

# **SOCIAL AFFAIRS SCRUTINY PANEL**

**THURSDAY, 25th JULY 2006**

## **Income Support Sub-Panel**

### **Panel**

Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier (Chairman)

Deputy S. Pitman of St. Helier

Senator B.E. Shenton

Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier

Advisor: Dr. Martin Evans

### **Witnesses**

Connétable K.P. Vibert of St. Ouen (Chairman of Comité des Connétables)

Mrs. Sue de Gruchy (Secretary for Comité des Connétables)

### **Officers**

Charlie Ahier

William Millow

### **Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Deputy Martin has been called out, a bit of a family crisis going on. She will be back as soon as she can. I have a formal notice to read to you before you start, which should be on the desk in front of you, just so we know what is what, what the rules are. It is important that you fully understand the conditions under which you are appearing at this hearing. You will find a printed copy of this statement I am about to read to you on the table in front of you. The panel's proceedings are covered by Parliamentary privilege through Article 34 of the States of Jersey Law 2005. As a result, you are protected from being sued or prosecuted for anything said during this hearing, although this privilege should obviously not be abused. The proceedings are being recorded and the transcription will be made available on the Scrutiny website. So, welcome, Connétable Vibert, and I think you probably know our 2 officers are Charlie and William, and Deputy Pitman and Senator Shenton here, and I am standing in for Deputy Martin for the moment, until she comes back.

### **Connétable K.P. Vibert of St. Ouen (Chairman of Comité des Connétables):**

And I have the Connétable's secretary with me, Sue de Gruchy

### **Deputy Southern:**

Welcome.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Okay, so, we will start with a nice, general opener. What level of consultation have you had with the Social Security Department over these changes and are you happy with the level of consultation?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

We have had a member of the Connétables Committee on the steering group which was set up, so we have been kept addressed all along. We have no problems with the consultation. I think that the only problem we have is the system whereby it would appear that the regulations are not going to be made available until after the law comes back from the Privy Council. We brought that matter up yesterday with the Minister saying that we saw no reason why they could not be produced prior to that. We accept that they can't go back to the States before that happens, but I would have thought that they could be worked on before that.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

That would mean in your view that we could get a better picture of what can and cannot be delivered by the system? Is that what you are saying?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Well, I think we moved forward a lot yesterday in that we wanted to know exactly what the Minister was thinking; how he was thinking. Certainly, we got a lot of answers to questions yesterday. But we will still not know the definitive answers until the regulations come out, because at the end of the day the majority of what we want to know will be in the regulations.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Indeed.

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

The Connétables are well aware that at the onset of low income support that the welfare system falls away and therefore their involvement with it falls away with it. But, certainly, we wish to know how our parishioners who happen to have to call for welfare, or will have to call for income support in the future, how they are going to be dealt with.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Certainly my impression at the beginning of this was that the system was to become centralised and that it would by and large be a central administrative body dealing with what is income support and that the involvement of the parishes would fall away. It seems to me that in talking to the Minister today he has come some way from that centralised view and that he is talking with parishes about the level at which

you might still maintain some involvement.

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Well, that was discussed yesterday, and I think it comes from the fact that if we are to deal with everybody equally that there are some people who will not fit into a system of coming into St. Helier even to be assessed. If that is to happen then they will need to be able to go to somewhere closer to their residence to be able to get their (...overspeaking)

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

Could you give a hypothetical example?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Yes, I can probably give you probably the best one in the Island. I mean, St. George's Estate was a social housing estate, and if there were a lady there with 3 children ranging from 3 to 7, for argument's sake, she would have difficulty to come to town and be assessed and get back during the period of time when the elder children are at school. We do not have a bus service which is very regular. Plus, of course, the cost of coming into town.

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

But surely someone from Social Security should come out and assess her. without the Parish being involved

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

What was discussed yesterday was the possibility of having satellite offices in the parishes where the lady can walk, just a short walk with her pram, and be assessed and go back home and be back in time for the children coming out of school. The parish are quite happy to be involved with the distribution of the moneys itself. Yesterday in our discussions there was a possibility that parish staff might be trained to be assessors. Certainly I have discussed that this morning with my own parish staff, and although I have no reason to think that they could not be assessors, they feel that their workload is such at the moment that they would not want to go down that line. But we have offices available, and we can make an office available to the Social Security Department and they can come out to St. Ouen. We can arrange for the appointments to be made; that is not a problem. But we would certainly as far as St. Ouen is concerned we would be interested in having a Social Security officer come out and do the assessments, and all my staff would have to do is pay out the amounts which need to be paid from the parish hall. Not all of them --

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

So, this lady with the pram from St. Georges Estate, the only advantage of keeping parishes involved is she has the inconvenience of walking to the parish hall, rather than being seen in her own home?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Well, that was not discussed yesterday. The idea of seeing her in her own house was not discussed yesterday. But, certainly, I think that one of the things that I personally would feel is that the fact that she might come to the parish hall, or even if it is only a 6 monthly basis, or an annual basis, at least we keep a one to one involvement with that person, and should her circumstances change we are probably in a better position to spot it quicker than a centralised system.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

But you would see that assessment being done by officers based centrally and travelling out to you, rather than you (...overspeaking)

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Well, we are quite happy to provide an office for them.

**Deputy S. Pitman of St. Helier:**

Is that the general consensus of the Constables?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

No, this was discussed yesterday and no one had -- I mean this was the first time that we had got to this level of discussion where we identified that staff would need a week's training to be assessors. The question is now going to be asked by the Minister -- he has sent me a pre-copy of the questions that he wants to ask the parishes -- and that is the question; whether we want to do it with parish staff or whether we would prefer to have Social Security staff come into do it. Certainly so far as St. Ouen is concerned we would rather have Social Security staff coming to do it.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

St. Ouen has relatively low numbers of people on welfare

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Oh, absolutely, yes.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Therefore -- yes, have you got an impression of what others are thinking? St. Clements, say?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

No --

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Or some of the larger parishes -- it has not been discussed?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

I would suspect that when they ask their staff that they will be told virtually the same as I have, because the majority of the country parishes are manned by a very small staff. The majority of them are 2. St. Mary's is only one. St. John's is one and a bit; one and a temporary staff. So, I think it is a numbers game. I think that the staff are going to say: "Well, we probably can't put that time aside to doing assessments." The assessment is going to take some time to do, from what we are told. There are a number of sheets to fill in.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Certainly, certainly. From what we were talking about in terms of the workload of an assessor, if it is going to be efficient, it cannot be a lump of training and you are ready to assess people, but you are only going to see maybe 6 people in a year. I mean (...overspeaking)

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

I think the other thing which my staff pointed out this morning is that because of the low numbers they are going to be dealing with; they will need to be retrained on a regular basis if they are going to do that. The person who is doing it every day does not have that problem, because they are more familiar with the system.

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

What about the Citizens fund and discretion, do you in St Ouen's do many discretionary payments as it stands, or --

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

I do some. Not that many. But I also do a drip-feed system on a number of claimants who I know if I gave them the full amount on day one would be picked up by the honorary police the same evening and taken into St. Helier for being drunk and incapable. Whereas if we feed them on a -- I mean they can come into the office and pick up £20 every day, and in that way we tend to keep them out of trouble.

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

So, after income support comes in and they come and see you -- we have already been told this morning that you will have a fairly low level of discretion.

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Well, I mean, I have a low level of discretion, if you like, but I think the majority of Connétables will have a small charity account that they can dip into if --

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

Which is outside the system?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Which is outside the system, if all else fails.

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

Right.

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

But certainly it is point that we raised with the Minister that there be the payment at 10.30 pm on a Saturday night, where somebody might need money to survive the Sunday, still has to continue. It is not necessarily from me. It might be from one of my Centeniers. It might be from my secretary. I do not know how other parishes have handled it but that is how we have handled it in the past in St Ouen. We are not talking of big money. We are talking maybe £20 to see them through the Sunday.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

A safety net -- for a safety net?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Absolutely, yes. I do not know if you recall the letter that I sent to Deputy Hill? There were a couple of other things that we pointed out there which I do not think Social Security had even considered prior to that, such as the cost of burying someone, which comes up quite regularly. I mean, even in St. Ouen it will probably come up 2 or 3 times a year, where someone dies, normally people who have been on welfare, who have no family here, and where the parish then takes over the cost of the burial. Okay, there is a death grant, but it does not go anywhere near the cost of the burial. That is one of the points that we raised with Social Security, which we have not had a reply to yet. Presumably, that will come in the regulations.

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

Probably just been buried

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

I would think it would have to be paid out of the Citizen's Fund. I cannot see where else it can --

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

We were talking to the Minister about levels of take-up. There is some say a hidden number of people who are too proud to deal with the charitable aspect of welfare, who may feel more easily about receiving -- about being eligible and claiming under the new system, which is more central and more

anonymous. What is your personal take on that? How do you feel?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

I really could not tell you what the take-up would be on that. I mean I think that it will need a good PR from Social Security Department to encourage these people to do that. There are still some people who will live on the bread-line just because of the fact that they are proud and do not want to talk to anybody else about it. Whether it is someone from Social Security, or someone from the parish, I do not think that will make a great deal of difference to some of the elderly. But, certainly, because of the present system we can keep an eye on these people and occasionally help them through other means. But, certainly, I have had experience in the last fortnight of someone who was receiving a Don Gruchy payment. Now, the Don Gruchy is a separate fund which the parishes administer, although I think in the majority of parishes now it goes into general funds and is paid back through the charité account, but we still run ours separately. It is based on land rentals, and the amount we get back from land rentals. Obviously, land rentals have plummeted in the last 3 or 4 years, and so our funds have diminished quite a lot. This particular couple, I made the decision that rather than be paid through the Don Gruchy that they would come through the charité account. They refused it, because it was charity. They were quite happy to take the Don Gruchy money, which is charity as well, but under a different name.

**Deputy S. Pitman:**

Going back to the Citizen's Fund, do you think that the Social Security should retain that, or the Constables?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Well, no, the Connétables are not going to be involved in this fund at all as far as I know.

**Deputy S. Pitman:**

Yes. What is your opinion on who should receive --

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

I think it should be an independent body who maybe advise the Minister as to how he should allocate moneys from the Citizen's Fund. It is not an easy job to do. It is very difficult to decide whether you are going to make a grant or a loan. It is not something which the Minister can do on a Friday morning while he is signing other papers. I think he did mention yesterday the possibility of involving an outside body to advise him on how these funds are (...inaudible) -- an independent, and I personally think that is the way it should be.

**Deputy S. Pitman:**

Is that the general view of the other Constables?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

I think it is, and I think the Connétables have suggested that they might have people who have been involved in the welfare distribution system who might be prepared to sit on an independent panel to do that. Because they have a vast amount of experience some of them and will have met the problem before. They would be well placed to assist in making that decision.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Can I ask someone to deal with that?.

**[Interruption]**

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

We will not get a very good transcript -- in fact, we will get a dreadful transcript.

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

The Connétable of St. Ouen's stomach, was not very good. **[Laughter]**

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Yes, there is some debate going on between the welfare visitors in St. Helier who see their role as somewhat multi-disciplinary, halfway to a social worker, helping people out in their homes, and an administrator. The role as envisaged by Social Security will change to strictly to do with administration, you know, do you get this assessment or not. Certainly one of the arguments about the involvement of the parishes is that you know your people, and therefore can probably spot hardship or a change of circumstances quicker than most. How do you see that role being taken up under the new system or ...

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Well, I have not any experience of that role, because there is not such a role in St. Ouen. But certainly, in St. Ouen we have regular meetings with the school teacher at the junior school, for instance, who would spot somebody coming to school without any lunch, or -- you know, they will spot people much quicker than we would. So, we have regular meetings with them as far as young families are concerned.

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

But they could report that to Social Services anyway, or indirectly?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

I have no idea, but I know that is how we do it in St. Ouen. I do not know how St. Helier works. I am not experienced in how St. Helier works.



**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

But none the less would you see yourself again outside of that loop or -- as income support transfers to Social Security, is that your role, or is that something that you still see (...overspeaking)

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Well, I would think that what happens now with our regular meetings with the school, I mean I have a private charity which allocates funds to children -- or under senior school age, and so we meet annually to dispense those funds anyway. We meet with the teachers from St. Mary's, St. Peter's and St. Ouen. So, that will not change, because that is going to be outside the new system anyway. I know that there are a couple of church groups who go round and visit people regularly, and I do not think that is going to change either. I mean, in a way, they are outside the welfare system, although they would report to me if they found somebody in trouble. I presume that in the future they would do the same. They would come along and say: "You know, so and so looks as if they're struggling." My role then would be to inform Social Security of that. I mean, I do not see the Connétables' role being involved in either the assessment or the dispensing of the moneys. The parish role would purely be office staff dispensing, not my role. I do not expect my secretary to come to me and say: "Do you think we should up this person's money this week?" That question will not be asked any longer.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Again, I have to come back to you, because certainly the Minister was suggesting there was a range of options discussed yesterday, and that a greater involvement could be possible. You are saying is that you do not have a feel for where the other Constables might be going?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Well, I know that St. Clement and St. Saviour and St. Brelade have dedicated staff at the moment, and would wish those staff to be retained and trained by Social Security, and will run an office in those parishes. St. Helier is obviously moving to Social Security. So, you are left with 8 other parishes who probably between them -- I do not know what the percentage is -- it is very low, the percentage of welfare payments -- what it will be of low income I do not know. There were 2 options. Either there would be staff in each parish hall who were prepared to be trained and would then do the assessment. Fill it into the computer. The computer would then come back with the amount to be paid, and they would pay it out. Or, alternatively, we would get an officer from Social Security in to do that assessment. All the staff would be left to do would be to see the figure and if it were to be paid from the Parish Hall, pay it from the Parish Hall or if it is to be paid by post, then they do not see it again.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Overall, there is a trend to try and make all payments payable by post.

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

I think there is a problem with that. We have a number of claimants who do not have a bank account and who wish to have cash. I go back to the drip-feed ones, who I think the drip-feed does them a real favour.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Sure.

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

I mean at the end of the day they do not receive any less. They receive it and can manage it better. There are a lot of people who are in trouble. It is not a case of the money being short. It is a case of not being able to manage the money they have got.

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

Is there any reason why they cannot have a bank account?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Probably not.

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

It is just inconvenient for them?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

It is inconvenient. They would have to go to St. Brelade, or a post office.

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

Well, no, you do not have to go to -- once you have got your bank account, there's cash machines, even in St. Ouen--

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

But then you have got to carry a credit card and you then have no control as to how much money you take out. You can take £200 in one go. I mean we are not trying to hold on to the things which we have had in the past.

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

No, no --

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

We are just trying to achieve the best for the people that we know will be on the system. I think that the people out in the country parishes are slightly different to the people in the urban parishes. The urban

parishes probably have a much easier -- I mean it is much easier for them to go to a cash point.

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

Yes, but I was --

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

We do not have a cash point in St. Ouen. You have to go to St. Peter's for a cash point.

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

I should think there is a lot more people fall outside the net in the country parishes.

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

I would dispute that.

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

Because of the stigma

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Well, maybe on the stigma side, yes, but then hopefully those will now be picked up. But it does not change the principle that some of them would need to go quite a long way to get the money that they need.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

You have just been talking about St. Brelade, St. Clement and St. Saviour may well take up the idea of assessments and training the assessor in that particular parish. What is the line of responsibility going to be? Are they still accountable to the Constable or --

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

No.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Employed by the Constable, or --

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Well, they will be employed by the Constable, but the Connétable will have an SLA with Social Security for the work that they do for that department, and they will also have to take an oath of office through the Royal Court; an oath of secrecy.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Right. So, the Service Level Agreement, it will come through your responsibility for delivering that --

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

They will only be responsible for me for the work they do for the parish. The work they do for Social Security will not be my responsibility at all.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

But the service level will be?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

But the service level will be. The service level, as far as I am aware, the Service Level Agreement will be made with the parish, not with the individual.

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

So, how do you make sure that they deliver on the Service Level Agreement if they do not report to you on aspects of Social Security?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

I presume they will have to report to Social Security on that.

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

So, the Service Level Agreement becomes irrelevant?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

We are in exactly the same boat as you are. We have no more information than you have. This is why we want to know what these regulations say. Without them we are struggling in the same deep water as you are.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Yes, yes. There is an issue to be thrashed out there, I think. We have established that with both our witnesses today then.

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Yes.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Again, what arrangements are you aware of that Social Security are going to undertake, and what involvement might you have in publicising the change-over -- we are talking between now and May of next year -- that the system will be completely revamped? Are you involved in any (...overspeaking)

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

I have not a clue. I do not know. As far as I know that has not been discussed at any level, and certainly not with the parishes.

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

Are the Constables looking for any amendments to the law?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

To the law itself?

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

Well, yes, or to the proposals?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Well, we briefly looked at the law itself yesterday and could not see any amendments to it, because at the end of the day it is going to be Social Security's law. We are not going to be making amendments to get more involved in it than we are now, that is for sure. You know, the involvement of the Connétables will cease when welfare stops.

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

This is completely off the point, but with the moves in welfare, do you think the parishes are losing their relevance? Do you still see a role for the parishes in 20 years?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Well, I think there is. I think, again, I come back to the fact that certainly there is a big difference between the parish, the urban parish, and the rural parish. But I think there is a role for the parish. I mean people still like to come to the Parish Hall Office, because they feel that they are then involved with the parish system. We have people who come in just to sort of say hello. Okay, they will come in to get their driving licence, or come to get a dog licence in January, but they will still call during the week just to say hello. Maybe not so much to know what is going on in the parish, because we have a rather excellent magazine which tells them everything that is going on in the parish. But there is still in the country a lot of involvement with the parish. I do not think you have got that same involvement with the parishes that are more urban.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Shona, have you got anything further to ask?

**Deputy S. Pitman:**

No.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Ben?

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

No, I have not. Mainly because there's more questions than answers at the moment.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Yes, yes.

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Certainly as far as the question you asked me, which was to discuss the views of the involvement of the parishes in payment of low income, I do not think that there is going to be much involvement, other than maybe giving out cash to certain people in the parish.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Also the provision of an office space?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

The provision of the office space for people who come in and assess them.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

You see it very much as being that central function?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Yes, that is right. I mean we will offer the service to parishioners that if they do not wish to go into St. Helier for that sort of thing they can do it in the parish, which I think is a service that we should be giving.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Where again, I'll take you on to that ground, where those 3 parishes are suggesting they might use their people as assessors, do you see that being a transitional arrangement until the centralised assessors will do that job anyway

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Well, like I say it was rather thrown at us yesterday. I have not had a chance to talk to any of the other Connétables about it. We finished our meeting at 5.20 pm, and most of us had another meeting last night. So, I have not had a chance to discuss it with anybody. But I did take the opportunity of going in at 8.45 am this morning and talking to my own staff about it. Their immediate response was: "No, we

don't want to do it. We've got more than enough to do already."

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

I suppose the problem the other parishes have is if they are employing people that just deal with the welfare there is a certain staff loyalty aspect there.

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Well, I think that is right, but then that is something which --

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

They feel perhaps that they have to offer it because they would be disloyal to their staff if they did not?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Well, I have to say I was surprised at my staff's reactions. I really thought that my secretary was going to say no, I want to do it, but she did not. So, I cannot tell you what the others are going to say. But I will say this, that secretaries do tend to talk to each other quite a bit, so it may be that the word will get round what the question is and by the time the Connétables get the letter and ask the question all the secretaries may have agreed to go down the same line. I do not know.

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

Yes, as we said before there will be a level of training and I should think there will be a level of continuing training (...overspeaking).

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Yes, well, that is what was identified yesterday. But I think what was identified yesterday was that there is every opportunity out in the parishes for staff from Social Security to do 2 parishes in one day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Because I think that once the original assessment has been made the numbers are going to be very small.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Okay. Well, I am sure once you have had the opportunity to discuss what your collective or individual reactions to the letter that is going around to you is, do send us a copy of your responses, and stay in touch. I am sure Social Security will stay in touch as well. At that point, with that, I thank you for your time. Unless there is anything you want to add?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Yes, sorry, one other thing. You did send a request to the Connétables for information concerning the amount of welfare currently paid to non-residentially qualified persons in respect of housing. We did look at this yesterday, and it is not a figure that we can come up with, because we are not always aware

whether they are residentially qualified or not. That question is not asked on the welfare application form. So, it would be very difficult for us to come up with a figure.

**Deputy S. Pitman:**

Is that across the parishes?

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Yes, because we all use the same form. The form was devised with Social Security, was it not? St. Helier created the form.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

St. Helier has got a different form, yes.

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

The question is not asked, so we cannot calculate it.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Thanks for that.