

2018.03.19

8 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier of the Minister for Housing regarding the use of direct debit payment guarantees in the tenancy agreements of Andium Homes: [OQ.51/2018]

Is it the Minister's assessment that the use of direct debit payment guarantees that rents are paid, come what may; if so, will she use the powers granted to her over matters of policy to direct Andium Homes to change its tenancy agreements to allow weekly direct debit payments to be made, where appropriate, and if not why not?

Deputy A.E. Pryke of Trinity (The Minister for Housing):

My response to the Deputy's written question deals with this matter in full, but to reiterate I and Andium Homes are not aware of any problems regarding the requirement for tenants to make rental payments on a monthly basis. The requirement is not new, it existed under the former Housing Department, and it is also applied by the other housing trusts. This being said, if some tenants are experiencing problems with monthly rental payments and there would be an advantage for them to make weekly direct payments, then Andium Homes would of course work with a tenant to look at this option. I am confident that Andium Homes and the housing trusts adopt good tenancy management practices. Nonetheless, my officers will be writing to them to seek reassurance about rent payments and to make sure that no tenant is put at a disadvantage.

3.8.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Unfortunately it seems to me that the Minister has been woefully misadvised because, in one case in particular, where the persons do not have £1,000 in their bank account to pay the rent by direct debit monthly in advance, they have asked to pay weekly because that they can do and have been refused. So Andium Homes, I am afraid, does not have flexible or useful guidelines to operate with its tenants, but is refusing blank to bend the rule that it is paid by direct debit a month in advance, which may be £1,000 plus.

The Deputy of Trinity:

As I said, I was not aware of other issues, and if the Deputy wants to send me an email about it I will look into it.

3.8.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Minister has said she will write to Andium Homes to request I think that they adopt suitable rules around rents. Will she use the powers that she has as Minister to direct Andium Homes to allow direct debits one week in advance instead?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I did say I would be writing to seek reassurance about rent payments and to make sure that no tenant is put at a disadvantage. Regarding writing to Andium and making a direction, I have no powers over Andium Homes, the only power is by the Minister for Treasury and Resources who can exercise his power as guarantee of the company. We had this discussion with the Social Housing Regulation.

3.8.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Final supplementary, if I may? It seems to me the Minister for Housing has said she has very little - no powers - to guide Andium Homes in terms of its policy for housing, what are often poorest, the poorest people and most vulnerable people in our society. What has happened then to social housing?

The Deputy of Trinity:

Social housing is good, we know that Andium and other housing trusts are doing good, but that was the whole emphasis of the importance of social housing regulations. I said at the time, and I say it now, I can write to Andium and I will happily take up the Deputy's case to look at that incident and take it from there.