

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SECURITY
BY DEPUTY G.P. SOUTHERN OF ST. HELIER
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 20th OCTOBER 2015**

Question

Can the Minister produce for members any documents which have resulted from the research carried out by her department into the impact of the Income Support and other benefit cuts on levels of relative low income for pensioner households; those containing children and those with a disability? If she cannot will she state why?

Will the Minister further explain to members how her statement that “The department has not decreased in any way the income support to those with disabilities” can be justified in the light of the removal of the 6% disregard for Long Term Incapacity Allowance income which will reduce incomes for those with a disability by £7 on average and by £12 for those with a 100% award?

Answer

The proposed changes to Income Support and other benefits were supported by detailed reports accompanying each proposition. It is never easy to make choices that reduce benefit expenditure, but each decision voted on by this Assembly was supported by a detailed, reasoned argument. I know they are not arguments with which the Deputy agrees, but the fact is that the research supporting them has already been provided.

To reiterate a point I made during the debate, the research that produced these propositions is based on the objective financial and numerical analysis of the extensive data that the Department holds on individual households claiming benefit. It is impossible to restrict benefit spend without some level of impact, but my officers are the experts in this area, and were able to shape a savings package that spread the reduction over a large number of households. A significant proportion of our required savings were achieved by maintaining Income Support components at their current level for the years 2016 and 2017, which is specifically intended to avoid a disproportionate reduction on the benefit received by any specific group.

In terms of payments made to people with disabilities, the approval of my spending plans has allowed the Department to maintain the level of these benefits. The impairment component of Income Support comprises three separate elements, providing additional financial support for personal care costs, mobility costs and GP costs. They are available to income support claimants of all ages, including pensioners and children. These elements have not been reduced. Long-term incapacity allowance is a contributory benefit that compensates a working age person in respect of a loss of faculty, judged on a percentage scale. The value of Long Term Incapacity Allowance has not been reduced. What has changed is that the treatment of the overlap between Income Support and LTIA benefit income has been brought in line with the treatment of other contributory benefits, to simplify the calculation of income support and ensure that all benefits claimants are treated fairly. This results in the removal of a 6% disregard within the income support system.

The most common award of LTIA is at 20% of the standard rate of benefit, or approximately £40 per week. A person with the most common 20% award would not see any decrease to the value of their LTIA, but if they were also claiming Income Support, the removal of the overlap would see the value of their income support benefit reduce by £2.40 a week. Only 1% of all LTIA claimants have an award of 100% and also claim income support.