



St Helena
Government

ST HELENA GOVERNMENT
REPOSENSE TO SELECT COMMITTEE 2
REPORT ON SOCIAL HOUSING

L.A.18 UPON THE TABLE 13TH FEBRUARY 2025



St Helena
Government

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24.01.2025

Hon. Dr Corinda Essex
Chairperson of Select Committee 2
The Castle Jamestown
St Helena

Dear Dr. Essex

Re: Response to Select Committee 2: Report on Social Housing

Thank you for your comprehensive report on the provision of social housing.

I welcome the Committee's thorough examination of this critical issue (and recognition of the challenges) as well as the constructive recommendations put forward to address the housing needs of our island, and to improve the quality of our homes and services to tenants.

As you have highlighted, there remains a substantial amount of work to be done in this area, and the Property Service in particular, has an ambitious program to deliver over the coming months. However some of these recommendations will require additional time and resources to implement, including collaboration with other Portfolios beyond my direct political responsibility or oversight.

Nevertheless, I would like to assure the Committee that the government remains committed to:

- Increasing the supply of social housing to address the demand;
- Improving and regularising the standards of existing housing stock to ensure consistency with the agreed minimum requirements; and
- Ensuring social housing is accessible to those in greatest housing need.

Please find enclosed responses to your recommendations with proposed timeframes for implementation, and those that require further consideration or cross-Portfolio support.



PROGRESS



INTEGRITY



TEAMWORK

St Helena Government, St Helena Island, South Atlantic Ocean, STHL 1ZZ

www.sainthelena.gov.sh

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Brooks', written in a cursive style.

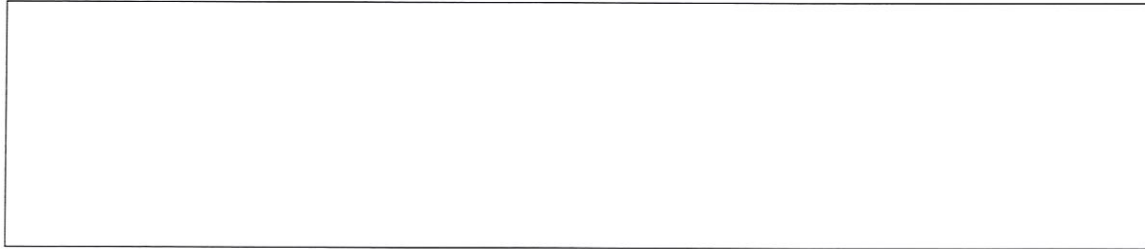
Mark Brooks
Minister for Treasury and Economic Development

| Theme: | Recommendation: | Timeframe: | |
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| <p>Provision of Social Housing and its Efficient and Effective Use</p> | <p>1.1 The provision of additional housing units must be aligned consistently with the yet to be developed, updated Housing Strategy, with clearly defined roles and processes within the workflow.</p> <p>1.2 Immediate action is taken to fast-track construction of additional social housing units at Bottom Woods and Half Tree Hollow Comprehensive Development Areas.</p> <p>1.3 The efficiencies and cost effectiveness of conversions as opposed to new builds must always be considered when making decisions regarding provision of additional units to meet housing needs.</p> <p>1.4 Urgent action should be taken to assess the reliability and accuracy of current housing data, and to identify gaps that require addressing. This work must be used to inform the development of the new Housing Strategy.</p> | <p>See Recommendation 2.1</p> <p>Immediate</p> <p>On going</p> <p>By 31st March 2025</p> | <p>Agreed.</p> <p>Agreed. Expressions of interest for the design and construction of a block of four two bedroom flats at the Bottomwoods CDA, using modern methods of construction, has been received. The tender information is with the Attorney General's Chambers for legal review before going to tender with the interested parties.</p> <p>Agreed. Cost considerations are factored into decisions on whether to refurbish or build new housing units.</p> <p>Agreed. Data collected during the tenancy audit will assist in the accuracy of Housing information.</p> |

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| | <p>1.5 It is imperative that housing data is regularly updated.</p> <p>1.6 SHG should reassess and define the level of priority that is given to the provision of social housing, in relation to the other services it provides, as it plays a key role in achievement of the Ministerial Vision and Strategic Plan, including the aspiration that nobody is left behind.</p> <p>1.7 The moratorium on sale of housing units should not apply to those assessed to be beyond economical repair, which must be disposed of promptly to avoid further deterioration.</p> | <p>On going</p> <p>By end of January 2025</p> <p>By July 2025</p> <p>proposed completion date: 31 March 2025</p> <p>Agreed. A database using a QGIS platform has been implemented within the Housing Service since 2023, which links to property and tenant information. All updates and changes are recorded in the database.</p> <p>Agreed.</p> <p>Proposed timeframe: February 2025</p> <p>There is no technical resource within the Property Service, and without up-to-date condition assessments for social housing or input from the Building Maintenance Service, that currently sits within a different Portfolio, it is difficult to assess those properties that are beyond economic repair, or for the Property</p> |
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| | <p>1.8 Consideration should be given to ring fencing interest or returns gained by the Housing Service Trading Account so that it accrues to that account only.</p> | | <p>Service to commit to the recommended time frame. However it is agreed that those assessed as such should be disposed promptly, where there are no wider considerations such as future investment plans for an area that may be affected by sale.</p> <p>Awaiting response from Treasury</p> |
| <p>Housing Strategy</p> | <p>2.1 Priority must be given to the urgent development, approval and implementation of an up to date Housing Strategy and of an Estate Management Strategy.</p> | <p>By 31st March 2025</p> | <p>By July 2025</p> <p>Agreed. An updated Housing Strategy (discussion document) was agreed by the Ministers Advisory Board in 2023, but did not receive the necessary support during the stakeholder consultation to progress beyond a discussion document. A new Housing Strategy for St Helena is needed and will be revisited with the aim of implementation by July</p> |

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| | <p>2.2 An "Accommodation for Life" policy should be introduced that reflects the intention of the current "Home for Life" policy, but provides greater flexibility to enable changes to be made that reflect alterations in the circumstances of tenants.</p> | <p>2025.</p> <p>Proposed completion date: July 2025.</p> <p>The development of an Estate Management Policy/Strategy is a priority for the Economic Development Portfolio. This will become the overarching framework for all property policies, and it is planned for this work to be progressed from April 2025, subject to funding for overseas recruitment. Failing which the Portfolio will revisit its options for completing this work, and will confirm timeframes for completion.</p> <p>The "homes for life policy" conferred on tenants by the nature of existing tenancy agreements will be</p> <p style="text-align: right;">By July 2025</p> |
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2.3.1 Annual Reports must be compiled and issued relating to both the Housing Strategy and the Estate Management Strategy, and their implementation. These Strategies should be reviewed and revised in line with the findings of the Annual Reports.

2.3.2 Eligibility criteria and rental brackets should be examined and amended where necessary to ensure these are consistent and aligned with the overall intent and purpose underpinning provision of social housing.

reviewed alongside the purpose and provision of social housing, with the aim of aligning the two, so that housing stock can be best utilised to meet the changing needs of tenants and those in housing need.

Proposed completion date: July 2025.

July – Annually

Agreed. However please see explanations in 2.1 relating to implementation timeframes.

By 31st March 2025

Agreed. This will form part of the review on the purpose/provision of social housing, where rent setting and eligibility will also be considered. The relevant policies will be updated to reflect the preferred options.

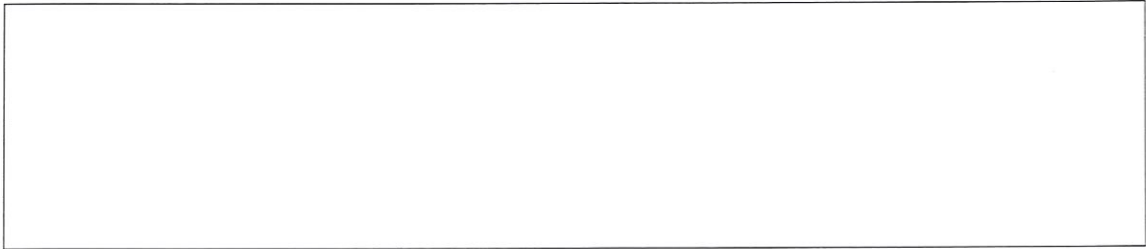
Proposed completion date: July 2025.

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| | <p>2.3.3 St Helena Government should establish and implement a clear, proactive and structured approach to the monitoring of rental payments and recovery of rent arrears.</p> | <p>By 31st March 2025</p> | <p>Agreed. The Treasury and Housing Service has developed and implemented a process for monitoring rent payments and managing arrears, including enforcement through the courts. This proactive management is working well, and arrears are modestly decreasing.</p> <p>Proposed completion date: 31 May 2025</p> |
| | <p>2.4 Rents, should more closely reflect affordability, and consideration should be given to introduction of a sliding scale instead of two tiers. Those tenants whose financial situation places them at the highest end should pay rents more closely aligned with those charged by the private sector.</p> | <p>By 31st March 2025</p> | <p>Rent setting for social housing will be reviewed, where a variety of options will be considered.</p> <p>This will be developed alongside the work streams outlined in 2.2.</p> <p>Proposed completion date: July 2025</p> <p>The management and maintenance of social</p> |
| | <p>2.5 Consideration should be given to establishing a trading account in respect of the provision of social housing in order to manage all related income and expenditure more efficiently</p> | <p>By 31st March 2025</p> | |

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| | <p>and effectively.</p> | | <p>housing is managed by a Trading Account established by the Special Fund (Housing Service Trading Account) Order, 2013, under Sections 3(3) and (4) of the Public Finance Ordinance 2010.</p> |
| <p>Repairs and Maintenance Strategy</p> | <p>3.1 A revised and updated Repairs and Maintenance strategy should be drawn up and implemented as a priority.</p> | <p>By July 2025</p> | <p>While the Portfolio agrees with the recommendations in section 3, repairs and maintenance of the Crown Estate (including social housing) is the responsibility of the Building Maintenance Service within the Safety Security and Home Affairs Portfolio, where the approach to repairs and maintenance is prioritised and carried out in accordance with the SHG Building Maintenance Strategy 2021, and the Building Maintenance Policy</p> |

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| | <p>3.2 All social housing units should be inspected regularly by a team of maintenance professionals.</p> <p>3.3 Urgent work must be undertaken to establish the true cost of ownership of each housing unit.</p> <p>3.4 A cross-cutting task force should be established to take a holistic view of how best to break the current vicious circle relating to maintenance, and formulate associated recommendations.</p> | <p>On going</p> <p>By 31st March 2025</p> <p>By August 2025</p> | <p>2022. However the cost of maintenance and repairs are funded by the Housing Service Trading Account.</p> <p>Without having political responsibility or oversight for the maintenance, the Economic Development Portfolio are unable to agree the timeframes for these recommendations, or ensure that they are implemented.</p> <p>Please see 3.1.</p> <p>Given current resourcing and priorities we are not able to commit to these works by the recommended timeframe. However future consideration will be given to completing this assessment.</p> <p>This recommendation should be led by the</p> |
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| | <p>3.5 An annual works programme should be developed in collaboration with all key stakeholders that clearly prioritises repair and maintenance needs of social housing units.</p> | <p>By December 2025</p> | <p>Building Maintenance Service who has policy responsibility for maintaining the Crown Estate. The Property Service will be a part of this task force. Please see 3.1</p> |
| <p>Minimum Standards</p> | <p>4.1.1 There should be a clear consensus achieved across SHG, in collaboration with other relevant agencies, regarding what are the minimum standards for social housing units and how best to provide these in the most cost effective manner. When determining these standards, priority should be given primarily to safety, then cost effectiveness to occupants, then cost of ownership to SHG.</p> <p>4.1.2 Minimum standards must be strictly adhered to and all properties must meet these standards. Priority for upgrading should be given to occupied units which do not meet the minimum safety standards.</p> <p>4.2.1 An agreed definition of homelessness should be established across SHG.</p> | <p>By May 2025</p> <p>By December 2025</p> <p>By end January 2025</p> | <p>Agreed.</p> <p>Proposed date of implementation: May 2025</p> <p>Agreed. Findings from the tenancy audit will help to inform these works and the work carried out in 4.1.1, however the timeframe for bringing all homes in line with the agreed minimum standards will depend on the availability of funding.</p> <p>Homelessness is defined under section 1.5 of the Homelessness Policy as 'having no accommodation that it</p> |



would be reasonable to occupy', with the policy and the St Helena Housing Procedure Manual 2015 detailing the considerations for determining homelessness applications, and whether or not there is a duty to assist.

The homelessness policy was reviewed by the former Head of Property in 2023, with the recommendation that the service continues as is under the existing policy, given the availability of resources, the number of applications and the relatively low costs of providing the service.

A more comprehensive policy in the absence of a legal duty to house was considered too onerous to implement.

4.2.2 A dedicated homelessness plan should be finalised and implemented. An associated budget should also be prepared.

By 31st March 2021

Agreed. Work has started with another Portfolio to provide bespoke temporary accommodation for homelessness relief, however timeframes for implementation are difficult to determine at this stage given the occupation and existing use of property by both Portfolios at this time.

Records on the costs to the Housing Service in providing homelessness relief are kept, and will be presented to the Ministers Advisory Board for consideration of additional funding for this service, which is currently met by the Trading Account. Consideration will also be given to an appropriate rent for temporary accommodation.

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| Customer Relations | <p>5.1 New tenancy agreements must be drawn up as a matter of urgency. These must reflect the social housing policy intent and may require specific provisions for differing types of units.</p> <p>5.2 All tenancy agreements must be regularly reviewed in order to meet modern best practice and changes in law, regulation and policy.</p> <p>5.3 A proactive and comprehensive Customer Relations Strategy must be developed and implemented.</p> <p>5.4.1 A method of capturing useful social housing and tenant data should be included within the tenancy agreement and the Customer Relations Strategy.</p> <p>5.4.2 Data collected from these sources must be regularly collated and updated.</p> | <p>By March 2025</p> <p>Annually</p> <p>By July 2025</p> <p>By July 2025</p> <p>On going</p> | <p>Time frames for this specific action is proposed for: 31 March 2025.</p> |
| | | <p>The form of tenancy agreement will be reviewed and form part of the work in 2.2.</p> <p>Proposed date of implementation: July 2025</p> <p>Agreed</p> <p>Agreed.</p> <p>Proposed date of implementation: September 2025</p> <p>Agreed</p> <p>Proposed date of implementation: September 2025</p> <p>Agreed</p> | |