

STATES OF JERSEY



STATES STRATEGIC PLAN 2009 – 2014 (P.52/2009): FOURTH AMENDMENT (P.52/2009 Amd.(4)) – COMMENTS

**Presented to the States on 29th May 2009
by the Council of Ministers**

STATES GREFFE

COMMENTS

The Council does not oppose the Deputy's Amendments (1) to (5).

It is clear from the report accompanying the Deputy's amendments that her focus is on the Income Support system. Priority 8 of the Strategic Plan has a much broader remit than any individual benefit and is intended to consolidate the ideas set out in the Social Policy Framework.

The role of government should be to encourage individuals to take responsibility for themselves whenever possible. Where that is not achievable, government should support people to become independent and protect the most vulnerable. Although the Social Security Department is involved in the provision of a range of financial benefits, the support that should be provided by government as a whole needs to encompass a much broader range of measures and, to be successful, these ideas must be incorporated into the policies and operations of many States Departments.

However, given that the wording chosen in the Deputy's amendments does not run counter to the main objective of the actions proposed by the Council of Ministers, the Council does not intend to oppose these amendments.

The Council does not accept or support the comments made in the accompanying report.

The Deputy's report refers extensively to Scrutiny Reports. It should be noted that the Scrutiny Sub-Panel has produced 2 reports, one in 2006 (S.R.6/2006) and one in 2007 (S.R.17/2007). The references to a 2008 Report are somewhat misleading in that no Report was published or presented to the States in 2008 and so members have no opportunity to consider the context of the quotes that are provided.

The Deputy suggests that the work incentives within Income Support are inadequate. It should be noted that since the introduction of Income Support, incentives for employment have been improved by both increasing the rate of disregarded earnings and by allowing a fixed period at the beginning of new permanent employment during which time all earnings are disregarded.

Income Support combines support for living costs, rental and child care costs. A single application form ensures that all applicants are asked questions on a variety of topics to ensure that they receive all the components that they are entitled to. Most applicants have no difficulty completing the application form and assistance is available to anyone who requests it. The Income Support budget is funded by taxpayers and it is essential that benefits are paid on the basis of a full assessment of the applicant's circumstances.

Both the published Scrutiny Reports expressed reservations concerning the role of the Parishes in Income Support. For example, the 2007 report noted that –

“The sub-panel is of the opinion that the simplest way of achieving consistency of assessment and administration is by having all staff in one central location”.

and argued that the Parishes should play no role in the administration of Income Support.

The Deputy may wish to seek to amend the Social Security objectives within the States Annual Business Plan, where the operation of Income Support is explicitly referenced.

The Council's comments on each of the amendments are as follows –

Amendments (1) and (2)

The original proposals are shared across at least 4 Departments and would include initiatives such as –

- Encouraging people to take more exercise;
- Encouraging the expert patient programme;
- Raising the self-esteem of prisoners;
- Building up a partnership between the Youth Service and the Prison;
- Targeting educational support to vulnerable children;
- Ensuring that planning policies provide affordable good-quality housing;
- Implementing a trauma service for abuse survivors;
- Improving information flows between Departments to ensure that individuals can receive all the help that is available to them.

The wording of the Deputy's amendments is not at odds with these proposals, therefore the Council accepts the amendments in their broadest sense.

Amendment (3)

The original proposal is shared across at least 4 Departments and would include initiatives such as –

- Profiling children's emotional learning and social needs and providing support arrangements in response to initial signs of difficulty;
- Developing advocacy initiatives for appropriate patients and clients.

The Deputy's wording would restrict this action to employment training, which is important, but only one of a number of issues that need to be addressed.

Amendment (4)

The community role of the Parish is already included in the 7th bullet, therefore this duplicates what is already there.

Amendment (5)

The addition of Key Indicators –

- Level of incentives to gain employment and stay in work;
- Amount of real training available for jobs;
- Number of claimants supported in full-time or part-time work and training.

The first 2 indicators do not fulfil the criteria of being 'SMART' and would therefore be difficult to measure. The Council of Ministers will ensure that appropriate measures are included in future reporting.