

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SECURITY
BY DEPUTY T.M. PITMAN OF ST. HELIER
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 1st FEBRUARY 2011**

Question

"Will the Minister clarify how a complaint from the public relating to an alleged abuse of the Income Support system is investigated and confirm that any such complaint is investigated to ascertain whether an allegation is valid or not.

Would the Minister advise how long such an investigation takes from the receipt of a complaint?"

Answer

All complaints relating to potential abuse of the Income Support system or benefit fraud in general are investigated. Often errors are quickly identified as genuine mistakes rather than abuses, which can be rectified. However, in the event that fraud is suspected investigations are conducted in accordance with PPACE (Police Procedures and Criminal Evidence (Jersey) Law 2003), and RIPL (Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Jersey) Law 2005.

All information received by the department is treated in the strictest confidence and can be given anonymously. Because of confidentiality requirements informants cannot be advised regarding the outcome of any investigation.

During 2010 the department obtained additional resources to increase the manpower of the fraud team to include 3 additional Investigations Officers to enable a more pro-active approach towards combating fraud. Alongside this the department is introducing a new fraud phone hot-line to encourage the public to provide information. This will be launched and publicised during February.

Investigations are prioritised based upon the quality of the information provided, the likely risk of the fraud occurring, and the potential value of any overpayment. The main emphasis of the fraud team is to ensure that any monies fraudulently obtained are repaid so that there is no loss to the tax payer.

The time taken to conclude an investigation from receipt of a complaint varies depending on the nature and complexity of the case. A simple case may be a few hours work, but something much more complex, and of a greater monetary value, that could be referred for criminal prosecution can take months from beginning to end. Decisions to prosecute rest with the Attorney General. All cases are reviewed regularly throughout the investigation to ensure that time and effort is spent appropriately, and that the investigation is proportionate to the alleged fraudulent activity.