

2018.09.11

**14 Deputy K.F. Morel of the Minister for Children and Housing regarding the rent policy of Andium Homes: [OQ.112/2018]**

Will the Minister advise whether he has been informed by Andium Homes of any change in policy that means the company now collects more than the contractually agreed monthly rent from tenants in order to build up one month's worth of rent in the tenants account with Andium? If so, when was he informed of this?

**Senator S.Y. Mézec (The Minister for Children and Housing):**

I am not aware of a change of policy in the precise terms that the questioner has described. What I am aware of is that Andium Homes tenancy since 2010 have required tenants to pay their rent monthly in advance and that this is not a new policy, and this mirrors what most private sector tenants will understand and in fact also other social housing providers. What can happen is when a tenant falls behind in their rent payments for whatever reason, Andium Homes will work with them to structure some sort of overpayment which is affordable for the tenant, to ensure that the rent account is managed in accordance with their tenancy agreement. There are also instances where Andium Homes may have to work with tenants to alter those agreements if circumstances change moving forward. I would say to the Deputy that if he is aware of any Andium Homes tenants who are facing a payment system which they are finding difficult to manage that they can either speak directly to Andium Homes or come and speak to me and we can see if there is a better arrangement that can be found.

**4.14.1 Deputy K.F. Morel:**

The Minister may or may not be aware that I have correspondence between tenants and Andium Homes, in which Andium Homes are asking for extra rent to be paid in order to build up a month's rent, which will be returned minus any money for damages. In my view, that is a deposit. I believe your party colleague, Deputy Tadier, had had that discussion on the floor with this Assembly in the past where a deposit was described. As such, I am concerned that Andium Homes are now essentially holding deposits. Has the Minister heard anything along these lines?

**Senator S.Y. Mézec:**

That also concerns me. Obviously, if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck then it is a duck. If there is some sort of arrangement that has been worked out to make up for deposits, unless there is a very good justification then I would want to know about it. I would suggest to the Deputy that we look into this together and find out with Andium Homes what the justification is and see if there is an alternative arrangement that works better than that.

**4.14.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Is the Minister aware of whether Andium Homes has sufficient flexibility in its arrangements to cater for those who find it difficult to find £1,000 as a month's rent in advance, but can afford to pay weekly in advance? Does Andium Homes allow that flexibility?

**Senator S.Y. Mézec:**

I could not say to the Deputy offhand if there are a portion of tenancies which are being managed in a different way, so it is not monthly payments, but I am certainly happy to look into that with him.

**4.14.3 Deputy M. Tadier:**

Is the Minister aware that in the past utility bills may have been included in tenants' overall rent and that is no longer necessarily the case? Will the Minister undertake to discover whether any tenants

are finding this difficult to save money sufficiently for bills which come perhaps every 3 months and whether this is something that Andium might be able to assist with in building up that pot of money so that tenants are not struggling to budget?

**Senator S.Y. Mézec:**

I am concerned that there are lots of people in Jersey who are struggling with arrangements to have a decent roof above their head and affording that. I think there are difficulties in the rents policy of Andium Homes in general, which I think need to be reviewed properly. If that includes whatever arrangements there are for including or not including utilities in that arrangement then of course that is something that has to be looked at as well.

**4.14.4 Deputy K.F. Morel:**

Would the Minister agree that if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck it should be deposited with My Deposit Jersey, as all landlords are meant to do by law? If Andium Homes are taking money, whether it is advanced rent, but looks a lot like a deposit, that it should be held with My Deposit Jersey and not within Andium Homes own accounts?

**Senator S.Y. Mézec:**

Absolutely, I 100 per cent agree with that. What the Deputy is describing is something that I have heard of happening in the private sector as well and I think it is unacceptable when it is happening there. If there is a form of deposit being held, that must be held with My Deposit Jersey. That is the whole purpose of having My Deposit Jersey to provide that security. Any arrangement that does not reflect that is not acceptable.