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Statement on Viewpoint Housing Programme

Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar notes with concern the issues that were raised at last week's Viewpoint programme on GBC.

The dwellings that were shown on the programme are properties that are rented to individuals by private landlords who offer these premises in these conditions.

The Government wishes to confirm that the Environmental Agency takes up every complaint of sub-standard housing and, if necessary, serves the appropriate notices. In the last six months the Agency has investigated 1902 complaints, of which 45 related to housing. There have been 145 Abatement notices served and 56 court appearances. However, it should be noted that many tenants of sub-standard homes chose not to report faults in their properties for fear of reprisals from landlords. That this should be a consideration for a person wishing to live in acceptable conditions is unacceptable, and any case of intimidation of this nature that is established will be taken up vigorously.

In view of these allegations, and starting immediately, the Environmental Agency will now visit every home shown in the Viewpoint programme. Approaches have already been made. Environmental Health Officers will also systematically visit other similar properties in the Upper Town which are suspected of being in sub-standard condition, serving notices as necessary. This work will make use of Section 82 of the Public Health Act, which refers specifically to situations which are "prejudicial to health" or a "nuisance".

In addition, all current legislation is being reviewed, specifically to check if the scope of the law can be widened, and penalties will be increased.

Minister for Housing, Samantha Sacramento MP, said: "I am extremely concerned by the manner in which private landlords are renting dwellings for financial return, however limited this may be commercially, which are clearly not fit for habitation. These particular cases had not been brought to my attention or that of the Housing Department. As such, I immediately asked that the Housing Department contact Action for Housing requesting details. As these were not cases that Action for Housing had previously referred to us in their monthly meetings, I look forward to receiving this information so that the proper assistance may be offered.

"These housing conditions are not acceptable and the Housing Department is always willing assist applicants, but officials require all the information. We therefore encourage all applicants to provide necessary information so that cases can be properly prioritised."



Minister for the Environment, John Cortes, said: “Despite what may appear to be the case, we have been working steadily to address the longstanding and reprehensible problem of landlords’ irresponsibility. We are reviewing the law and looking at ways in which we can pile on the pressure. There will now be knocks on many doors. I call on all those citizens living in sub-standard dwellings to make their case known to the Environmental Agency without fear, and that any reprisals or threats of reprisals from landlords be reported immediately. They will not be tolerated. This has to end.”

The Chief Minister, Fabian Picardo, said: “The issue as to how some members of our community, who are of Moroccan origin, continue to live in Gibraltar is a real concern, but it is one that we have already started to tackle. Many of our citizens who originated from Morocco and have lived in Gibraltar for 20, 30 or 40 years have not, until recently, had the opportunity to have their rights recognised. Since 2011 we have dealt with many historic applications for citizenship of such individuals and this in turn gave rights, including the ability to apply for housing. These applications are recent however; there are over 500 applications by citizens of Moroccan origin in total, 90% of which are after 2011. Over a quarter of such applicants have already been rehoused and the Housing Department will always endeavour to assist, prioritising the most urgent cases. Of course, all information as to living conditions needs to be made available to the relevant departments and I encourage all applicants to be open in doing so. I have no doubt that working together we will assist everyone on the housing waiting lists, particularly those in most urgent need.”