

The Bailiff: Thank you, Deputy Bailhache, you nominate Deputy Warr.

Is that seconded? [Seconded] Are there any other nominations? No. In which case the position will be that Deputy Mézec will first speak for 10 minutes and then I have the 20 minutes available for questions to him. Thereafter, Deputy Warr will have the same opportunity to speak for 10 minutes and have 20 minutes of questions available to him. As is usual, when one candidate is speaking, the other will leave to a room where he cannot overhear what is being said. Deputy Warr, I ask you to retire from the Assembly with a member of the Greffe, I think. We will wait just a moment for the Deputy to be ... yes, I think that allows sufficient time, so up to 10 minutes, Deputy Mézec. 6.1

Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier South: Can I start by acknowledging the work of Deputy Warr in the last 18 months and say that I [Approbation] hope to have the opportunity to build on much of that. There are 2 reasons why I have accepted the kind offer from the Chief Minister to nominate me for this role today and why I am asking States Members to vote for me. The first is my genuine desire to offer my services to a new united Government, which turns the page on the political strife we have seen recently. Being in opposition is often seen as the easy option but it is not the reason we went into politics. We went into politics to make a difference on behalf of the people who put us here and I do not want to shout from the sidelines and throw stones, I want to get stuck in and get my hands dirty. By doing so, I hope we can help bring the Assembly together and achieve the more inclusive and representative Government that we are all hoping for. The second reason is because Jersey faces a severe housing crisis, which poses a huge risk to our future prosperity and social cohesion, and there is no time to waste in resolving it. It is vital that the new Government can inspire confidence in Islanders that we will make progress in this key area as a matter of urgency, and we must acknowledge that it is urgent. Successive reports from Statistics Jersey confirm that the cost of housing is the biggest contributor 30 to causing poverty; maybe that is something to do with the increased reliance on foodbanks. We also know that hundreds of locally-qualified Islanders are leaving Jersey every year in search of better lives elsewhere with many of them citing the cost of housing as a key factor in their decision. This is something that is even now touching the lives of the relatively affluent as they fear losing their children and grandchildren to emigration. Forgetting the human impact, there is of course the economic impact too. The increased cost of housing puts pressure on businesses and employers to raise their salaries to levels that they will struggle to afford or risk losing the staff they have invested in, so either way we suffer socially and economically, and that is why it is a crisis. But I have experience leading an emergency effort on housing during the crisis, as I did during the pandemic, where I established a service which found and kept people in safe homes at a time when all sorts of restrictions were imposed on us. This was extremely successful and an example of how I am capable of stepping up to the plate and delivering in challenging circumstances. But as well as my experience, I believe that my decisive approach, my intrinsic understanding of this portfolio, and my communication skills mean I can hit the ground running and start steering things towards quicker progress right away. My 3 priorities will be: to support more Islanders into home ownership, to improve the experience of renters and to reduce the plight of homelessness in our wealthy society. A large part of the solution to all of these will be to improve the supply of new homes. I am very pleased to have shared positive words with the proposed new Ministers for Infrastructure and for the Environment, expressing their desire to work with me to address the blockages that have prevented new developments of family homes across the Parishes from being able to get started. I am sure that is a frustration that many of the Constables will recognise as well. I commit to working with them and supporting them. Whether that is on the reforms to the planning system or getting improvements to our infrastructure to sustain those homes, they will have my active support every step of the way. Through our government-owned developers, we can do more to provide the right kind of homes for Islanders.

Andium is doing an extremely good job and are currently on site building 726 homes, but only 18 of these are 3-bedroom homes. That is why we need to get those sites in the Parishes moving forward as quickly as possible. The States of Jersey Development Company needs to be steered in the right direction instead of spending huge amounts of money on failed applications to build unsuitable homes; in particular I will tell them that they must respect our democratically-elected Planning Committee. Members will know that I am particularly keen to support schemes for firsttime buyers. I desperately want the First Step scheme to benefit as many people as possible. I successfully got the funding to establish this scheme and I will argue for more funding to expand it. But as well as supply, we need to make better use of what we have already got and improve the experience for people who rent their homes. For both renters and landlords, we desperately need a new Residential Tenancy Law. The one we currently have is thin and provides very little for landlords and tenants to work from. There are all sorts of unjustifiable practices going on which we are aware of through our constituency work and evidence from Citizens Advice and the Government's Housing Advice Service, which I helped to establish. Whether that is the exploitative rent increases or revenge evictions, it is clear that we need a law that will protect tenants from bad landlords by upholding the practices already exemplified by the good landlords. I intend to get the work on a new Residential Tenancy Law back on track after it was delayed by the outgoing Government. I think the consultation on it took too long and by providing a lack of clarity on the political commitments for change, it provided an opportunity for some stakeholders to dig their heels in the sand, rather than forcing different sides to come together to help us identify where the right balances are. On that note of bringing different sides together, in advance of today I reached out to the Jersey Landlords Association to commit to them that I would meet them as early as possible to get things moving on several issues that I know they are concerned about. In particular, I want to work with them to get their input on effective measures to protect tenants from revenge evictions. Some landlords are nervous about this because they are worried it might mean losing autonomy and control over their properties and their ability to retain possession when a tenant breaks their tenancy 31 contract. But there is absolutely no reason why that should be the case and I want to make sure that they can have confidence that the balance we strike will suit them too. [11:30] It is also vitally important that we respect the decision of the Assembly made last year when it voted in favour of establishing a proper Rent Tribunal, and I make it clear that this service will be as much for landlords as it is for tenants. There is also work to be done to establish the code of practice for the licensing scheme that the States approved at the end of last year. I want to be sat round the table with them making sure that their voice is heard in this process so that that licensing scheme can be up and running, supporting those vulnerable tenants in our community, while providing really good guidance and advice to those who are renting out properties so that we do not inadvertently end up making criminals out of people when we could have helped them from the outset and made things much easier. There are lots of other little bits that I want to make quick progress on. For example, we need to improve the deposit protection scheme. I have raised numerous issues with how this scheme works in the last year which have not been resolved yet, and it just causes unnecessary stress for people who are just trying to live their lives and acquire a new home. There are some quick wins that we can achieve there and I know where to find them. On homelessness, I am absolutely committed to implementing all of the recommendations of the homelessness strategy. One in particular was to enshrine the definition of homelessness in legislation. Until now we have not had clarity on that, so let me provide that clarity now by saying I support that and will do it. The last time I was Minister for Housing I managed to secure a more appropriate funding mechanism for the main homelessness charity that we work with, and so I have developed a very good relationship with them and the other homelessness charities too. The more supply of affordable homes we can deliver and improvements to security of tenure we can achieve, the fewer people may end up facing homelessness, so all of these issues go

hand in hand. I hope that Members will consider me as a candidate who has the experience and the know-how to hit the ground running with this Ministry and get things moving quickly with the sense of urgency that is required. I am very pleased to have the confidence of the new Chief Minister to do this and I pledge to Members that, if elected, I will play my part in a positive and unified Government that can help bring the Assembly and the public together while resolving this crucial issue that threatens our future prosperity. I look forward to taking questions from Members. [Approbation]

The Bailiff: Thank you very much, Deputy. There is now a period of 20 minutes of questions.

6.1.1 Deputy H. Jeune: House prices, whether to buy or rent are impacted by supply. What will the candidate's approach be to managing an increasing supply for those who need it the most?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec: I thank the Deputy for this question. The last time that I was Minister for Housing I was a champion of providing the sites and access to Andium Homes as quickly as possible and giving them the certainty that they need to plan their building schedules so that they can get building. I did support the development of Ann Court, which was not a unanimous decision of this Assembly and which did lead to delays initially, but I supported that all the way through. That development, I think, is now almost full and has had a huge effect in getting people in urgent need of new housing into some really, really decent well-built homes at a more affordable level than they would have found in the private sector. I will absolutely be a champion and supporter of them and seek to get as early indications as possible for Andium about those sites when they become available. But also, as I mentioned in my speech, it is vitally important to work with the new Ministers for Infrastructure and the Environment on some of the newer sites that we know are coming available so that we can build 32 those family homes because there are not enough 3-bedroom homes on the building schedule at this moment in time.

6.1.2 Deputy H. Jeune: Demand for housing to buy or rent is fuelled by availability of third-party debt. Will the candidate's approach be to make it easier or harder to borrow and, if so, for which categories of people?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec: Well, we know that there was commentary recently about what was called the "Jersey premium" for mortgages where Islanders were facing terms that were not as favourable as the same banks were providing in the U.K. There were examples we knew of people who, with the same bank, were paying hundreds of pounds a month more, which means over a longer period of time these people are paying more and it is harder to get that first step when you see that prospect facing you like that. It is not the Minister for Housing and Communities' remit to tell banks what they can and cannot do but we have seen from the Chief Minister his intention to allocate the financial services portfolio to Deputy Gorst on this. If he is successful in that, then I will want to work with him so that whatever arrangements we may seek to arrange with banks so that they are providing that more, then I would work with him to do that, the mortgage lenders, yes.

6.1.3 Connétable K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour: The candidate has touched on this subject already. I am sure the candidate is aware that there are a number of landlords who fear that if the candidate is successful that he would weigh legislation far too far in favour of the tenant as opposed to the landlord. What would the candidate say that would allay those fears and promises of an equitable solution?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec: In my role as a constituency representative and as Minister for Housing previously, I have read more tenancy contracts than I could possibly recall, and I have seen all sorts of different examples of practice, lots of it absolutely decent and good, and many landlords going above and beyond what legislation requires of them, and I have seen instances where the complete

opposite is the case. I believe that it is important to bring people with you, that is why I have made a proactive approach to the Jersey Landlords Association to say that I will meet with them early on. Despite what some might perceive, there are people in the Jersey Landlords Association who I have a decent relationship with. In fact, if you were to draw a Venn diagram of Jersey Landlords Association members and Reform Jersey members there would be a significant overlap, and I have lots of people in my social circle who are involved in that too. I have no problem sitting down with them and saying: "Right, I accept that landlords will have concerns about how they manage their assets and whether legislation will impinge on their abilities to do that. What I am not prepared to do is to say that difficult conversations are a reason for us not trying." We do need to try and we do need to put more protections in law for tenants against exploitative practices but one of the ways we do that is by learning from the good practice and trying to make that standard.

6.1.4 The Connétable of St. Saviour: Also, will the candidate be working with Parishes to furnish new first-time buyer housing and first-time rental housing? Deputy S.Y. Mézec: Sorry, did he say "furnish"? Could he just elaborate what he means by that? The Connétable of St. Saviour: As in supply; the supply of housing.

33 Deputy S.Y. Mézec: I had a picture in my head of the Constable and I with his St. Saviour van going round and delivering sofas and beds into new flats, which I am sure we would enjoy doing that. The Constable is right that there are sites that have been allocated for first-time buyer housing and affordable rental housing across the Parishes. The point in getting those sites was that they are not to be big tower blocks of one-bedroom flats. Okay, there is lots of need for one-bedroom flats, and managing that supply is important as well, but there is a great need for 3-bedroom homes for people who want to grow their families and have a nice place for those people to live in and also those who have special needs as well, whether that is for outdoor space and accessibility. I want to make sure we get moving on those sites as quickly as possible, and that is why I have been lucky to share some words with the other nominated candidates and hopefully we can start that very quickly.

6.1.5 Deputy P.M. Bailhache: How would the candidate define homelessness and what would be the consequence for an individual defined as homeless?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec: There are many different forms of homelessness and there has been an informal definition that has been provided by the Government already. That can include anything from rough sleeping, which is the obvious one, but also the less obvious ones where people may technically have a roof above their head but because of the circumstances they find themselves in they have no security with that and so can be classed as homelessness for the intents and purposes of providing support to them. That might be somebody who is facing domestic violence and cannot leave the home that they are currently in, that might be people who are sofa-surfing, so there are a variety of different ways of defining it. What I would want the consequence to be for having that enshrined in legislation is that it can then trigger a process so that the public authorities that are responsible for dealing with a homelessness case are required to deal with it and do not pass it from pillar to post or ignore it. So that compulsion then for a public authority, whether that is Customer and Local Services or another department, perhaps the Health Department in some instances too, will then have a legal position established that requires them to then manage that case and get that person into a stable home eventually.

6.1.6 Deputy P.M. Bailhache: Does the candidate have any concerns about the financial implications of what he has just said?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec: Potentially yes, because a consequence of that would be that you either have to find a home for somebody which, if we do not have the supply available at that particular moment, or if that person has got particular needs in what kind of home they would need, that would be difficult. But I say that the financial costs to our Island society in the long term by having a severe homelessness problem costs us more in the end because all sorts of things emanate when you do not have a secure roof above your head, whether that is mental health problems, whether that is the difficulty in sustaining employment, and as a society we pay for all of those costs as well. So getting things right at the start by getting people a decent and secure home, in the end that costs our society less.

6.1.7 Deputy R.J. Ward: During the Chief Minister debate, I asked a question about circumstance. I have got another one that came from a constituent, a landlord who, very well-intentioned, but had a tenant that they simply could not get rid of for one year. What would the Minister do about that on the other side, if you like, of the coin, although I am not sure there are sides.

34 Deputy S.Y. Mézec: As well as protecting tenants from exploitative practice when requiring them to leave their homes, there is no excuse for bad behaviour, and people who own properties should be able to retake possession of them if the person who had been living in that property is in breach of their contract. For something to happen where the Viscounts are not able to implement an eviction order for a year even though the order has been granted, then there is clearly something wrong. I do not necessarily know the full details of that case, although I have been told a little bit, if they are not able to be moved out of that home over a year with the Housing Advice Service and the Gateway and whoever would be connected to to find that person a new home so they can leave that property and the landlord can have a fresh start with it, then there is clearly something not working there and I would want to get those systems properly in place. I think that the proposed Rent Tribunal could be a good place for that where there is a specialised service separate to the Petty Debts Court that will hopefully deal with those better and perhaps even identify those difficult cases where an eviction is legally and contractually the right thing to do but would cause hardship on a tenant, to then kickstart those services into action to find that person a home so that that landlord can take repossession of their property as quickly as possible.

6.1.8 Deputy R.J. Ward: It may have been slightly answered but I was going to ask, because one of the issues is that the landlord has to take legal action, if you like, which is not easy and certainly not quick here at times - no criticism - what would the Minister do to try and improve that situation? I hope I have not just got myself into trouble.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec: Well having the combination of the new Rent Tribunal and the new Residential Tenancy Law I hope would help that. I am aware of instances where landlords have faced an extremely difficult situation where the tenant is either not paying rent or is wrecking the property and causing thousands of pounds of damage to it, who then think that they have to issue 3 months' notice in accordance with the Residential Tenancy Law to get rid of that tenant; that is not right. They do not have to do that, they do not have to wait 3 months before starting action, they can start that action much sooner. Lots of landlords do not know that they have got the right to do that to protect their properties. So as well as the Rent Tribunal and the new Residential Tenancy Law, I hope that that can be accompanied with some kind of information packages for landlords so that they know what rights they have got as well over their properties because I do think I have come across cases where they have not necessarily been aware that they could have been able to deal with things quicker.

6.1.9 The Connétable of St. Brelade: Given that relationships between landlords and Government generally have not been that good over the past few years, and I heard the Minister in his speech mention that he would be meeting them, would he agree to go a step further and put formally in place perhaps quarterly or 6-monthly meetings in the diary with the landlords or those who are landlords, not necessarily the association, to enhance those relationships and learn from the problems of others?

[11:45] Deputy S.Y. Mézec: That is an easy question to answer; I would be perfectly happy to do that. I have been trying not to get ahead of myself in advance of today but I have started thinking about what I would like my engagement schedule to be like as Minister, how often I would want to meet the social housing providers, how often I would want to meet Citizens Advice and other bodies like that, but the J.L.A. (Jersey Landlords Association) would absolutely be a part of that schedule. 35

6.1.10 The Connétable of St. Brelade: How would he anticipate working with the main States property division, if you can call it that, Andium Homes? What will his relationship be there?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec: I do already have a close relationship with Andium, not just from being a constituency representative, but from my time as a Minister previously. I know some very, very good people there who I normally go straight to when I have got a particular constituency case that I need to deal with. I think, certainly in my previous term, there were difficulties in the lines of accountability where the Minister for Treasury and Resources as shareholder representative on some things had a greater say than the Minister for Housing and Communities who is responsible for setting policy for Andium. I would want to have a think about how we could perhaps work more closely with the Treasury side of things, who have the shareholder function, to make sure that they are not getting mixed messages from Ministers and that they are best placed to be able to finance the implementation of the policies that ultimately the Minister for Housing and Communities would be setting.

6.1.11 Deputy A. Curtis: The candidate referenced the South Hill site. Could he clarify from his speech if it is his intention to work with the Minister for Treasury and Resources and the S.o.J.D.C. (States of Jersey Development Company) to see a different scheme proposed for the site or, if he has other plans, what are they?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec: I have to say that I have not enjoyed this episode with South Hill and how the development proposals have progressed there. I think that when the Planning Committee rejected the most recent application, that ought to have been a wake-up call for them to say that there is not that much support for that particular development. The size of the homes and the way that they are formatted around that site gives rise to serious concerns about the quality of life that people will have in there. I think that now is the moment to sit with them and say: "Right, okay, things have kind of changed recently in terms of our expectations of our property sizes, for one-bedroom homes, for example, and the amount of affordable housing we would expect a government-owned developer to be providing." I think having that conversation early on would certainly be a priority for me and I think I have been consistent on that.

6.1.12 Deputy A. Curtis: On that site with the existing plans, it has been suggested that the affordable homes on the site would be the ones facing into the quarry and would be single aspect. Does the candidate support providing affordable category homes on this site with those units being the ones with the least sunlight and daylight or does he prefer not to discriminate on access to light?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec: I am a staunch supporter of the basic human right of access to life; I find it an illuminating thing more generally. What does it say about us, frankly, that we would have a

government-owned developer that would build a load of homes and the ones that are designated as affordable objectively be the worst ones in them without enough effort made to design them a bit nicer? I mean, for goodness' sake, we can do better than that.

6.1.13 Deputy B. Ward: Please may I ask the candidate how he would manage the Deputy's strong views and commitment to his party's manifesto and the commitment of not crossing their red lines, especially if it will be contrary to a Council of Ministers' decision?

36 Deputy S.Y. Mézec: Let us be clear that it is the States Assembly that is the supreme decision-making body of the Island, not the Council of Ministers, and I am very pleased from the discussions that fellow candidates have had so far in trying to recognise that principle. I would be a fool if I attempted to bring forward a policy to this Assembly that I did not do the work on to convince people it was the right thing to do and to convince stakeholders that they could have comfort that it was the right thing to do. I appreciate that I have probably got some explaining to do about the finer detail of some of the things that I would want to propose but ultimately I want to bring States Members with me on that and they can, I hope, expect a lot of engagement from me, and probably even pestering at times, so I can try to explain what kind of policies we are pursuing and hear what concerns are and change them if I have to to get things over the line, to get progress rather than get nothing.

6.1.14 Deputy B. Ward: The Deputy states he is a team player. Please can the Deputy provide the Assembly examples of this and how the Deputy will apply these skills if he was appointed as Minister?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec: Well for my almost 10 years in this Assembly I have always been part of an organised and transparent team in the form of the political party that I helped found. I am very proud of the progress that we have made and the leadership that I have shown in being able to bring a wide diverse range of people together to be a part of that team and for us to be so cohesive and, frankly, getting on really well. I have served in the Council of Ministers previously where I was very much a minority on many issues. I hope that those who served around the table at that time with me can recall those days that I was never unpleasant and was not a menace towards anyone else. We did very often respectfully agree to disagree and, when it came to staunch manifesto positions, we just agreed to disagree and I did not stand up on the floor of the Assembly and surprise Members with things that they were not expecting or deliberately antagonise them. It is in my personal interests, quite frankly, electorally, that this new Government succeeds and I am going to work as hard as I possibly can if the Assembly chooses me to make sure that that happens.

6.1.15 Deputy M.R. Scott of St. Brelade: What assurances could the Deputy give to landlords who have fears that they may not be able to reoccupy homes they intend to reoccupy or that they intend to have family members occupy?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec: I thank the Deputy for that question. A landlord who owns a property that they rent out which they intend to reoccupy themselves at one point, that might be as they are retiring or something like that, in even some of the places in Europe with the toughest rental regulations they do still normally have a clause in the law that gives landlords the right to have a tenant move out of a property so the owner can live in it. I think it is fair that if a landlord knows well in advance that that is their plan, they are coming up to retirement or something like that, then I think they should be encouraged to give as much notice as possible for the tenant who themselves might have lived there a very long time and need time to be able to plan where they move next. So even the places I

think with the toughest regulations on this, that is an allowance that is made for so that possession can be retaken.

The Bailiff: There are about 4 seconds to go and therefore I will not call upon any other questions. I would then ask Deputy Mézec to leave the Chamber and for Deputy Warr to be brought back. Very well, Deputy Warr, you have up to 10 minutes to address the Assembly and thereafter, as is usual, there will be 20 minutes of questions available to Members to ask you. If you would like to speak, Deputy Warr.