

When the landlord licensing scheme was rejected in 2020, we had presumed that the Minister would go back to the drawing board to understand why it had been rejected and to explore a way forward that had a better chance of commanding a decent-sized majority in the Assembly. We were therefore extremely disappointed when a tweaked version of the original scheme was brought back for debate earlier this week. We have made no secret of the fact that we think the licensing scheme is not the best way to achieve what are very worthy objectives, namely the identification of bad landlords and poorly maintained accommodation.

Proponents of the scheme said that good landlords would have nothing to fear from it, but we ask: why bother them at all? And they say that landlords would have no costs to bear, but what about the poor old taxpayer? In short, we think that the licensing scheme is a sledgehammer to crack a nut, and an expensive one at that.

We accept that some tenants are reluctant to report their landlords for fear of losing their accommodation. It would help if there was not a shortage of rental units in the island, but that is another story. However, it is our contention that, with the right protections, tenants can be persuaded to come forward. But what sort of protections? In a situation where a complaint has been upheld by Environmental Health, how about a moratorium on eviction (for a period to be agreed) and a limit on rent increases to prevent predatory pricing? We are not sure exactly where the lines should be drawn, but we feel that a more targeted strategy along these lines would be much better than a licensing scheme, both in terms of limiting the costs to the taxpayer and leaving good landlords well alone. At the very least, it is a strategy that deserves to be fully investigated before the Assembly reaches for the sledgehammer.

Good legislation is that which commands broad support in the Assembly. Three times now we have seen roughly half of States Members reject the concept of a licensing scheme. The JLA has a number of proposals (e.g. a landlord register, better leases, protections for complainants, limited random inspections) which we think would better balance the interests of tenants, landlords and taxpayers. After the first vote we contacted the Minister offering our help to find a middle ground that could be supported by a big majority, and we reiterate that offer now. To repeat what we have said all along, we all want the same things, but we just believe that we can do better than a landlord licensing scheme.

JLA Committee

22<sup>nd</sup> July 2021