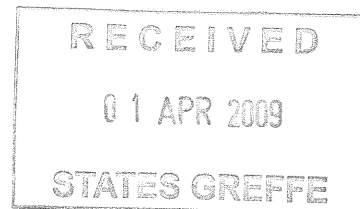


Deputy Geoff Southern,  
Chairman, Income Support Sub-Panel,  
Scrutiny Office,  
States Greffe,  
Morier House,  
JE1 IDD



28<sup>th</sup> March, 2009

Dear Deputy Southern,

Health, Social Security and Housing Scrutiny Panel  
Income Support sub-Panel

Thank you for your letters dated 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> March, 2009 addressed to Mr. R. Le Brocq and myself requesting information on what impact, if any, the changes from the previous welfare system have had on our clients. We regret not being able to speak to you personally as inter-action is necessary when dealing with such a difficult subject but trust the following will be of some use:-

1. Firstly, we consider that the Income Support system is not working. After almost ten years of deliberation by Employment and Social Security there are many flaws and loop-holes. In our view the transfer from Welfare within the Parishes to E & S.S. was a retrograde step.
2. Parish Welfare gave vulnerable people a point of contact. Parishioners were known to the staff and knew who to contact in an emergency. Requests were not always granted but they were given a fair hearing. Decisions were made on the spot. Income Support covers some areas of assistance but Community Support is also necessary and is now almost non-existent.
3. Many clients come to us as they are confused and do not understand the Income Support system. Having always 'paid their way' they now find that someone else is responsible for paying their rent. This is an anathema to them. On occasions this procedure has led to older people receiving letters from "Housing" telling them they have "overpaid" or "underpaid" thus causing unnecessary distress. Many are under the impression they have lost their Disabled Transport Allowance as their benefits are now paid in one lump sum. The forms coming out of E & SS are complicated and

intrusive. Why can they not be made more user friendly? Many older people find it difficult enough to request help and say they would rather go without the benefit than have to cope with this type of form filling. Age Concern and the Senior Citizens Association are available to help but even then some older people refuse this.

4. The present lay-out in the offices of E & SS is not conducive to confidentiality and, from experience, we know that requests for help are not always sympathetically received. (We have spoken to the Minister about the lay out and he has confirmed that changes will be made). He confirms that staff are given customer service training so there should be no problems in that respect.

5. Clients approach Age Concern and the Senior Citizens Association to take up issues on their behalf that were previously taken up by the Parishes. Parishes employed paid officers ready and willing to visit whenever necessary. We are told that Social Security officers will make a visit on request but this falls far short of the Parish visitors who made a point of calling on vulnerable people whom they had not heard from for a while. On occasions these people were found in poor health and in need of hospitalisation.

6. We consider that, with this new system, care, compassion and concern have gone out of the window. Vulnerable people feel that if they are “unable to tick all the boxes” as laid down in the Income Support System they have no chance of getting help at all.

7. Clients living on a fixed income are very worried about their future. Many have managed on their pension and the interest on their savings. Interest is now almost nil. Middle Jersey seems to be left out when it comes to benefits. These people are not millionaires but because they have a few savings they are penalised. GST has not helped. The reason given for not allowing exemption on food and energy is that our rich residents will benefit. Is this a reason for penalising struggling older people and families? E & SS are giving a GST bonus to those on low incomes but what about those who are excluded because they pay even a small amount of Income Tax?

8. With people living longer and their savings dwindling, with the credit crunch and little or no interest on savings there will have to be a re-think on Income Support. More people, through no fault of their own, are going to fall into the poverty trap and a lot more work needs to be done to ensure that older people and families receive the support they need. This could be achieved by emulating the previous Parish welfare system and having a team of paid officers who are responsible for visiting certain areas and keeping case loads of vulnerable people under review.

9. The Parish of St. Clement has set up a Community Support Team and we commend them for this. The team members will need to be vetted very carefully and police checked as they will be going into vulnerable people’s homes. The question we pose is “should the Island be relying on voluntary workers yet again?” We have an ageing population, older people have given much to this Island, they are

the responsibility of the Government and they have a right to be given the best care possible.

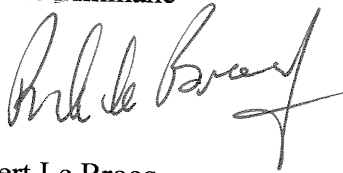
We trust these comments will be of some help to the sub-panel.

With kind regards.

Yours sincerely,



Daphne Minihane



Robert Le Brocq