

2015.01.20

**4.7 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Social Security regarding the ability of the Income Support system to address relative poverty across different categories of claimant households:**

Will the Minister review the income support system to assess its ability to address relative poverty across different categories of claimant households?

**Deputy S.J. Pinel of St. Clement (The Minister for Social Security):**

The income support benefit is made up of many different components and is designed to meet the reasonable costs of many different types of claimant households. Components are reviewed regularly to meet the needs of current circumstances. The most recent changes were implemented in April 2014. The disregard in respect of earned income was increased from 20 per cent to 23 per cent, creating a substantial improvement in total household income for those households that use income support to top-up low wages. At the same time changes were made to the rental components within income support, increasing the maximum amount available to private sector tenants and covering the full cost of rents for tenants in the social sector. Members may be aware that a major assessment of relative poverty among different household types is already underway. A clear understanding of the impact of the economic downturn on different categories of claimant's household will be provided from the new income distribution survey currently being undertaken by the Statistics Unit. The results of this survey will be published towards the end of this year. It would be a very poor use of public resources to attempt to double-up this work with a similar review of income support in advance of the detailed information that will be produced by the Statistics Unit. However, while the Statistics Unit's survey is underway I will continue to monitor all aspects of the income support system and where changes are needed during the year I will return to the Assembly with proposals for Member's approval. As the Chief Minister has already explained in response to a separate question, a key agenda for this Council of Ministers is to help all members of our society and I will work with the Chief Minister and other Ministers to ensure that this Government presents a co-ordinated response to any issues raised by the income distribution survey.

**4.7.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Supplementary, if I may. The Minister is aware that there has been no general review of the effectiveness of income support in the 6-plus years now that it has been in existence. Will she undertake to come to the House with figures which indicate the effectiveness of income support alleviating relative poverty for the households for which she is responsible, such as pensioner households, children in poverty or not, single parents and families with couples? Will she undertake in her own right to examine how effective her arm of the weapons against poverty is so that we can join the work that the Stats Department does to the work that her department has done in reviewing her system?

**Deputy S.J. Pinel:**

Income support is paid to income support households. An income support household could be one person, a couple or a family living together at the same address. Couples can be married, in a civil partnership or unmarried. This includes same sex relationships. In answer to the Deputy's question, income support is constantly under review inasmuch as I mentioned in my answer in the first place that the 2 components out of many components of income support - of which there are 14 - and 2 components where reviews were implemented in August last year with the increase in the rental components and the increase in the disregard.

**4.7.2 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Does the Minister agree that the disability benefit side of income support is not working when it sees people suffering from long-term illnesses losing their benefits, despite not actually getting better, simply because they do not tick the right boxes on an arbitrary form. Does she agree that this is an area in need of urgent review because this is the single largest amount of constituent work I end up taking on?

**Deputy S.J. Pinel:**

The disability component is consistently under review, as is any other part of income support and is even more so now because of the introduction of disability discrimination in 2017 or 2018. Hopefully 2017.

**4.7.3 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

I asked in my question if the Minister would agree that the disability side of income support is working given that this happens. Is she satisfied that every person is receiving the amount that they should and that it is being targeted and that these arbitrary forms are the best way of determining who should be getting benefits for disability or long-term illness?

**Deputy S.J. Pinel:**

The question of long-term illness: a review on that is being undertaken this year. With disability components it is constantly updated with reference to the Medical Tribunal, and there is an appeals situation should the claimant have a problem with their allowance component.

**4.7.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Sorry, I thought we had a signal there from my left but obviously we had crossed wires even with the party. The Minister keeps repeating that the system, the income support system is under continuous review. What I am asking for is a review, a proper review of its effectiveness, what elements get to which parts of our society? That review has never been undertaken. How effective are we at alleviating policy for single parents, for the disabled, *et cetera*. That has never been done. Will she commit to doing a review on the effectiveness of income support in reaching the people it is supposed to be reaching so that we can fully understand the figures that we get from the Stats Department come the end of this year, and so we can properly address from the bottom-up rather than the top-down the Chief Minister's aim to address poverty in the coming Council of Ministers regime.

**Deputy S.J. Pinel:**

I keep providing the same answer to the Deputy. The income support is constantly under review with all its 14 components and its benefits as has been said many times before.

**4.7.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

If I may, final supplementary. Then when I ask in the next fortnight for the Minister to come forward with figures that prove what effect income support has on various households, she will be able to do so, will she?

**Deputy S.J. Pinel:**

I think if the Deputy wishes to discuss this further, he has been invited on several occasions - not necessarily just on this matter - to come and talk to the department and I cannot guarantee that we will complete a review in 2 weeks.