

**REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS OF
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**Douglas, Tuesday, 22nd January 2002
at 10.30 a.m.**

Present:

The President (the Hon N Q Cringle), The Lord Bishop (the Rt Rev Noël Debroy Jones), the Attorney-General (Mr W J H Corlett QC), Hon Mrs C M Christian, Messrs E A Crowe, D F K Delaney, J R Kniveton, E G Lowey, Dr E J Mann, Messrs J N Radcliffe and G H Waft, with Mrs M Cullen, Clerk of the Council.

The Lord Bishop took the prayers.

Housing for Single People — Government Provision — Question by Mr Lowey

The President: Now, hon. members, at this sitting of the Legislative Council, our first in 2002 we have but a very short order paper and two questions.

Question 1. The hon. member (Mr Lowey) to ask a member of the Council of Ministers:

- (a) *What steps is government taking to make available housing for single people on the Island;*
- (b) *when was any provision made for this group; and*
- (c) *would a failure to make any provision for this group amount to discrimination and not comply with human rights legislation?*

The President: I call upon Mr Lowey to ask question number 1.

Mr Lowey: Thank you, Mr President. I beg leave to ask the question standing in my name.

The President: Member of the Council of Ministers, Mrs Christian, to respond, please.

Mrs Christian: Thank you, Mr President. With regard to part (a) of the hon. member's question, the Department Of Local Government and the Environment has stated in the Housing Policy Review Report 1999 and in subsequent progress reports its clear policy of providing additional housing to include at least 80 first-time buyer units and 80 elderly persons' units each year over a five-year term. Such housing is intended for the use of any eligible applicant, whether singles or couples, with each unit containing no less than two bedrooms. It is perhaps worth saying that the general construction of additional housing, whether or not that housing is suitable for single occupancy, eases the housing situation and has a knock-on benefit for single people.

In addition, the department has submitted a proposal to the Council of Ministers after extensive consultation with local authorities that single people of 18 years of age and over be eligible for acceptance onto public sector waiting lists. This proposal has been endorsed. Additionally, the department maintains a register of those interested in purchasing a property for the first time and accepts applications from single people. The register is currently being reviewed, with each registered person being contacted to confirm their interest and to update their particulars in respect to any change in circumstances, and any other interested people are being invited to apply for registration.

The department believes that the local authority housing waiting lists and the register of first-time buyers will provide a more detailed analysis of the true demand for housing and the needs of the individual applicants. The department points out that a distinction between need and aspiration is a prime consideration in planning future developments and in the allocation of properties. The department does recognise, however, that the needs of single applicants have to be addressed. It intends to develop a model for a housing association with the intention of providing suitable

accommodation for single people and also for key workers. The department is currently submitting bids for additional funding to accelerate the public sector and first-time buyer housing programmes.

With regard to part (b) of the hon. member's questions I have already mentioned that the department proposes the inclusion of single people on local authority housing waiting lists and has always accepted single applicants on the register of first-time buyers.

Turning finally to the question in relation to human rights legislation, article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights provides that everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence, but does not confer any general right to be provided with a home or housing. Article 14 of the convention states, 'The enjoyment of the rights and freedom set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any grounds such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.' As there is no right to be provided with a home I am advised that there can be no breach of article 14. However, as the information given indicates, the department is not failing to make provision for single people.

The President: Hon. member Mr Lowey.

Mr Lowey: I thank the hon. minister for her reply. Could the minister answer two supplementaries? The first: could she tell me when the provision to allow single people to go on the list was endorsed? I think that must be in the last week. I may be wrong. And could she also say how many single people since 1999 - and perhaps the minister may not have this to hand, and I readily accept that - have actually been allocated a first-time buyer's house? It is all right saying they are on the list, but if they are not being allocated any of the houses, then it seems rather a pyrrhic victory to be on a list when there is no chance of getting a house.

The President: Can I just have clarification - are we talking about being on the housing list for local accommodation or a house purchase list?

Mr Lowey: Two parts: the minister did make reference to both, that since 1999 single people have always been allowed on the housing list. How many have actually got government first-time buyers? My first question was, the minister said the policy now is to include single people and that has been endorsed, I presume, by the Council of Ministers, and I would like to know when it was endorsed and is that a policy that has just been slipped out in Question Time.

The President: Minister, Mrs Christian.

Mrs Christian: Yes, thank you, Mr President. The decision was endorsed, as the hon. member indicates, recently on 18th January.

The situation with regard to first-time buyers since 1999 is not one that I have the information available to answer and I regret that. I could perhaps give the hon. member some indication that, in respect of the recent Springfield/Harcroft development, out of 55 houses, 17 were allocated to single persons, five of whom were single people with no children, so that gives an indication, perhaps, of the breakdown as between single people with family responsibilities and others. The current register stands at 739 applicants, of which 394 are single without children. There have been allocations of public sector houses to people over 45 and in some areas under 45. The introduction of the uniform criteria will make sure that all public authority housing enables single people to go on the list, though it has to be pointed out that there will still be a points system and perhaps single people may still have a difficulty in actually achieving the allocation of a house, but the department's objective in allowing that procedure and inviting people to go on the register is to get a much clearer idea of what the needs actually are.

The President: Mr Delaney.

Mr Delaney: Thanking the minister for clarifying for us what the situation is from 18th January, could the minister tell us, if she is aware whether they have made arrangements to tell the public what the new regulations are in relation to housing and single persons and if she has any idea when that is going to be advertised, for example. The second one: bearing in mind the answers given by the new minister at the January sitting in relation to single persons' housing, is she aware when any schemes, including the financial assistance to single persons in the private sector, were brought to the Council of Ministers, when they was brought and were they accepted or thrown out by the Council of Ministers? We have never seen that on the minister's briefing.

The President: Minister.

Mrs Christian: Yes, Mr President. Insofar as there was a scheme brought to the Council of Ministers with regard to assistance to people in the private sector, such a scheme was brought to the Council of Ministers in the period running up to Christmas but was not accepted for a number of reasons, and I think that the department is now reviewing that scheme with a view to coming forward with some amended or other proposals.

Mr Delaney: Thank you.

Mrs Christian: Mr President -

Mr Delaney: The other one is telling the public what the new rules are for single people on the housing list.

Mrs Christian: Oh, right. The situation, Mr President, is that the decision as indicated was made last week, it has gone back to the department, the department will be advising the local authorities and the public, but I have no indication as to when that will happen.

Mr Delaney: Thank you.

The President: Mr Waft.

Mr Waft: Thank you, Mr President. Understanding the rules with regard to article 14, 'No right to be provided with a home,' and they have tried to provide a uniform criterion. I wonder if the minister might have a comment with regards to, which was mentioned, discrimination and human rights. For instance, what are the rights of someone who is being denied access in one local authority area to acceptance on one housing list, yet applicants in another area with the same criteria, the same circumstances, would be allowed on that list. Would there be any discrimination there?

The President: I think the circumstances have changed, but Mrs Christian to reply.

Mrs Christian: Yes, Mr President, the recent decision means that there will be uniform criteria applied across the Island, so that the indication that the hon. member has given should not in future apply. However, it still does not, as I understand it, relate to the Convention on Human Rights, article 14 of the convention setting out that the enjoyments and rights and freedoms set forth in the convention shall be secured without discrimination. In other words, this discrimination shall not apply to those items which are set out in the convention. If they are not set out in the convention one cannot say it is a breach of human rights if there is discrimination. It may be that discrimination should be dealt with in other ways, through legislation locally, but not necessarily through the human rights convention; I think they are two separate issues.

Mr Delaney: A supplementary, just to ask the Attorney-General.

The President: One moment. Mr Waft to continue.

Mr Waft: Thank you, Mr President. Whilst it is recognised that the department and probably the Council of Ministers would like to have a uniform criterion for the Island, when push come to shove at the end of the day, will the Council of Ministers be making the decision and enforcing local

authorities to conform with a uniform criterion for the applications and decisions with regards to appointing et cetera?

The President: Mrs Christian.

Mrs Christian: Mr President, this matter has been discussed with the local authorities, and the uniform criteria are being introduced and accepted, as I understand it, by all local authorities who will have to apply the uniform criteria.

Mr Waft: I would just put it to the minister that this has been put to the local authorities previously, but no success. I was just wondering whether they were going to enforce it if there was failure to conform.

Mrs Christian: I believe that the Council of Ministers would certainly wish to ensure that the uniform criteria were applied.

The President: Mr Delaney.

Mr Delaney: Delighted to hear what the minister has said and I am grateful for it, but has the minister at this moment been given any idea of what sort of numbers of people this will increase the housing list by?

Mrs Christian: Mr President, that is not anything that is within anybody's knowledge, I feel, at the moment, but it will be a useful indicator for future policy in terms of the need in different areas. People will apply for public sector housing within the criteria which will be set out, and those who do not meet those criteria may very well register their interest for first-time buyers' properties, and the number of people seeking accommodation will then be much clearer.

Mr Lowey: I thank the minister for her reply and I am quite sure it will be warmly welcomed out there, because it has been irk, to put it mildly, between males and females and not being allowed on a housing list, so I think it is not going to make it any easier, I accept what the minister says, but at least there is a level playing field now. I thank the minister.

School — Laptop Computers — Question by Mr Lowey

Question 2. The hon. member (Mr Lowey) to ask a member of the Department of Education (Dr Mann):

- (a) *How many laptop computers have been distributed to teachers in Manx schools;*
- (b) *what are the total costs incurred to date;*
- (c) *who advised the department on the type of computer to be used;*
- (d) *what problems (if any) have been experienced with the project;*
- (e) *who is assessing the results?*

The President: Again I call on Mr Lowey.

Mr Lowey: Thank you, Mr President. I beg leave to ask the question standing in my name.

The President: And on this occasion I ask a member of the Department of Education, Dr Mann, to reply.

Dr Mann: Thank you, Mr President. To stop confusion I will refer to the individual parts of the question. 'How many laptop computers have been distributed?' The department's Laptops for Teachers Scheme was introduced in September 2000. At the launch of the scheme every full-time teacher in the department's employ was provided with a laptop. The numbers were as follows: In the primary schools 322, which were entirely Apple Mac, and secondary schools 356; 253 were PCs and 103 Apple Macs. This figure includes 79 for Ballakermeen High School. This school piloted the scheme for a year in advance of the others.

In addition to those, there are 81 additional laptops, which includes the Isle of Man College, Primary and Modern Language Department, peripatetic music teachers, Life Education and Manx language teachers and nursery, So the total altogether is 759.

Part (b) of the question, 'What are the total costs incurred?' Hardware and software costs per laptop were £1,566 for the PCs and £1,505 for the Apple Macs. Hardware and software costs together add up to £477,687 for PCs and £681,540 for Apple Macs. So the total costs come to £1,159,228.21.

Support and maintenance costs to date are, for warranty, spare parts, servicing and insurance a total of £10,554.60; replacement costs for laptops stolen or damaged beyond repair, not recovered by warranty or insurance, of which there were eight, added up to £10,400. So the overall total came to £1,180,182.81.

Part (c): 'Who advised the department?' The choice of laptop computer was the result of consultation with headteachers, ICT specialists in schools, Information and Systems Division of Government. The precise models of computer chosen were those which best met the required specification for education purposes and which represented the best value for money at the time of purchase, the final decision being made by the department's ICT adviser. The models chosen were Compact Armada E500 PCs and Apple Power Book G3 Mac. Apple Power Book G3s were provided to primary school teachers, since they most closely matched the department's current policy for primary school ICT procurement. Both Apple Power Books and Compact Armadas were offered to secondary schoolteachers since secondary schools possess a combination of the two types, the final choice being left to the teacher.

Part (d) of the question, 'What problems have been experienced?' To date no significant problems have been encountered with the project. The biggest problem encountered is to ensure that part-time teachers, nursery nurses and support staff have adequate access to ICT now that some schools are using electronic methods as their primary means of communication.

Part (e) 'Who is assessing the results?' The department is monitoring the effects of the 'Laptops for Teachers Scheme'. In particular, feedback from teachers has been sought on the scheme and on the training provided. The responses have been overwhelmingly positive. In addition, a number of leading ICT education specialists have visited the Island in the last 12 months and given very positive feedback on the scheme. Most recently the department's ICT adviser received a national award for his work and the work of his team. A major element of this award is recognition of the Isle of Man's 'Laptops for Teachers scheme' and the way it has been implemented. A more formal research project is being planned. The main objectives of this research would be to quantify the educational benefits of teachers' laptops and to provide a foundation upon which the department's strategic development planning for ICT can be built into the future.

The President: Mr Lowey.

Mr Lowey: I thank the member for his reply. Could I ask, of the two types that are in operation in the schools, are they compatible with those organisations in which they operate? I have been told that the Apple Mac is not compatible I am sorry, Mr President, I am not technical, but from what I gather there are two different types and they are not compatible. Now, if we have got both types which are not compatible, how do they inter-change with one another, which defeats the objects of the laptops in the first place, which is to increase communication. I am told that Apple Macs are not in general use outside and in the UK, and does not that then deprive those that have got Apple Macs from actually fulfilling their potential? I am sorry that is rather elongated, but that is the lack of technical training and knowledge that I possess, but I have had concerns expressed to me that they are not compatible. Perhaps the member would like to. . .?

The President: Dr Mann.

Dr Mann: I have to bring members back to the comment that the choice of the laptop and the choice of the computers is based on educational need, and the assessment of the educational need is, I am afraid, definite. There is a definite advantage in using the older Apple Mac system for primary schoolchildren and particularly the younger children. They learn more rapidly on the Apple Mac system and are able to develop through that system very satisfactorily. Even in the secondary schools the teaching staff in one particular secondary school insist on the Apple Mac right through, because they still say they get better results in ICT training with that system than they do with the straightforward PC system. This is the basis for the choice and so you have got 100 per cent at the moment use of the Apple Mac system in the primary schools and, when the children come to the secondary schools, the choice is available within the school. Now, it is true that there is no direct compatibility, but that is accepted within the secondary schools without any difficulty. For instance, one of the Douglas schools has 100 per cent Apple Mac right the way through and their results in examinations are higher than all the others. So the choice has to be left to the teachers, but it is available; both of the systems are available depending on the choice of the teacher.

The President: Mr Radcliffe.

Mr Radcliffe: Could I ask the hon. member, how many teachers are there in total on this Island? I guess that he may or may not have that information!

Dr Mann: At the moment his number is changing continuously. I would not like to immediately answer that with a degree of accuracy, but -

The President: Earlier, 759 was the answer you gave.

Mr Radcliffe: Yes, that is computers, but I know of some teachers who have not had computers from the department, and that is why I ask. You stated categorically that every teacher had one.

Dr Mann: Every full-time teacher.

Mr Radcliffe: Well, I would say that this particular one I am thinking of is a full-time teacher and has been at the same school for four or five years. Would you count that as full time?

Dr Mann: I am assured that every full-time teacher has. There are certain teachers who are peripatetic - that is, going from school to school -

Mr Radcliffe: Yes, this is all at one school.

Dr Mann: - who are the last ones to get them.

Mr Radcliffe: This is permanently at the one school; in fact, she spent £1,800 last year on a computer so that she could keep up with what was required. Her figure would seem to be about right by what the figures you have given us here this morning, but I do wonder: is it the headteachers or the department itself who make the offer to the teachers of a laptop computer?

Dr Mann: It was the department that made the offer, but the headteachers and the ICT teachers within each school were the determining factor as to the choices.

The President: Mr Waft.

Mr Waft: Thank you, Mr President. This is with regard to the laptop computers and computers in general within the auspices of the Department of Education. With information technology speeding along as it is, what today could be state of the art laptop computers and computers in two or three years time they will be old hat and they will need replacing; but I just ask the department if they would consider notifying the Overseas Aid Committee (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) if they have any disposal of laptops or other computers which might be of use to other countries.

Dr Mann: I have asked that question myself as to what happens to the computers at the end of their useful life. This scheme is based on a three-year renewal. Now, the cost has been, as you

know, quite high. Part of that has been part of the e-mail strategy of government, not to the Department of Education by itself, and at the end of the three-year period we have yet to determine, firstly, how this is going to be renewed and who is going to pay for it. Now, if those at the end of the three-year cycle are then renewed they will actually continue to be used within the schools. I will certainly convey your comments elsewhere, but I understand that if some of those computers are still capable of being used they will continue to be used within the schools themselves.

Mr Delaney: My supplementary is on the same subject, Mr President, bearing in mind part of it has been asked, but would the department who is doing very successfully in the computer training - I know this - consider the systems being operated without government? The taxpayer actually is funding the Civil Service to have them renewed in their offices and teaching should not be treated any differently than that. It is part of the everyday need now in education, these computers. We supply the pens; we should be supplying the computers.

Dr Mann: I am sure they will continue to be but, as I say, at the moment this is a stand-alone three-year system, but at the end of the three years it has to be determined as to how successful it has been, and at this moment it is obviously very successful and compared with, for instance, Jersey, which has tried a similar scheme with a very much larger capital expenditure. Their actual results are lagging behind ours. So we obviously have a very efficient system in place and it certainly will be the intention of the department to ensure that we stay ahead.

Mr Delaney: Hear, hear.

The President: Mr Crowe.

Mr Crowe: Can I ask the hon. member if the primary schools that have all these computers and e-mail connections connect to other schools in other countries as a way of learning foreign languages and geography and history of other countries? Do schools, for instance, adopt another school in another country?

Dr Mann: I think you are ahead of the game! In due course there obviously would be a capability. I think the first aim is to get communication within the Isle of Man and certainly communication between schools in the Isle of Man. I think the advantages you are setting out are advantages that will come first to the secondary schools, communicating with other schools outside the Isle of Man, but at this particular moment we are concentrating on getting communication within schools and within educational establishments on the Island. One great advantage which we will soon be able to achieve is conferencing between the sixth forms of secondary schools within the Isle of Man, which will enable some of the minority subjects that some students want to be shared amongst all the secondary schools so there is a lot of potential which is going to develop as the years go by.

The President: Mr Lowey.

Mr Lowey: Can I thank the member for his technical know how, and I am grateful to him for his answers. Thank you.

The President: Hon. members, that actually completes our Legislative Council order paper for this morning, so it remains for me to say that Council will adjourn at this stage unto a date to be announced. Thank you, hon. members.

The Council adjourned at 11.02 a.m.