

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SECURITY
BY DEPUTY L.V. FELTHAM OF ST. HELIER CENTRAL
QUESTION SUBMITTED ON MONDAY 25th SEPTEMBER 2023
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON MONDAY 2nd OCTOBER 2023**

Question

“Will the Minister provide an update on progress delivering MSS P5: Conducting a review of our benefits landscape, to ensure that benefits are well-targeted, modern and effective, as set out in her [Delivery Plan](#), including –

- (a) the actions identified following completion of the MSS P5.1 review, including details of the work plan developed, and progress against that work plan;
- (b) what specific groups were included in the work undertaken on MSS P5.2, the findings of this review, or work to date if the review is ongoing; and
- (c) outlining the work undertaken on MSS P5.3 to ensure that the IT system delivered by the Transform Project will support and deliver any future changes to benefits that the States Assembly may decide upon?”

Answer

(a) Previous answers to Members’ questions (WQ.162/2023, WQ.75/2023, OQ.30/2023, QWON.21/3/23 and WQ.152/2023), have provided details of the areas identified by the high level review.

This information is repeated below:

- The impact of relevant quarter rules on local residents with short gaps in contribution record.
- The impact of relevant quarter rules on parents seeking to claim parental benefit for a second child.
- Provision of death grant for still born babies.
- Home carers allowance rules for parent with more than one child with a long-term health condition.
- Income Support rules in respect of critical skills courses and part time work requirements; asset limits across all benefits.
- The level of special payments for funeral costs.
- Means tested pensioner benefits – asset and income tests; overall application process.
- Gluten free vouchers – future eligibility criteria.
- Jersey Dental Fitness Scheme – value of benefit.
- Overall cost of proposed changes.

Early in 2023, following comments from the general public and States members, the 2023 workplan was expanded to include a major project to support the reduction in the cost of GP surgery fees; a few months later it was also agreed to incorporate the project to implement a free GP surgery offer to children and young people aged under 18.

In addition, decisions of the Assembly have led to further actions being added to this work stream as follows:

- P.24/2023 - review of financial support for provision of flooring in social housing properties
- P.52/2023 - financial support for parents of neonatal babies
- P.59/2023 - amendment to Christmas bonus provision

- P.64/2023 - extension to cold weather bonus scheme (to be debated 3/10/2023)

The principal focus of work to date in this area has been the delivery of the GP schemes for both adults and children and the expansion of the Pension Plus scheme which was successfully launched in September, extending access to a wider group of pensioners and improving the benefits available under the scheme.

In addition, a detailed review has been completed in respect of existing benefit legislation to identify areas that may need amendment to support the implementation of the major Transform programme. This is designed to deliver a new, highly customer-centred benefit administration system and associated processes

Other work that is currently ongoing includes:

- amendments to Christmas bonus legislation to support the recent States decision
- possible amendment to Cold Weather bonus legislation (subject to States decision on P64 as amended)
- review of income support special payments to include funerals and flooring provision as noted above
- review of Jersey Dental Fitness Scheme

(b) The high level review process initiated in early 2023 considered both the structure of benefits and their recipients in a holistic manner. Two main groups have been identified for the early action which has been completed: the work to provide additional support in respect of GP costs is particularly pertinent to individuals with health conditions. It also provides support across groups who currently access means tested benefits but and to those with incomes a little above this level who may have been affected by recent price rises and the increase in bank lending rates. In addition to this wide group, additional support has been targeted at lower income pensioners with the recent changes to Pension Plus. In particular, the scheme has been expanded to include those with modest savings of between £30,000 and £64,000. The income test (income below the income tax limit) remains in place for now but changes to the future income test will be considered in 2024.

(c) As set out above, a detailed review has been completed in respect of existing benefit legislation to identify areas that may need amendment to support the implementation of the major Transform programme. This is designed to deliver a new, highly customer-centred benefit administration system and associated processes. The specification for the IT system to be delivered by the Transform programme includes requirements to enable GOJ to be able to deliver new services or update and amend existing services quickly and easily. Similarly, a major emphasis has been made on the need for the solution to produce comprehensive datasets regarding the use of services and capture feedback from customers to support future policy development. It should be noted that the process to implement a major IT project will often include a period of “change freeze” during which it is not possible to accommodate new design into the planned system. The detailed timetable for the implementation of Transform may need to include a period during which additional changes cannot be made.

As set out in both the 2023 ministerial delivery plan and the 2024 ministerial plan, this work will continue into 2024. Further details will be provided in the 2024 delivery plan.