

2015.03.10

4.5 Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for Social Security regarding Income Support rental reductions:

Notwithstanding the answer tabled to question 8648 on 24th February 2015, in which no figures were provided, will the Minister inform Members how many claims for income support are subject to a reduction in rental component because of under occupancy?

Deputy S.J. Pinel (The Minister for Social Security):

Then answer tabled to written question 8648 explains that it is not possible to say how many income support claims are subject to a reduction in rental components because of under occupation without examining claims on an individual case-by-case basis. I am happy to repeat the explanation previously given. There are a variety of situations in which the size of the property does not match the size of the household but the household will continue to receive a full rental component. Although the department keeps detailed information on income support claimant households it does not continue to track people who leave the income support system. It is therefore not possible to differentiate automatically between a household receiving a reduced rental component due to under occupation and a household receiving a reduced rental component because the accommodation is being shared with a family member or someone else who is not on the same income support claim or is not receiving income support. There are also situations in which households are supported with full rental costs, even though the property is being under occupied. Establishing the precise reason for the level of the rental components in each case would require checking on a claim-by-claim basis. This would be a time-consuming task which would take operational staff away from their core function of providing services to our customers.

4.5.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

Good luck with the F.O.I. (Freedom of Information) requests, Minister, because if that is the state of the department there is not going to be a lot of information coming out. I am not so much interested in what we do not know and what the department does not know compared to what the department does know, and the question remains fairly simple about those on income support, not those not on income support who have a reduced claim because of under occupancy. That could be for all sorts of reasons but it should be possible to give at least a figure with some caveats in there. Is the Minister able to do that, perhaps not today but could she go away and provide that figure with the relevant caveats?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

As a straight answer to the Deputy's question, no, we cannot do it for the reasons explained in the written question, as I have just explained in my first answer. It would simply be too time-consuming with 4,000-odd income support households and we just do not have the facility. The main computer Nessie, is not able to do that so it would have to take staff to do individual claims, and it is just too time-consuming. But I could give the Deputy examples of different types of property makeup that constitute this problem, but that does not answer his question about numbers.

4.5.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

In the good old days, in another life perhaps, we used to have a Housing Department which used to co-operate widely with the Social Security Department and the custom and practice then was that provided a person in receipt of rental support had applied to downsize, that rental support would be maintained. Under the new regime with Andium Homes does that convention still apply and if Andium Homes says that this person is looking to move will she waive the reduction in whatever effectively is bedroom tax on that particular household under income support rules?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

As Minister for Social Security I am not in a position to comment on Andium's waiting list but people who are on the waiting list for new social housing property are not treated as under-occupying.

[10:15]

They are paid the accommodation component at the higher rate until a new property is available, and this can be paid for up to a year or until 3 reasonable offers of alternative housing have been turned down.

4.5.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

It must be me but would the Minister simply repeat the word she used there because I cannot work out whether that was a yes or no, the convention still applies?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

I think I made it quite clear that if somebody is in a 3-bedroomed property, for instance, and the 2 adult children leave home, leaving the couple, just to give an example, that couple would then be required to be on a waiting list for a one-bedroomed unit. Until such time as one is available then the rental component will stay the same.

4.5.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

So the Minister is aware of those particular instances and does she have a list of those, does she have a number for the exemptions that she obviously in the system makes? Because that would be part of the answer to Deputy Tadier's question.

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

No, there is no list of numbers. It is constantly changing. In the previous question Andium Homes have confirmed that an average of 154 one-bedroom units have been available to let each year over the last 5 years but that is not all these units for households that are moving from larger properties.

The Bailiff:

Deputy Higgins is not here so question 7 falls.