

4.2 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Social Security regarding sanctions imposed on job seekers leaving a job without sufficient reason:

Will the Minister inform members of the number of sanctions imposed on job seekers for leaving a job without sufficient reason or failing a task by quarter since the adoption of P.101/2013 (Income Support (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Jersey) Regulations 2013) and detail the measures, if any, which have been put in place to assess the impact of these sanctions on the behaviour or well-being of those sanctioned?

Deputy S.J. Pinel of St. Clement (The Minister for Social Security):

The Regulations made in P.101/2013 came into force in October 2013. During a period of bedding-down at the end of 2013, 358 sanctions were applied, however the figure for the first quarter of 2014 onwards most accurately show the new sanctions coming into effect. The following numbers of sanctions have been applied to people in receipt of income support. In the first quarter 2014, 463 sanctions were applied; in the second quarter, 404 sanctions were applied; in the third quarter, 373; and in the fourth quarter, 299 sanctions were applied. Financial sanctions are a last resort and are not required for the great majority of job seekers. However, the enhanced sanctions were brought in as a response to very clear evidence that the previous regime did not do enough to change the behaviour of a minority of job seekers. It is not right that the people have the option of choosing not to seek work. For this commonsense reason, the new sanctions were strongly endorsed by this Assembly. Our subsequent experience reflects the success of this policy; the figures show that the number of sanctions are falling and that for most people the receipt of a written warning is enough for them to change their behaviour. I am very pleased to report this reducing number of sanctions as the new system is settled-in. Job seekers are now more aware of their responsibilities and are taking up the opportunities and training offered to them through the Back to Work teams. This has been reflected in the actively seeking work total at the end of 2014, which stood at 1,440, the lowest figure since September 2011. We have had a particular success in this last year with our foundation's programme which is designed to support job seekers with barriers to employment and further from the labour market. Many clients benefiting from this programme have in the past been sanctioned because they failed to demonstrate sufficient commitment to job seeking. But we have given them an opportunity to prove themselves and the results show that motivation for work increases. Work is always undertaken to identify vulnerable individuals long before a financial sanction comes into play and whenever a financial sanction may affect children or other members of the household. It is however worth noting that most job seekers who reach the higher stages of the sanction progress are young, single people with no family responsibilities. The majority of these are living at home with their parents.

4.2.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

It does strike me that with 1,400 job seekers and 460 sanctions at one stage that this was an inappropriately harsh measure designed to focus on the minority and not the majority. Does the Minister believe that focusing and making up rules for the minority is not a sound principle on which to base her policies?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

The job seeker, if he or she does not comply with the job seeking requirements, will have a written warning and if this is breached by the potential job seeker not complying with the written warning, i.e. not attending a job interview or a work experience or a training session, then a breach of this warning is what is the next sanction. That will require the removal of the adult component of income support for 2 weeks. If this continues in breach of the job seeking compliance then another sanction will be applied. But during all this time an adviser will be with the job seeker and the

warning will be made very clear that this will happen if they continue to disregard the obligations that they have as job seekers.

4.2.2 Deputy J.A. Martin:

In the reply the Minister said vulnerable families with children are always spoken to before financial warnings. Can the Minister tell us, out of all these numbers, and she did say the majority are young people still at home, the number that have gone on to the second sanction, gone beyond the adult component and had the whole household income taken away, including rent. Could she tell us that figure and would she agree that it is not in the best interests of anyone to leave children without their rent paid or any food?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

Any person who continues to ignore warnings and reaches a third breach of a written warning will lose all entitlement to benefits for 6 weeks. Since the sanctions were brought in, 106 have reached this stage of the sanction process. But, as I have said before, it does not apply to somebody who is sick, vulnerable or with disabilities, and it is very much the majority of people who are young, single and at home. It appears that the home situation picks up the loss of the adult component, which does not encourage the young person to keep job seeking.

4.2.3 Deputy J.A. Martin:

The Minister said "it appears". The figure of 106 to have that total household income taken away is quite worrying. Could she break that down later for the Assembly and let us know how many of these are families with children and have 6 weeks no money and no rent paid?

[10:00]

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

Yes, of course I can fund the Deputy with some more figures. There is always the ability to appeal and in the whole year and quarter of this being in effect, there have been 7 appeals to the tribunal and all of these appeals have been from only 2 people.

4.2.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

It seems to me symptomatic of this Tory Government that they like to impose sanctions and facilitate unfair dismissal before they have even got three-quarters of the remainder of the discrimination law passed. This is where the priorities of this government lie when it comes to work. Is the Minister for Social Security, as part of this government, proud of the mental duress the increased poverty and the social instability that these sanctions being applied across the board punitively, often in my experience it is in cases of unfair dismissal, are being compounded by the action of her department?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

No, I do not think the sanctions are punitive. A job seeker is constantly, constantly, advised, helped, encouraged and motivated to look for work. It is quite clear from all evidence that everybody is happier when in work. If a job seeker consistently refuses to comply with the terms that have been made very, very clear to them, is it also right that taxpayers should subsidise these people who are not complying with quite minor requirements to job-see?

4.2.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

I do not see how any sense can be gained from question time when we are given answers saying sanctions are not punitive. I was under the understanding that sanctions were deliberately designed to be punitive to put people off, the so-called work-shy we are told, who do not like to work from otherwise claiming benefit when they could be working. So I think this line of communication for this question is certainly closed, as far as I am concerned, until we get more sensible answers.

The Bailiff:

Was there a question there, Deputy?

Deputy M. Tadier:

No, Sir. I mean if there is a question...

The Bailiff:

It is question time.

Deputy M. Tadier:

The question would be to ask the Minister in future to give sensible answers and courteous answers, which do not undermine the basic intelligence of other Members.

4.2.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister address the second part of the question which asks what measures have been put in place, if any, to assess the impact of these sanctions on the behaviour or well-being of those sanctioned? In the U.K., where sanctions are used, it is known that 20 per cent of people sanctioned leave schemes altogether and disappear from the D.W.P. (Department for Work and Pensions) records. There are investigations going on into a number of suicides where people have been sanctioned, and that has caused them terrific distress and hardship. What research has she done into the impact of these sanctions on particular individuals?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

The Deputy keeps trying to refer the Jersey situation to the U.K. situation. The 2 situations are not comparable. Having said before that this law has only been in implementation for just over a year and out of that we have had only 7 appeals from 2 different people, I do not think we are neglecting our duty in looking after these people with sanctions. They have put themselves in this position against the advice of their advisers and mentors. There has to be a carrot and stick situation in any occurrence like this and I do not think in any occasion that a member of the public who cannot job seek through illness or disability is asked to do so.

4.2.7 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Has any effort been made to assess the impact - please answer the question - on these particular individuals, the impact of these sanctions, and if not will the Minister undertake to do so in the near future, because these are significant measures?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

Of course all job seekers are registered with the Back to Work team and of course they know all of them, unlike the U.K. situation where it could be in different councils over different counties, different training areas. We know all our job seekers and they are monitored the whole time. If the Deputy wishes me to give him a list of job seekers who have gone through the full sanction treatment I am not able to do so. It is individual cases.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

So the Minister has not committed herself to making any effort research the impact of these sanctions.

The Bailiff:

I think her answer was that they know in the department those who are receiving the sanctions but it is a matter for Members.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Sorry, the Minister just said to the other Deputy she could not supply because they are individuals. Earlier she said she could supply numbers to me that were sanctioned fully with children. That is fine, thank you.

The Bailiff:

Although I cannot see him I understand the Minister for Treasury and Resources may be somewhere near. **[Aside]** I excused him, you are quite right, Senator. Thank you very much indeed. I did excuse him. So we will go back to question one and Deputy Mézec has a question to ask of the Minister for Treasury and Resources. I can see him.