

STATES OF JERSEY



MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2016 – 2019 (P.72/2015): SEVENTH AMENDMENT (P.72/2015 Amd.(7)) – AMENDMENT (P.72/2015 Amd.(7)Amd.) – COMMENTS

**Presented to the States on 5th October 2015
by the Council of Ministers**

STATES GREFFE

COMMENTS

Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade proposes –

The £100,000 expenditure proposed in the total expenditure and for the States Assembly for States members' pensions in 2016 is not reduced as proposed by the Council of Ministers (P.72/2015 Amd.(7)) but instead transferred to the Transport and Technical Services Department for Concessionary Bus Travel for the Disabled in 2016.

The Council of Ministers maintains its original Amendment (7), strongly opposes this Amendment to Amendment (7) and urges States members to oppose it.

Summary of Council of Ministers' Comments

- The Social Policy Unit is currently working to develop an Island-wide disability strategy. Research to support its development is underway and consultation with key stakeholders will commence in Q2 2016.
- The strategy will set out a range of recommendations in relation to transport. Initial work undertaken in 2013/14 clearly indicated that a package of transport solutions is required to meet differing needs.
- Concessionary bus travel will remove/reduce financial barriers for individuals who are able to travel by bus but who cannot afford to, but it will not address other more problematic barriers to the bus network (e.g. lack of access to and from bus-stops). Nor will it benefit those unable to travel by bus. Concessionary bus travel is potentially a very limited remedy.
- The Social Policy Unit, working in conjunction with the Transport and Technical Services and Social Security Departments, is in the process of collating the data required to make informed decisions about the costs of concessionary bus travel. Initial indications suggest this could be in excess of £500,000 per annum depending on eligibility criteria. This work needs to be concluded before informed decisions can be taken about the cost of concessionary bus travel, its prioritisation over and above other transport solutions, and how it could be funded.
- The package of measures presented in the MTFP has been proposed to reprioritise resources by reducing spending in some areas to invest in other, higher priorities for Health, Education, infrastructure, economic growth and improving productivity.

Detailed Comments

The Social Policy Unit is currently working to develop an Island-wide disability strategy in consultation with people with disability, their family and friends. To date, a postal survey has been distributed to 10,000 households and focus-group meetings are underway. Consultation will commence in Q2 2016, after the initial research has been completed, with the strategy published in early 2017.

The strategy will set out what needs to be done to support people with different disabilities and long-term conditions to participate in every aspect of society. It will build on preliminary research on transport matters undertaken in 2013/14 which clearly indicated –

- that a range of transport solutions is required to meet differing needs (for example, dial-a-ride schemes, mobility scooters, adapted taxis or adapted private cars)
- barriers to bus travel do not necessarily relate to cost. Key inhibitors include: safe access to and from bus-stops, confidence to travel and/or ability to communicate needs with drivers/passengers, a requirement for a travel companion.

A key objective of the strategy will be to help ensure that any investment removes barriers to mobility for as many people as possible. It is unlikely that this will be achieved simply by providing free or subsidised bus travel to those who are able to access to the bus network in the first instance.

Whilst concessionary bus passes are available in the UK, there are a multitude of different models across Europe, some of which provide a better transport solution for a greater number of people. For example Sweden, which is among the most progressive nations in providing mobility solutions for people with a disability, does not have concessionary bus passes. Rather it provides financial support, targeted to those with the highest need and a more comprehensive range of transport options. The individual may then choose the mobility solution which best suits their requirements.

In Jersey, the mobility component of income support already equates to £2,388 per annum for those recipients in employment and £1,194 for non-earners. Consideration needs to be given to enabling individuals in receipt of this allowance (approximately 1,000 people in total) – and others who are not in receipt of benefits – to purchase and access affordable mobility solutions which meet their needs and lifestyle. For example, if the ‘Dial-a-Ride’ service which is currently being considered by LibertyBus were to be introduced, it would pick up people with disabilities from their own home. A fare would be charged in order to ensure sustainability into the future (albeit the amount of this fare and associated concessions are yet to be determined).

In making decisions about concessionary bus passes for people with a disability (in addition to those passes already provided to older people), consideration must also be given to the long-term financial impact. In the U.K. 30% of all bus travel is free to the user and, as a result, rural bus services are being decimated by the associated funding pressures.

In conclusion, whilst the Council of Ministers is committed to bringing forward transport solutions for people with a disability, it would be pre-emptive to make a decision at this point in time about providing a blanket benefit which –

- is unlikely to address or solve the very real problems encountered by people with a disability, and
- is not financially sustainable.

Process of re-allocation and re-prioritisation in the MTFP

The Deputy is proposing a re-allocation of funding that has been carefully considered as part of a significant prioritisation process and spending review –

- The Council of Ministers has prioritised the proposals in the MTFP on the strategic priorities of the States.
- The prioritisation was carried out alongside an ongoing spending review, supported by external advisers, to identify savings and efficiencies both across the States and within individual department programmes.
- The Council of Ministers conducted a series of workshops and the prioritisation of available funding has evolved over a period of discussion and several iterations of the proposals before the final allocations were agreed.
- Each department has prioritised the available funding, and we can't afford to cherry-pick certain savings or growth; we have to make decisions which align with our strategic priorities, and this means that every department will be affected and has to contribute to the overall reprioritisation.
- Further work is required to develop the detail for 2017 – 2019, but the Council of Ministers believes that it is presenting a balanced and sustainable package in line with the strategic priorities.
- The package of measures presented in the MTFP has been proposed to reprioritise resources by reducing spending in some areas to invest in other, higher priorities for Health, Education, infrastructure, economic growth and improving productivity.

Financial implications

The funding suggested by Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade is not sustainable into the future and is far from sufficient to provide the benefit he proposes.