

4. Oral Questions

4.1 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Social Security regarding updating the Jersey Dental Fitness Scheme:

What progress, if any, has the Minister made on updating the Jersey Dental Fitness Scheme?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley (The Minister for Social Security):

Members will recall that the major proposition on health strategy, P.82/2012 Health and Social Services, The New Way Forward, was approved by the Assembly towards the end of 2012. That proposition included a commitment to develop a new model of primary care, including general medical practitioners, dentists, high street optometrists and pharmacists. This work is ongoing and the Social Security Department is supporting the Health and Social Services Department in the development of primary care in Jersey, including dental services. The Jersey Dental Fitness Scheme is a good example of an existing co-operation between the 2 departments, with the Health and Social Services Department providing dental services to ensure that children aged 11 and above are dentally fit so that this dental fitness can be maintained by a community dentist. The ongoing cost of the community dentist is then subsidised by the Social Security Department. Against the background of the major Primary Care Review, I am also committed to making a complementary improvement to the Jersey Dental Fitness Scheme and this work is currently underway. As set out in my written answer tabled today, I will return to the Assembly with details of my proposals as soon as they are ready. It would not be appropriate to commit to a timetable today, as both legal and financial issues must be resolved before any firm plans can be brought forward.

4.1.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Minister for Social Security appears to have lost a chunk of time. He refers to P.82 of 2012. He first promised to do something about the Jersey Dental Fitness Scheme as a result of S.R.12 of 2010.

[09:45]

He failed to produce anything by the end of 2011, and at the end of 2011 promised that it would be in his business plan for 2012 and he would deliver a review of the Jersey Dental Fitness Scheme by the end of 2012. It is now October 2013 and still we have seen nothing. Can the Minister for Social Security account for this?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

The timeframe the Deputy has just described includes the time when I was not Minister for Social Security. I was appointed Minister for Social Security in November 2011. The work that developed the healthcare proposal P.82 was developed in 2012 and it is as a result of that that we held back on the full review of dental services. However, we have, as I stated in my opening statement, and we are working on the Jersey Dental Fitness Scheme. I have looked at proposals and as I said, subject to legal changes required, if required, I will be bringing those proposals back to the States.

The Bailiff:

A final question, Deputy Southern?

4.1.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Surely, Minister, it is a very straightforward thing to update a scheme that is already in place. It was very useful when it was introduced in 1992. In 1992, the sum paid to dentists monthly for maintaining people at dental fitness was £6 a month. Members might like to hazard a guess as to what it is now, 21 years later. Why? It is £6 a month and completely inadequate.

The Bailiff:

Come to your question, Deputy.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Surely the Minister for Social Security does not have any legal problems with updating a scheme that has been accepted by the States of Jersey previously?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

If it was only that simple, we would have done it by now. The only thing that the scheme has allowed us to do is to increase the annual disregard for income, which is now in excess of £40,000. We did not have provision in the way the scheme was devised to increase the payment to dentists and it is exactly that which I am obtaining legal advice on as to how we can amend the scheme to improve the contribution that the States of Jersey makes to the dentists.