

SOCIAL AFFAIRS SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY, 25th JULY 2006

Income Support Sub-Panel Hearing

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

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

Mr. Richard Bell (Controller of Social Security)

Ms. Sue Duhamel (Strategy Analyst, Social Security Department)

Officers

Charlie Ahier

William Millow

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

Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier:

Good morning, and thank you all for coming. I presume you know everybody; we have just introduced, but for the tape, I am the Panel's Sub-Chairman, Deputy Judy Martin. We have Deputy Southern, Senator Shenton and Deputy Pitman, she will be here a little later. She had, I think it is a doctor's appointment detaining her. For the purpose of the tape, I have to read the rules under which you are here. It should be on the desk in front of you as well. It is important that you fully understand the conditions under which you are appearing at this hearing. You will find a printed copy of this statement I am about to read to you on the table in front of you. The panel's proceedings are covered by parliamentary privilege through Article 34 of the States of Jersey Law 2005. As a result, you are protected from being sued or prosecuted for anything said during this hearing, although this privilege should obviously not be abused. The proceedings are being recorded and the transcription will be made available on the Scrutiny website. So, really, I would just like to start you off, Senator Routier, with a question. It is quite general, really. What consultation has there been in developing these proposals, and with whom?

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

Is that a general question about income support or is that just the focus of what we are talking about today?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Focussed on today, yes.

Senator P.F. Routier:

But focussed on whether it is delivery in the parishes or not?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

The Citizen's panel ^[1], yes, please.

Senator P.F. Routier:

Certainly, we did have general consultation originally, when we went out to some of the parishes and did have a few open meetings. We also had some discussions at St. Pauls; we had about 3 or 4 meetings at St. Pauls, where we invited various people to come along to that. With regard to focussing on the delivery, certainly, we have had a mixed response from various people. Some people have wanted to have the delivery near to them; others want to have it more central. But it has been a real mixed response, really.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

How many satellite offices do you think we need for an Island of about a population of 90,000 people?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I do not think we are really going to be as precise as that with regard to the number of offices. What we are doing currently, is we had the meeting only yesterday with the Constables Committee and we know, for instance, St. Helier have decided not to continue delivering welfare because they recognise it is going to be not particularly brilliant to have 2 places in St. Helier. So, there will be the main focus of delivering income support will be in our department. The meeting we had yesterday with the Constables, we discussed the various options of how income support could be delivered. We suggested to them perhaps some of them might like our officers to go out to the parish on a rota basis, on a regular basis, to do the work, to make assessments and to make payments. That is one option. The other option we suggested to them as well is that they might just carry out payments but no assessments. An assessment would be done by our officers, but if people who were living in the outlying parishes were wanting to get their payments near to where they live, we would then give them that option. That would require the person who is making the payments to take an oath to ensure that they were abiding by the directions of the Minister and that they would just deliver the payment and there would not be the matter

of assessing people. Or, they could go, if it was perhaps one of the bigger parishes that do have currently a lot of welfare claimants, they could, under a service level agreement, assess people and make payments. But that would be literally it. What we are doing currently is writing to each one of the Constables to ask them which way they would prefer to do it. I have to say that I do recognise that people in the country should have the choice to be able to decide for themselves whether they want to go to their parish hall or not. If they do not want to, certainly, they are to have the ability to come into town into our department to get their assessment and their payment there.

Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier:

Surely, the payments can be received by post, I would have thought. Certainly, you operate today on basically a postal system. They do not come in for their family allowance necessarily, they get posted to them. Surely that is the mechanism by which most of the income support will be delivered?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Certainly, that is exactly right. We want to encourage as many people to either have BACS payments or to have a cheque, whichever suits them. But we want to encourage as many people to use that option. But we know that is a generational thing that some people would prefer to have cash in their hand. But we will be encouraging as many people as possible to have either electronic payments or cheques.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

In that sense, you have not got a policy to drive that? Presumably, some time down the line, you want to see the vast majority of payments being made by post, which is obviously efficient?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Yes, certainly.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Are we not talking about transitional arrangements, effectively, in terms of what might be arranged with the parish workers for payment?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I think that it is a generational thing. People with our benefits now are currently moving to electronic payments and to cheques. That is happening as the years go by. We have pension books which, I have to say, that the modern way of doing it, they are very expensive to provide and to use. We would certainly prefer to go down the route of having the pensions paid electronically or by cheque. But there is a number of pensioners who want to maintain that old system.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

What sort of number?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I am not sure. I cannot remember. About 1,000.

Ms. S. Duhamel (Strategy Analyst, Social Security Department):

There are just over 1,000 but you have lots of new ones. ^[2]

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Again, I come back to, obviously, I can see that you are attempting to be flexible by consulting with each Constable individually as to what they would like. But it seems to me that what you have got there is a mishmash. It started with a mishmash. One of the functions of centralising and co-ordinating was to improve efficiency. Is there not a danger that you are going to end up with the same mishmash and a not very efficient system? We ask the question, how many centres do you see? Is it one? Is it 3; is it 12?

Senator P.F. Routier:

At the discussions we had yesterday with the Constables we did suggest one in the east, one in the west, one in the north and our central office as an option, and I think the Constables are going to think about it. Individually, in their own parishes, they are going to, I think. You are going to speak to the Constable later, so you will know what he is going to say. But he will be no doubt responding for his own parish perhaps, and have a view more stronger on that. But I think it would not be wrong for me to say that there was a feeling among some of the Constables that they did not really want to be involved as much as others do. I mean, at what level? Some would feel that just providing leaflets and the option for somebody to come in and collect the cash is probably the level that they would be prepared to do. I do not think they want to pull away from providing a service to their parishioners. I think that is their right in certain circumstances in some smaller parishes. I think it better to ask them for that. They will have a better view of how they feel about it. That is certainly the feeling I had.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Your impression is as mixed from the 12 Constables as it is from the rest of the community?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Mixed? Yes, I think they all have different views, yes. I mean, like, we have seen St Helier make a decision that they are going to have absolutely nothing to do with it; they are passing it over to us. But I do not want to be the one who is going to say that, if a customer in the parishes is going to have difficulty in getting their benefit, I am not going to be the person who puts that barrier in the way for them. I think it will just develop over the years. As you say, it is probably a transitional thing and people will make their choice; the customers will make their choice.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Following up that transitional thing, how long do you see the transitional rate as being? Do you see a unified and centralised and efficient system in place 3 years down the line? A year down the line?

Senator P.F. Routier:

A unified system will be in place from day one, because it is all one system. It is literally one system, and any application for income support, will be administered through the one computer system. There will be one form. It will be the one assessment. If anybody is going to talk to anybody to ask about assessment, they will have had all exactly the same training, whether it be in the parishes or whether it be ... For them to go into a parish hall, they would certainly have the quality of service that they would if they were to come into our department.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

There will be a cost to put it into the parishes. Have you costed what it will be?

Senator P.F. Routier:

The parishes already have computer systems. We are already linked with them.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

They might not have to whatever, but there will be a cost.

Senator P.F. Routier:

Yes.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

Have you worked out what the cost will be?

Senator P.F. Routier:

There is no additional cost, really, not as far as I know. The parishes already have computers linked to us already, so it is not a cost issue. It is literally a matter of service. One of the options I mentioned earlier about our own staff moving on a rota basis around the parishes, well, there may be a cost to that, perhaps, if our own staff will be going to do that, but the parishes themselves are going to use some of their own staff.

Senator P F Routier:

But they have to be trained.

Senator P.F. Routier:

It is not as if it is going to be a totally different ball game with regard to the assessments, and anybody

who is doing an assessment has to be responsible to the Minister. They are not responsible to the Constable; they are responsible to the Minister, and they would have to carry out an assessment in a proper manner, be trained to do that and it will be carried out.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

So, the parish staff will be responsible to you as to their Constable?

Senator P.F. Routier:

It will be under a service level agreement. What happens is the parish will have a service level agreement with us to provide income support and make delivery. That is the way it will be.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

What happens if he does not comply with the SLA (Service Level Agreement)?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Well, we break the SLA; the SLA with him.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Can I just come in about the assessment? We seem to have moved in about 6 months. I may have recorded it wrong, but the initial assessment was always going to be done at Social Security by Social Security staff or, on occasions when people cannot come in because of disability, one of your staff will go into their home. We seem to have moved even to assessments, which I find very worrying and the Citizen's Advice Bureau finds very worrying, assessments and reassessments being done by parish staff.

Senator P.F. Routier:

You have to move away from thinking that they are parish staff. What they are is somebody who has been trained to assess somebody in a proper manner. They will have to have extensive training. They will have to have updates on how to deal with people. If somebody in the parish is not in a position to follow the set procedures regarding the service level agreement and assess people in a proper manner, they will not be doing it.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

So, it is not a hard and fast rule now that every first assessment will come through Social Security? You have moved to the parishes can do assessments? As someone coming first into benefits, their whole world collapses; the husband runs off, or they have 2 kids, lose their job; they can go to their parish and be assessed? Now, this is totally removed from what we were told, or I remember what we were told, 4 or 5 months go, that the initial assessment will be always done at Social Security. Is that a yes or a no?

Mr. R. Bell (Controller of Social Security):

The current way of looking at it is that for simple assessments, they could be undertaken in the parish. So, yes it is so. In all cases I envisage it working but for more complex assessments, they will have to be referred to Social Security.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Until they are assessed, who knows if they are simple or complex? This is my problem with this. I was quite happy that every initial one was going to be carried out by Social Security, and then the way of delivering it is still up for discussion. But this simple and complex, until somebody walks in, who knows if that is a simple or a complex assessment? Do you get that? If they go in and then they are told: ‘You are too complex for me to deal with; go off to Social Security to deal with you’?

Mr. R. Bell:

I do not envisage it working like that. I envisage the individual in the parish, or those who worked at the parish, referring directly through to Social Security there and then.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

It seems to me that straight away you are reintroducing an element of discretion into the system. Is this complex; is this not? Is this straightforward? There is a judgement call being made there unless you are going to codify it in some way, which seems even more bureaucratic. Discretion is one of the things that we are trying to get away from, I would have thought, if we are going to make the system more efficient and we deliver to the people what one should be doing.

Mr. R. Bell:

Because you are trying to deliver it to the people in the way that you deem appropriate, then you will want to try and help people that fall slightly outside of the curve.^[3] In simple cases, for example, pensioners who do not receive a full pension, then that would be a fairly simple assessment. But more complex areas, and particularly those, for example, around^[4] 5-year residency or the one-off items, I would expect those to be referred through to the more senior Social Security staff, rather like they would be within the department.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Can I just ask you how many staff you envisage being assessors based with you? How many staff are we talking about. Are we talking about 10 staff who were at the Parish of St. Helier? How many staff do you envisage?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I will ask Ms. Duhamel, because she has been dealing with that.

Ms. S. Duhamel:

There will be 12 advisors at Social Security plus a manager directly involved with assessments.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

It seems to me 12 assessors and a manager can deal with the entire Island, so why are you ...? If you have to go out to the parishes, one of those 12 goes would seem a logical and efficient way of delivering. What is your reaction to that, Senator Routier?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Well, I honestly believe that what we are trying to do is deliver a service, which people can make a choice about where they go to make their application. Some people, I have to say, are comfortable with going to their parishes. They just are. I mean, I know there is a view that people just do not think that the parishes are able to do this, but currently they are delivering the welfare service. People have various views of the suitability of that, but the people who are receiving welfare do go to the parishes now, and are comfortable going to the parishes.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

Yes, but they would probably be comfortable going to banks.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

When you say they are comfortable going to the parishes, what evidence do you have that they are comfortable? At the moment there is nowhere else to go. I mean, it is the parishes or nowhere, so, what are you basing that evidence on?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I have been told that. People have said they go to their parishes. They are told to go to their parishes.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

You said you had a very mixed reaction from the public, pro and con. Now, we are being told that going to the parishes is okay.

Senator P.F. Routier:

No, I am told a mixed response. There are people who do not like going to the parishes and will not go to the parishes. There are people who are comfortable going to the parishes.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Again, can I come back to Deputy Martin's question? What evidence do you have, for example, for take-up?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Verbal.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

For example, there is a certain amount of stigma attached to going to the parish enforced on people because it is charity, because they know your business, for whatever reasons. What evidence have you got over the take-up of those who are entitled to claim and not claiming?

Senator P.F. Routier:

None.

Mr. R. Bell:

I will add a bit more into there. Most of it will be anecdotal on both sides when you say people are reluctant to access the parish. When you say people are reluctant to access the parish, there is a lack of dignity perceived in the existing system, or otherwise. But there are some people who tell us they do like to access through the parish. Now, we are doing a bit of consultation this summer surrounding the regulations, i.e. subordinate legislation, and asking questions on how people would like the system to work, and within there we will make reference to and seek consultation and responses in respect of provision through the parishes.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

When you say a spot of consultation, what are we talking about?

Mr. R. Bell:

I will move out from a spot to extensive, as wide as possible.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Just going back to the staff in the parishes, is the line manager of the assessment staff the parish, or would it be Social Security?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Social Security.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

With income support you have a tremendous opportunity of starting almost with a clean sheet of paper to provide a service that is efficient and cost effective. It seems to me that you want to contaminate it and keep the parishes involved more for political reasons than anything else. You say people are more comfortable going to the parish hall but I live in Grouville. I would be more comfortable going to the Grouville parish hall because it is more convenient. That does not mean I would not go into town. I mean, are you not paying too much attention to what the Constables want whereas, in fact, you should

be putting a policy together that is efficient and cost effective.

Senator P.F. Routier:

Firstly, I am not focussing on particularly what the Constables want. What I am trying to achieve is a system in which people can access the income support system in as easy a way as possible. That is what I want to achieve. People who are on low incomes who live in St. Ouen's, to come into town is an expense for them. It is an issue for people who live in the outlying areas, to move into town on a regular basis.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

But it won't be regular. We have already established the assessment will done in town, hopefully. Regular payments will be posted or put into their bank, like your other benefits. So, I do not really see that. I mean, we are 9 by 4 and you say St Ouen's and town, but it is not a move ... you would face to do it once every 6 months if you want to -- I do not know how often you are going to assess, but the initial assessment, upgrading, different things, they might never need come back for another year or 2.

Senator P.F. Routier:

You are right, certainly, with the people who are on a very steady income and just do not change. But there are going to be people who will be -- because you have to recognise, this income support system, for those who are able to work, those people need to try and get work. So, there will people who will have to be monitored on a regular basis to ensure that they are attempting to get work. So, it is not every 6 months or every year or whatever. There will be people who will need to be talked to a lot more regularly than that. A week, 2 weeks, that will need to happen to ensure that they are trying to get back into work. No doubt those people, if they are that active, they will be wanting to come into town anyhow to find a job. There is no doubt about that.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

The job centre is in town, so it would be feasible, yes.

Senator P.F. Routier:

But people on low incomes, it has been made quite clear to us that people on low incomes, if they are in the outlying parishes, for them to come into town on a regular basis, it is an additional expense.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

So, on that, if you feel that strongly enough, for those Constables that want to opt out, surely you have got to force them to deliver the service. Or is it not that important that they deliver it or not?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I think that if we have got to a situation where we have, as I said, 3 to 4 places in the outlying parishes

who are prepared to deliver, it may be that they just decide to pay money in the end, rather than doing assessments. It is still in development, really.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

So, you seem to have taken it a stage further. Suppose you have got a service level agreement in a particular parish, would the applicants for income support be advised to go to the parishes as your first contact point and would you see service level agreement training involving this job coaching role as well in order to encourage people back into work and monitoring their situation?

Senator P.F. Routier:

People have the choice of where they go but they would come into our department for job coaching and all the rest of it. The parishes are not going to be involved in doing job coaching, no.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

But monitoring people? I maybe using the wrong phrase, but encouraging people back to work, would that be a role where you have got a service level agreement for the assessment officer out in the parish? Or would that be centralised?

Senator P.F. Routier:

It would be centralised.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

You are saying that will be centralised. It will be one of your 12 is trained up in that?

Ms. S. Duhamel:

There are extra people to do the job coaching.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

All right, I have used the wrong phrase, but the encouragement back to work; not necessarily the job coaching. I have used the wrong phrase, but that encouragement to make sure that these people are actively seeking work, that is a role that your officers based with you?

Ms. S. Duhamel:

Yes.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Okay. Maybe it is too early to ask the question, but when you say a service level agreement, what are you talking about? What would be in that service level agreement?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I will ask Ms. Duhamel for a response to that.

Deputy G P Southern

Especially on assessment

Ms. S. Duhamel:

The service level agreement would explain that the Social Security Department had a responsibility to provide the computer connections to the parishes because you cannot do anything without the computer. We want everything to be recorded on the computer. Also, there will be a lot of requirements around data protection within the service level agreement. That is one of the key issues, that obviously we are taking our data into other offices, and we do need to make sure that that is very secure. So, we have included extra security within the computer system so that all screen inquiries are recorded and will be monitored and audited. It would be our responsibility to provide training to staff and to maintain that training, and it would be our responsibility to provide telephone support to staff during office hours so that any question at all, they have their line manager to get in touch with straight away. The Parishes would be required to be Staff would have to take the oath of secrecy, as per the Social Security Law. They would have to ensure that they maintain the data safely, provide private facilities if they were going to do assessments, so there is no question of people being intimidated in general offices. They would be responsible for their own cash. Basically, the main thing would be that they would be required to run the system to our standard and if there is any issue with that then the agreement would be broken, and we would monitor every action that goes through the computer. You were talking before about it not being efficient but it is efficient because it is the computer that holds all the information in one place. That is the efficiency of it; that is the centralisation of it. The fact that there is somebody accessing the computer from a remote location is not any less efficient. That is how computers give you the flexibility to do things these days. So, if we pay a reasonable amount of money for somebody to access a computer from a remote location, that does not cost any more or less than when you are accessing it from our office. As I say, all the actions would be audited. There is an amount of discretion built into the system. If you did not have any discretion, you would not have the income support system that you wanted and certainly would not have the system that we want. We have to be able to allow people who have got just under 5-years qualifications, just do not meet the specific requirements of the law, but we want to be able to help people in a particularly difficult situation. Every time you do that on the computer you have to override. So, the computer says to you: "The Law says this. Do you want to override it?" and you say: "Yes." It will then check that you have the security level to do that. So, the parishes would have the lowest security level, as would our advisors. Then there would be a level for team leaders, supervisors, and an even higher level for managers. So, you have got this hierarchy of discretion going up, depending on it becoming more money or more outside the basic rules.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

So, the parishes would have no discretion whatsoever?

Ms. S. Duhamel:

There is a very small amount of discretion which is available to an advisor, but it really is not very much, not worth a lot of money.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

Do the Constables realise this?

Senator P F Routier

Yes

Ms. S. Duhamel:

Yes. The only thing, just to finish it off, when you press that button and say: "I am overriding this rule", that goes on a report. That report goes to Social Security so there is somebody looking at it every week saying what has been overridden for different reasons. First of all, it is a check of what the parishes are doing but more importantly, to check trends within society. Should we be changing regulations? Is there an area which is coming up over and over again is discretion, which should be put into the main part of the system. We can see trends within needs of people and that is what regulations are all about: you can change things as time goes forward.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

Can I just ask about the Citizens' Fund? What are the arrangements for the administration of the Citizens' Fund ?

Senator P.F. Routier:

It is an add-on to income support. For instance, if somebody has a need which is not covered by the basic income support benefits and whatever the components in that, for instance, equipment blowing up and all those sorts of things, there will be an application to that, which will be monitored.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

How much money do you envisage being in the Citizens' Fund ?

Mr. R. Bell:

It depends. We have started doing the modelling exercises so that will be dependent on one of the options in terms of you squeeze here, there is a bubble up there, in terms of how much money will be available with in the fund.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

Will there be a finite figure per year. So there will be a fixed figure. So if you ran out of money by September?

Mr. R. Bell:

Income support is a finite figure but it will be closely monitored and the initial year's monitoring will be the key as to the size of the fund.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

So, you have done no research through the parishes? I mean, the 12 parishes, their discretion at the moment that what they spend on emergencies over and above any welfare, you have got no figures from them?

Mr. R. Bell:

The parish system itself is inconsistent from one parish to another, so identifying the core parish system is quite difficult in any case.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

So, by giving only a low amount of discretion to the parishes, you will keep in control of the Citizen's Fund centrally?

Mr. R. Bell:

Yes.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

If I went off to the parish hall for relief and I saw someone, and I was slightly outside that band that needed a bit of discretion, how quickly do you get a response? How quickly does the computer system override all?

Ms. S. Duhamel:

That is because it is a live system. So, you can type it in Grouville. You say: "I have hit my limits", whatever, phone your supervisor at Social Security, ask them to access the same claim because they can get to the same thing. It will be there already. The supervisor can look at it, perhaps talk to the advisor in the parish. If that is all okay, the supervisor in Social Security is quite happy with it, they can authorise it there and then. Then the advisor can then go back into the claim and do it there. It will take 5 or 10 minutes, in a straightforward situation. I am not saying that will happen all the time, but technically that is possible.

Senator P.F. Routier:

Can I just mention - perhaps I should not offer answers without being asked the question - but it is just a

general observation about we keep on referring to what is going to go on in the parishes. Everybody who is going to be administering the system will be, as I say, trained fully. They will be responsible to the Minister and have to take an oath of secrecy. It is not the parish that is doing it; it is Social Security.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Can I just come in? So, you are saying the cost of the parishes improving their administration, security, interviews and facilities would be 100 per cent paid by Social Security? You have just read out over the service level agreement. They have got to have a private room; they have got to have computer stuff; everything to meet the service level agreement, administering the low income support is 100 per cent paid for by Social Security? If so, are you not

Ms. S. Duhamel:

No, there is no cost to Social Security of the facilities in the parishes at all. They have interview rooms now and they have computers now. The only thing that we would be paying for is the broadband connection if we need to strengthen and increase the broadband connection to the parishes because of the live data, that is all. That is the only thing we are going to pay for.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

The training?

Ms. S. Duhamel:

The training, yes, but that is the only kind of training.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Also, basically the policing of the service level agreement? Someone is going to be checking on that, obviously, regularly?

Ms. S. Duhamel:

Yes, but if you think about it, there are no more assessments being done. The number of assessments is the same. We are just asking whether we are doing it here or there. We would have to assess our own staff. We would have to monitor our own staff or the parish staff. There is a slightly bigger overhead in assessing and monitoring external staff to internal staff, but the basic assessment of the assistant is not going to be massively bigger because you've got x amount of people in it.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

The Minister is responsible for the staff and you are having a service level agreement with staff that you are already responsible for?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Can you explain this better to me?

Senator B E Shenton

I can't see how that can work.

Mr. R. Bell:

My interpretation of how this would work is there will be a service level agreement with the parish Constable, who will be employed by the parish. The Constable would be accountable, or the parish would be accountable, for the services provided.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

But that is not what you just said.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

That's not what Senator Routier said earlier.

Senator P F Routier:

No, I talked about the line manager being

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Yes, and also that ultimately the staff working in the parish was totally responsible to the Minister, not to the Constable. Now, which one is it? The Constable or the Minister?

Mr. R. Bell:

My position on this is that the member of staff would work with the Constable. The parish would be accountable for the service they provide.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

To the Minister?

Mr. R. Bell:

Yes.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Thank you for that clarification.

Senator P.F. Routier:

Literally, it is developing as we speak so, it is a matter of how it happens. My general principle is that income support is the responsibility of the Minister and anybody who sits and assesses will have to have

direct responsibility for delivering that in the way that the Minister says.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

In a way, I am glad to see that the system is evolving as we speak. However, it strikes me that - again, I come back to my original point - lacking direction from the top, it is lacking a policy, I think some policy early on, that is saying: "This is what we are aiming for." It is evolving, very much in different ways. Can I take you onto something else? One of the measures for efficiency of the system is the case load per assessment officer. Now, presumably, you have got figures of around 7,000 people who should be receiving income support. You were talking about 12 officers centrally placed, and you were talking about possibly other assessment officers out in the parishes. Surely, an assessment, in order to achieve efficiency, there must be a case load that you are aiming for and surely if somebody is out in the parishes doing assessments, they would have to be assessing people from outside of their own parish to achieve similar levels of efficiency. Is that a way of looking at it?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Well, the discussions we had yesterday with the Constables obviously did identify the number of people in St. Mary claiming welfare and those claiming in St. Clements. There is a big, big, difference. So, one of the ways we were thinking of addressing that, currently, some parishes pay welfare one day a week and Friday is their day and that is it. It is the only day you can go and make an application. That is what currently happens. Whether that would be an option, where a member of our staff be in a parish one day of the week and the people would know that, as they currently do, is just an option.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Going back to the Citizens' Fund, if you have got an emergency on Saturday at 4.00 p.m., no food in the house, no money in the purse, what happens. How are you going to pay for emergencies in that sense, over the weekend? Because one of the alleged advantages of the parish is you can get the purse open on a Sunday or a Saturday. If necessary, it can be made to happen. How do you see that working?

Ms. S. Duhamel:

It would be the same. We would probably piggyback off the existing system and just have a simple form that Constables or whoever could get the money back afterwards.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

Well, you have said that they have limited discretion, but now you are saying there is no limit.

Ms. S. Duhamel:

You are talking about emergency payments out of office hours, after hours. At the moment, first of all, we have asked all the parishes and there are very, very few emergency payments made out of office hours, one or 2 a year in most parishes.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

I know how hard it is to get them out at St. Helier on a Friday afternoon.

Ms. S. Duhamel:

Well, Friday afternoon is not a problem, but actual weekends and bank holidays, we need to have a network of places where you know that you can get money from. That might be the Constables; it might be Honorary Police, it might be States Police, it could be a variety of areas. It would be small amounts of money and there will be some way of recouping that from Social Security.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

That would be an automatic recoup? So, even if you disagreed with the money being handed out, you would still recoup it?

Ms. S. Duhamel:

It would be a tiny amount of money we are talking about, yes, and it would only be responsible people would be allowed to have that authority to do that. So, you have to give them a certain amount of trust with the responsibility.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

The service level agreement is going to presumably improve the Friday afternoon situation, where I have had to stand in a welfare office and say: this woman has 2 kids, no food in the house; you're telling us come back on Monday morning; she is not leaving and neither am I.

Senator P.F. Routier:

Friday afternoon would be office hours, so it will be there. But if there is an emergency even outside of those office hours, we are saying that we were going to find a way of achieving something.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Can you talk to me a bit more about the role of the administrators? One of the problems with the transfer of staff from St. Helier is that they see their role very much almost as a cross between an administrator and almost a social worker, in that they care for people out in the community. They are called welfare visitors but they do not see their role as that. How do you envisage that transfer? Because I know some of them see your vision for an administrator or a welfare visitor as very different to theirs.

Senator P.F. Routier:

Well, we recognise there is a job to be done with regard to people being visited at home, certainly, for assessments and we will have people go out to the home to assess people, what they need for income

support. It then becomes a bit difficult to decide. What is currently going on in the parishes with regard to some of the social things that they do, for instance, doing shopping for them, personally, I do not see that as being a function of a Social Security system. But there needs to be, somewhere along the line, perhaps Social Services should, or Family Nursing and Home Care, that is the sort of role perhaps they should be doing, and they do do that, and they probably need to pick up those people. I think the way that St. Helier visitors have been working has probably grown a little bit like topsy to a certain extent, and they have taken on these additional things of doing shopping and that. But we know that there probably is a need for that service to be carried out, but I do not imagine that our staff, under this new system, would want to be doing shopping services. But we have got to find a way of covering it all.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

But they could have a role in monitoring that a person was surviving and thriving under the service level agreement.

Senator P.F. Routier:

Yes. They would obviously look at all the signals of anything that was not quite right and they would refer to the appropriate agency. But, it would not be their function to go out and, as I say, do the shopping.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Carrying on from that, the function, they see the welfare people in St. Helier also see that they had a function, basically, it might be 6-monthly, it might be yearly, to go into people's homes who are receiving the welfare, to basically check that their circumstances have not changed; they have not moved somebody in with them, and sort of policing their own payments. Who is going to be dealing with that? Are you doing it?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Well, I think they would still.

Ms. S. Duhamel:

They do not do that at the moment. They have not been able to do that for some time. They visit elderly people at the moment. We will definitely do that. Visiting lone parents and suchlike is not being done at the moment. There is an issue about compliance. We have a compliance team. If we had any suspicions about people then we have other ways, more formal ways, of making sure that people are complying with the law. There also is a law at the moment^[5], which says you must furnish us with information and change of circumstances. That does not exist under the parish welfare system. People are breaking the law if they do not tell us if somebody moves in with them and so on, in future.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

When you say that there will be mechanisms put in place, are you monitoring for fraud or probity of the system?

Ms. S. Duhamel:

Exactly, we all monitor for fraud. We have fraud detection.

Senator P.F. Routier:

As we do with Social Security now.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

You will call people in?

Ms. S. Duhamel:

Absolutely, yes.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

Could I ask you to write to us, just to clarify the line of reporting, for the people based out of the parishes and the Constables' responsibilities?

Senator P.F. Routier:

As I said at the outset, we are in the process of writing to each Constable to formalise the options from each Constable. We will sit down and work out what is appropriate for the delivery and we will obviously deliver it.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

Because I do not think you can have a service level agreement with someone that reports to you. Or it's a new concept.

Senator P.F. Routier:

Yes. Thank you for that.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

You were talking about extensive consultation before. It seems to me that one of the problems that you still have is any unexpected increase in take-up and the level of take-up that is not being monitored. You have said earlier that you have got very little idea of what level people that should be claiming are not claiming what they think you might have. What specifically can you do to try and monitor that, to try and get a picture of what the level of take-up is and what might hit you from what you do?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I think we have got a fair take-up of benefits. In fact, you have asked us a question on that.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Income support or welfare -- I mean, take your benefits --

Senator P.F. Routier:

I have responses to all your questions here. I know you raised that and that question is answered in here. I will just see if I can find the response. It is quite a lengthy answer. I do not know whether you want me to read it out or do you just want to deal with it? It is up to you.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

It would have been nice to get it yesterday if we have got a query on it then.

Senator P.F. Routier:

Well, we have literally only just finished it last night. It gives a full answer of the take-up of all the various benefits, so that is probably better if I just give you that.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

The various benefits that are already in your remit but presumably not of the take-up of welfare, because that is out of your hands. Really, you have no idea, I would have thought, at this stage, of what that take-up might be, given that you have got a more efficient system, which presumably should be able to get the benefit out to people who need it, in a more effective way.

Ms. S. Duhamel:

We have no way of monitoring the existing welfare payments now.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

So, can I just ask, in picking a date, about I think you are hopefully going to go live in April next year?

Senator P.F. Routier:

No; we planned for May, but it is looking more like June. It is going to the Privy Council and approval of the law and the regulations and all the rest of it. The timescale looks as if it has moved to June time now.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Right.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

When are you going to lodge regulations?

Mr R Bell

That will depend upon when the law comes back from the Privy Council

Deputy J.A. Martin:

But my question was about going live. How many months, weeks, of that take-up? What do you plan to transition from the parish hall when it is going live in 4 of 5 weeks? You are not going to have every single person who goes to the parish on, say, the last day of May, and it starts on the first day of June, coming down to -- how have you planned to put this transition period in?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Ms. Duhamel has a very good idea of that. She has given me a flow chart here somewhere. Perhaps you have got it off the top of your head?

Ms. S. Duhamel:

Transferring people's details on to the income support system will start in probably October this year.

Senator P.F. Routier:

I have got a very colourful flow chart around somewhere, but it does not come out good on recordings.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

The training of the parish staff, on the basis that there are lots of them, as soon as possible?

Ms. S. Duhamel:

You want to do the staff training as late as possible because people forget, and we will not be able to let them practise on our computer system. The only access they will have will be to the live system. People in the office will have various test machines that they can have access to, to do practises. So, we will want to train the parish staff on the computer side of it very late on, just so they would be fresh in their minds when they start to use it. We will drip-feed them bits of the law and we will involve them very completely in the consultation so they understand the principles behind it and they understand that side of it. But the actual technical stuff will be towards the end of that process.

Senator P.F. Routier:

So, we are looking to lodge the law itself on 15 August for a debate on 26 September. That is the law. Then we will have to obviously wait for the Privy Council to come back with that. The regulations will be lodged in March for debate in April. But obviously, during that time the consultation with regard to our regulations will be going on. So, there will be a document out there which is going to give a very good indication of what is likely to be the take-up figure.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

We are spreading to more of a general question, but when are we going to see the levels and the model, if you like, of what is going to be delivered and the levels of benefit

Senator P.F. Routier:

Nearer the time.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Which will be?

Senator B E Shenton:

As late as possible.

Deputy G P Southern

Because that is crucial to delivering the system.

Ms. S. Duhamel:

To be realistic, early 2007. If we start collecting data in October we would hope to have collected perhaps half the data by the end of the year. That would give us a good idea of where we were going. Rather than do you a model, we will do it off real data.

Senator P.F. Routier:

Yes, so the figures that have been bandied around so far have been all from historical information. What we want to do is, before we set any regulations with amounts in, we want to work on current data, and that is what will be happening until the early part of next year.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

But, surely, you have got a fixed budget.

Senator P.F. Routier:

Yes.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

So, if you do data up, you are going to go through your budget (...inaudible)?

Ms. S. Duhamel:

No, because we set the rates after we have got the data.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

So, you must have an idea now from the budget you will have.

Senator P.F. Routier:

You're working with it.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

You will certainly get not enough but you have got a fixed amount, have you not?

Ms. S. Duhamel:

The budget is the sum of all the existing budgets so, if you want an estimate now, you take the existing rates. It will not be that, but that is what we are calculating.

Senator P.F. Routier:

Because we are shifting the balance, remember, do you not recall that there are some people who are quite worse off with the current system?

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Surely, but until we see that balance, we can't possibly assess how effective it's going to be.

Senator P.F. Routier:

Our aim is to get rid of that dip in the graph in which those people are worse off in the £200 area, and take it away from the ones at the top end. So, we have got that overall budget and we are going to fix this.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

But in the strategic plan, you are also charged with reducing poverty levels.

Senator P.F. Routier:

Yes.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

So, if you are using the same budget, how are you ...?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I think the whole principle of this debate was that it's recognised that there are some benefits which are fairly generous, and it is to reapportion those to people who are really in need. Of course, we have the additional £20 million for transition and also the additional money to preferably cope with the cost of GST (Goods and Services Tax).

Deputy G.P. Southern:

No doubt we return to this in the future.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Has anyone got any more questions? No? Thank you.

Senator P.F. Routier:

I do have the responses to your questions there so, I will hand them out. There is one for each of you. Thank you very much.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Thank you.

[1] This was, in fact, a reference to the Citizen's Fund

[2] At this juncture, it was difficult for the transcript to be made as noise obscured part of the recording. The Department has suggested that the following response was given: "There are just over 1,000 but there are no new ones."

[3] The witness has suggested the word 'scheme' (rather than 'curve') would more accurately convey the intended message.

[4] The witness has suggested the word 'below' (rather than 'around') would more accurately convey the intended message.

[5] The witness has suggested that the response should have been 'There is no law at the moment' rather than 'there is also a law at the moment'.