

2.5 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Housing regarding the sums of rent involved in the 600 “zero tolerance” letters sent to tenants:

Will the Assistant Minister detail for Members the sums involved in the 600 “zero tolerance” letters sent to tenants in terms of the rent owed by monthly bands over a period of 0-24 months and in bands of £200 from £0-£2,000? Will he or she further state how many of the 600 letters were sent to pensioners?

Deputy J.A. Hilton of St. Helier (Assistant Minister for Housing):

The letter referred to is the second in a series of letters sent to advise tenants who fall into arrears that the matter requires their immediate attention. An initial letter is generated after the rent account falls into arrears of one week. The letter in question is sent out a week later if no communication has been elicited. Early intervention is imperative to prevent tenants accruing unmanageable arrears. These particular letters have only been used since January 2007 so there is no 24-month period to review. A manual exercise has been undertaken to show the information requested for the month of October 2007 as follows: £0-£200, 4 letters; £200-£400, 10 letters; £400-£600, 2 letters; £600-£800, 1 letter; £800-£1,000, 1 letter; £1,400-£1,600, 1 letter; £1,800-£2,000, 1 letter. During October in excess of 200 letters were automatically generated by our in-house computer system but only 20 letters to which this question refers were sent to tenants. None of those 20 letters sent out during October were received by pensioners. It is clear that October 2007 has seen a continued monthly reduction in the issue of this letter. This, I believe, is an indication of the success of “zero tolerance” policy. The policy has seen a reduction in arrears of £326,000 so far in 2007 releasing valuable funds that can be reinvested into the housing stock and so improve the quality of life of all our tenants. Sir, I would like to explain to the House that this particular question just for the month of October took 2 officers 2½ hours to answer and this is the reason why I have only answered the question for the month of October 2007.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

I thank the Assistant Minister for her answer.

2.5.1 Deputy S.C. Ferguson:

Would the Assistant Minister please come back to the House and tell us exactly what the total of the outstanding arrears is? Would she not confirm that it is somewhat unusual to allow rents to accrue to the point of £2,000?

Deputy J.A. Hilton:

I can answer the Deputy’s question today. The level of arrears at 1st October 2007 is £790,000. As I explained before, the arrears reduction in the last 10 months has been £326,000. The level of arrears obviously in December 2006 was £1,117,000. The level of debt that she points to - the £1,800-£2,000 - it is not a question of this debt just becoming aware to the Housing Department, we are continuously engaging with those 2 tenants in an effort to reduce those arrears