

Reintroduce eviction ban and rent increase ban.

The Jersey Tenants Forum has called for the eviction and rent increase bans, which were introduced shortly after the start of the first Covid-19 lockdown, to be reinstated. We question the need for such draconian action when the pandemic risks are receding, and most landlords are behaving in a very responsible and considerate manner.

Since the bans were lifted on 1st October 2020, we understand that there have been 24 cases brought before the Petty Debs Court in Jersey for evictions. 15 involved social housing, 6 private landlords and 3 “commercial”. In an Island of 20,000-plus residential dwellings, this is hardly the stuff of opened floodgates that the likes of former Housing Minister, Senator Mézec, and the Jersey Tenants Forum have talked about.

It should also be remembered that some evictions have been necessitated by the Health and Safety (Minimum Standards) (Rented Dwellings) (Jersey) Law 2018. In many cases, it is just not possible to refurbish a property (as required) whilst tenants are in situ. There are many other legitimate reasons for a landlord taking back a property and the Jersey Landlords Association looks forward to consulting with the Housing and Communities Minister, the JTF and other interested parties concerning this, in due course.

We do not know of any publicly available figures regarding rent increases in the private rental sector. But we do know that during the pandemic many landlords have foregone rental increases, given rent holidays and written rent off. We also know of landlords who have previously forgone rent increases year after year, but have reluctantly increased rent at this time due, in part, to the public campaign by some States Members and other bodies for rent control measures to be introduced in Jersey. Landlords who have been renting below market value, feel compelled to “catch up” with the market, so as not to be left behind should rent controls be adopted which set the current rent as a permanent benchmark. The timing of this is unfortunate and should have been better thought out by proponents of rent control.

The ban on evictions was brought in during March 2020, to stop renters having to move during the first lockdown, as doing so would increase contact with other people and hence increase the risk of spreading Covid-19. This risk has largely passed, and renters can generally now move in a safe manner.

The bottom line is that this call for the ban on evictions and rent increases is not about the pandemic but rather it is driven by an ulterior motive, namely the introduction of general rent controls.