

4.3 The Deputy of St. Martin of the Minister for Home Affairs regarding the retirement age for Fire and Rescue Service staff:

Given the physical and arduous job that the Fire and Rescue Service staff perform on behalf of Islanders, would the Minister for Home Affairs agree that the current retirement age of 55 is a suitable age for fulltime operational firemen to retire?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand (The Minister for Home Affairs):

The role of a frontline firefighter is physical and can be arduous when there is a major or lengthy incident. The Fire Service is different from other services that I am involved with, because unlike the States of Jersey Police, Customs and Immigration, there are not many desk-type jobs and therefore it is not easy to transfer officers who may no longer be fit across to desk-type jobs. The key issue in relation to the test of fitness is the level of oxygen-uptake of the individual. There have been medical studies on this fairly recently in the U.K. and this varies between individuals as to the starting point when they are young and decreases with age. The U.K. recommended level is 42 millilitres per kilogram per minute, but with an absolute lower limit of 35. There is much debate as to whether 42 is the right limit or not. The opinion of our Chief Fire Officer is that it is possible for firefighters to maintain an adequate level of fitness and work safety to the age of 60 provided that they remain free from injury and disease and provided that they keep fit. However, not all firefighters will succeed in that. The current retirement age is not 55. The current retirement age is between 50 and 55 and the S.E.B. (States Employment Board) proposals are a move to between 55 and 60. With that move, there may be some officers who would be no longer operationally fit before 55 and a provision may need to be made for them to be able to retire before 55 with a pro-rata pension.

The Bailiff:

A supplementary, Deputy? You do not have to.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

That is all, Sir.

4.3.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

I think maybe the Deputy of St. Martin has an interest in this question which he may wish to declare, but if I can carry on, I would ask the Minister for Home Affairs, is he fully supporting the S.E.B. move that the pension age be moved from 55 to 60 and would he be prepared to contemplate, for example, transfers to other work within the States as a whole? It seems very limiting to transfer simply within the Fire and Rescue Service.

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

I just need to correct the Deputy very gently that it is not a retirement age from 55 to 60. It is moving a compulsory retirement age from 55 to 60, because there is a 5-year slot in relation to that. In general terms, I am supportive of it, provided that fair arrangements can be made for firefighters, and in particular, I have highlighted the particular issue of a difficulty which may occur if a firefighter is unable to retain the necessary fitness level before 55 and therefore is forced to retire effectively because he no longer can do the job. He is not being retired on health grounds in the normal way and there is going to be a gap before he receives his pension. That is why I said that I think there needs to be some consideration of this and I certainly will be in discussions with the S.E.B. on this kind of issue.

4.3.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Just to clarify, Sir, that the Minister for Home Affairs is supportive of the move to reform the system?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

Provided there are appropriate safeguards. This one cuts both ways, because there have been those arguing for some time that it was unfair on officers who were still fit that they were being forced to retire at 55.

[10:00]

I am told in the notes which I have from the Chief Fire Officer that he has on occasion obtained an extension for some people to 57, so you have 2 different views here. There are those who would want to enable fit officers to continue later and there are those who are concerned about the effect on pensions.

4.3.3 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Would the Minister for Home Affairs give an undertaking to maintain the current retirement age?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

I am sorry, Sir, I did not hear that. I am undertaking to ...

The Bailiff:

Would you give an undertaking to retain the current retirement age?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

It is not my decision. It is an S.E.B. decision.