

4.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour of the Minister for Education regarding the implementation of Nursery Education Fund means testing for providers: [1(572)]

When is the Minister planning to implement Nursery Education Fund means testing for all providers, as approved within P.68/2016 Medium Term Financial Plan Addition 2017-2019?

Deputy R.G. Bryans of St Helier (The Minister for Education):

Thank you to the Deputy. Just to remind Members last October this Assembly agreed that we should proceed with means testing for nursery places. This was originally due to start in September 2017 but was postponed for a year until we received the findings of a report into this area by the Early Years' Childhood Partnership, an independent body that includes experts in this field. The report is due in November and once I have seen it, digested the recommendations and decided on a course of action I will make an announcement on any changes.

4.1.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Is the Minister aware that parents plan years in advance for the care and education of their children and does he agree that it is unacceptable that they are left waiting and completely uncertain as to what is happening with regards to the provision for their child's nursery care?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

Yes, I am aware and I always take the parents' views into account mainly because I am focused on the situation with regard to the children. I was advised that the report would be in this month, unfortunately it has been moved to November. I was only informed just prior to the half-term. But as soon as I have that information I will make it clear.

4.1.2 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier:

Can the Minister inform Members what that timescale means in terms of bringing forward to the States a proposition based on the report? When will he be taking that action?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

I will be taking that action as soon as I have looked at the report and seen what the report details. I have no evidence of what the report contains presently but as soon as I have that information, as I say, as soon as I look through it, consulted with my colleagues at the department I will make my findings known.

4.1.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

That sounds a fairly prompt mechanism for making this decision. Is he intending to make a statement and bring a proposition before Christmas?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

What I am intending to do, as I say, is to look at the report, look at the findings, discuss matters with my department and, if necessary, to go back to the nursery owners themselves to see what the situation is at present. As soon as I have that information I will come back to the House.

4.1.4 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier:

I did not really hear much of an answer there to what Deputy Southern asked, which is: can we expect something this side of Christmas?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

Hopefully, yes.

4.1.5 Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I was trying to remind myself because it was my amendment that Deputy Doublet was referring to. My recollection, certainly from the wording of the amendment I put in - it was some time ago now - was that there was no issue about consultation, that Education had agreed or decided to bring in means testing. They were going to do it in an unfair way because it was only going to be on a certain part of society and not another, or more particularly it was about **[Interruption]** ... thank you. The question is why is the Minister deciding to consult on his original plans effectively because surely he should have done that in the past?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

I think it is common knowledge that when I first came across the decision ... you are quite right, the Members decided here in this Assembly to go for means testing across the board. But we had always had it in our minds to make sure that we had consulted widely and had taken the view of some experts, which I think Deputy Doublet is aware of, she has fantastic knowledge in this particular area, and we wanted to make sure that we covered all bases before we move forward.

4.1.6 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Has the Minister had any briefings from the individual who is crafting the report and does he have any indication of whether the report might recommend that the means testing is not implemented for either private or states nurseries?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

I had a briefing from the particular individual but it was not related to this report that she was putting out, it was related to the Care Abuse Inquiry information that she has some relevance to. So I have no knowledge of what the report contains at this point in time.