

2025.06.24

**3.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour of the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development regarding the Cost of Living Ministerial Group Plans (OQ.137/2025):**

Will the Minister detail any plans that the Cost of Living Ministerial Group is developing to assist Islanders with increases in the cost of living, including (but not limited to) plans relating to single-parent households, families with children and pensioner households?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter (The Chief Minister - rapporteur):**

I understand in the Minister's absence, I am responsible for answering the question. The Government has delivered a range of actions to help reduce the impact of the increased cost of living on Islanders, especially in the groups mentioned in the question. Action includes reducing G.P. (general practitioners) fees, free school meals, introduction of a living wage - moving towards that - now keeping duties, fees and charges low, expansion of nursery care, to name but a few. These are all priorities approved in the Common Strategic Plan by the Assembly under the move of the Government to bear down on cost of living by keeping fees and charges as low as possible. The Cost of Living Ministerial Group closely monitors inflation and cost-of-living pressures in Jersey. It provides background information which is used to make practical policy decisions, target support specific groups. The group is also working to better understand how cost of living affects specific demographics through the development of minimum income standards. These will define a minimum income needed for households to live in Jersey and will be developed for all household types, including parents and pensioners, which will go towards informing future policy and how we help Islanders with the cost of living.

**3.1.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:**

As I understand it, the group has only met perhaps twice this year. Can the Chief Minister inform the Assembly what new measures have come directly from this group and whether he feels that this group is doing everything it can to address the cost-of-living pressures?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

The Ministerial Group was officially established on 15th November last year, superseding the previous Inflation Strategy Group, which was established in 2020, which I chaired at that time, which produced a report at that time, which is still valid. I believe the group has met 4 times and, as I said before, it is really the individual Ministers that have responsibility for various policies; for example, Treasury, Social Security, and such force. The group's main focus now is on the Cost of Living Group ... yes, its focus now is on the minimum income standards work, which is focusing on a specific demographic, so we can understand on what the minimum income should be.

**3.1.2 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf of St. Saviour:**

The Chief Minister is answering on behalf of the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development, and he has not said anything in his answer about the private sector price pressures that were only mentioned on Radio 4 this morning; the increase in grocery prices? What is the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development, which he will know about, doing about market dominance? Are they using the J.C.R.A. (Jersey Competition Regulatory Authority)? What action is being taken to evaluate the impact on the living wage on R.P.I. (retail price index) and all the other competition issues? It is not just about the Government putting lower charges in, it is about the market. That is the majority of the basket, is it not?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I did not provide an answer because that question was not part of the original answer, but I am pleased to try and provide one on behalf of the Minister. The Deputy knows full well the challenges we have in controlling inflation; a lot of inflation that lands with us is out of our hands. The Deputy will also know that we import something like 85 per cent of the food we consume here. We do not have monetary policy, we have fiscal policy, so our actions are limited. Having said that, we know full well what those actions are, which is why in the C.S.P. (Common Strategic Policy) we detailed that as one of our top priorities. The Deputy knows, because he was the Member I think that took forward the establishment of the Competition Authority, we encourage competition wherever we possibly can. Competition is one of the tools we have availability for to help Islanders with the cost of living. That is working in some areas, and other areas I think we need to bear down a little bit harder and that work that is being overseen by the Minister.

### **3.1.3 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:**

I do not want to take the Assembly's time up, but the Minister will understand my concern of the lack of progress by the J.C.R.A. There is a 6(4) Article in the J.C.R.A. law which mandates the Minister to ask the J.C.R.A. for specific issues. I know they have asked for it but maybe we could have a discussion offline as to how we can get the J.C.R.A. to address the issues which a large amount of Islanders are really concerned about.

### **Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

Yes, I am happy to facilitate a meeting with the Deputy and the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development to discuss that important issue.

### **3.1.4 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:**

Affordable housing has, especially in the rental sector, constantly been identified as a key driver for the cost-of-living crisis, particularly impacting single-parent households and pensioners. In that context, does the Chief Minister believe that rent control measures, including a rent cap, are an effective way to help address these pressures?

### **Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I think it depends on various circumstances in relation to the individual, I suppose, circumstance to which it applies. In principle, I do not like caps, but what is being proposed there is not technically a rent cap, it is a rent bar, if you like, it is a hurdle to say if landlords want to increase rent more than 5 per cent they have to have a reason to do it. I think anything that helps to introduce more affordable housing will have a beneficial impact on the cost of living because, as Members will know, from how our cost-of-living index is formulated, housing plays a big part of that.

### **3.1.5 Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

The Cost of Living Ministerial Group of course should look at a range of issues around the cost of living. Because the Chief Minister did not mention affordable housing, is this something that has not been on the agenda to ensure their support across the Ministers who sit on the Cost of Living Ministerial Group to such things on affordable housing?

### **Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

Again, I refer Members to the Corporate Strategic Policy that was approved by this Assembly where the provision of more affordable housing is probably our number one priority. Members will have seen significant steps forward over the last year with more homes becoming available, step-up scheme, more help to buy schemes today. Just today, Andium have announced a new shared equity scheme. Of course, that has also been assisted ... I say although it is not always good to see a falling

house price market, the fact that the cost of homes has come down I think has also helped more people on to the property ladder.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

That completes the time for that question, save for a final supplementary.

**Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:**

Did you see my light, sorry?

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

I did, I regret to say that the time for that question has now expired. We have to be quite strict to get through all the questions we have got. There are 22 today and we do not want to have a situation arising where there are a number of unanswered questions at the end. Yes, I regret to say that there will only be time for 2 or 3 questions from other Members.

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

Can I just put it on record, I think it would be helpful if P.P.C. were to look at a system so that Members knew who has been selected to speak and who has not and maybe use better use of the screen? I just put it out there for them to consider and it might be helpful also for everyone.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

In that case, I will just say which Members have put their lights on so everyone knows. Final supplementary, Deputy Doublet.

**3.1.6 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:**

What I would like to understand from the Chief Minister is: are the Cost of Living Ministerial Group utilising the available data on the households mentioned in the initial question and other households to target specific measures to Islanders who are in most need of solutions helping with the cost of living? Is the Cost of Living Ministerial Group doing this in a co-ordinated way? If that is not happening already, what plans does the Chief Minister and other Ministers have to make this happen?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

The group is working. Like I say, its key focus at the moment is working to better understand how cost-of-living pressures affect specific demographics through the development of the minimum income standards piece of work. To do that piece of work, the group will need access to all of the relevant statistics, because it cannot formulate a policy without it. But I will make sure that the Minister can confirm upon his return the process being followed in that piece of work.