

2.4 Deputy J.A. Martin of the Minister for Social Security regarding preferred suppliers under income support special payments

Can the Minister inform the Assembly whether the Social Security Department has preferred suppliers for items covered by special payment provisions within the income support scheme; namely carpets, white goods and dental treatments? If so, can he advise how these dedicated suppliers were identified and selected?

Senator P.F. Routier (The Minister for Social Security):

Since the Income Support Scheme came into force in January 2008 the department has continued to use the suppliers of goods and services which were previously used by the St. Helier Community Services Department. The decision to use established arrangements was deliberate as the department wished to use tried and tested processes at a time of significant change. Furthermore, it was necessary for the department to gain experience of special payments to determine the scope and size of future arrangements. The department is currently working with the States procurement team to develop a fair and robust tendering process, following which new arrangements for suppliers will be formalised. The department has no plans at present to appoint preferred suppliers for dental treatment.

2.4.1 Deputy J.A. Martin:

I fully understand why, not particularly how, the same suppliers have been used. Under investigation some of them seem to have been used by other departments over the years and I am not sure how the tendering process ... My main concern is that I am told that some suppliers, especially of carpets, are supplying cheap and wrong carpet for stairs and that the person on income support is having to sign a disclaimer that if any accidents happen it is their fault because they have agreed to have this carpet laid. It may seem trivial but can the Minister assure me that for the sake of an extra few pounds the right carpet is fitted in the right areas?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I have no knowledge of this suggestion. I will endeavour to find out from the department and let the Deputy know.

2.4.2 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire of St. Helier:

Would the Minister, in his answer, give us an assurance that this will be subject in the future to an open tendering process, because his answer illuminated the fact that they were looking at a robust tendering process in the future but he did not imply that there was going to be one that would occur, so could he just confirm that there will be an open tender for these in the future?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I thought my answer made it clear that we are working with the States procurement team to develop a fair and robust tendering process and that is a process which they, with my accounting officer who has ultimate responsibility for ensuring best value for money, will undertake.