

2024.10.01

3.16 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour of the Minister for Social Security regarding progress of the conclusions to the Family Friendly Post-Implementation Review: Report and Ministerial conclusions (OQ.191/2024):

Further to the publication of R.68/2024, the Family Friendly Post-Implementation Review Report and Ministerial Conclusions, will the Minister update the Assembly on the progress, if any, made to date in respect of the further actions identified in the Ministerial conclusions to the survey, as itemised in the report, and any other changes to policy or legislation in this area that have either been made or are planned?

Deputy L.V. Feltham of St. Helier Central (The Minister for Social Security):

The main conclusion of the post-implementation review was to address issues of effective communication and training. As I said in my original Ministerial response, the Jersey Advisory and Conciliation Service, has a vital role to play here and, upon asking for an update on what they have been doing, I know that they have organised and continue to organise free training sessions and to promote awareness-raising on social media platforms and also mainstream media of parental leave provisions in the Employment Law for the benefit of both employees and employers. I have no current plans to bring forward additional legislation relating to parental leave rights at this stage, because I understand that the legislation is currently working well.

3.16.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Many of the respondents to the consultation stated that they were not able to access the full extent of the rights because they could not afford to do so. Can the Minister outline what plans she has to support those families who require more of the leave to be paid?

Deputy L.V. Feltham:

I understand that for very many families they would not be able to make best use or the type of use that they may want to make out of the flexible working arrangements because of cost. Currently, birth mothers can access 6 weeks' paid leave from their employer and also parents can share the 32 weeks of parental benefit. In making any changes to that, I would need to consider employment legislation as a whole and how any changes that I would be making to employment legislation would indeed affect employers as well as employees. I did - as the Deputy will be aware, because I updated her Scrutiny Panel - ask for a cross-jurisdictional review of where we sat with employment legislation. I came to the conclusion that making changes in relation to parental rights was not the top priority, so I am at the moment focusing on other priority areas including, of course, raising the minimum wage.

[11:45]

3.16.2 Deputy R.S. Kovacs of St. Saviour:

In my work as chair of U.N.I.C.E.F. (United Nations Children's Fund) Baby Friendly Initiative and Breastfeeding Guardian for Jersey, it has also come to light that although the legislation is in place, not too many expectant or new parents know their rights in this matter and neither do all employers know all their related responsibilities or have it established appropriately in practice. What exact measures does the Minister intend to take to equally raise awareness of all those, and also assure compliance with the related legislation in the workplace?

Deputy L.V. Feltham:

I thank Deputy Kovacs for raising awareness and for all of the work that she does in relation to raising awareness of breastfeeding. To answer her question, as I said in my main answer, following the post-implementation review I did commit to working closely with J.A.C.S. (Jersey Advisory and Conciliation Service) to ensure that employers and employees do get communications. I will also promise now - today - to also follow up with the maternity services as well, with the Minister for Health and Social Services, to ensure that people, when they are expecting a baby, are fully cognisant and

aware of what rights they are eligible for. I am very aware of the importance of breastfeeding and the need for flexible workplaces to encourage and promote breastfeeding and ensure that breastfeeding mothers do have the right provisions in place. I will always have my door open to the Deputy to discuss ways in which we can further improve that.

3.16.3 Deputy K.L. Moore of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter:

The family friendly measures were brought in to improve outcomes such as the birth rate, the number of women engaged in employment, and also the reduction of the gender pay gap. The Minister says in her answer that she is content that the legislation is working well. Could she therefore describe what she believes are the causes of our current severely declining birth rate?

Deputy L.V. Feltham:

I am afraid the causes of the severely declining birth rate is not something that is part of my portfolio or something that I feel qualified to comment on at this particular point in time, but perhaps the Deputy would like to raise the question with myself and perhaps other relevant Ministers at a later date.

3.16.4 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Could the Minister give some more detail on something that she mentioned at the same hearing that ... the panel initially raised this, where she mentioned that she was looking at the income support rules for families who perhaps own their own home and may be able to benefit from income support to access this leave for a longer period of time.

Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Income support is of course a different benefit to the parental benefits. Perhaps what I can update the Deputy on is I have asked officers to look at eligibility with regards to parental benefit, specifically in relation to contributions records and the relevant quarter. I have not yet started or commenced any work in relation to income support and people on mortgages, although I do continue to look in very much detail at our current income support legislation.