

3.8 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Social Security regarding a full review of the Income Support scheme:

Will the Minister state why there has been no full review on the income support scheme despite undertakings to that effect and does his department have any plans to conduct such a review and, if not, why not?

[15:30]

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

During my time as Minister for Social Security a wide range of operational and policy areas relating to income support have been reviewed and changes implemented. These include: a review of residency requirements to bring income support in line with the new Control of Housing and Work Law and requiring both adults in a household to pass a residency test; a review of the support provided to private sector tenants and changes to the support provided to social sector tenants in line with the Housing Transformation Project; a review of the operation of sanctions as applied to job seekers and people giving up work, leading to substantial changes in this area; a review of customer communications leading to a revised application form and award letter and changes to the income support website following extensive staff training last year in lean management, methods and models of customer service. Officers have initiated reviews of operational areas of income support and implemented significant improvements in customer service in parallel with a customer service review. **[Laughter]** The design of the income support customer area has been reviewed and an improved layout has been implemented. Alongside the introduction of the long-term care scheme, the support provided through the Income Support Law for long-term care costs has been completely reviewed and overhauled. I have fulfilled my commitment to publish detailed information on income support expenditure on an annual basis. I have also updated and reissued and reviewed detailed policy guidelines on the application of the Income Support Law and Regulations. Given the wide range of reviews already undertaken and those in the pipeline, my department has no plans to carry out a separate full review of income support. **[Approbation]**

3.8.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

My heart goes out to the poor Minister. No wonder he is retiring, he has been so overloaded. Nonetheless, there has been no overall review of the effectiveness of delivery of income support in the right places. Is it the fact that whereas the Minister looks and reviews the operation of income support to see where he can save money, he does not want to risk an overall review that might ask him to spend some more because it identifies a gap or a limited spend in areas of greatest need?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

In a calmer response, the Deputy is aware that we are due to carry out a review on the introduction of a living wage in Jersey. This review will be co-ordinated with the Household Income Distribution Survey currently being conducted by the Statistics Unit. This survey will be completed in 2015 and will provide the basis for a review of income support benefit levels alongside the calculation of a local living wage.

3.8.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will that review also include taxation - so the Tax Department - in order to co-ordinate the tax policy, wage policy and income support policies so they form an coherent whole because that has been an outstanding need for a number of years?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

It is quite possible that that will happen.

3.8.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Would the Minister consider that there is scope for an additional review relating to the housing component, especially the figure of how much taxpayers' money is given by his department each year to very wealthy landlords in the form of the housing component?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

A review of income support assistance with rent levels was carried out in 2013, an independent review by Professor Michael Jones of the Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research and, as far as I am aware, the department has no intention to carry out a review of the housing component in the near future.

3.8.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

Is the Minister, nonetheless, concerned that a very large sum of taxpayers' money ultimately finds itself in the back pocket of very wealthy landlords who, in some cases, might own hundreds of properties that they let to people on income support? Does he recommend that perhaps a future incumbent should work very closely with the Housing Department, or what is left of it, in order to try and resolve this issue for the future?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

The Deputy, of course, was successful in bringing a proposition fairly recently that the Minister for Housing should investigate rent control. I supported that, as did the majority of the Assembly, and that is possibly the best way to control this expenditure or certainly one way of looking at the total bill.

3.8.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

In his rather excitable presentation of myriad reviews, some of those were obviously in the public, some were not. Will the Minister agree to publish, where relevant, the matters that he been investigating, reviewing which are of an internal nature so that we can all know what is going on?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

Where relevant, publications have already been released. I will certainly review again whether any of the reviews should be reviewed and issued.