

SOCIAL AFFAIRS SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY, 25th JULY 2006

Income Support Sub-Panel

Panel

Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier (Chairman)

Deputy S. Pitman of St. Helier

Senator B.E. Shenton

Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier

Advisor: Dr. Martin Evans

Witnesses

Mr. Francis Le Gresley MBE (Manager of Citizens Advice Bureau)

Officers

Charlie Ahier

William Millow

(**Please note:** Upon reading the transcript, some points of clarification were suggested by the witness. Whilst the transcript has not been altered, the suggestions have been included as footnotes to the main text.)

Deputy GP Southern

So, good morning, Francis.

Mr. F. Le Gresley (Manager of Citizens Advice Bureau):

Good morning.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Welcome to this public hearing of the income support Sub-Panel. Before we start I have a formal statement to read to you which is in front of you. It is important that you fully understand the conditions under which you are appearing at this hearing. You will find a printed copy of the statement I am about to read to you on the table in front of you. The panel has no statutory powers -- **[Interruption]**. The panel's proceedings are covered by Parliamentary privilege through Article 34 of the States of Jersey Law 2005. Although at present this privilege only extends to Members of the States. As a result you are protected from being sued or prosecuted for anything you say during the hearing, although this privilege should not obviously be abused. The proceedings are being recorded and a transcription will be made available on the Scrutiny web site. Really, we are here to discuss the possible role, or

otherwise, of the parishes in the new system that is to replace welfare. First of all, with everybody else we started with: are you happy with the level of consultation? Have you been involved in the early phase, and discussions about what was going to happen? Can you tell us something about that?

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Yes, I have been invited to various meetings; reference the introduction of income support. I was quite pleased to be invited in particular to a meeting at Social Security last year. I cannot remember its exact date, I am sorry, where I was one of the only non-States employees, or parish employees, where we were discussing about how the income support would be administered within the department and how involved are the parishes, and also we touched on payments to beneficiaries and things like that. So, that was like a planning day which I was very pleased at being invited to attend.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

In terms of the administration, what is your picture of how you envisage it working? I suppose I could define that with -- and can you tell us your experience of the welfare system as currently constituted, and why you think it is important to change it?

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Okay. Well, obviously, in preparation for today I revisited some of the documentation, and the key words in the proposal that went to the States was that delivery of the benefit should be built with the customer and cost in mind. I am sure if you asked the majority of welfare recipients at the moment: "Is the current system built with the customer in mind?" they will probably tell you "no". So, it clearly needs to change. What they object to basically is revealing their personal finances and situations to parish officials, including the Constable, although he is an elected official. They feel it is humiliating, and although I have to say that in the 15 years or so that I have been involved it has improved, particularly in the parish of St. Helier with the move from the parish hall to the Old Fire Station confidentiality has definitely improved. There are less complaints. So, it is and has got a lot better over the last 10 years or so. There is still the danger of people who have not sworn an oath of secrecy in the parish hall discussing somebody's affairs with a neighbour, in a shop, or whatever, and that is totally contrary to people's rights under the Human Rights, or whatever rights you wanted to name it, Data Protection, Confidentiality, whatever. So, the need to change with the arrival of the income support to a central one-stop shop is absolutely fundamental to the success of introducing this. Data protection issues have to be dealt with. All officers dealing with applicants have to have sworn an oath of secrecy. Clearly, the proposal is for the parish staff in the various parishes who solely deal with welfare, moving to be employees of Social Security, and therefore the involvement of the parishes will become fairly minimal, if at all. We are talking here I think about payment, but the actual assessment -- there is no indication necessarily for the parishes to get involved in assessment, because the majority of the initial assessments would be by interview. Obviously, there would be a form to fill in and all that data would have to be captured by Social Security, building on the data they already hold for a vast majority of the

probable applicants. So, I would see all those interviews and all that paperwork being dealt with at Le Feuvre House. I would not personally see any benefit in diluting the process by enabling people to do it in the parishes. Furthermore, there are community workers, or visitors, who are already employed by -- particularly the parish of St. Helier-- and the intention I believe is to retain some community workers who could go out to the elderly perhaps who are still in their own homes, who would need help, one to one, to fill in the form. All of that can be done, as I say, centrally with the exception of people who are house-bound who would need some help; maybe people with disabilities as well. When it comes to the payment of the benefit you have to bear in mind this is a weekly benefit, although some people would probably elect to receive it every 4 weeks, or every month or whatever. But when we had the meeting at Social Security I was one of the advocates of a -- not a cash payment system, but of a benefit paid direct into a bank account. Clearly that is the way to go. If they do not go that way, then they are missing a great opportunity, because there is already a problem with family allowance cheques which come every 4 weeks, people trying to cash them, having to wait until the banks to open, or the post office is open, or whatever. So, clearly, people will be relying on this new benefit, as their "daily bread" for want of a better word, and they have to have access to that money as soon as it is in their bank account -- if they can get a bank account. The one issue around this is that some of the recipients will not be eligible in the normal circumstances to open a bank account, possibly because they have not got a permanent place of address, have not got any ID, passport, driving licence, whatever, or they have got problems with debts in the past and bad credit reference ratings, so they would not in normal circumstances have a bank account. I am sure if Social Security have kept their word they have been talking to the States of Jersey primary bankers, which is HSBC, of the need to have a basic bank account, as it is called, for all recipients of income support. Basic bank accounts are quite sort of restricted in what you can do with them. They would not, for example, give you a cheque book. It is really -- the version would be equivalent of a deposit account without interest. So, it is just an account where you have a card that you can draw your cash out of any hole in the wall.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

Banks do those for children aged 12 and above.

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Yes.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

You have a cash point card.

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

That is right.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

You cannot overdraw.

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

That is correct.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

You do not have a cheque book?

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Yes, that is absolutely right. So, there is no question of overspending. If the money is not there you cannot get the cash out of the machine. Some banks on a basic bank account will allow you to set up one or two standing orders, but that would not necessarily be essential, but it might be something to consider. We need to use the very sophisticated banking system to mandate the income support payments into recipient's bank accounts. Then, as I say, with a cash card, 24/7 they can go and get their money out, even if it is only £10, or whatever is left, they will still have access to their money. Now, what we did discuss and which is a very relevant issue is what if they have run out of money in their actual account and it is Saturday, late afternoon, and children are hungry, and they have got to get some food from the supermarket, and whatever. How they are going to deal with that. The suggestion was, which is the current system as I understand it, is that the Duty Centenier for any particular parish has a wallet of money, would you believe, and if he is aware, made aware, that there is somebody in real need he will give them £20, or whatever it might be, to do their shopping out of this money that has been allocated currently out of welfare money. I think, sadly, that in this day and age we will still have to have something like that as an emergency payment, because people do not budget very well, and there will be the odd occasion when people will be desperate and do not know who to turn to. The Duty Centenier system is quite well understood by people. You can ring up Police Headquarters to find out who is your Duty Centenier. They will give you the phone number. It is advertised in the *Evening Post*, so people would know who to turn to in their particular parish if a cash crisis arose over the weekend. Then it would be, if that was the system, the centeniers would have to report to Social Security on the Monday that they made an X payment to a particular income support recipient. The question also arises is how are they going to know if they are a genuine income support recipient? I guess, I have not really thought that one through, but if there is an issue they may have to have some sort of card, or -- we all have a Social Security card, maybe income support people could have their own card, I do not know. The Duty Centenier should not have to worry that he is paying it out to somebody who is not genuinely entitled; I am certain there would have to be some form of identification I guess.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

We have just had the Chairman of the Constables Committee this morning, and we covered that point. He implied that if it was not possible to claim it back from the income support system, but each parish does actually have a charity reserve which they would use, which would then all be outside the system.

Going back to your argument by BACS.. One thing that he did bring up on a number of occasions was the fact that he tends to drip-feed quite a few claimants, because otherwise they would withdraw all the cash.

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Yes.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

How do you get round that?

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Yes, well, again, that is not a problem really because the scheme is designed to have multiple payees, so if a recipient says: "Well, look, I am not very good at managing my affairs, would you send part of my benefit to my landlord, part of it to my doctor, and part of it to whoever," the scheme and the computer system is designed to have multiple payees, so you can elect to receive 50 per cent of your income support direct to your bank account and the rest Social Security would on your instruction pay direct to third parties. So, I am afraid I do not agree with the drip-feeding of cash to people. It is a sort of nanny state type of "we know better than you", so, you know --

Deputy S. Pitman:

Well, the idea behind that was it is not realistic for some people to have their money in a bank account because they can just take the whole wad of it out in one go and then just spend it.

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Yes.

Deputy S. Pitman:

The Constable was saying it is down to these people -- they do have the money, but it is down to management, and that is the reality of it.

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Yes. I agree that that does happen, and we come across this at the Bureau. There are people who cannot manage their affairs, but as long as it is clear that -- I mean if this was occurring it would be for Social Security officers dealing with this to say: "Right, well, it's the second time you've come to us and told us you've run out of money. Let us sit down and work out a budget for you. Let's see who you need to pay, at least to keep your rent sorted, and whatever each week. If you agree to that, then we will pay you the difference." There is always, as we were saying before, an emergency fund available in cash if you run out. But how far can you really go with people to manage their affairs? I mean, you cannot cover the people who are incapable of looking after their affairs in a system that is sort of a broad-brush,

if you like, system. You can do your best, and I think the multiple payee option is probably the best that you can do to help people with an emergency cash wallet, if you like, to dip into for emergencies. For example, people in the hostels, I am thinking of Shelter Trust, or Roseneath or something like that, are, we believe, probably some of the most vulnerable people and most likely to have difficulty managing their affairs. As happens at the moment the payments for their board, which is in the region of £80 a week, whatever, and that includes food and a roof over their head, is paid by the authority direct to the trust. The multiple payment system would allow that. Similarly, if somebody is in residential care, the majority of the money can go direct to the provider and the “pocket money”, or whatever you want to call it, can be made available either through the care provider, or through a bank account, as spending money, cigarette money, or whatever. So, I do not think you should -- if you are designing a system you do not design it for the absolute weakest link in the system. You have to try and include a lot of options, but there will always be people who have difficulty with any system, and I think multiple payments are the best option that you can give them really. Well, that is my own personal view.

Deputy S. Pitman:

During your consultation did you express any of these ideas?

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Absolutely, yes.

Deputy S. Pitman:

Did they take them on board?

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

I think so. There was some reluctance perhaps to use the bank account route because they made reference to family allowance, how a lot of people prefer a cheque. But Income Support is a weekly benefit and so you are going to have to make 52 payments a year unless people agree to take it every 4 weeks, or whatever, which presumably can be offered to them. Obviously, there may be people who -- and they may have a right to in the law, I do not know, to receive a cheque which they can then go to a bank or a post office and cash, but that will not give them the money on the weekend when these outlets are closed, if you like. Plus, it is far more costly to have a benefit system that provides and issues cheques, and we know from our experience that family allowance cheques do not always turn up, and even incapacity benefit cheques do not turn up when people are expecting them, and they are wandering around saying: “You know, Social Security said my cheque is in the post, but I haven’t received it.” So, using a very expensive form of payment, which is cheques, and the cost of postage, et cetera, the BACS system which we alluded to before has to be the most cost effective way of making a payment of the income support.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

Well, what about cash? I mean, the Constables I think pay cash out as well? I think in a lot of instances it is because people do not have bank accounts, but they are more than capable of opening bank accounts. I mean do we mollycoddle them a little bit too much? The argument is it is comfortable, but how comfortable should it be?

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Well, the majority of people in work will be getting their wages paid by banks, or whatever. Because now with the deduction for ITIS (Income Tax Instalment System) and Social Security, whatever, the majority of employers now require people to have a bank account to have their wages paid into. So, a lot of the recipients on income support will be in work. The more elderly will probably have over the years built up sufficient credit rating and length of residence to justify opening a basic bank account without any further inquiry. I think the difficulty will be people who have only just come into the system after 5 year's residence who maybe are out of work, who have up until now managed with cash, whatever, and then suddenly are told that if you want this benefit you need to open a bank account. But you need to have a good relationship with the predominant bank you are going to use, and I feel although we have a possible difficulty within Jersey that the banks are chasing overseas business, which is far more profitable than dealing with basic bank accounts, there has to be a sort of partnership with the main provider. You know, we offer a lot of incentives to banks to set up in Jersey, and maybe this is part of their social responsibility

Deputy G.P. Southern:

You say you hope the Social Security Minister had followed this up. He certainly did not mention it this morning. He seemed to talk about payment by cheques, rather than -- I did not hear banks used. Did you?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

No, although cost effectively it --

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Certainly in terms of cost effectiveness that would be the way forward. It is something we should follow up with him I believe as a matter of urgency, because it certainly was not mentioned this morning. Would you be surprised to hear that the Social Security Minister is talking about not only his central bank of assessors -- he is talking about 12 positions based at Social Security -- and sending them out where people were house-bound, or could not get into do assessments, he is further talking about and in those parishes, for example, possibly St. Clement, St. Saviour, St. Brelade, training up the officer the parish officials, who are already there and training them to assess and using the various parish halls as a hub? How do you feel about that?

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Well, that was in the original proposition of 2004, that there would be satellite offices that are manned by parish officials.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

But as a satellite office which pays out to the cash customer as it were?

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Yes.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is a local contact point? But they seemed to suggest that they would be involved in doing assessments?

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Yes.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is that something ...

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Well, my own view on that is it is totally unnecessary. Given that the collection of money to fund welfare is now central the parishes really have no need to be involved certainly in the administration of applicants in particular. The more you have people working out of the centre the less they become tied to strict guidelines on what is right and what is wrong and how things are done in the centre. You sort of water down your effectiveness and your staff I feel. That is part of the problem that has always been with welfare is that it really has evolved in different ways in different parishes, because some parishes have a far more discretionary viewpoint on people's needs and other parishes stick strictly to the limits; the amounts that have been agreed by the committee of Constables. There is no written down detailed procedures in the payment of welfare, even though we attempted some 10 years ago to put those in place, they have more or less been ignored. The welfare leaflet booklet has not been updated for years. In fact, the only detailed guidelines on parish welfare is on the CAB website, because we are the only ones who bothered to collate all the different instructions that came over the years from the Committee of Constables and put it in one place, for example, dealing with ex-prisoners, and things like that. So, I would imagine that a new employee in a parish would have very little passed on to them as this is how we do it, you know. So, I really do not see the need, because it is a small Island -- I mean in England you would not contemplate setting up satellite offices for such a small area of responsibility. So, I do not really see the need for it. Now is the time to make that change. If you miss this opportunity you are really making a big mistake I feel.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

We are told that the level of take-up in Jersey is fantastically high and that maybe people fall outside the net, which implies that you must get very, very few people coming to the Citizen's Advice Bureau entitled to benefits that they are not claiming. Is that the case? Do you get very few people?

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

We still get people who have not claimed -- you are talking about parish welfare I guess?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

Just the whole range of benefits.

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

The whole range of benefits. Well, statutory benefits, nearly always people are informed either by the GP or by a social worker that they can claim, and it is an entitlement as you have contributed into the system. So, I do not think many people fail to claim statutory benefits, but non-contributory benefits, it is a slight differently matter. The family allowance in particular depends on submitting an up to date tax return. Some people, dare I say it, do not do tax returns, so they probably do not claim their family allowance that they might be entitled to. But the parish welfare, being a totally discretionary, non-contributory benefit, is almost certainly not claimed by some people because of the current procedure for claiming it. I think it is mainly the elderly who would say: "Well, you know, I know my pension is only 50-60 per cent of the maximum pension, but I do manage and I wouldn't dream of going down to the parish hall and, asking them for money because there's probably people more in need than me" is the sort of attitude that a lot of them would have.

Deputy S. Pitman:

Do you have any idea of the numbers?

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

I cannot really put a number on it, because these things sort of happen in the course sometimes of conversation with an elderly person on a totally different issue. They might be asking about, you know, a neighbour problem or something, and then they get on to talking about how they're coping, but I cannot really put a number on it. Although the parishes would say: "We're very user-friendly and we want to help," and I know genuinely they do want to help their parishioners; it is because it is steeped in Victorian tradition that is why people do not want to use that.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

Well, I think there is a stigma in going to the Parish Hall. I think people are worried about confidentiality. I think most parish halls are basically just little hot beds of gossip, which is how the Parish system operates over here.

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Well, I would not dispute what you are saying, although I think some parishes are worse than others in those things.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

But even assuming that one administered the oath of secrecy to such officials, one's staff would have to deal with the perception of it is just the old tradition being passed on. You do not necessarily change it by changing the rules and tightening up on that sort of behaviour when it is one of the perceptions. It seems to me that U.K. figures suggest that top-up pensions are not being claimed by something like 30 per cent of people who are eligible. I mean on that sort of level, without the additional stigma, the possibility of figures like that -- being eligible and not claiming -- who might come forward under a new system, that sort of level could be possible?

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Yes. I am telling you what you already know, but the big difference with income support is that it will be a statutory benefit. Therefore, it is very easy to persuade people in need to claim statutory benefit. It is far harder to persuade people that discretionary benefit that comes out of parish rates, it is their right to go and obtain help. I am sure that in throwing all these funding of benefits into one pot that some new people will come out of the system who have never benefited before, because they will for the first time be picked up and helped. Those who perhaps have enjoyed receiving benefits over and above possibly what most people would say is an entitlement, will over a period of time fall out of the system. So I think there will be quite a lot of winners and hopefully not too many losers out of the new income support.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

The other issue that has come up is that were you to involve the Parish officials to any great extent, obviously when you've got a group of 12 people centrally administering things, you can work out what your quota - how many cases you are taking on, and drive those efficiencies that way. Essentially you cannot necessarily do that if you are out in St. Mary's with your 6 candidates unless you are taking in several Parishes. The efficiencies are not going to be there, notwithstanding all the arrangements about secrecy, et cetera. You seem to take a view that as far as possible the parishes should not be involved in the administering the system, certainly not in assessment. If necessary there should be a pot, an emergency reserve, although the Social Security Minister himself seems to think that that sort of arrangement could be - the weekend emergency reserve - appointed a 24/7 number administered by their staff and then it overcomes the problem of are they one of our clients.

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Well, I think there maybe a little bit of bureaucracy around centrally doing emergency payments in the sense that whoever is on duty is going to have to access some computer records and then perhaps not be

certain that that person is entitled, et cetera, et cetera. While I was aware before that the parishes had their own trusts and some funds that you can access for people in need, that would seem to be - and obviously there is an enormous demand on that budget - you know: "Well, you can have 20 or whatever it is to buy something for the weekend", it has got to be fast, it cannot be dithering and say: "Well come back in half an hour or whatever", it has got to be what it is, an emergency payment and pay it and maybe ask the questions next week, but do not ask questions on the day because you have got to get these people sorted.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Citizens' Fund is not just for emergency things but also for large scale things. For, let us say, a set of dentures, which is a typical thing. From your understanding of how well it worked in the past, do you see that being able to deliver effectively?

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

I am going to just sidestep that for a minute because I read the law drafting brief for income support and I was a bit puzzled because it says that - which I am quoting: "Rather than set up a separate Citizens' Fund, the money would rest in the income support budget and be accounted for separately." So I am not sure that we are going to have a Citizens' Fund as such.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

No, that was clarified this morning inasmuch as -- because I thought it was a finite fund but it is not, it is a movable feast.

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Right.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

So, depending on how much is drawn off it, they can move money into it as and when.

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Right, right. But we are still going to give the label --

Senator B.E. Shenton:

They are going to label it as that but it is not: "a set figure of money."

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Right, okay. So, going back to Deputy Southern's question - at the moment the payment of things for purchase of white goods, I think they used to call it, rental deposit sometimes, large doctor, dentist bills, whatever - assuming that there is no other source of funds for this because (...inaudible) particularly for

the senior citizens there are other schemes in place to help them with some of those things. Assuming that there is no other statutory provision or scheme that they are entitled to claim, they could then apply, as they do at the moment, to their parish for help. I know there are applicants who have already been welfare recipients so they would be known, although they do - and as this scheme is intended to - help people who are not necessarily welfare recipients with one off grants or loans. I think it works quite well, I think in the parish of St. Helier they have a separate panel that looks at these type of applications and my gut feeling is that more people get given loans than grants which - okay, they are interest free loans but if they are a regular welfare recipient, they may find that their welfare each week is reduced by 10- 15 or whatever it might be to repay the loan, which is fine because the Parish have got control of their money anyway. But, of course, that means they have got to live on less than what is already a very basic income. So, I would hope that the Citizens' Fund and whoever administers it would be more minded to give grants in many cases than loans. Although for non income support recipients who can apply for a grant or loan from the Citizen's Fund, if they are above income support incomes or whatever then you would possibly expect those more likely to be offered a loan, interest free loan, for their needs.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Yes, certainly I have seen that happening where somebody is paying the loan back out of their welfare, I mean, it is obvious the system does not work, you cannot start paying back until your circumstances have changed and you have got more money coming in. It does not necessarily work, you are just living on next to nothing and going down in spiral, borrowing at the end of the week to pay off, et cetera. It is just a mess. There was talk this morning about possibly setting up a separate advisory body over the Citizens' Fund, would you see that as a way forward? Certainly it was suggested this morning using people who have had experience of welfare in the past.

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Yes. I did give this a lot of thought when the specific question was posed about the role of Constables. I do not see the individual Constables being involved in the administering of the Citizens' Fund at all, I just think that is pointless and probably is just a gesture to the past and what the parishes have done in the past. But I think there has to be clearly administration personnel within Social Security dealing with the paperwork for applicants for a grant or loan and I think that those officers, or the senior officer, would have some discretion to make payments based on his limit, if you like, so maybe a 500 limit. But there will be obviously amounts over and above 500 - I picked 500, it just seemed a sensible sort of figure - amounts over that figure which might be, for example a rental deposit can be 1,200, could be even more in Jersey. Now, there may be a case for an independent panel to hear those sorts of applications and give some guidance or make a decision for the officer to follow. Of course, there would have to be an appeal against their decision if people were not happy with the decision of the panel, which maybe the Minister could be the final decision maker, as it is with planning. Who would be on the panel? Well, that is the interesting question -- if you wanted to you could have a representative of the Constables but it is not necessary but the panel have to meet quite often. I would

envisage it meeting every week because people do not want to wait, say if they want a rental deposit, 2 weeks or 3 weeks for a panel sitting, they need to grab that accommodation as soon as possible. So, it would be a weekly meeting at Social Security as I would see it. But it could include the officer who is in charge of the Income Support Department for one who would be over the people dealing with the actual systems and fund applications. I thought of maybe the Head of Social Services, the Directorate Manager Marnie Baudains, because she or the post holder would have a good knowledge of social needs and the type of situations that people might be helped with. I thought of a Jurat, we have got 12 Jurats so they could usually find one available, I would have thought. The Jurats do sit on a number of trusts, for example, the Greville Bathe Trust, which is run out of the Treasury. So they have got some good experience of dealing with these sorts of applications. I did think of maybe of somebody from the Citizens Advice Bureau but maybe that is a bit presumptuous. So, I think you would need a little panel of 4 or 5 people and they could nominate their deputies if they were unable to attend. They would just look at the applications which are not within the discretion of the officers, particularly loans. I think all loans should go to the panel. Grants, yes up to £500, quick decisions but all loans and amounts over a certain figure should go to the panel and then their decisions would be carried out by the officers.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

So how often would the panel meet?

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

They'd have to meet every week.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

Weekly? So if someone needs a loan, they would not have to wait for a panel to meet essentially?

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Yes, I do not think, you know, a week is unreasonable to get a decision on what is on an application. I mean, the banks probably would not turn it round as quickly.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

I think that the important one would be a deposit on a flat, I mean – that's the one

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Yes, --

Deputy G.P. Southern:

People need to act fairly quickly and about a week is standard.

That is the sort of loan that might be effective.

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Yes. But I think if landlords were aware applicants may have to apply to Citizens' Fund for a deposit, that the time span is a week for the application and another 3 days for paying them something. Bearing in mind that is the deposit, I am sure they could, with a bit of goodwill, hold accommodation for that length of time while the applicant is going through the process. Because they would have to have their income support reviewed as a result of maybe an increase in rent of whatever, so all of that is a process that would have to be understood takes place.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

It has been put to us - put to me - by the community visitors in St. Helier that they see their role as halfway between service worker and administrator. That they do go out to visit people and they say that they are checking that they are coping and that circumstances have not changed, et cetera. Others say: "Well, it feels like it's Mrs. Snoopy coming round to check that I am not bending the rules and looking out to be on the fiddle." In transferring to Social Security, Social Security have got a different vision of how they see their administrators very much more as administrators. How do you see that semi-social worker role working out? Does it have a role going onward or would you like to see something else? Is there a question of proper social workers being involved in the loop somewhere?

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Well, I certainly would not think a community visitor should have anything to do with trying to detect fraud or anything like that because certainly Social Security have their own people who do that and this is yet another benefit that would have to be supervised.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

So, a clear distinction between a --

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Yes, I daresay it would be hard for a community visitor not to possibly report back with, there's you know a £2,000 new hi-tech TV just been installed. You might think: "Well, how have they managed to afford that?" or something like that. But I do not see them really being a snoop, if you like, for want of a better word. There is a need to investigate fraud, clearly, or otherwise the system would be under pressure. But community visitor (...inaudible), it is a social worker type role, where they are trying to look into and help the applicant or the recipient with their needs over and above the actual payments. They would be alerting them to other benefits that they could be claiming or other sources of help for them to live in the community. That is what I see the community visitor doing. I think the majority of the current ones do do that; that is what their role is.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

If it were down to you would you be advising the visitor to pursue that role at that --

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Well, they might need their job description amended from their current one, if they are doing other things but with a job description that fits the post - fits the purpose - then I do not see a problem. I think they play a valuable part in the community.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

I mean, certainly, because of that particular change that they see happening, I think of the 10 possible transferees, I think only 3 at the moment have opted to transfer. So they do see that as a serious obstacle to change the nature of what they see as their job.

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Yes, well maybe they just have not been sold the right vibes about it. To me, their work will continue maybe on a broader area, they might do - a bit like the Family Nursing and Home Care they have the East, West and Centre or something. Maybe --

Deputy G P Southern:

(...several inaudible words) exchanges.

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Ideally that would be something to mirror because clearly the community visitors would work hand in hand with Family Nursing and Homecare and alert them if their members, or encouraging to become members, to get that extra help. I do not know if these people have seen a job description, perhaps they have got fears that could be allayed.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

I think they have seen a job description recently - in the past week - so that may change. In terms of the information out there going to people who are eligible in this changeover - certainly talking to Constables and the Constables saying what is going out there - I am not sure that we have seen much publicity about the changeover. Do you have an opinion on when we should be starting with publicity there's a change coming?

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Yes, I think the only real information that has been promulgated is the fact that income support will come in before GST. That is all we have really been told. As far as I am aware I do not know what Social Security have in mind, but I would imagine they will produce some sort of leaflet or some sort of document that will alert all households to the change and what it involves and who they will be dealing with and all that sort of thing. Obviously, it will be on their website as well as in the States' website and

in the parish halls or whatever. But I guess they do not know the final details of it yet so it is too soon to be putting that sort of information out. Sadly, the only publicity at the moment is the problem with the St. Helier community staff, which is negative publicity obviously rather than positive publicity.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Are people contacting you saying: "What is happening to my benefits?" or anything? Certainly I am picking up one or 2 phone calls, you know: "Am I going to be left high and dry? What is happening?"

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Not really, no, and I think the reason is because people do not even know what is going to happen. I do not think we particularly have had people being concerned about the future. Obviously there have been a lot of changes with the assessment for private rent rebate and States housing with the last third, if you like, coming in for assessment of people on long term capacity, et cetera. So there have been a lot of knock-on effects from that. People worried about how they are going to manage in the future and as you know yourself the Social Security have said quite a lot of this will be sorted once income support comes in. But there are a few people now, I think, who have got a lower income than they had this time last year. They have not been able to top up with welfare or whatever. So, the sooner it comes in really, the better because I think some people probably have dropped in living standards.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

It was put to us by the Constable, the Chairman of the Constables Committee that he was somewhat dissatisfied that he had not seen the new regulations coming forward yet because, he says: "Only when we see the regulations we will see what the form and how it is going to deliver and we can start examining whether it will be successful." Certainly Social Security were not thinking about bringing forward their regulations until early next year. Would you agree with the Constable that the sooner we get them the regulations, the sooner we can start to examine them?

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

I am a bit puzzled quite what you mean by regulations. You mean these would support --

Deputy G.P. Southern:

The principle of the law, you know, the enabling law is in draft. That can only be delivered by the regulations so you can only work out who is delivering to - and how - to whom when you see the regulations.

They are not forthcoming.

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

I do not know. I would not know if they have been drafted yet. I do not know, I guess they are waiting for the law, the first or second or third draft to be finalised then they will work on the regulations, I

would imagine, but I understand we are hoping to move to this in May 2007 so the clock is ticking.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

The clock is very much ticking. Yes. We also have talked about the changeover, presumably, come May, everybody is not assessed simultaneously and the new system kicks in for everybody. It will have to be slotted in. Well, we do not know yet how this --

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Well, I am not sure I would make that assumption. I suspect everybody will be assessed at the same time initially and then certain criteria would be used to spread the load over the calendar year, if you like. So, this is perhaps around children reaching an age where they would be leaving school or would be like key dates that would be used to diarise that particular recipient. Or someone who is on a short term capacity allowance, maybe in their doctor's certificate is the prognosis that they will back in work within 2 months so then they would diary that file 2 months. Initially, I guess they are going to be swamped, they're bound to be because everybody has got to change over. I mean, I think with a lot of the elderly it will not be too much of a problem, it would be fairly streamlined. But the people with... certainly all, the people getting a rent rebate or on subsidised States rents they have all have to be, as a mass, dealt with fairly quickly, because, as I understand it, the people who are States' tenants have got to now receive payments to help them with their rent. At least that is my understanding of it. So that is a first for them so they will want to be as a block, sorted fairly quickly.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

It will place a heavy reliance on the efficiency of (a) the computers and (b) the system in itself because one of the problems that I am aware of that happens regularly where welfare picks up the burden is with things like Family Allowance that arrive late I think, and often it can be months in the system and welfare picks it up. Under the new system that will all be centralised and being the same computer if things go wrong there isn't going to be particularly a safety net to pick that up I don't think. Do you see that as a problem?

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Well, yes, I mean, I think the introduction is a major headache for everybody concerned but there is a lot of preparatory work they could be doing because they are going to share databases, as I understand it, with the parishes and with Housing. The Data Protection Registrar has no problem with that. So, in advance the majority of your applicants will be known and they could be sent a preliminary form to fill in to register, if you like, so that some work could be commenced on assessing what level of income support they are likely to or what the components of their income support would be. So, it would be, obviously, I would imagine, the intention to have - those that are the easy ones, those that are the more difficult ones and that those we're going to have to spend a lot of time on and sort all the easy ones so they are ready to go from day one and then spend more time on the more difficult cases. But, I mean, as

I say, if it is to be introduced in May 2007 I think the timescale is already very tight, given that we have not got a draft law or, as you say, regulations. I would think the run into it, once all that is in place, has got to be at least 3 months work for people before you stop the old benefit system in various areas. But it is an enormous task --

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Right. I think I am only just starting to see how enormous the task is.

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

It is. But they are very confident their computer system can cope and they are saying how the computer system can deal with these sort of additional volumes quite well.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

Mind you, you would hope it would with the amount of money they spent on it.

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

How much money, sorry?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

With the amounts of money that they spent on it.

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Oh right, yes. I am not sure of the figures for that. (...overspeaking).

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Shona, anything else you want to ask? Ben?

Deputy S. Pitman:

I was going to ask about fraud, but I do not think it is relevant to you, it is probably more relevant to the Minister.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

About what?

Deputy S. Pitman:

About would you think that this new system would stamp out more frauds --

Deputy G.P. Southern:

More fraud?

Deputy S. Pitman:

Yes, than it currently is?

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Yes, I do not know and I do not know if anybody knows or has a figure of the exact amount of benefit that is obtained fraudulently in one calendar year. I think it is probably very small in relation to the total -- I do not know the percentage, but I would imagine it would be very small. That is not to say that there are people who are receiving the benefit that are not necessarily entitled to and have not been caught. But, I mean, the system - the new system - has to be designed to, as far as possible, eliminate fraud but have an inspector or whatever to check up on those that there are concerns about. But no system will ever eliminate it because it is the nature of some people that they want to get as much money as possible for nothing really, I suppose. You cannot stop that occurring from time to time as long as the people who are caught are punished in whatever format's appropriate. It is all you can do really, but if you compare it to England or whatever, I think the amount of fraud that takes place in Jersey is far, far less percentage wise.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

One thing, it's a minor point, that the Constable did bring up this morning was about people on welfare who passed away with no money, there is no money for the burial. Is that something you have come across before --

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Yes, well that is not a problem, I mean the Social Fund in England pays for funerals and the Citizens' Fund could do that.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

So, that will just get picked up by the Citizens Fund or whatever?

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Yes, I mean there is a basic cost that most funeral directors would quote you for a simple funeral. I cannot remember the sum they need, in the order of about £800, something like that for a very simple funeral and coffin. That would be a straightforward grant, it would almost be statutory with a (...several inaudible words) ^[1]. Obviously you have got your death grant anyway in addition to the whatever top up would be needed.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is there anything that we have missed that you feel you want to say to us in particular?

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

I'm just going to glance at my notes. Yes, I think you have talked about the regulations and I would say that there has to be a guidance book for Social Security officers to use as a - I hate to use the word "bible" - but there has to be a rule book that is in simple English for the officers to follow. That book should be available to the public if they want to read it. It's not hidden on a shelf and you do not know what the rules are. Particularly in our work at the Bureau, if we do not know what the guidelines are and we have to keep checking the regulations which are going to be written in legal language every time we get somebody saying: "I do not know why I was turned down", or whatever. As I said to you before, the problem with Welfare is that that bible was never written that guidebook was never written and you had 12 different administrations going off in different directions. Procedures manual - that is the word I should be using - for the payments of income support. Because there are so many elements that are going to be involved in this in respect of disability or housing or whatever, it needs to be absolutely clear and obviously there will be revisions - in the light of experience - amendments made to the procedures manual but in an open and honest fashion that should be available to the public if they want to read it. A lot of people will not bother to read it, but people like ourselves will be reading it and following it all the time to make sure that the public are getting what they are entitled to. That is where, as I say, I repeat it really where the welfare system fell down because that procedures manual was never in place.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Social Security system has got so many different regulations it is impossible to find your way through it, it is even very difficult for people like you who have been dealing with it for years. You come across a new twist you have never come across time and time again. If simplification is going to work, it should be possible to have everybody who is a potential claimant aware of what their rights are and aware of how system works in very simple terms and that would be critical to making sure the whole system works. I could not agree more.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

The actual income support booklet which the public will pick up to see what their benefits are, what they're entitled to, do you know whether they are going to produce that in Polish and Portuguese or --

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Well, I hope they would, it would make sense to do that (...overspeaking)

Senator B E Shenton

I haven't heard anything about Polish

Mr F Le Gresley

But I am not -- I know, it is a slightly different question but what the public can receive as a leaflet or

even read off the website, is not the same as the detailed procedures manual that the officers and those who might be interested such as us can access and read. You get them in England, I mean, there are big document books or whatever. Obviously with websites now it is probably easier just to read it off a website, but that has to be available from day one and corrections or amendments in light of experiences made as you go along.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Demystifying the system.

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Yes. Okay

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Well, I would just like to apologise, I had to be somewhere else and I could not not be there, but thank you. Anything else you want to say?

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

No, no, no, I do not think so. But I go back to my opening statement which was it is supposed to be built around the customer and we must not allow old prejudices and old traditions to decide how this is dealt with in the future. The customer should come first.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Thank you.

Mr. F. Le Gresley:

Okay?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Thank you very much

[1] The witness has suggested that his answer at this juncture was as follows: 'That would be a straightforward grant, it would almost be statutory within the scheme.'