

**STATEMENT TO BE MADE BY THE MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SECURITY
ON TUESDAY 6th DECEMBER 2011**

Access to Dental Services for local residents

I have recently met with Senator Breckon to discuss his proposition P.170/2011 which seeks to improve access to dental services for local residents.

After a positive discussion, Senator Breckon has agreed to withdraw his proposition on the basis that I will undertake to ensure that two issues identified by the Scrutiny Panel Review of Dental Health Services will be prioritised within my Departmental Business Plan for 2012.

I am pleased that one of my first acts as Minister has been to make this agreement in a spirit of co-operation, confirming the importance of the scrutiny function and that of independent backbenchers.

The Dental Health Services Review was undertaken by the HSSH Panel, under the chairmanship of Deputy De Sousa. The report SR.12/2010 was published on 8 November 2010. A joint response from Health and Social Services and Social Security Department was published on 20th December 2010.

The Review noted that support with dental costs was available to teenagers through the Dental Fitness Scheme and to pensioners through the 65+ Health Scheme. However, neither of these schemes have been reviewed for a number of years.

I will undertake to review the provision of assistance with dental costs under both these schemes during 2012. The reviews will also consider the administration of the two schemes.

Senator Breckon has agreed to play an active part in the two reviews that will take place in 2012 and I look forward to working with him during the year.

STATEMENT ON A MATTER OF OFFICIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Bailiff:

Very well so that brings Questions without notice to the Chief Minister to an end. There are no matters under J so we then come to K, Statements on a Matter of Official Responsibility and the Minister for Social Security will make a statement regarding access to dental health services.

7. Statement by the Minister for Social Security regarding access to dental health services

7.1 Senator F. du H. Le Gresley (The Minister for Social Security):

I have recently met with Senator Breckon to discuss his proposition P.170/2011, which seeks to improve access to dental services for local residents. After a positive discussion, Senator Breckon has agreed to withdraw his proposition on the basis that I will undertake to ensure that 2 issues identified by the Scrutiny Panel review of dental health services will be prioritised within my departmental business plan for 2012. I am pleased that one of my first acts as Minister has been to make this agreement in the spirit of co-operation confirming the importance of the Scrutiny function and that of independent Back-Benchers. The dental health services review was undertaken by the Health, Social Security and Housing Scrutiny Panel under the chairmanship of the former Deputy de Sousa. The report S.R.12/2010 was published on 8th November 2010. A joint response from the Ministers for Health and Social Services and Social Security was published on 20th December 2010. The review noted that support with dental costs was available to teenagers through the Dental Fitness Scheme and to pensioners through the 65-plus Health Scheme. However, neither of these schemes has been reviewed for a number of years. I will undertake to review the provision of assistance with dental costs under both these schemes during 2012. The reviews will also consider the administration of the 2 schemes. Senator Breckon has agreed to play an active part in the 2 reviews that will take place in 2012 and I look forward to working with him during the year.

The Bailiff:

So then we have up to 10 minutes of questions.

7.1.1 Senator A. Breckon:

Notwithstanding the existing schemes, does the Minister agree with me that many people still do not go to the dentist because of the cost?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

When I made my speech for the Ministry of Social Security, I outlined my concerns about the high cost of dental treatment. As the Senator is aware, we have these 2 schemes and also the income support arrangements allow for special payments for emergency dental treatment but it is a fact that a lot of people do find difficulty paying dental bills in the Island.

7.1.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Yes, like Senator Breckon, I did not think it got to the root of the problem. Could the Minister comment on whether he thinks the model applied with all its imperfections to visiting doctors might be one of the models that could be considered because it seems very odd that 2 areas of the community are going to get a high degree of attention but there is this massive missing group in between.

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

The Deputy is quite correct in what he says. We have to bear in mind that the 2 current schemes, in fact, and if we include income support, the 3 schemes, are funded out of taxpayers' money. The Health Insurance Fund could be used to fund a dental health scheme for Island residents. It is a question of whether that is an appropriate use of the fund and that is one of the things that I would be looking at or asking the department to look into is the actual funding of dental health treatment in Jersey.

7.1.3 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister acknowledge that even if the sums in these current times might seem absolutely off the radar, that something to pay for inspections, for example, might be a good way of starting?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

Yes, I agree again with the Deputy. The actual money that is being paid out at the moment for the combined schemes of the 65-plus Health Scheme and the Jersey Dental Fitness Scheme is in the region of £239,000. It seems feasible that if we were to consider payments to have check-ups or whatever, we would use the model of the 65-plus Health Scheme where a recipient receives the sum of £22 towards an annual check-up.