

2017.11.14

2.2. Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour of the Minister for Social Security regarding the latest part of the Social Security Review: [1(615)]

Will the Minister update Members on the scope and progress of the latest part of the Social Security Review and indicate what the timescales are between now and the elections for any resulting changes in policy and legislation that may arise?

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

The latest part of the review of the Social Security Fund focuses on some areas where society has changed since the current scheme was set up. It asks for the public's views on maternity and bereavement benefits and drills down to some of the results from last year's survey. The consultation is open to everyone and we want as many people as possible to take part as we all contribute into the fund. For example, last week we noticed that the response rate from men was on the low side and we used Facebook to encourage more men to respond. That has worked well and we have now had over 1,000 responses to the online survey, which is running until 15th December. 1,200 people also gave their views and ideas through Apptivism's Facebook chatbot in October. Four workshops were held last week for organisations and members of the public with another 4 plans for later in the month. The results will be published early next year and will feed into the remaining stages of the review. This will continue after the election, leading to a co-ordinated set of policy and legislative changes which will be led by the next Minister for Social Security.

2.2.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Can the Minister confirm that there will be no actual changes to the maternity or paternity legislation in her term of office?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

As the Deputy will be aware, we are waiting for the results on family friendly responses and consultation from the Employment Forum, which I am due to receive in December.

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

Can the Minister explain to Members why, in the second part of this survey, they have not transferred a finding from the first part that employers could pay more to the options available for people to tick? The 2 options available are: "I would pay more myself" or: "I would accept a reduction in benefit." Why not the option for employers to pay more?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

I think the Deputy has asked a similar question before. We have had a U.K. (United Kingdom) consultation agency who have put the consultation together with the help of the Statistics Unit and we also asked the public, based on the previous review, what their options were. In order of popularity it was to tighten benefit rules, businesses pay more, less benefits, people pay more, pension goes up less quickly and higher pension age. So we have tried to incorporate these into the second review. These 2 reviews so far and the third one will come together in 2020 to give an idea or a comprehensive response to what has been gathered.

2.2.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Minister said she tried to get all these elements together and went through the list of options. The second option, to request employers to pay more, was supported by 71 per cent; it was significant. Yet it does not appear as one of the options on the second consultation; why not?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

As I said, because it is a different consultation from the first one. There is no point in putting out a second consultation which is identical in questioning to the first. The second one is on maternity benefits and survivors benefits, partners of whom have died, and this is what this second review is all about. All the results will come together at the end of the third review to be put out as a formal recommendation.

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

Following on from Deputy Doublet's second question about maternity leave and the Minister saying that there are ongoing reviews looking at this; does she anticipate that any of these reviews will conclude anything other than statutory maternity leave in Jersey is wholly inadequate and needs to be increased?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

Also, as I have said before, in other areas the Employment Forum is an independent body. It is apolitical and they get on with their job. They have had to fit the family friendly consultation in between the minimum wage and it is not for any politician, and certainly not me, as Minister for Social Security, to interrupt their findings until they give me the recommendation. But, as a working mother, I would sincerely hope that there would be an increase in some of the maternity benefits that we have at the moment.

2.2.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

Can the Minister tell us - and if she does not have the information circulate that information - about... because we do of course have a Stats Department ourselves who I think are quite well respected throughout the States, which is the company that she has been using for this survey and how much are they being paid for that?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

When I said we use the Stats Unit, I did mean the one over here, who are very helpful in putting together our consultation and numerical findings. The company that is used is a U.K. company called CAG and the cost of it, for this one, off the top of my head I think is about £38,000.

2.2.6 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Minister accept, as somebody who got this message on my phone, like I am sure many other people did in the Island, that my initial reaction, irrespective of the fact it was from Social Security, was that these are not full and complete questions and that they are very much leading? I, for one, was asking: where is the option here for higher earners, those who earn a lot or whether they are an employer, for them to be able to pay more in contributions at the same rate as everybody else so that we can all have access to the same benefits? That was not one of the questions that was asked and why is that the case?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

I understand both Deputy Tadier and Deputy Southern's questions on why were the questions not asked but there are only so many questions you can put in order to keep people's interest on an online survey. In this survey, which is almost completely online, we have included 3 different video

outlets as well to make the whole survey and answering of it more enticing, which limits the amount of questions that you can put into the consultation. Otherwise it would take 30 minutes to do it and nobody would have the attention span for it. So thank you.

2.2.7 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I thank the Minister for her answers. I wanted just to zero in on one of the areas in the survey. I believe a question has been asked about the maternity payments and whether they should in fact be available to either parent so that the father or mother could receive the maternity grant and the payments. Given that this is an issue under consideration can I ask the Minister for her view on something which is perhaps achievable within this term of office, for the States of Jersey as an employer to offer the maternity pay to their employees where both parents are employed by the States of Jersey could this be available to the mother or the father?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

As I said in a previous answer, I am waiting for the recommendations of the Employment Forum, at which I would not interrupt under any circumstances until I get them. They will be putting forward their recommendations at the end of December and I would hope to bring forward lodged regulations end of January for debate in March.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Can I just clarify my question? I was asking about a separate issue on principle really, on the Minister's view on the principle of whether she believes that States of Jersey employees, where the mother and the father are both employed by the States of Jersey should the maternity or parental leave be available to either parent, which would be a separate policy decision rather than legislation change.

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

As I had to instruct as Minister for Social Security the Employment Forum, all that area was included in the instructions so I will await what their recommendations are. But, yes, I would hope that they would do that.