

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR HOUSING
BY SENATOR F. du H. LE GRESLEY
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON MONDAY 19th JULY 2010**

Question

Would the Minister advise why he has chosen to delegate to his Chief Officer the power to agree to the eviction of States tenants due to rent arrears or other breaches of the tenancy agreement?

Will the Minister give exact details of how many tenants currently have rent arrears and the total amount of rent arrears outstanding?

Can the Minister advise whether his Department is on course to achieving the 2010 Business Plan target of reducing the percentage of rent arrears to 1.6 percent of gross rental income and, if not, whether he intends to use the power of eviction more frequently in the future or whether, in the current economic climate, he will exercise a more sympathetic stance?

Answer

I have chosen to delegate certain functions to my Chief Officer to ensure that the efficient operation of key areas of the business are not delayed due to myself or my Assistant Minister being unavailable. Those delegated powers will seldom be exercised and where they are will be within the policies and guidelines already in place which ensure that eviction is an absolute last resort in the enforcement of the tenancy agreement. In the last 12 months the department has only pursued two evictions for rental arrears and in each case the tenant had failed to engage and address their rental obligations. The current arrears policy has been developed in partnership with the Tenants Forum and is therefore supported by those it serves.

In the States Business Plan for 2010, submissions for which were made in May 2009, the department set out that it would aim to achieve a rental arrears reduction to 1.6% against gross rental income and charges before the close of 2010. Reference to the departmental 2010 Business Plan, submissions for which were prepared in September 2009, will show that that target was deliberately adjusted to 1.8%. The reason for this, as the Senator has suggested in his question was the deepening recession and the department's concern that striving for the target of 1.6% would have too great an impact on those tenants who were trying hard to address their arrears.

As at July 2010 there were 777 rent accounts in arrears with a combined value of £678k. This represents 1.8% of gross rental income and charges and therefore achieves the restated 2010 Business Plan target. This has been achieved without unnecessarily resorting to evictions and I am of the view that the 1.6% target is still achievable albeit over a slightly longer period.

The Housing Department's approach to tackling rent arrears has been one of its key successes in recent years and has seen total arrears fall from £1m in January 2008 to £678k today. This has additionally helped steer 544 customers from the burden of debt.