

2019.06.04

9 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Social Security regarding the implementation of Priority 4 of the Common Strategic Policy, to reduce income inequality and improve the standard of living: (OQ.150/2019)

What measures, if any, does the Minister have under consideration to further priority 4 of the Common Strategic Policy, namely to reduce income inequality and improve the standard of living for residents?

Deputy J.A. Martin (The Minister for Social Security):

Members will be aware that an outline work programme across all C.S.P. (Common Strategic Policy) priorities was published in November 2018, which was R.130/2018. The work programme listed 20 areas of activity under Priority 4. Each C.S.P. priority cannot be dealt with by just one Minister, which is why this is being overseen by a ministerial team. C.S.P. 4 is overseen by the Minister for Children and Housing, the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture and myself and where not available Assistant Ministers have been stepping in. I can confirm that all 20 areas, outlined last November, remain under consideration by all the relevant Ministers.

4.9.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

With reference to Written Question 244/2019, does the Minister not recognise that a rise in components does indeed benefit those worse off on income support, because they are not in work, a rise in this regard disproportionately benefits those who are in work and, therefore, relatively better off than those out of work?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

I do not agree with the Deputy. We have been looking at this and we are where we are, but the Deputy was in talks with us. He does not agree with me that people in work should be rewarded more and we have less people out of work. We have very few people not doing any form of work, we say around 800 actively seeking work, 400 of them are doing hours, they are just not doing the set hours with the age of their children. So, the Deputy will know more, I will be lodging this year's uprate of income support today, if not tomorrow.

4.9.2 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Can the Minister elaborate a little bit further on the work on C.S.P. 4 that has been taking place; how many meetings have taken place since November and what reports, if any, have been produced?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

We have set up the Migration Board, the Housing Board, we have frozen rents for housing, we are out today, literally, to look at minimum wage. Sorry, we managed to freeze part of the rents for housing. Meetings, it has been difficult to get myself, Senator Mézec and Senator Farnham in a room; that is why a lot have been attended by Senator Pallett and, on my behalf, it was mainly Deputy Southern. The work is ongoing and it is all coming together now and you will see the workstreams and the money under the Government Plan very shortly.

4.9.3 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

As Deputy Southern is no longer your deputy, who has taken his place in this important work?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

All will be revealed very shortly.

4.9.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The answer to Written Question 244/2019 reveals that, for example, the adult component of income support over the period 2008 to 2019 has gone up by 16 per cent at the time when inflation R.P.I. (retail price index) has gone up by 30 per cent. What measures has she in hand to reverse this erosion of income support?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

The Deputy was here in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, when everybody was losing their jobs, we were in major financial crisis and like wages - and the Deputy would know this one - wages were frozen and certain components of income support. Until we get a few extra million coming in, we are where we are and they all went up last year, the cost of living, R.P.I. and I am lodging today, or very early tomorrow, where I am going this year. But it is the same amount of money and the Deputy knows that. It is how you cut the cake; do you reward more people in work and, as we have more people in work, why would you not?