

2019.03.12

19 Deputy R.J. Ward of the Chief Minister regarding measures to assist Islanders on low incomes with preparations for the impact of Brexit: [OQ.64/2019]

Following the comments of the Minister for External Relations, on BBC Radio Jersey, that families can add a few extra items to their weekly shop to stock up for Brexit, what plans, if any, does the Government have to assist those on low incomes, who may struggle financially to do this?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré (The Chief Minister):

Yes, as the Deputy is aware, we already look after low income and vulnerable people through a range of benefits. The Minister for Social Security is kept updated by officers, to ensure that these benefits provide an adequate safety net to Islanders, who would otherwise struggle to support themselves. This will continue, regardless of what happens with Brexit. Benefits are updated annually. We can respond more quickly, if we need to, including to respond to any effects from a potential no-deal scenario that necessitate additional support for low-income households.

6.19.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:

I am pleased to hear. Can you confirm what I heard from that is that there will be the possibility of additional income for those on low incomes to, perhaps, stock up on a little extra, as a response to Brexit and, if so, how will that be decided upon?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I did not say that. I said we obviously have systems in place to look after vulnerable people. At the moment we do not believe there is a significant risk to the Island's supply chain and so adding additional items to the weekly shop is purely a precautionary approach. Obviously, the position is being monitored, on a daily basis, and we can move quickly if changes need to be made to provide that additional support for low-income families, but that is not on the agenda at the moment.

6.19.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the issue of having to stock up on food, in this case for Brexit, but for any potential doomsday scenario, bring into question Jersey's food security plan and, if so, would the Minister expand on whether he thinks that is sufficiently robust, particularly in terms of the agricultural land, or former greenhouse sites, that may be going into non-agricultural use?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

That is certainly taking the limits of the question to an interesting level. The point is there is not a suggestion that we are going to run out of food as a result of Brexit; what we are saying is there could be some implications, it depends what happens over the next, possibly even today, tomorrow, and the next few weeks. What we are saying is, just take a slightly precautionary approach, if you are able to. But the crucial thing is, in terms of level of severity at this stage, it is the equivalent of if we get hit by a couple of days of storms, or something along those lines. That is the view at present. The position is being monitored on a daily basis; should that change, obviously, we will advise the Islanders and Members accordingly.

6.19.3 Deputy K.F. Morel:

The Chief Minister said that the item was not on the Council of Ministers' agenda at the moment. What concerns me is that, given Brexit is potentially just 2, or 3 weeks, away and therefore the effects, which are most likely to be felt more keenly at the beginning of it, no matter how quickly the

Government moves, if it is just planning to give hard-up Islanders a few extra pounds in their pocket, that is very likely to miss the point where Brexit happens and where the shortages happen. Does the Minister have a plan as to how to help needy Islanders should there be food shortages?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Yes, but what we are saying is: at the present we do not think we need to enact that plan. What we are saying is, to Islanders, we are just saying take a precautionary approach, if you are able to. We do not believe we need to enact that plan.

6.19.4 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Having been involved in the Brexit Review Panel, I believe that there is a plan in action, but the point of the question was that those who are unable to take those precautions, because of their income - and there are significant numbers who use food banks on this Island regularly, because they simply come across hard times due to life situations - some reassurance from the Minister that there is a plan in the background that will support those members of our community, who are the most vulnerable, would be very advisable and certainly appreciated.

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Absolutely. All Islanders need not worry and those who are in what we call the vulnerable elements of society will be looked after. At the moment, we believe we are well prepared. We do not believe there is any need to enact such a plan that the Deputy is referring to. If we need to, we will do, and they should not be concerned about it and they will be looked after.

The Bailiff:

No final final supplementary, Deputy?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Just to say that the reassurance is what is wanted and I thank you for that.