RTL”) consultation**

On the Residential Tenancy Law consultation, you say *“the report of the consultation was published some time ago”*. To be clear, this is not the case. An initial iteration of a consultation response document was overseen by my predecessor but was not published or distributed for use or consideration within government. Upon being elected Minister for Housing, I reviewed this iteration of the document, and concluded that it was not of a standard that would help inform the next stages of developing this law. I have, therefore, asked that it be improved before it is published. This is standard practice, and government does not routinely publish dismissed drafts of reports before they are finalised.

More broadly, I welcome the letter submitted by the Homelessness Strategic Board as part of the public consultation on the Residential Tenancy Law, although I was disappointed to note that it did not address the specific elements of the consultation connected to homelessness.

Overall, there were few comments received to the consultation that addressed homelessness specifically. This is perhaps unsurprising given the nature of the consultation, with issues such as tenancy types and rent controls being amongst the most frequently cited issues of concern to respondents.

It is worth stating that the emphasis on the rights of tenants and the enhanced protections and standards that I wish to introduce into the new RTL are consistent with helping to alleviate homelessness. I would be happy to update the Homelessness Cluster in due course about my plans for the RTL.

Looking at the responses in detail, there were no views expressed by those identified as landlords about homelessness. The small number of comments received from those identified as tenants, ranged from support for more sheltered accommodation to observations around the need for a homelessness definition and the prevalence of unseen forms of homelessness such as sofa surfing.

I trust my above responses demonstrate my commitment to tackling homelessness in Jersey. I hope that this letter provides a constructive basis from which to take forward a review of the Homelessness Strategy, through the Homelessness Cluster, so that we can achieve the vision of the strategy of ending homelessness in Jersey and delivering its priorities.

Minister for Housing



Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sam Mézec".

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