

2019.11.12

## **12 Deputy K.G. Pamplin of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding the introduction of a new online tax system: (OQ.281/2019)**

Further to the answer to my Written Question 483/2019, will the Minister update Members on the progress towards a new online tax system? Will she reassure Members that it will be in place, as predicted, from 1st January?

### **Deputy S.J. Pinel (The Minister for Treasury and Resources):**

Revenue Jersey remains on track to offer the option of filing online for some Islanders in 2020 for their 2019 year of assessment tax return. We will go live on a date in January, to coincide with Islanders receiving their paper tax returns by post. The exact date and availability of the launch will be decided following user testing currently involving members of the public. Most of the team doing the development work on this transformation programme are separate to the business teams processing Islanders' returns, which is why we have been able to maintain our commitment. In its first year it is very much about a choice between online and paper, but all Islanders who opt to file online will then be taken off the print list for tax returns for the following year. During 2020, we will be planning community road shows to give support to Islanders who want to take up this online service.

### **3.12.1 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:**

May I thank the Minister for a very concise and well-responded answer, although I do pick up on the wording of 'some Islanders'. If she could clarify what that means and whether any of the delays that some Islanders are incurring at the moment have had any impact at all.

### **Deputy S.J. Pinel:**

There are 2 questions there. When I say 'some Islanders', many do not have the facility of online applications and will remain on paper and it is a choice. You do not have to select online; you can remain with paper. The second question was: has the delay had an impact? We are expecting all tax returns to be dealt with by the end of January 2020. Yes, people are concerned, but if they have any concerns as to whether their circumstances are causing them hardship, they can apply to the Tax Office for assistance in that way.

### **3.12.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Has any consideration been given to this as an opportunity to provide a facility where people can come in and be assisted with an online application, sat down one-to-one and, therefore, helping people to have accurate income tax, which would save in the long run, but also enabling people to see the benefits of online registering rather than the paper registration?

### **Deputy S.J. Pinel:**

I said at the end of my initial statement that we are doing road shows next year. There are staff available, as I mentioned just now to Deputy Pamplin, who will answer questions and if people are facing hardship then they can come into the Department to deal with that. There is a difficulty with offering one-to-one services on what would be an *ad hoc* basis anyway, because we are very short staffed, or the Tax Department is very short staffed. There will be as much help as we can possibly give to education in online filing.

### **3.12.3 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:**

Just picking up on the Minister's wording there, I pay tribute to the hardworking staff who helped me and some of my family members with a very delicate situation under the huge experiences that they are under currently. But I return to my written question where specific technical resources have been allocated to the instruction of online filing and just picking up what the Minister was saying there about short staffed: what is the process for the well-being of the staff who are working under extraordinary measures in tax, which is one of the most fundamental ways of Island life?

**Deputy S.J. Pinel:**

I thank the Deputy for his obvious heartfelt concern. Yes, the Tax Department is working extraordinarily hard but, as I mentioned earlier, in 2 different ways. The tax assessment and the Revenue Jersey management system are being operated by 2 separate levels of staff, but they are working incredibly hard. This is not the first time that there has been a delay in this, but when one is replacing a 35 year-old tax system, it is going to take time for the staff to get used to it and for the customers to get used to it.

**3.12.4 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:**

Sorry, just the bit about the well-being of the staff who are working overtime and long hours and dealing with very nervous and confused members of the public who have concerns, that has an effect on the mental well-being of staff, especially if they are short staffed. What is going on to protect the well-being of our hardworking civil service staff in this area?

**Deputy S.J. Pinel:**

Quite a lot, because obviously the well-being is the most important thing for us that they continue, but it is very confusing and difficult to accommodate oneself with the new system, so they are all being watched very carefully, as their overtime mounts up. It is being taken into consideration.