

## **Oral Questions**

### **The Deputy Bailiff:**

We come then to oral questions and I would inform Members that Deputy Mezbourian has requested that her oral question to the Minister for Planning Environment be moved from seventh place to the end of the list and the questions renumbered accordingly. We come first to a question that Deputy Southern will ask of the Minister for Social Security.

### **2.1 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier of the Minister for Social Security regarding ...**

Will the Minister advise Members how many applicants for income support have been informed exactly what their benefit, including the Household Medical Account, will be as of 28th January 2008, and what it will be after October 2008?

### **Senator P.F. Routier (The Minister for Social Security):**

By Monday, 28th January - which was yesterday - 7,534 applicants for income support had been informed of the value of their income support benefit to be paid from yesterday, 28th January. Household medical accounts have been set up for 2,454 claims and all these claimants have been informed of the value of their Household Medical Account. With regard to informing applicants of the rates after October 2008 this is not possible because, I am sure as Members are aware, the Income Support Law requires Members to limit the Minister to review the rates at least once a year. I have already stated publicly that the income support rates will be reviewed on 1st October 2008. The new rates will be subject to a States' debate and will be set in the light of a number of factors including obviously the retail price index (R.P.I.), the earnings index and also feedback from the first few months of the income support scheme. In October 2008 the first reduction in protective payments will take place. All claimants receiving protective benefits have been informed that there will be a reduction. They will receive individual information regarding their protective payments by the middle of this year. One other aspect to take into consideration will be the possibility that claimants' own incomes may change between now and October.

### **2.1.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Is the Minister aware that there was a 20-deep queue for most of the day in the Social Security Department for income support inquiries and could he inform Members what the bulk of those inquiries were about and what proportion were about the payment of cross-checks to people without bank accounts?

### **Senator P.F. Routier:**

I obviously cannot give the detail of that. I was aware the department was extremely busy. I was there myself and witnessed that obviously there was a queue. It was to be expected obviously - the first day of the system - and we are gearing-up to ensure that we are able to provide people with the service they would expect, but with a new system there will be obviously a need to ensure that we do staff-up at an appropriate level. With regard to the cross-checks, I am aware that there have been a number of people who have needed to have their form of payment changed and we have done that for them.

### **2.1.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Could the Minister inform Members what procedures he has in place to inform recipients of income support who receive H.M.A. (Household Medical Account) if they consider that their assessments for the number of visits is inaccurate, what they should do? If they have to receive visits from a G.P. (General Practitioner) rather than go to the G.P. which costs extra, what are they to do?

### **Senator P.F. Routier:**

The matter of when people go to a doctor or the doctor goes to their home is something which is a negotiation between the doctor and the patient. If the doctor thinks it is appropriate for somebody to receive visits at home or to attend to the surgery, the doctor will make that clinical decision. It is

not really a financial decision that my department would take into consideration and the Household Medical Account will be credited for the appropriate amount.

**2.1.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

The Minister must be aware that the maximum allowed is 12 visits, so monthly visits, unless exceptional circumstances, exist. Are recipients and are doctors aware of what procedures need to be followed if that limit on the H.M.A. is to be exceeded either by visits from the doctor or by a greater demand?

**Senator P.F. Routier:**

The medical profession have been visited and are being visited on a one-to-one basis and I could not say that 100 per cent of G.P.s know exactly what to do but the department has been trying to get appointments with many of them to ensure that they are aware of how to proceed. As far as the public are concerned, their visits to their doctors, as I said earlier, is a medical matter which they need to take into consideration with their G.P. and I would assure them that if they have a medical need to go to the doctor, they should go to the doctor.

**2.1.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

A point of clarification, Sir, if I may: could the Minister clarify for Members that in fact the majority of recipients of income support - over 4,000 - have not had an H.M.A. assessment made? The Minister looked confused. 2,500 I believe he said have been done. That leaves about 4,500-5,000 not done.

**Senator P.F. Routier:**

There is no need for the remainder of them to have a Household Medical Account because they have managed to pay for their doctors themselves in previous time. The majority of people are people who have been getting housing benefits and only housing benefits and so there has been absolutely no need for them to... because they have not been getting free medical support through the H.I.E. (Health Insurance Exemption) system. The majority of people who are... in fact, all of the people within that group are the H.I.E. people who have been transferred over to the new system. I do not think we would even expect to have - and would not want to have - all of the people on income support having a Household Medical Account.