

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SECURITY  
BY DEPUTY G.P. SOUTHERN OF ST. HELIER  
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 10th SEPTEMBER 2019**

**Question**

Will the Minister publish her latest list of priorities for reducing income inequality for the years of the Government Plan 2020-23, giving the timescale for any research and consultation to be undertaken and the delivery of policies?

**Answer**

The current list of priorities is set out in the Government Plan. Under the strategic aim of: Reduce income inequality and improve the standard of living, the following actions come under my ministerial responsibility and are planned for delivery in 2020:

Develop proposals to improve financial independence in old age. As one of the elements of the Social Security Review, in 2020 we will investigate ways in which the Government can help people to maintain their financial independence as they get older. This will include investigating a workplace pension scheme, which could afford every worker access to a second pension on top of their Social Security pension. We will also look at other ways to encourage savings and make the best use of the increasing numbers of older workers in our economy.

Permanently fund the Diffuse Mesothelioma Payment Scheme. In 2018, the States Assembly agreed (P.124/2018) to provide one-off payments to individuals (or their dependents) with diffuse mesothelioma, a disease associated with historic exposure to asbestos fibres. The payment is based on the age of the claimant, so someone diagnosed at the age of 65 would receive a payment of £25,440. This scheme is due to be introduced in October 2019, but will require permanent funding from 2020 onwards. We anticipate approximately five claims a year.

Reintroduce permanent funding for the single-parent component of Income Support. The previous States Assembly (P.113/2017 and P.28/2018) agreed to provide a single-parent component as part of the Income Support system, and identified funding for 2018 and 2019. The component currently provides an additional £40.39 a week to around 1,000 eligible single parents. We will make this funding permanent from 2020 onwards.

Maintain the Food Cost Bonus for a further three years at the current value. This lump sum annual payment is worth £227 a year and acknowledges the cost of GST levied on food for households that have incomes above the Income Support level, but do not have an income tax liability. The further extension of this scheme provides time to review this bonus as part of the planned review of the interaction between the tax and benefit systems for individuals and households, to be undertaken in 2021.

Work with businesses, parishes and community groups to improve social inclusion by delivering the disability strategy, improving community-based services and supporting diversity. The disability strategy was published in 2017 and some initial projects have already been completed using existing resources. The extra funding identified in the Government Plan supports the roll-out of a wider range of projects

from 2020 onwards. In 2020, we will also build on the successful Closer to Home initiative, launched in 2019. The first stage of the project delivered a range of community services at Communicare in St Brélade. In 2020 we will extend this model to other locations, as well as extending the range of services provided. We will also work within Government and across the Island to support diversity.

Develop proposals to support disabled adults living at home and their informal carers. As the population ages, more Islanders will live with a long-term condition and will need daily help. 10% of households include someone who provides informal care to a friend or relative (Jersey Health and Life Opportunities Survey 2015). In 2020, we will develop additional support for disabled people who continue to live in their own home, and their carers. This may include the provision of a personal budget, or financial help with the additional costs faced by households looking after a family member at home. We will also consider how to fully recognise the role of family carers

Amend the social security scheme to provide benefits to both parents. The contributory benefit system currently only supports a birth mother with a weekly allowance of £216 per week while she is off work caring for a new baby. As part of the Social Security Review, we have acknowledged the need to move to a more family friendly labour market, which acknowledges the role of all parents in the care of their children. In 2020, we will make changes to contributory benefits so that both parents will be able to receive parental benefits. This will be funded from two changes to Social Security contributions. We will increase the cap on earnings from £176,000 to £250,000; we will also increase the contributions rate received from employers of higher-earning workers, and high-earning self-employed people, from 2% to 2.5%. These changes are anticipated to generate an additional £3.35 million in 2020..

Develop a new approach to supporting workers with long-term health conditions. Supporting workers with long-term health conditions to return to or remain in employment supports their wellbeing, mitigates the effects of the ageing population, reduces health costs, increases tax revenues, and also reduces the need for inward migration. Building on research undertaken by the Social Security Review, in 2020 we will work closely with employers, health and other professionals to develop improvement proposals. These will focus on a new assessment process, the balance of responsibility between Government and employers in supporting workers during periods of incapacity, and a health and benefit framework that supports individuals to remain in employment whenever possible.

Deliver improved legal rights to employees. The Employment Forum is an independent statutory body that makes recommendations to the Minister for Social Security on changes to employment law. In 2020, the Forum will report on the possible extension of employee rights in respect of rest breaks (the right to a break during the working day) and annual leave. The next area to be considered will be a review of the use of 'zero hour' contracts

Complete the annual minimum wage review. In 2018 (P.171/2017) the States Assembly agreed to aim for a minimum wage rate set at 45% of average (mean) earnings by the end of 2020, subject to economic and labour market conditions. There will be two increases during 2019 and the minimum wage will be reviewed again in 2020, with the aim of increasing the minimum wages of the lowest-paid employees. The Employment Forum's review will take account of the views of stakeholders during consultation, and Government commitment to support productivity improvements in low-wage sectors as well as the general economy.

The Government Plan also provides some outline information on activities in 2021-23. My responsibilities in this area comprise:

- implementing a workplace pension scheme and/or other measures to support financial independence in old age
- agreeing and delivering a new approach to supporting workers with a long-term health condition
- delivering actions across all areas of the disability strategy
- improving support for adults with care needs living in their own homes and their carers
- completing a review of the interaction between tax and benefit systems

Additional actions in this area may be identified in the next Government Plan to be published next year.