

Letters to the Editor

Join the discussion Email editorial@jerseyeveningpost.com or write to The Editor, Jersey Evening Post, PO Box 582, Jersey JE4 8XQ. Letters must include full name and postal address, which will be published. They should be no longer than 400 words and may be edited.

Housing Minister alienated private-rental sector

● From Emma Paul, committee member, Jersey Landlords Association.

SENATOR Sam Mézec seems keen to make emotive statements concerning the private-rental sector. One concerned a 16% rent increase once the Covid-19 rent freeze restrictions end. Using this headline, he calls for a rent freeze extension until he can bring in rent-control legislation – but he gives no context.

In this case, the landlord publicly defended their stance. The JLA offers no comment on the rent increase, but we like to look at the context and it appears:

1. Seemingly, these are one-bedroom flats rented by the former landlord for c£830pcm.
2. The new landlord proposed a rent increase to £910pcm – a 10% increase.
3. A further 5% increase is for services (cleaning and call system).
4. Senator Mézec said it was a 16% rent increase.
5. The new landlord said that the new tenancy agreements brought arrangements up to date with the government's latest housing regulations and rent increases aligned to what could be received from housing support (c£910pcm) and to invest in the accommodation.
6. Andium's average price for a one-bed flat, on their website, is £826pcm. Their rents are capped at 90% of market rent. So market rent would be £908.60. Which is basically what the new landlord is proposing.
7. On 7 August, Andium Homes advertised an over-55s, one-bed flat for £909.02 (c£1000 at market rent). In other words, more than what the new landlord is charging.
8. Andium Homes rents 'no-frills' ac-



■ 'Senator Mézec is Housing Minister, not "Tenants' Minister"'

commodation, without carpets, window dressings or any white goods. Most private landlords provide these.

So, some may conclude that the new landlord's rent increase was because the old landlord was charging rent at below market value.

The new landlord may have approached things differently, eg taken a smaller above-inflation rent increase over some years, increased rent when the flat was next vacated or maintained the rent, given Covid-19 – everyone will have their view.

However, many landlords who haven't put up rents in a long time may be reassessing their strategy in the light of Senator Mézec's calls for rent control. Future rent controls may mean they cannot 'catch up' market value rent when, say, the tenant leaves or costs rise. If this is causing landlords to put up their rents now, Senator Mézec has done a great disservice to tenants.

Increased bureaucratic regulation means landlords sell. New landlords reassess rent in the light of their capital investment and current rental legislation. Sadly, this often means rents increase. The JLA maintain that this will get worse if the proposed landlords' licensing scheme becomes law.

Senator Mézec has stated he doesn't want rent controls, but then talks about rent freezes, rent stabilisation, and European-style regulation, all of which encompass 'rent controls'. Rent controls again mean landlords leave the market, reducing availability, causing standards to fall and, at worst, cause a black market to develop.

The rent freeze was put in place to reduce/stop people having to move during the Covid-19 pandemic, to reduce transmission of the virus. This reason has currently passed, hence the rent freeze should not be continued without research into its likely implications.

Senator Mézec may have another reason why he wishes to continue the rent freeze beyond 1 January 2021. On this date, Andium rents will increase by RPI +0.75%, with a minimum of 2.5% and maximum of 4%. Senator Mézec put in the minimum rent increase of 2.5%. The latest RPI figure is 0.5%, and, if maintained, Andium's rent increase will be five times higher than inflation.

Senator Mézec is Housing Minister, not 'Tenants' Minister'. There is so much positive work he could be attending to rather than continuing his headline-grabbing emotive statements, which only serve to alienate the private-rental sector and make the housing issue in Jersey worse rather than better.

21a St John's Road, St Helier.