

STATES OF JERSEY



INCOME SUPPORT SYSTEM (P.86/2005): AMENDMENT

Presented to the States by the Connétable of St. Ouen
and lodged au Greffe on 21st June 2005
by Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier

STATES GREFFE

INCOME SUPPORT SYSTEM (P.86/2005): AMENDMENT

At the end of paragraph 3(a), add the following words –

“, except that the delivery of the Income Support System shall be undertaken in conjunction with the 12 Parishes;”

CONNÉTABLE OF ST. OUEN

REPORT

As stated in the report of the Employment and Social Security Committee, the 'one stop shop' approach to delivery of income support is broadly supported by the Connétables. It must be in the client's interest that income support replaces the many current benefits which are delivered by several different departments.

However, the Connétables firmly believe that the Parishes have the expertise, from administering the current system of support, to be best able to effectively and efficiently deliver income support to those in need. In addition the Parish office provides a local delivery point more easily accessible for those who are living in the Parish who would otherwise incur additional expense in travelling to St. Helier to receive benefit.

During the consultation preceding this proposition the Connétables have consistently commented on aspects of the current system which must be provided by the new income support. These include –

1. Immediate access to funds, including in cash, and the possibility of 'drip feeding' support to those unable to manage funds (currently £90,000 is paid each week in cash whereas the Employment and Social Security Committee makes all payments by cheque);
2. frequency of review which for many clients needs to be weekly (P.86/2005 suggests review periods ranging from one to 12 months but an individual's circumstances can change from day to day and this would affect the claim for benefit both upwards and downwards);
3. the need to exercise discretion in individual circumstances (the Employment and Social Security Committee currently delivers statutory benefits with no scope for flexibility, which frequently results in persons being referred to Parishes for support, and thus Employment and Social Security Committee staff do not appear to have this experience or expertise);
4. there must be provision for urgent payments e.g. at weekends as currently provided by Parishes;
5. access to the Citizens Fund for emergency purchases must be immediate and not subject to delay whilst applications are processed.

The report suggests that satellite offices might be used with a contractual arrangement to enable Parish Secretaries to provide a basic, local service but otherwise provides that all staff involved full-time in the delivery of the benefit are employed by the Employment and Social Security Department. Because of the varying numbers of residents from Parish to Parish and therefore the number of claimants, some Parishes currently have staff who are employed full-time in the delivery of welfare, whereas others spend only a proportion of their time on this work whilst also assisting with other Parish responsibilities. The Connétables consider the current Parish provision of offices, many of which have been extended in recent years to provide more appropriate and comfortable facilities for dealing with personal circumstances, together with trained staff should continue to be the principal delivery point for those claiming benefit.

P.86/2005 envisages a one-stop shop providing access to both contributory benefits provided by Social Security and to non-contributory benefit such as income support and that where a contributory benefit is insufficient to provide income for a household that income support will be paid as a top-up. Whilst much of the detail of the new scheme has yet to be determined, it is presumed that those seeking income support will still have to make an application, as is currently used for welfare, and provide evidence of their financial circumstances. The current welfare system requires an applicant to provide evidence such as bank statements, details of assets held/disposed of in recent years etc. and requires careful analysis at the time of claim – subsequent continued claims are subject to the applicant confirming that the details previously given, and the applicant's circumstances, have not changed. A similar system would seem to be intended given the references in the report to assessing income and assets. This work is more involved than processing a statutory benefit determined by legislation as is the case with Social Security contributory benefits and other non contributory benefits.

Whilst the numbers expected to benefit from income support are not known, the report estimates that staff across the Parishes and States departments currently cover 7,500 households and 18,000 individuals. It is difficult t

determine the likely impact at this stage but in recent months the Parishes have seen an increase in the number of persons seeking support because of the change from sickness benefits to short and long-term incapacity allowances. These changes have resulted in benefit being based on individual entitlement and an assessment of the loss of faculty and have resulted in a reduced statutory payment to a number of claimants which is insufficient to meet the household living expenses. Those affected by this change have been referred by the Employment and Social Security Department to the Parishes for assistance.

The Connétables believe that as the system is further developed it should be on the basis that it is delivered through the existing Parish structure where the appropriate controls can be exercised, the current expertise rests and the facilities are available. This assumption is not evident from the report of the Employment and Social Security Committee, and accordingly the Comité des Connétables has agreed to an amendment being proposed to clarify the issue.

There are no financial or manpower implications for the States arising from this amendment.