

2021.10.05

**11 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Social Security regarding measures to alleviate any hardship caused by the rise in gas tariffs (OQ.210/2021):**

Will the Minister give Members a detailed breakdown of how she proposes to alleviate any hardship caused to households by the rise in tariffs proposed by Jersey Gas over the winter period?

**Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier (The Minister for Social Security):**

We do not know how many low-income households use gas for their heating but my officers have been in contact with all the social housing landlords to submit how many social housing properties use gas and what they use it for. Across all the portfolios there are only 158 homes that still have gas. I have asked my officers to explore a method to make an appropriate extra payment to any of these households who depend on gas to keep their homes warm. Although I cannot give the Deputy details of these extra payments, we will make sure that people know how they can expect to receive this extra help so they will not have to worry about using their heating this winter.

**4.11.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

The Minister's response applied only to social housing. What, if any, action can she take on rentals in the private sector because they will have to stay as warm and will have similar bills surely?

**Deputy J.A. Martin:**

Absolutely. As I say, this research started last Friday as soon as we heard about the gas. We could easily contact the trusts and Andium, et cetera, and we got the figures. Absolutely, if you are in the private sector, you are on low income, I want to help them as much if they are heating their homes with gas. It is going to take a little bit of time to find out but it will be the same payment.

**4.11.2 The Connétable of St. Martin:**

As the Government will be profiting from the rise of either 5 per cent G.S.T. (goods and services tax) on the higher price of gas, is the Minister planning to pass 5 per cent on to people who need it, such as families who are struggling and members of Age Concern, et cetera?

**Deputy J.A. Minister:**

I have not thought about that one; it is something I could think about. But I was asked, literally, how am I going to help households who will struggle to pay their gas bills? But I can look into that for the Constable.

**4.11.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

In an answer today to Written Question 385 to the Minister for the Environment, and it is relevant, which asks about conversion of homes to electricity as part of our commitment to carbon neutrality, it suggested that there is a carbon-neutral roadmap, policies will come forward in the carbon-neutral roadmap for consultation by Christmas? Can I ask the Minister, will she be involved in that consultation? Does she support the transition from gas to electric systems for those facing hardship? Would she prioritise those people to give support so that they are not reliant upon what is becoming an increasingly uncertain supply of energy?

**Deputy J.A. Martin:**

I do absolutely support. I think it started when it was the Housing Department and then went to Andium, and to me seemed like to be ripping out some very good heating systems and replacing

them with electric. It was the right thing to do and we absolutely know it is the right thing to do and we need much more. As I say, there is only 5 per cent of the whole population that use gas, I think that is domestic. I am not sure if that is commercial as well. We are getting there but gas heating is a thing of the past or should be.

**4.11.4 Senator S.Y. Mézec:**

Does the Minister accept that increased financial payments for those on low incomes to assist with their gas bills, while it would provide a neutral effect for those people, it would ultimately be a shift of taxpayers' money into the pockets of U.K.-based private equity investors? Would she, as the Minister who would have to be responsible for these financial payments, agree that it would be helpful for other Ministers to put pressure on to Jersey Gas or other energy providers to look to a more long-term solution so that we do not simply have to increase financial support for those on low incomes every time that these private equity investors decide to raise prices?

**Deputy J.A. Martin:**

I absolutely agree with the sentiment of the Senator. There is supposed to be a shortage of this, that and the other worldwide and it has ended up making gas that goes into people's homes more expensive. But the sentiment I absolutely agree with. I can work with other Ministers. But this is going to happen quick and it is going to happen fast, it is going to start coming in in the middle of October. I need a solution that will help people not be scared to put their heating on because it is gas heating and we will find a way to make sure they get a payment.

**4.11.5 Senator S.Y. Mézec:**

I welcome that and providing extra support to those people is absolutely the right thing to do in this circumstance. But I just wonder if the Minister could overtly agree with the point that I have made, which is that, ultimately, this is money that will end up in the pockets of private equity investors from the U.K. who have nothing to do with Jersey and no real interest in the sustainability of the energy provision in the Island. I ask her to state if she agrees with that point because I think it helps with the context in the wider debate on moving to carbon-neutrality to understand where this money is going and who it really benefits.

**Deputy J.A. Martin:**

That is a very big question. The money that I am putting in will go to the families that need it and the Senator is asking me if I think it is wrong that it will end up in some very rich and powerful companies, and obviously I do not think that is right either. I would have to know a bit more to absolutely 100 per cent agree with him.

**4.11.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

I suppose the final supplementary is very often the when question. When will the Minister come to this Assembly with her scheme detailed?

**Deputy J.A. Martin:**

As I say, it will be a one-off to get through the winter. I probably will not need to come to the Assembly but I will inform States Members. Obviously any help, if there is any sort of things that I could not think of or our officers have not thought of, I am always willing to talk to people. But it will be soon. The bills are going up, the gas prices go up on the middle of October, so we are not that far away. If you either get a monthly bill, and that will be at the end of October, or if they are 3-monthly you will be getting a bill by December. I want it well in by then and I have notified people of the help

that they will get by then. As I say, we do not want people, if it is really cold, not feeling comfortable putting their gas heating on.

**The Bailiff:**

Deputy Tadier, you have indicated a desire to ask a question. That was the final supplementary, I am afraid.

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

Sorry, Sir. Thank you.