

20.09.22

11 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Chief Minister regarding income levels (OQ.242/2020):

What data or estimates does the Chief Minister have either from Statistics Jersey's Income Distribution Survey or elsewhere on income levels and their distribution pre-COVID-19 in 2019 and following the outbreak of the pandemic during the first 6 months of 2020; and will he provide a date by which such data will be shared with Members prior to any debate on the economic recovery plan?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré (The Chief Minister):

The Deputy did ask me a similar question I think twice in June - one was a written question and one was an oral question - where I highlighted that the chief statistician expected the results of the analysis of the household income data, which was collected between July 2019 and March 2020, to be published in Quarter 4 2020. As I stated in that answer, the results would be available to all Islanders for review. One thing I did realise in kind of preparing for the answer to this question is that I did say at the time I would meet the chief statistician to try and get some more details and to discuss the matter. Unfortunately to date that has not been possible. I think it has probably been as result of the combination of COVID and trying to get the Government Plan into a decent shape, but I have asked for that to be expedited and I will feed that back to the Deputy as soon as I have had that discussion.

4.11.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Chief Minister appeared, when he last answered my questions on this topic, to say that the chief statistician was completely independent of his direction but I would beg the Chief Minister to simply ask the question as to when will we see this data, because it is important for one of the major thrusts of our policy to reduce income inequality, and that surely he can say whether it will come in the first half of October or whether we have to wait for it until December before we see what this vital piece of information suggests.

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

As I have just said, I did undertake to have that discussion and unfortunately it did not take place. I have for that to be expedited and as soon as I get a date I will feed it back to the Deputy and Members. But the point is the chief statistician, when we last spoke to him, was basically saying it would be during Quarter 4 and I suspect it is a case of how long it takes to finish compiling and summarising the data.

4.11.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Given that the Government Plan is due to Scrutiny on Monday how can the key Common Strategic Policy target of reducing income inequality be addressed effectively without this data being available to the Council of Ministers or those not in the Council of Ministers deciding upon the Government Plan?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

As I said previously, this data and the results of the survey have long been scheduled for quarter 4 and the Government Plan - as the Deputy is absolutely correct - is scheduled to go to Scrutiny effectively in the word form on Monday, and that is what we are focusing on. So that is the timing that we are dealing with and in terms of the area that the Deputy has alluded to, we are ensuring that the format of the Government Plan is very similar to last year and will obviously work through

the various C.S.P. (Common Strategic Plan) priorities. I do emphasise the point, we have been through and are continuing to go through the pandemic crisis. This has caused all sorts of ructions to normal preparation and has caused all sorts of delays, and that is what Scrutiny will see and then Members will see when we present it.

4.11.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

I agree with the Chief Minister that we have been through a very difficult time with COVID and it is clear that those on the lowest incomes and our poorest in our society are disproportionately affected. Therefore, this data which uncovers that inequality, would it not enrich the response that we can make and make it more effective and, therefore, is there not a gap in the analysis in order to develop the Government Plan in this area.

[11:15]

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I am not unsympathetic to the Deputy's comments. I think I will break it into 2; one is we will get the data and then of course it will feed into the following year's Government Plan. Secondly, the Deputy is right, there are all sorts of individuals that have been affected by COVID-19 and, as we know, measures were put in place both in income support levels through the C.R.E.S.S. (COVID-19 Related Emergency Support Scheme) scheme, through others measures to address some of that, and that included within the fiscal stimulus measures where not only does every Islander get the £100 vouchers, which included those at the lower end of the spectrum, but also those at the lower end also received an extra £100 each which was paid out in July. So we have tried to take the measures we needed to take to protect the vulnerable in society, including the financial terms, but as we said, we are dealing with extraordinary times and they will continue for the next few months as well.

4.11.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

No matter how extraordinary the times it is a simple matter of timing. I could press the Minister to say earlier is better than later but whatever it is, if we know when we are going to see this data then we can prepare for what measures we want to see in the Government Plan more accurately, better researched, if we can have that. So it is a simple matter of tell us when we can see this data so that we can plot it into our work schedule to get decent amendments to the Government Plan.

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

As I said, I am not unsympathetic to that comment. I will make sure that discussion is held shortly with the chief statistician and I will come back to Members as soon as I can. I do apologise to the Deputy from the perspective I did say I would do it in June but, as I said, with the combination of both COVID and getting the Government Plan into a reasonable shape - and we will obviously be updating Members on that - obviously unfortunately I think matters got overlooked. But I will rectify that as soon as I can.