

**REPLY BY THE MINISTER OF  
THE HOUSING DEPARTMENT  
TO A QUESTION ASKED PURSUANT TO RULE 6 OF THE  
RULES OF PROCEDURE BY DEPUTY L B QUERPEL**

**Question 1**

*Could you please advise me as to how many, if any at all, Housing Department properties are currently unoccupied and the reasons for this?*

**Answer**

The Housing Department currently has 125 empty units of housing, or ‘voids’; however, that figure can be broken down to give a more accurate and meaningful picture of the Department’s unoccupied stock.

42 of the 125 units are at Cour du Parc, which is to be redeveloped by the Guernsey Housing Association; and a further five units are spread across three properties that the Department has earmarked for sale (with the proceeds being paid into the Corporate Housing Programme Fund and used to fund future housing developments).

This leaves 78 empty units – a mixture of houses and flats – that the Department intends to re-let. These units represent 4.6% of the Department’s stock.

The 78 units are at various stages of being redecorated and/or renovated. Some will be reallocated within weeks, while others – usually older properties that have been occupied by the same family for decades – will need substantial modernisation before new tenants can move in.

A property can become empty for several reasons: the tenant may move into private rented accommodation, or a partial ownership property, or a care home. They may choose to move in with another family. They may die, or be evicted, or be transferred by the Department into a Guernsey Housing Association property or a different States House better suited to their needs. Sometimes the Department knows when a property is going to become empty; sometimes not.

Void numbers will go up and down. It is not uncommon, thanks to the nominations agreement between the Department and the Guernsey Housing Association, for a large number of the Department’s properties to become empty simultaneously. For example, tenants living at the Rue Jehannet estate moving to the new Clos Barbier development next door. All of the tenants in question were under-occupying, and by moving out they have freed up properties that can be allocated to families who will make use of the space. However, one unavoidable by-product of their migration is a sudden influx of empty properties.

**Question 2**

*Could you please address the seemingly growing public perception that people returning to the Island are being given preference in regard to the allocation of social housing?*

## **Answer**

The short answer is that people returning to the Island are not given preference when it comes to allocating social housing; in fact, the allocations system is more likely to work against them.

An application only becomes active once the applicant has lived at their current address for six months (and the address itself must be permanent, e.g. not a winter let). For example, if someone returns to the Island in February and applies for social housing straightaway, they will not, as a rule, be considered for a property until August.

The Department allocates properties based on need, with applicants being awarded points based on the suitability of the accommodation from which they are applying: cramped, inaccessible, expensive and substandard accommodation will generate a high number of points and push the applicant to the top of the waiting list. The 'six month rule' exists to prevent applicants from moving into patently substandard accommodation with the express purpose of jumping the queue.

The Department waives the 'six month rule' in certain circumstances. For the avoidance of doubt, there is not a blanket waiver in place in respect of people returning to the Island.

The Department uses its discretion when allocating its properties and will do what it can to ensure that the people in most need are housed as a priority. On occasion, this may mean that someone who has recently returned to the Island gets housed before someone who has never left the Island, or who has been on the waiting list for longer; but this is not as a result of a specific policy that favours applicants returning to the Island.

It is also important to note that to be eligible for social housing, an applicant must be a qualified resident under the Housing (Control of Occupation) (Guernsey) Law 1994. Someone who is not a qualified resident will not normally get onto the waiting list; only in very exceptional circumstances will this criterion be waived – usually where a person has been granted a so-called 'compassionate' housing licence and does not have the financial means to support themselves in private-rented or owner-occupied housing. In such instances the person will, of course, already be living in the Island.

**Date of Receipt of the Question:** 17<sup>th</sup> January 2013

**Date of Reply:** 28<sup>th</sup> January 2013