

### **3.7 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Social Security regarding ensuring that those entitled to benefits are aware of their entitlement:**

It would also be very new, Sir. What efforts has the Minister made to ensure that those entitled to benefits, especially those that are means-tested such as income support, are aware of their entitlement and do claim, and what research has his department undertaken since the 2008 reforms to assess the degree to which benefits are effectively delivered to those in need and to compare the figures with those produced by the U.K. Department of Work and Pensions?

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

Succinctly, I can reassure Members that my department places great importance on communicating the availability of benefits to people who need them. Alongside booklets, leaflets, and targeted mail shots, we have expanded our pages on the States of Jersey website and released a detailed policy document explaining income support. We redesigned the income support award letter and application form following customer feedback and we will shortly offer an online tool to estimate benefit entitlement. Officers work with voluntary groups, agencies and associations to raise awareness of benefit entitlement. They offer presentations to States Members and participate in a variety of multiagency groups. We also have a rolling programme of training to ensure that all staff can offer advice about eligibility. I am aware of the results of the Annual Family Resources Survey carried out by the U.K. Department of Work and Pensions. Although our 2 jurisdictions operate benefit systems with a similar purpose, they differ considerably in terms of how they are administered. The U.K. offers a number of overlapping benefits administered by multiple agencies on local and national levels. Under-claiming is more likely under an overlapping system, which Income Support addressed with a single means tested benefit with one application form. Jersey does not have the resources to carry out the equivalent of the Annual Family Resources Survey although my officers continue to utilise the valuable data provided by the Household Income and Expenditure Survey.

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

The Minister points out that it is relatively easier to control the effective delivery of benefits in Jersey, which is a small society, and with a single authority delivering that. Does he have a figure for the degree, the amount of under-claiming, or non-claiming, in our society? For example, say, pensioners or the disabled?

#### **Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:**

The issue of under-claiming is not one that has been particularly drawn to the attention of the department. We are not aware of the issue and if the Deputy has evidence to the contrary perhaps he will let me have it.

#### **3.7.2 Deputy M. Tadier:**

In the interests of balance, would the Minister be willing to put up very large and alarming posters in Social Security warning people that they may not be claiming benefits that they are entitled to, and that if they know anyone in the community who is under-claiming or not claiming when they are entitled to it, to make sure that they phone a special help line, with big red letters, so that they may be reimbursed potentially retrospectively for monies which they are entitled to?

#### **Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:**

I am sure that was a very tongue in cheek question from the Deputy ...

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

It was not, for the record. It is genuine. We do that for benefit cheats. We create alarm for benefit cheats when the scale of the problem ...

**The Bailiff:**

There is no need to re-put it, Deputy.

**Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:**

The fact is that we all have responsibility in this Chamber to alert constituents to the benefit system and I have to say that sometimes I am amazed how unaware some Members are when they ask me questions about the benefit system, which is all, as I have already said, explained on the States of Jersey website. We do need to make sure that people who are entitled to benefits claim them but there is absolutely no question if somebody has not claimed a benefit they are not entitled to a refund.

**3.7.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Does the fact that certain Members in this House continue to surprise the Minister on a lack of knowledge about the benefit system, does that not point to the lack of effective communication from the Minister to describe and make sure that people are aware of what they can and cannot claim?

**Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:**

Quite the reverse. As I said in my opening response, we have offered States Members in particular tuition sessions on the income support, which is a complicated benefit. The attendance at those meetings has been poor and I am pleased to say that our 2 new Deputies were very willing and came immediately to receive the appropriate tuition.