

**WRITTEN QUESTIONS TO THE MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SECURITY
BY DEPUTY G.P. SOUTHERN OF ST. HELIER**

ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 28th MARCH 2006

Question 1

Under commitment 3.6 of the draft Strategic Plan, one of the success indicators is a “*Reduction in the number of children/pensioners living in relative low-income households*”. Will the Minister inform members –

- (a) which of the actions outlined in sections 3.6.1 to 3.6.6 under the heading “*What we will do*” address this target?
- (b) what specific targets will the Minister set and be judged on for reducing both child and pensioner poverty from their current level of 33%, and in what timescale?
- (c) in the light of the U.K. government’s inability to meet its 1999 target for the reduction of child poverty by one quarter from 4.1 million to 3.1 million by 2005, what difficulties, if any, have to be overcome if the Minister is to be successful in meeting the targets set?

Answer

The Strategic Plan is a draft and I am happy to receive comments on it from any person. As far as section 3.6 is concerned members will see that there is a timescale built into what we intend to do which allocates time for further priority setting, describes existing activities and importantly through the Chief Minister’s Office identifies how performance might be measured on a more regular basis.

In general terms, the aim over the next few years is to improve the system overall, in terms of equity, fairness and easier access under the Income Support proposals. Once the new system is up and running, there should be better data available on which to establish the actual position and set targets for the future, depending on the economic circumstances that might prevail at the time.

In response to the specific points:

- (a) all but 3.6.1 and 3.6.6. will impact on relatively low-income households;
- (b) specific indicators and targets will be set at a later date as mentioned above. The 33% mentioned in the question is not a measure of child and pensioner poverty. It is only one figure from the Income Distribution Survey based on 2001 incomes; and,
- (c) until the new Income Support system is up and running and targets and measures are agreed, there is little to be gained in comparing the Jersey with the U.K. Government’s target set in 1999. This does not mean that Jersey cannot learn from the U.K.’s experience or any other country. However, the starting point is very different, for example, Jersey has maintained higher Social Security Contributory Benefit and Pension Rates.

Question 2

With regard to success indicators under commitment 3.6 of the draft Strategic Plan, namely -

- “*Reduction in the proportion of working age residents needing income support during each stage of the economic cycle*”

- *Increase in proportion of working age residents with long term health problems in paid employment*”,

would the Minister inform members –

- (a) what the proportions currently are, and which of the actions outlined in sections 3.6.1 to 3.6.6 under the heading “*What we will do*” address the first of these targets?
- (b) what specific targets will he set and be judged on, if any, in terms of his own success?
- (c) of the mechanisms to be used to develop support for working age residents with long term health problems outlined in 3.6.5 to address the second of the indicators above, along with the additional resources and funding required?

Answer

As I answered above, the information on which to base targets is not yet available but will become apparent during the life-cycle of this strategy. I have to point out that the income support system will not be in place until 2007 and from that we will be able to measure success. At this stage I cannot answer questions (a) and (b).

- (c) The mechanisms are in place, as the Deputy is aware, namely the employment services available in the Social Security Department and the Jersey Employment Trust. As with all programmes, they will continue to be assessed and developed to provide the best possible support to people with special employment needs. Resources, as I have already answered in a previous question, will be monitored.

Question 3

Under commitment 3.6 of the draft Strategic Plan, one of the success indicators is:

- *“Increase in the employment rates of disadvantaged groups*

Would the Minister inform members –

- (a) what disadvantaged groups this refers to?
- (b) what employment rates currently exist in these groups?
- (c) what improvement in employment rates is targeted and to be judged upon, and
- (d) what mechanisms he intends to use to achieve improvement?

Answer

- (a) In any discussion on social exclusion there are certain groups within the population that are at greater risk of exclusion. The classic examples are lone parents, pensioners and people with disabilities. However “disadvantaged groups” is somewhat of a generic term which may have to become more focused on different groups of people during the lifetime of the strategy.
- (b) and (c) I refer to my answer above.
- (d) See answer to question 2 (c) above.

Question 4

Will the Minister undertake to provide a calculation of the gross and net replacement rates for Jersey to enable accurate comparison with the data revealed in the 2005 OECD report entitled "Pensions at a Glance: Public policies across OECD countries"?

Answer

I answered a similar question on the 14th February 2006, and the answer remains that I will not be undertaking a calculation because as I said at the time it would be misleading. I have asked the Statistics Unit to comment on the replacement rate comparison.

Question 5

In his reply to my question on 14th February 2006, regarding income thresholds relating to loss of HIE, the Minister pointed to over 60 possible low income thresholds depending on household type. Would the Minister inform members whether a single person paying a weekly rent of £23.24 loses HIE if their income rises above £172.92 and, if not, would he provide evidence in support of this?

Answer

I cannot confirm this as, in this hypothetical case, it is necessary to know how the £172.92 a week is made up (£8,991 per annum). This figure is at the 5% discretion allowed in the HIE system but with benefit disregards, the figure could be higher without affecting HIE entitlement.

Question 6

On 14th February 2006, (section 2.2.5 of Official Report), the Minister undertook to provide a written answer on the means of updating the income distribution survey this year. When will he do so? Similarly, in response to a question on supported employment, (section 2.6.1 of Official Report), he referred to the sum of £600,000 to be spent on refurbishment at Oakfield Industries. Can he confirm that this sum will increase the number of people employed there and supply figures in support of this?

Answer

The Department is currently working with the Statistics Unit to update the income distribution survey from more recent information collected in the Household Expenditure Survey. I cannot, at this stage, give any timescale but the aim is to work towards establishing the starting rates for the different components by the end of this year.

The refurbishment of Oakfield Industries supports the strategy agreed by the States, (P.16/2000), namely to provide more training and development facilities to help individuals with very special employment needs enter the job market. The intention is not to employ individuals but to give development and training support so that more can become 'work ready' and, therefore, have a better chance of obtaining work.