

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SECURITY
BY DEPUTY T.M. PITMAN OF ST. HELIER
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 10th SEPTEMBER 2013**

Question

Will the Minister provide a full description of his reported proposals regarding instances of members of the public leaving employment 'without good reason' and clarify how such criteria has been decided upon; who will monitor this and how people will be able to challenge decisions if they feel this has been unfairly applied?

Answer

The proposals included in P.101 and its accompanying report were designed in the context of a high level of unemployment in the Island, and follow the decision of the States to significantly increase the funding available to help locally-qualified people find work. Given the ongoing economic situation, and the level of support my Department makes available to unemployed residents, it is not right for anybody to take the decision to leave employment without good cause and to then expect to be supported by tax-funded benefits.

The principle behind the proposed regulations is clear: that people in receipt of Income Support, or planning on claiming Income Support in the future, should be required to make decisions that are financially responsible. Income Support was designed as a 'safety net' for people who are living on a low income through no fault of their own, and I believe that the decision to leave paid employment to rely on benefits is one that few people would describe as financially responsible. We have always encouraged anybody considering giving up work to seek advice before making the decision to rely on Income Support, the proposed changes will create a financial penalty for the small minority that choose not to take that advice.

Those people who are able to demonstrate good cause for leaving employment will not face financial penalties. Officers will distinguish between people who leave work or are dismissed due to their own poor conduct and those who are made redundant, or who are forced to leave work through no fault of their own. There will always be sound reasons why a person could decide to leave paid employment, such as being physically unable to continue in a certain line of work, or being required to care for a young child or sick relative. In circumstances such as these, people will face no financial penalty and may benefit from dedicated support to pursue alternative employment.

If the proposition is adopted by the States, I will be approving detailed guidelines for officers to use when making these decisions. These guidelines are currently being drafted and will be discussed with the Jersey Advisory and Conciliation Service (JACS) before they are finalised. Throughout the development of the proposed regulations officers from my Department have also benefited from close contact with the UK's Department of Work and Pensions. The DWP has extensive experience in determining whether a person has good cause for leaving work under their own comparable benefit system.

As with all decisions made under the Income Support legislation, customers who are assessed as having left work without good cause may request that the decision is reconsidered by a second officer. If they are still dissatisfied with this second decision, they have the right of appeal to an independent tribunal.