

4. Questions to Ministers Without Notice - The Minister for Social Security

The Bailiff:

Very well. Then we will come next to questions to Ministers without notice, and the first is to the Minister for Social Security. Deputy Southern?

4.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister inform Members of his estimate of the additional cost proposed for the income support rental component caused by the proposed increase to 90% of market rents, contained in the Housing Transformation Plan, and state to Members how he proposes to make the additional £3 million cuts to income support he is already committed to?

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

I have already provided a written answer to Deputy Southern on this matter. I would say to the Deputy that I shared his concern about the potential costs to the income support budget with the Housing Transformation Programme increase in rents. I asked my officers to do a more detailed study of the figures that were provided in P.33 and I am now satisfied that the figures in P.33 are accurate and, in preparation for the debate, I will be providing a detailed analysis over the 30-year period to satisfy Deputy Southern and others as to how the Housing Department arrived at the figure after 30 years of £2 million for income support. On the other matter, I am working with officers to look at where we can potentially make the £3 million cut in our budgets. It may not all need to come out of the income support budget, but that is the most likely place. I will be spending some time on that during the summer with officers to bring forward any proposals that might need States approval.

4.1.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is the Minister in a position to release the figures that he has, the new calculations, in response to information that I gave him, in advance of the usual one day before the debate, so that I and others can inform themselves and be fully prepared for a proper debate on fortnight Tuesday?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

The analysis that I have mentioned will be part of a Council of Ministers comment on Deputy Southern's amendment. I will not be in control of when that paper is released.

4.1.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

This goes on all the time, we get comments the day before; that is no proper preparation for any debate. On such an important debate, where what we accept has got to last for 30 years, will the Minister for Social Security, since he has the figures, produce them in advance of the 24 hours before the debate? A weekend would do; if he can produce them on the Friday, that would be better, and he is in control of his own data, surely, not the Minister's.

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

I will do my very best to provide Members with this information before the debate. In fact, the data, of course, is the data belonging to the Housing Department, not the Minister for Social Security, it is just that we have done an analysis with the Housing Department officers in order to satisfy the queries raised by Deputy Southern in his amendment, and we will get that information to him as soon as possible.

4.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Could the Minister confirm that his revised target date for introducing long-term/community care insurance is indeed on target and, if not, would he identify any issues or problems that he believes may delay matters?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

I am delighted that Deputy Le Hérissier has asked me this question, as it gives me the opportunity to advise Members that great progress has been made by officers of my department working with the Treasury and with the Health and Social Services Department, to bring forward the scheme for commencing on 1st January 2014, whereby the first recipients will receive benefit from July 2014. The scheme may be slightly changed from what was originally proposed, but I am satisfied that we will have a robust scheme and that I will be sharing my thoughts and how we progress with Scrutiny in the next couple of days.

4.2.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Just a supplementary. That is good news, could the Minister confirm that recipients will start receiving the relevant care in July but that payments will commence in January 2014, and what are those slight changes to which he refers?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

I can confirm, because Deputy Le Hérissier has just repeated what I said, is that the contributions will commence to be collected through the tax system on 1st January 2014 and the first beneficiaries will be from 1st July 2014, in order to all a build-up of funds from which the benefit will be paid. As to the changes, I am not at liberty to discuss these because there is still policy under development.

4.3 Deputy J.H. Young:

Will the Minister give the Assembly a progress report on the Back to Work scheme that he undertook to introduce in this Assembly, to assist with the maintenance of countryside infrastructure in response to the proposition I withdrew in favour of his undertaking? Can he tell us when the scheme started, how many people are on it and what the progress is, please?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

In relation to working with the Environment Department, we have run a pilot scheme where volunteers have done work with officers from the Environment Department, and my officers in Back to Work are working very closely with the Environment Department to run another scheme in the summer months. At the moment the majority of the work that is taking place on the environment is taking place with the National Trust for Jersey, where we are running volunteer schemes over 4 weeks; 3 groups have taken part and it has been extremely successful, and a fourth group will be starting very shortly.

4.4 Senator L.J. Farnham:

In the lack of other questions, I just wanted to ask the Minister which way he voted in the referendum. [Laughter]

4.5 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Notwithstanding the excellent successes of some of the Back to Work programmes and the Minister's commitment to ensuring local youngsters work in hospitality, what are his feelings about how placement in work will ultimately strengthen the future of the Jersey economy? Does he really believe in the depths of his heart that putting youngsters in large numbers into hospitality will secure the economic future of Jersey, excellent though some of these moves have been?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

The one industry that has sustained in Jersey is tourism, and I am a very big supporter of tourism and therefore I think that there are career opportunities for our young people, particularly in the tourism industry, which, of course, is evolving and changing all the time. I am pleased that I can use this opportunity, perhaps, to advise Members that since we launched the hospitality initiative, which was 4 weeks of training followed by specific meetings with potential employers

at job matches, of which we have had 2, 135 people have started jobs in hospitality this year, of which 79 people went through the training programme. Of those who went through the training programme, a further 21 took the jobs in other industries. We still have more and more job offers coming through hospitality, following the last job match, and although the target that I set the department was considerably higher, I am still very pleased with the results that we are achieving.

4.5.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

The Minister did not deal with other economic sectors. Would he, for example, say whether a lot of these youngsters are indeed qualified to work in other sectors and are unable to get work in their chosen sector?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

The largest number of people registered as unemployed, looking back to their previous work, are in construction at the moment and also retail. We are aware of the problems that construction has had of late, and the fact that there is not a lot of investment being made in new buildings. This is a matter more for the Minister for Economic Development and the Minister for Treasury and Resources to stimulate the economy, but the other area is retail, and of course, we know of the problems that the retail sector in particular has had and the growth of the internet shopping. We do encourage still our people who are seeking work, to look for jobs and careers in these industries, and I was very pleased that the construction industry recently announced that they were running more apprenticeships for people who want to join the construction industry. So there is work going on with the more traditional industries, but it is very difficult out there and it is very tough for people looking for work, and we are working very hard through Back to Work to give them every assistance to find permanent work.

4.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Since the Minister has just mentioned apprenticeships, could he explain to Members what the role of apprenticeships is in the modern-day Back to Work schemes and define for Members what constitutes an apprenticeship nowadays, because there seem to be all sorts of mixtures of packages at various times?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

This is a question that really has to be directed at the Minister for Education Sport and Culture because apprenticeships comes under his area, not under my area, but of course we do work together on Back to Work to make sure that apprenticeships are available. I seem to recall that the recent figure was that there were about 58 people on the Trackers apprenticeship scheme, and that a further 55 places would be made available, I believe, before the end of the year. Also, T.T.S. (Transport and Technical Services) is advertising apprenticeships, so I think we all recognise that apprenticeships are a very valuable tool and very helpful to get people into work.

[11:30]

4.6.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

A supplementary, if I may? Will the Minister inform Members how long a Trackers apprenticeship lasts?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

I did not come with that information because it is not in my portfolio, but I am looking at the Minister for Education Sport and Culture, who is ignoring me ... **[Laughter]** but my belief is it is for 3 years.

4.7 Deputy J.H. Young:

During the debate on Survivor's Allowance, the Minister told us about the review of the pension contribution, particularly for additional voluntary contributions, and the contributions for those while redundant to make shortfalls. Could he tell us how his progress is getting on with that work and when we might expect to see some recommendations?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

This is a piece of work that has not started but I would say that at the moment anybody can make voluntary contributions if they so wish, but in my experience those people who have inquired as to the likely cost of making up contributions have found that it is fairly penal, and they have not necessarily wished to make those payments.

4.7.1 Deputy J.H. Young:

The right to make additional payments, would the Minister confirm that they are not permitted once people reach their normal retirement age, and therefore short people have no options but to make up a way of making up pension shortfalls? **[Laughter]** Would you like me to clarify the question?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

I do not have the information with me, but I think the Deputy is probably right, in that once you reach pension age you cannot make any further contributions, but I do not have that information with me today.

4.8 Deputy P.J.D. Ryan of St. John:

Would the Minister agree with me that the important thing about apprenticeships are flexibility, so that it can be available to all sorts of different trades and circumstances which might include full-time study, in which case the apprenticeship might be a shorter period of time, or it could be not full-time training at the technical college, and also that one of the most important things in an apprenticeship scheme is that it would certainly address the question of making our young people work ready by the end, which includes many of the elements in the Advance to Work or Advance Plus but over a longer period of time and that parental involvement is also a key element of it and that it is very formal?

The Bailiff:

A concise question.

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

I think I agree.

4.9 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Would the Minister with no responsibility for apprenticeships please attempt to tell me whether a Trackers apprenticeship does not need an employer, and he can still be in an apprenticeship; is that the case?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

The Trackers apprenticeship was a new way of delivering apprenticeship schemes, and the Deputy is right, the apprentice is not linked to one particular employer although over the period of the apprenticeships they would probably work for a number of employers.

The Bailiff:

Very well, that brings questions to the Minister for Social Security to an end. We move on now to questions to the Chief Minister.