

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

ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 4th DECEMBER 2007

Question

Given that the first Key Principle of the Social Policy Framework is that of 'Promoting Independence', and that the Framework also states that all major policy initiatives should be assessed against the Aim and Key Principles of the Framework, what assessment, if any, has been made of the Minister's decision to take control of rental payments to the Housing Department away from tenants and how does this decision rate in terms of 'Promoting Independence'?

Answer

The principles of The Income Support system were developed some time before the publication of the Social Policy Framework in May 2007 but the aims and principles of the Framework are very closely aligned to the aims and principles of Income Support.

Rent abatement currently provides a benefit to tenants of the Housing Department by reducing the amount of rent that they pay. All tenants receiving rent abatement currently pay a discounted rent and are not in "control" of their full rental payment.

The Income Support system requires that payments of Income Support should be made in the best interests of the claimant's household. As existing Housing Department tenants are accustomed to paying a discounted rent under the present system and the provision of housing is a basic necessity of life, it is considered reasonable to make direct payments to the Housing Department, in respect of rental for Housing tenants. Tenants remain responsible for any balance of rental payment, depending on their household circumstances and income.

Over 3,500 households have been informed of the new arrangements and have been given the opportunity to comment on the amount of benefit that will be paid direct to housing. Approximately 10 individuals have responded to the Department requesting some alteration in the proposed arrangements. These requests will be dealt with on an individual basis.

The principle of promoting independence, as set out in the Social Policy Framework relates to providing individuals with tools and skills to enable them to make choices during their lifetimes to help them achieve independence. These include helping individuals make healthy lifestyle choices and encouraging people to undertake education and training so that they can find employment at a level to provide financial independence.

The direct payment of rent is more closely aligned with the other two principles within the Social Policy Framework, namely "supporting those at risk" and "protecting those in need". By ensuring that families who need support are provided with decent accommodation and are less likely to face the problems associated with rent arrears, Income Support will play an important role in helping families, so that they can become independent in the future.