

23.04.18

**12 Deputy L.V. Feltham of the Minister for Social Security regarding the Pension Plus Scheme (OQ.61/2023)**

Further to the comments of the Council of Ministers on the Pension Plus Scheme, P.90/2022, will the Minister provide an update on her current policy position regarding the extension of eligibility for the Pension Plus Scheme to more pensioners as well as a timeframe for the action to be completed?

**Deputy E. Millar of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity (The Minister for Social Security):**

I thank the Deputy for her question. The comments referred to in the question were published before the cost-of-living mini-Budget was approved by the Assembly last year. At the time, I made a commitment to include a review of pension benefits in my 2023 Ministerial Plan. That commitment has been upheld and I have completed my initial review of benefits to identify specific areas for further work.

[12:00]

These include a detailed review of the treatment of income and assets within Pension Plus and other pension benefit schemes, and this will be undertaken as soon as possible and it is a priority area for 2023. This work is likely to increase the number of pensioners who qualify for the Pension Plus benefit.

**4.12.1 Deputy L.V. Feltham:**

I do not think I actually heard a policy there, so could I ask for the Minister to confirm what her own policy position is, given that she is providing the political leadership in this area?

**Deputy E. Millar:**

I thought I possibly had done. I do want to increase the number of pensioners who can qualify for Pension Plus, and that is my policy. We need to work out how we do that and, critically, how we fund it, but my policy is to increase availability of this benefit to pensioners.

**4.12.2 Deputy M.R. Scott:**

I understood at the time that I withdrew the proposition that the proposed changes were likely to be ready around July 2023, if I am not mistaken and I am happy to be corrected. I just wondered if the Minister could confirm exactly when she expects to see changes to the Pension Plus policy should there be the funds to happen.

**Deputy E. Millar:**

I would certainly hope that July 2023 is achievable. I have a small team of policy officers. I have given them some quite tight timescales across the board and there are a number of areas that we do need to look at, but pensioner benefits is certainly a priority, particularly in light of the recent press on the poverty report in Jersey and the impact on low-income pensioners. So Pension Plus is certainly a priority and I would hope that whatever amendments we make will be in place by July at the very latest.

**4.12.3 Deputy L.V. Feltham:**

Can I get some clarity from the Minister about who exactly she wishes to extend Pension Plus to and what direction she has given to officers when they are undertaking their reviews?

**Deputy E. Millar:**

Well, there is a pensioner group and there is a group of low-income pensioners and those are the ones we are particularly focused on. Our initial stages will be to consider things like the asset disregards and the income levels, and the asset disregard I believe is £30,000. I think I got that wrong last time. But we are certainly looking at the asset disregard and income levels to make sure that pensioners who do not currently qualify will be brought into the net for Pension Plus.