



Health and Social Security Scrutiny Panel

Quarterly Hearing

Witness: The Minister for Social Security

Thursday, 6th August 2020

Panel:

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat of St. Helier (Chair)

Deputy K.G. Pamplin of St. Saviour (Vice-Chair)

Deputy C.S. Alves of St. Helier

Deputy T. Pointon of St. John

Witnesses:

Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier, The Minister for Social Security

Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour, Assistant Minister for Social Security (1)

Deputy S.M. Wickenden of St. Helier, Assistant Minister for Social Security (2)

Mr. I. Burns, Director General, Customer and Local Services

Ms. S. Duhamel, Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population

[14:07]

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat of St. Helier (Chair):

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the Social Security quarterly hearing with the Minister for Social Security and 2 of the Assistant Ministers. I am Deputy Mary Le Hegarat. I am the chair of the Scrutiny Panel. Before we introduce all ourselves I would just remind that we are under the normal rules that we would be if we are holding the hearing in the States building but some of us are working remotely, so we will move forward. I will start with my panel.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin of St. Saviour (Vice-Chair):

I am Deputy Kevin Pamplin and I am vice-chair of the panel.

Deputy T. Pointon of St. John:

I am the Deputy of St. John, Trevor Pointon, and I am a member of the panel.

Deputy C.S. Alves of St. Helier:

I am Deputy Carina Alves of St. Helier District 2 and I am a member of the panel.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Deputy Southern is currently unavailable for this meeting.

The Minister for Social Security:

I am Judy Martin, Deputy of St. Helier No. 1, and the Minister for Social Security.

Assistant Minister for Social Security (1):

Good afternoon, Deputy Jeremy Maçon of St. Saviour No. 1 District, Petite Longueville, Assistant Minister for Social Security.

Assistant Minister for Social Security (2):

Good afternoon, everyone. Deputy Scott Wickenden, Deputy of St. Helier District 1 and Assistant Minister for Social Security.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Good afternoon, Ian Burns, director general for Customer and Local Services.

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

I am Sue Duhamel, head of policy at the Strategic Policy and Performance Unit.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Perfect, thank you. I think we have probably got everybody that is likely to speak this afternoon. If anyone else does contribute during the course of this hearing then I would ask that they introduce themselves prior to doing so, so that the public are fully aware as to who they are. I will kick off first of all in relation to departmental impacts and the spending of the Social Security Department. Please, Minister, can you provide us an update on the total departmental spend to date from the £184 million allocated to you as Minister for Social Security?

The Minister for Social Security:

I have a breakdown in the benefit spend up to June, income support, other tax funded benefits, is that what you are looking for? Obviously long-term care, Health Insurance Fund, et cetera.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

We are looking for the overall spend for the department of the £184 million that was allocated to you. So whatever you have spent during the course of the year to date.

The Minister for Social Security:

Up to date we have spent ... it was only allocated ... did you say £184 million? I have already spent £208 million under social security benefit payments for the 6 months to the 30th June and £36 million was on income support; social security benefits £129 million; Health Insurance Fund £14.5 million; long-term care £26.6 million; and that totals £208.868 million.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Is that including therefore ...

The Minister for Social Security:

Sorry, that is the budget. The actual is £208.708, sorry. It is just slightly under the actuals.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

So what you are saying is that you have spent more than the £184 million.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, I would imagine a lot of that, it would be on income support because the highest we had ... we had sort of around £900,000 in reserve and then obviously COVID hit and we found another 1,000 people at least, plus the people already on income support, could not do the hours that they were doing so they had to have more money. I think I am answering the right question. Ian might need to add to that because you are saying departmental spend and these are benefit spends. I do not want to muck them up.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Have you got anything to add, Ian?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

It just might be helpful if the chair could clarify the £184 million you are referring to, is that from the Government Plan under the Minister?

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

That would be correct. That would have been the amount of money that was allocated was £184 million to the Social Security Department and that would have been out of the Government Plan because obviously that was the money that they were going to be allocated.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

I think the numbers that we have given the Minister are not quite matching that total but they are all budgets that perhaps are held elsewhere in the Government Plan. It may be the difference perhaps is the £20 million, which is for Customer and Local Services, which is the administration of the department. If you add that on to the £184 million then you are up around the £208 million, the Minister was describing. I think the key thing the Minister said is that we are for the half year, and you will see this in the half year Treasury report, where benefit spend we are broadly on track against the budget despite all the variances of coronavirus affecting different levels of benefit spend.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Thank you for that. Just another point, given that the spend so far for 2020, what proportion of that has been income support claimants in order to ... has it been at the level you would have been expecting following the outbreak of COVID-19?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

At half year we are on roughly about £39 million against the original income support budget of £36.5 million, so we are about, at the end of June, spending about £2.6 million more on income support and we are forecasting by the end of the year that we will be spending £10.3 million more than the original budget of £73.3 million.

[14:15]

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Thank you.

The Minister for Social Security:

I think you asked was that what we expected through COVID. I think we probably expected a bit more than that even. It went very high and it came down quite quickly. It is still going down and we are not seeing so many claims. It is bad to what obviously we had but we are not as bad as we thought we could have been. I think that was the question you were asking as well.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

At the quarterly hearing on 5th May you stated that you had not yet had discussions about the department's plans to address the financial losses resulting from COVID-19 response. Have you had those discussions yet?

The Minister for Social Security:

Are you talking about the deferrals of social security and monies not being collected?

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Basically, have you had discussions about the financial losses that the department has had in relation to the COVID-19 responses? Have you had any discussions about how you may address these matters?

The Minister for Social Security:

Not in particular because at the moment we are still in the mode of trying to do fiscal stimulus, helping the economy, the first 2 quarters were completely frozen. We have now told businesses they have got 2 years. It was looking like a one-year but it is 2 years to pay that back. They will start paying these quarters and the last 2 quarters of the year. It is one of those things. We cannot ask them to pay any more at the moment when we are asking them to keep this money and reinvest it in their business. So we have had discussions. It is again all the big business discussions, how long do we borrow, how long do we make until we even the books. That is in line with all the other Ministers. There will be more of that in the Government Plan.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Have you made provision for further spending in 2020 in response to COVID-19 without plans to recover the resulting financial losses?

The Minister for Social Security:

With the people who come on income support, they must have the money. The plan is, again what I am saying, we need to make sure that we are covering the benefits that we are paying. That has been agreed. The budget is increased. What part of that is coming out of Ian can probably tell you but it is all the part that Susie's asked for for extra money, it is me giving her money from one fund and she gives me money back to pay the benefits. But we are not trying to collect it back off anybody at the moment.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

The Minister is right. In terms of income support, if we are forecasting it is £10.3 million overspend then there is a business case with the Minister for Treasury and Resources to provide us that £10.3 million for 2020. In the Government Plan there will also therefore be an increase to the income support budget for 2021 and beyond so that obviously there is enough money to pay out the benefit in line with the economic forecasts.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Has your department and the functions within the Minister's remit incurred any debt following the new fiscal stimulus measures?

The Minister for Social Security:

Not that I can think of. We have sent out already ... it is a payment but it just adds to the payment that we have sent out to all low income and Pension Plus people an extra £100. But that is because of what they have been through and also that we want them to spend this money locally. But it will be found. I would not class it as a debt. It could be classed as a debt, I would not class it as a debt.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

I will now move on to efficiencies. As part of the Government Plan 2020 to 2023, the Customer and Local Services Department was due to make £2.2 million worth of efficiencies in 2020. Please can you advise what proportion of the efficiencies under the Minister's remit have been achieved in 2020 so far?

The Minister for Social Security:

I think we were completely on track and we had the £944,000 as a buffer and then COVID hit, but we are still achieving. As you say, this is the extract from the published C.L.S. (Customer and Local Services) operational business plan. It is about the new target operating models, again that is just C.L.S., which is not necessarily ... some of my remit comes in there but it is a lot of other things so it might be easier for Ian to answer that, as it is his business plan where those efficiencies need to come from.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

So we had, I think, £2.220 million of efficiencies to make for 2020 and the largest chunk of that was £944,000, which was a reduction in the income support budget. Just talking about that one specifically, that budget was reduced. It started the year and for January, February and March the income support expenditure was coming in underneath the reduced budget, so that was on track. Obviously coronavirus has changed that significantly, as we have just been discussing, and with the forecast now going in the other direction. The remaining roughly £1.2 million worth of efficiency savings have all been made and they have been removed from budgets in 2020. The biggest chunk of that was the target operating model work which we were talking about before, but those have all been implemented; those budget reductions.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Basically, reductions in non-staff budgets of £0.3 million they have been achieved?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Yes, that is right.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Perfect, thank you. Finally from me before we move to Deputy Alves, what impact will the fiscal stimulus measures have on the Minister's planned efficiencies for the remainder of 2020?

The Minister for Social Security:

What impact would they have on my efficiencies, the fiscal stimulus?

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Yes.

The Minister for Social Security:

The fiscal stimulus needs to be paid out and the efficiencies are exactly what Ian says. We have achieved some but at the same time the budgets on the other side are going completely up. They are £3 million over what was planned for, for income support. The others are pretty set. Like the social security benefits, pensions and everything like that; they are slightly up as well. The fiscal stimulus is to again help the people to spend. It should not have any effect on my budget. I am not quite there yet, we will make bids into the fiscal stimulus if we maybe want to target different areas for reskilling or jobs or people to take people on, especially young people. That will be a bid into the pot and that will all again be in the Government Plan.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Thank you, I will now hand over to Carina Alves.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

Thank you, Chair. I am going to be picking up on some of the points in the Government Plan starting with financial independence and old age. Minister, you recently advised us that D3P Global Pension Consulting was commissioned to undertake scoping work in regard to financial independence and old age. From your initial discussions with D3P, concerning their draft report, did you note any specific findings as being of interest or concern?

The Minister for Social Security:

No, what we saw was a draft and there were different ways to look at this. It could have been a work-based pension, it could have been different, it could have been different in including our own pension. We have only got to there and then I had invited a few extra Ministers. It would have been the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture but his workload was too busy. This was just before COVID. Deputy Montfort Tadier was on the board and I thought we were

making some progress. There were lots of variations. It could be this, this and this and obviously to be worth anything somebody has to pay. But then COVID and we had tried one online discussion but, to be fair, I think their minds were on other things. This was early COVID, everything was going mad. To me everyone has sort of gone down that work-based pension and they seem to like that idea. But we did not get much more forward. I think we had about 3 meetings after January.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

Do you have a timeline in place to resume the discussions with D3P about their findings and possible next steps?

The Minister for Social Security:

This is a bigger picture. We need to have a discussion on ... I am sort of still up for it but I do not want to spend loads of time, a big report, when again this will be money. There are only 3 people ... companies, workers, government and that is all the same money really. It is one of those I am still thinking about. I knew it was always going to be a very, very tight timetable. I knew Guernsey were a couple of years ahead and I knew we could look over there and see how that was being received. That is more of now I need to have a bit more discussion on that. The timeline, if things carry on we can get started again last quarter or first quarter next year, if that is what we decide to do.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

Finally on this part, we are aware that £27,000 of the £150,000 allocated for 2020 has been spent so far. Are you still due to spend the remaining £123,000 allocated to this project or have the funds been reallocated as a result of COVID-19?

The Minister for Social Security:

No, the funds are there and it has given all the other things I have just said. Do I do another ... knowing I have not got a help in getting businesses behind me, workers behind me, or even the rest of the Assembly behind me, so that is the bigger picture. But the money is still there so I could resume it. I have to have a real good think about that one.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

Moving on to support for home care and carers. You stated that the pilot scheme for 2020 was delayed following the outbreak of COVID-19, which occurred in mid-March. What work had been carried out in 2020 prior to the outbreak of COVID-19?

The Minister for Social Security:

This is a small group of families who still have adults who are needing different sorts of care at home. It was one of my officers and I think an adult social worker who were literally dealing with family to family, going in homes explaining because they had been on this way. If you wanted to get them on to long-term care it had to be explained. Every family would have a different ... possibly an extra expense. It could be some have extra different food that they need. Some have extra washing that needs to be done every day, which unless they talk to all the family who did not appreciate that. These being probably a lot of the most vulnerable on the Island as well. It had to stop. People did not want our officers in their home and it could not be done on Teams. It is literally going to have to be when it is safe to do so and we are hoping to get started very early. It is not that many families. They know who we are and we know who they are. Hopefully we get started in early 2021.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

Has the delay of the pilot scheme incurred any additional costs or has it just been simply paused?

The Minister for Social Security:

It has just been simply paused because there will be ... if it all crossed over and it had worked then there would have been more money but that was a small budget, it has not been spent and it has not cost anything not to do. It is just staying as they were for the last 6 months. We would have liked to have seen it in the third quarter of this year but it is impossible.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

I am just going to move on to the disability strategy and community support. You recently advised that the recruitment of 2 additional staff members to support the work on the disability strategy was paused due to COVID-19 and has only just recommenced.

[14:30]

Was any interim support for the disability sector made available following the freeze on recruitment?

The Minister for Social Security:

Not that I know. Other than maybe helping organisations, which you know through our community group, if they were losing the people that normally would work they would be given other volunteers but, no, these 2 people are sorely needed and they will start interviews. I think there is a third, I may be wrong. It will be in sport so they have ... I think there is 3 and one is in sport but once they get started that is where we should have been right at the beginning of the year. But again it is end of August we are going to start interviewing.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

Thank you. That is all from me at the moment. I will pass on to Deputy Kevin Pamplin.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

My line of questioning is going to be around the COVID-19 response. I know you have touched upon that a little bit and because we are in States Assembly recess what we have tried to do here is play devil's advocate and think of questions that Members might have until we get to the Assembly. So starting with the obvious, the reducing of the social security contributions first, again would greater fiscal stimulus be achieved by investing the money into a more generous voucher scheme, the £100, instead of doing the contributions? Your thoughts.

The Minister for Social Security:

The economic adviser, and this was all new stuff to me and you give more money and save the economy. He wanted a package and so the vouchers will be having to be spent - that is fine - in the local economy. But this makes people feel in their pay packet, weekly or monthly, which is always monthly now, that they are going to have a little bit more money in their pocket. It is to give them confidence to spend in the economy. They know when it is happening, they know it is for 9 months, and they can plan better. It is not cheap. I think it is costing the department £26 million and about £8 million in 2020 and then the rest. But it was not hard to convince me once I got the why you would be giving money away at a time when you have never spent so much in the last 3 months. But this is the time that the confidence, the businesses need to know that they are there, people are going to do that little bathroom job, keep that small builder going, et cetera. So that was just one of the packages. I was quite happy with it. Although I am not getting the money it is what it is. It is not coming back, it is an actual cut for 9 months and it will be money in the workers' pockets.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Putting it another way. Why could you not target the reduction in social security contributions at the average earnings for workers in sectors maybe hardest hit by the outbreak and what we have been going through, so hospitality and retail, and cut the contributions where it could help those who are really feeling the pinch?

The Minister for Social Security:

I think sector specific we will need some extras but again the economy and the thing is keep it simple. So everyone gets a cut, the workers, but we may need to do more to industries with the other fiscal stimulus over the coming months, which has not been finalised yet. But that just makes it ... would it be sector specific, would it be sectors within sectors? So we are not doing the businesses, we are doing the workers. So we are giving it to the workers where they can choose to spend it in another business, hopefully, and it is the circle of life. It keeps going round.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

You just touched upon my next question there. Was it discussed or why was it ruled out not giving a reduction to employee contributions and not employees' contributions to; you just touched upon it there? Was it explored and why was that ruled out?

The Minister for Social Security:

On the panel that have got the experts on, apparently not so. They thought the one for the employees would be good. It came then down to the political oversight group, could I work with that? Yes. I mean again once it was completely explained to me. There may have been discussions and it was ruled out but it never came to me from officers or anyone else: "Would the Minister be able to do this, could she deal with it?" et cetera. So I am not saying there were not discussions. Ian has put his light on. I think Ian might have a few more ...

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

If that is okay. Obviously the Ministers were also discussing at the same time about the co-funded payroll scheme, which has been a tremendous success in keeping people in work and encouraging businesses to still be able to operate. I think that is the other part of it, is that it was always anticipated that the co-funded payroll scheme perhaps would it carry on, how long it would carry on for and in what degree? That is obviously supporting employers, keeping their costs and being able to keep people employed. So cutting employers' contributions has the same sort of effect as the co-funded payroll scheme albeit the co-funded payroll scheme is more targeted at the sectors who perhaps need the most help, as you questioned earlier on, Deputy. I think Ministers have the whole rounded package to have a look at. It is a combination of things we are trying to do; support businesses, support livelihoods but also create confidence, as the Minister said, and the people carry on spending and support the local economy.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

There is the rub, is it not? Because none of us have a crystal ball here in what the outcomes will be. This is something we have never seen before. That if wages do not go up or go down effectively because they are nervous, we do not know what the winter is going to do, that they do not spend the money. Equally then people get used to the reduction and then suddenly it jumps back up and if we are still in a bit of a bind economic-wise and people are still feeling the pinch will you then make a decision to continue it or how would you phase it back in, I guess, if people are still struggling.

The Minister for Social Security:

The regulations that are coming to the Assembly put the 9 months in, again as you say, nothing ... we have had to watch this right from the beginning not knowing everybody a lot of how it will react, how people will react. This is what I am told by the economic adviser and the panel that if you give

a bit more to people they will spend it in the local economy. The vouchers are definite. I think most people get it. It is their local economy as well as ... it does not do anything if you do not go and spend now when you feel you might want to go and have a treat those firms might not be there. It is as easy as that. But you cannot force people to spend it. You are right. If they save it ... but then again if they are not spending ... if it is not working in 9 months I would not extend it. Why would I if it is not working?

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Fair enough. You touched upon it earlier, £26 million it is costing, as you described. What impact does that have on the sustainability of the fund, and I guess that has been risk-tested as well?

The Minister for Social Security:

We are in a really fortunate position with the Social Security Reserve Fund. If they persuaded me that £26 million loss now can keep your economy and not see it just really go bad it is money well spent. But when they go up and if the economy then starts booming it probably will not take that long to ... we never say get it back straightaway but it is the difference of keeping people in work or seeing another few thousand possibly on income support, which nobody wants that. It is not good for anyone's morale. It is not good for anyone's health. And it is certainly not good for the economy because it is so proven that some people who come out of work, especially if they have had a small company and then they find themselves on benefits it is a hard slog to get back there. So it is just trying to keep the economy going. The F.P.P. (Fiscal Policy Panel), I have only read a few pages, said we are not doing too bad because of Jersey being Jersey. Let us hope that they are right. They normally are.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

We will have to wait and see on that one. You mentioned income support there. One of the things that has happened already is the payments to low income households. Before I go to my question could either you or Ian give us an update on how many payments have been processed and how do you know that they have been claimed because they have been direct payments and for those people who do not have bank accounts? If you just bring us up to date on how it has gone, how much money has gone out and how much you think has been used so far.

The Minister for Social Security:

You are talking about the extra £100 per person in income support and Pension Plus, yes?

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes, that has already gone.

The Minister for Social Security:

I have literally just come back on the Island on Monday and I have just had an update so Ian will be the one. But it is sounding brilliant and we have had some lovely letters but Ian can tell you if anything went wrong. But they are about one of the easiest people to get to, we have all their details, but Ian might know if there is anyone that was a bit awkward.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Yes, the Minister is right. It has gone very well. We are able to make the payments ... they landed on 24th July. They have gone straight into where we have bank accounts, which is the vast majority of people in income support and Pension Plus, we were able to make payments straight into people's bank accounts. We know that has been received because people have been calling us up and telling us what they are spending it on and thanking, et cetera. I have been asked to pass on thanks to the Minister for making the payment. There is a small group of people who do not receive their monies via bank accounts for lots of different reasons. Some of them receive cheques, some of them still receive it in small amounts of cash. Where we have safeguarding concerns, again we would not just ... where we have known individuals with safeguarding concerns we would not give it out to them in one go. We have managed about 300 people separately out of the main payment run. It has gone to 12,500 people roughly and the remaining people who have been receiving it in smaller amounts have obviously now received that money. As far as I am aware, it has gone very well and, as the Minister said, we have been getting people writing to us, asking us to pass on thanks to the Minister for the payment. That was relatively straightforward and easy to replicate if it was needed to.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

You just pre-empted my next question. If there was any left over or not claimed would you then think about maybe giving £100 to people on long-term incapacity benefits or those others that may need support during this crisis or because how well this has gone you would look to target other people who may really benefit from this, who are also struggling?

The Minister for Social Security:

I do not think there would necessarily be anything over because we have literally found the people we expected, we knew how many people are on income support, children and the Pension Plus. I do not think there is any over. If there is a case that we have missed somebody, I mean those people will get the other £100 voucher. Should they have had this as well? I can look into that. I do not know how many people you are talking about and we picked income support and the Pension Plus because we knew ... especially income support because a lot of them have lost ... so that might not be a lot of money but say they were getting half income support and half wages they would always be a little bit better off because when they were earning they keep 26 pence in the pound.

So then their hours dropped because they could not work so we knew that those families had lost quite a bit and even though that they were getting their benefit. So we targeted them and then they will get the other voucher as well. But it is on long-term incapacity you said?

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes, so anybody claiming long-term incapacity or any additional support really from Social Security, whatever that is, would it be something you would look at and see if there was an ability to support those people who are equally struggling?

The Minister for Social Security:

I will not not look at it. I had not even thought about that one until you mentioned it today and say how many people are on it, how many people are quite managing and have other income or how many people are struggling. We can look into that for you. Not a problem. Absolutely, I will look at that.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

If I could just jump in. So obviously there are quite a number of income support claimants who will be receiving long-term incapacity payments as well and so they would have obviously benefited from the £100 a head. Long-term capacity allowance is not a means-tested benefit. That obviously covers a wider range of the population, as long as people have paid in contributions in the past. So the Minister's action by targeting those on the lowest incomes will have picked up people who are struggling the most, including those who may be already on long-term incapacity allowance.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

So if there was somebody who just fell out of the system, so to speak, they should contact the department and it is something you would look at that maybe if they do meet the criteria for whatever reason possibly?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

If people are struggling they should definitely check out whether they can claim income support and get the financial support that is available to them, absolutely. They should give us a call.

[14:45]

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

I think that is a good message. Just some feedback we have been getting from people on long-term incapacity and it always a tricky one because people do not want to seem like they are looking for handouts and it is a very personal thing. But obviously if they missed out the threshold for the £100

that is gone on income support I can see where they are coming from. But that is good news. I guess the last question on the payment of £100 to low income families is there is no guarantee of course that that money could be spent locally because it has gone into the bank account, that person might use it to go shopping online or whatever. So just to reiterate again, this payment is not specifically there for targeted and local economy because it has gone into somebody's bank account, therefore they can use their card online and purchase online. It is to give some respite. I guess you would argue instead of ... obviously they could spend it locally but just a bit of clarity on that because obviously it is a slightly different thing to the thing we are going to talk about in a minute.

The Minister for Social Security:

We send it out ... what was the actual wording on the letters, Ian? You are right, it was money but we said something ... but if they boosted something and they spent £100 online that gives them still an extra £100 in their pocket to spend on the school shoes, the food or whatever. We wanted to get some money out to the people with the lowest incomes, most affected, how can we do it? We were not ready with the vouchers but they will get the vouchers and that will be all local. Yes, I think the chief economist says it is leakage but at the end of the day most lower incomes spend all their money and the majority will be local. It is just the way it is. It just gives them a bit more to spend locally.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Can I quickly cut in because there is something you said earlier that you are getting a lot of feedback from people on long-term incapacity that are struggling or the like? Would you be able to, as a panel, share that or go back to those people and see if you can share that information with us because that would be really helpful for us to go and target?

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes, and on that point some of the charities as well who support people with long-term disabilities and stuff. I am quite happy to orchestrate some of that because obviously they have come to me with my connections with charities, so, yes, I am more than happy to do that. I guess the final on this one is how do you capture the success of something in terms of ... I mean did you say when you told the people, like you have just described: "You are getting this money, obviously it is to help the economy but it is money in your account", is the way to sort of capture how it has been successful and go back to those people and say: "Oh, we are just touching base, how did you spend your money? Did you use it locally? Did you not?" just to sort of gauge the response from an actual point of view in terms of ... and it is great you have had good feedback, but do you know what I mean? Targeted feedback and where that money went and how it was used.

The Minister for Social Security:

Ian, have we got any plans to do that? But I think the economist would say the proof will be in the pudding when the economy just carries on going. These people are spending locally, they are spending that extra money locally, and then the £100 to be spent locally. I do not know how many ... I mean it was a few thousand people. I do not know if we write to them and ask them how do they spend their money seems a bit of an intrusion. But some sort of survey if you think that that would give us ... I am not sure it would give us everything. There is a survey already going out at the moment from another ... I have got it written down somewhere. That might be a question, I think it has already gone out, but what would you think on that, Ian, about asking people how they spent their extra money?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

I think you have covered it already, Minister, that the advice is that low income households tend to spend all their income so there is no real question that people have saved it and the messaging that went out was to spend it locally at your favourite business. The chief economist, Nick Vaughan, would say that people will spend it and that is the feedback we have had, that people have spent it. It is a different question with the £100 card because we wish to have some better data on that scheme and understanding what sort of areas that has been spent on on-Island.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Let us quickly, from me, touch on that £100 voucher. The first question is you are bringing the social security contributions to the Assembly, that is obvious because there are regulations we have to debate that, but not the £100 voucher. I guess this has been a Government decision anyway. Why is that? Why was the £100 card stimulus because it is quite unique to the Island as well? Do you intend seeing it come to the Assembly or is it just now down the train and it is going to happen?

The Minister for Social Security:

Things that come to the Assembly like the regulations must come to the Assembly. Again, it is timely and targeted and it was one ... it is unique to Jersey but when the economists were looking around the world there was a couple of other countries doing similar and it was like this could really work in Jersey, it could be targeted, business can work with it. When these vouchers go out if I was a business I would be targeting that £100 and giving you £110's worth of goods; overnight stay with a breakfast or something. You know what I mean? It is something they could really work with. Need to go to the Assembly? It does not. It is something that the fiscal group, Treasury, I was on that group, officers, tax group, we all went back and said: "This is part of the package, it should work." We hope to have it in before we sit in the Assembly.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Very clear. Some quickfire questions here. Can you provide us updates on how it is going to work, how they are going to be distributed to the Island so everybody gets their voucher and they are monitored because obviously we do not want people claiming other people's vouchers and somebody using their child's instead of theirs, will they be named? Can you give us a bit of an update on how it is going to work?

The Minister for Social Security:

Ian is going to have to give you the operational part of it because I literally came back on Island, as I say ... I will get an update tomorrow at my Social Security but him and his officers are ... the policy is to get it out to everybody and he might not have to give me an update tomorrow because he is going to tell me now how it is exactly going to work.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

No pressure. I will do my best. We are still working on the exact final details but broadly we are looking to send cards to all adults on the Island that we have address details for. We are working with colleagues in the Health Department and Tax Department to ensure that our data quality is as high as it possibly can be and using obviously recent addresses. That is harder than it sounds, but we are working hard to make sure that we can give as many people their cards directly. We wanted very much to avoid the need for Islanders to apply for the card because that would create a barrier for many in between being able to get access to the card and the £100 and, therefore, the whole purpose of the scheme, which is to create fiscal stimulus and energy and confidence across the Island. Therefore, we are trying to send as many people as possible a card. There will be a sort of backup application process. If somebody has potentially been missed out for whatever reason, they will still be able to get a card in the 2-month period. We are looking at the distribution methods for children, which is slightly different, both school-age children and also children under school age. We are still finalising those details, but we have a number of options there potentially around those cards. They could be quite different in terms of their operation as well as distribution methods, but again we are trying to avoid people having to apply online for cards, for adults or for children of any age.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Okay. Quickly, will there be exceptions to this voucher, i.e. they will not be allowed to use in bookies or other areas we do not want people to maybe use it for the wrong reasons, so to speak, who would be sort of barred? So you tap in and it just will not be accepted, something like that?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

So, the Council of Ministers have given us a steer, which is to try and make the cards as open as possible because that will give us the best distribution of fiscal stimulus activity across the Island.

Of course, there is a hope also that people spend more than £100 when they are doing various things, so the wider it can be spread the better. But the key benefits of using a card is that people can use it on smaller purchases as well rather than be concentrated around lump sum vouchers, but with the card also we get very good data on where things are being spent, which sectors it is being spent on, and that will be very helpful going forward, I think, in terms of understanding how the money is being spent, £11 million is being spent in the economy. The cards will be restricted so they can only be used geographically in Jersey, and they will not allow online purchases as well. Also, although there will be a P.I.N. (personal identification number) with the card, you will not be able to withdraw out cash. What you will be able to do, though, is use the P.I.N. to check the balance on the card.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Very good, thanks for that. Final question from me, Minister. So, the sort of feedback we have seen from all walks of life is there are some sectors of the Island who are simply saying: "We do not need this, we do not want this." So various options are being discussed, we are seeing it playing out, giving it to charities, not accepting it. Could it be that this could have been means tested so, therefore, it is targeted to middle Jersey, workers and stuff, and that higher bracket of individuals who simply say they do not want it, that would put more back in the pot and then maybe you could have targeted, I do not know, £200 to targeted families? Is that something that ... is it too late to rethink that and how to go about that?

The Minister for Social Security:

Well, I think I had this question asked to me. COVID did not means test and we have so many middle Jersey. Where would you cut it off? I mean, income support is quite a low income depending ... then is it couples with 2 children? It gets very complicated and if you have to start means testing, you have to start going through every ... is it 2 children and a joint income of £60,000, £70,000? Do they own a house? Have they got a mortgage or have they bought the house outright? It just got really, really ... yes, we have some millionaires and they can donate some parts, they can buy things and give them to charities, they can do this. They can even give it back. Now, look, if they want to give it back, then there is not a problem. See how many give it back and redistribute the money that was on them, but it was just everything ... you start means testing the middle, Kevin, and it is: "Oh, look, those always get everything and we never get nothing." As I say, it just seemed easier, your 2.5, you know, 2 adults, 2 children, just give them all the £100. There will be some innovative ways they are going to spend it. Everyone thought the kids were going to go out to Bambola. Well, my kids I know would treat me to a meal and they would not get their ... they would treat me to a meal. Kids are generous. Kids are innovative and, as I say, who might have been having quite a good time of it last year are seeing some real damage done to their businesses and I think we are targeting right. We will be giving it obviously to a few people ... well, the rich, rich, rich, as you call them, I

am sure they will find a way to get it to the right people and, if not, just say to send it back. Now, if we end up with quite a few back we can rethink where we can re-put that money.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

I think that is the key point, is it not? Because what you do not want is the money sat out in the Island not being spent. Let us be honest, on this Island people have very busy lives or people just forget it is there. Is there a way you can follow that up and say: "Look, we have noticed you are not spending that money. If you are not going to spend it, just the first port of call is give it back to us"?

The Minister for Social Security:

Well, from memory, Kevin, the cards are only operational for 2 months, is it not, 8 weeks? So, then the money would disappear off of them. The money would not have been spent, so then we could probably think about ... we would know who they were, but this is the beauty of it as well. It is time limited so they do not ... how many times, I am sorry, somebody - I love them - has bought me a Christmas voucher out of a lovely shop and I mean to go in there and I go in there, I did not realise it was a year and a month later, and they have gone out of ... apparently that is not legal but I do not know, because you have spent money buying it, but they do. So it is to get people out in town, town buzzing, spending and everything, and they have ... is it 2 months, Ian? We did talk about 3 but I think we went back to 2, did we not?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Yes. So, if I could just build upon what you have said there, Minister, the cards ... one of the other things the Council of Ministers asked us to look at when we were trying to work out how we might do this was that the cards would potentially be reusable. So the cards themselves will have a much longer ... like on your normal credit card will have a much longer expiry date.

[15:00]

But with these cards we can deposit money in the cards at the beginning, in September, and then at the end of October when the 2 months is up, we will just remove all remaining balances from the cards, thus we are encouraging people to spend it. Depending how much money then is available, obviously the Council of Ministers will consider how that is best used to help deliver the priorities of the fiscal stimulus programme. But that, therefore, creates that 2-month window but also hopefully maybe opens up options, if it works, to do this again and reuse the cards perhaps in 2021 maybe. So, yes, there is quite a bit to work through, as you can see. We are on track and we are looking ... at the moment we are running a campaign to help make sure that people, if they have moved address and have not told Government, then they should do so. We are encouraging people to do that at the moment.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

You just reminded me there, Minister, the critics of the scheme, which is fine because it is, again, playing devil's advocate here, there are obviously people who like it, but the critics are saying it does not go targeted enough, that we know the industries who are really struggling, do we not, hospitality, those sort of industries? Could you arguably say: "Look, can we target it even more? How could you limit it?" I guess it is difficult, I understand it, but again how could you say to businesses: "If you want to be brought into this scheme, you really want to buy in" maybe do it that way, instead of it being spent and it goes off-Island. I am just playing devil's advocate on how could it be more targeted or is it just we do not have enough time really because you want it out by September?

The Minister for Social Security:

It is not about we do not have enough time. Everyone says, we all know, hospitality, but some of the hospitality has done better than others. They were doing lots of takeaways and they were doing this. It is your small beauty shops, your coffee shops, retailing. You know, WHSmith on our Island, it is a chain. They are laying off is it ... anyway, loads of employees. It all has a knock-on effect. Yes, there are going to be some that are going to be worse but, again, targeting ... you cannot just say retail, you cannot just say hospitality, because do you mean pubs that have been doing quite well since they opened? Is it hotel stays? Yes, and did we have time? Because while we are sitting ... you know, it is a bit like fiddling while Rome burns and suddenly we do not have any economy and we should have targeted there, targeted there. The economists said you have to get it out there. This is the time. The payroll scheme starts going away a bit, starts ... and it has to be there, gives people ... same as the cut in the social security, it all has to be in the pockets, the confidence to go and spend or just sit there with it in your pocket. Then the economy, honestly, they convinced me, will not do very well. So, yes, simple and, again, it is businesses ... as I say, once we have given it out, I think the businesses should be doing the deals. They are businessmen and I am only a Minister for Social Security, never run a business ... a wet fish stall outside a pub, when I was about 19 for about 2 years, but loved every minute.

Assistant Minister for Social Security (2):

Can I just add in that I think this voucher scheme is definitely about trying to help local businesses, whatever? Because all local businesses, whether they be like you mentioned earlier, a betting shop or something, all employ people. So they always employ staff, and by giving this to do something in the economy and saying: "Spend it in the economy", wherever it goes it will help people keep jobs and at the same time give people something for it as well. So I think that is where if you target too hard you are penalising. We know from things like the co-funded payroll scheme ... let us look at Jersey Gas, for instance. When you start putting barriers on to this kind of help and where it can go, then you get an awful lot of trouble in other areas that you might not foresee, Deputy.

Assistant Minister for Social Security (1):

Yes, and if I can just add into that, I think when we talk about fiscal stimulus it is part of a package. There are always going to be different elements and, as you picked up, part of it will be redistributed, which has happened with what we have done already. As Scott has talked about, it is about jobs. The other bit which the voucher scheme is particularly good for, and it is a bit of behavioural psychology, again it is about giving people the confidence to get back out into town, into a restaurant, all those kinds of behaviours that we kind of abandoned in the last couple of months. Again, it is trying to encourage that because, again, going out and meeting friends in restaurants and everything ... and, therefore, that does not really matter what your income is. If you want to encourage that behaviour and get people back into those processes, obviously safely with keeping social distancing and taking the appropriate mitigations, again it is trying to encourage people to go back into those behaviours that encourage our economy. It is not just a case of something being redistributed around the fiscal stimulus, it is trying to achieve different aims. I hope that clarifies it.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes, good, I think it is just good to have these open conversations because I think it is new for everybody. It is really important that it stays on the Island and it is used in local businesses and people feel confident, so I think it was a good point. On that and feeling confident and talking about friends, let us head to St. John now and hand over to Deputy Trevor Pointon, who will take over from here. Thank you.

The Deputy of St. John:

Thank you, Deputy Pamplin, for that brilliant introduction. Minister, my job here today is to talk about C.R.E.S.S. (COVID-19 Related Emergency Support Scheme). I was wondering, for the sake of the people watching and listening, if you could explain what the acronym C.R.E.S.S. means and why the arrangement or what group of people is the arrangement created for.

The Minister for Social Security:

So it is COVID Related ... I just say C.R.E.S.S. now. COVID Related ... I cannot ... Scheme.

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

Shall I help out?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, go on. I cannot. I have called it C.R.E.S.S. for so long.

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

It is COVID Related Emergency Support Scheme.

The Minister for Social Security:

That is it. I knew the last was scheme. Thank you, Sue. Sorry, the second part of the question, Trevor, was?

The Deputy of St. John:

The second part of the question was: for what group of people was this arrangement put into place?

The Minister for Social Security:

About 2 or 3 weeks, might have been 4 weeks, before we knew this was going to hit bad and then we knew that flights were stopping, I was asked questions: do I want people under 5 years to do X, Y or Z and do I want to give something ... I went: "Yes." So I did not want people to automatically go on income support because it has been a qualifying period for a long time. So then there was this scheme which I had to go to the Council of Ministers. So, basically, it was everybody who had been here in March 2020 and they may not have even worked, I do not think, but they were here. When I say not worked, they were signing up to work but COVID had hit and the business they were going to work in was shut down. So, that was it. On average, I think the majority of people have been here a year or 2. There was a few, not many, that had been sort of nearer the 5 years, around 4, 4½, but that was the people it was targeted to help who had lost their jobs.

The Deputy of St. John:

Thanks for that, Minister. We really want to bring ourselves up to date with the way the scheme has been working. Could you give us a breakdown of the current numbers of people in receipt of the C.R.E.S.S. payment?

The Minister for Social Security:

I thought I had up to date but I have 470 and I do not think that is right. I think that is the people who registered right at the beginning. We shut the scheme to new people on 1st August and it shuts completely on 30th August or the 31st. Ian, do you have the up-to-date numbers? Because I thought I had them. I know they are going down. They have gone down a lot from the beginning because a lot of people are finding work and some have now returned home because of the flights. Thanks.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Yes, we are I think on about 120 to 110 claims at the moment. It has dropped right down. People have been returning to work as employers have picked up activity, and also, as the Minister says, some people have gone back to be with their families. So, the combination of the 2 things has brought this ... I think the last time we checked I think pretty much everybody who is claiming

C.R.E.S.S., there are no restrictions on anybody getting home at the moment if they wanted to, but the scheme, as the Minister says, is due to ... has now closed to new entrants and will close at the end of August. We are speaking to C.R.E.S.S. claimants, all of them, to make sure that they have plans, they are aware of this, and that they are taking the necessary steps to be able to support themselves at the end of August. Obviously, C.R.E.S.S. payments were only providing a certain level of actual financial support so they have been supporting themselves anyway throughout the period via a number of different ways. But the scheme is currently planned to close at the end of August.

The Deputy of St. John:

Yes, of course, but there was a time when you were going to close it down at the end of June, was there not, and you extended the scheme?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, absolutely. It was like 1st April to the end of June, 3 months, like originally the co-funded payroll, but obviously we did not know how long COVID and there were no flights. You know, the majority of those people who were claiming were stuck here. If they could have gone before COVID they would have, but their countries had shut down. So, yes, I could not shut it then when it was ... it will not get any more people on it but they were not getting off it. So we had that 470 to start with and then it dipped, but no, we took the decision to extend it to the end of August. We are writing, as Ian says, and we are constantly in contact reminding them that this benefit or this support will be going. That is why I knew that that 470 was right; it was just over the 100, 120 claims at the moment. Then it is still early. They may get a job. They might be still thinking about their future. I do not know what they are going to be doing but that is it, yes.

The Deputy of St. John:

Okay. For that extended period, Minister, could you tell us how many people responded to your efforts to get them to ... to inform them about C.R.E.S.S.? How many people applied during that month between 30th June and 31st July?

The Minister for Social Security:

Well, they went down. The figures have been going down since 1st April. So April, May and June and then they have been going down. Sorry, I am not quite clear, Deputy, of the question.

The Deputy of St. John:

Just really the numbers that had applied and if you are saying they are going down, the numbers are possibly going down because as the ports opened people were able to get off the Island and some people will have found jobs as well, which is what you were just saying.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, so it has gone down. Obviously, nobody has applied or if they have applied they have been told there is no ... from 1st August, but it stands at 120 and I think at its highest it was 470. But I could not have shut it at the end of June, definitely. We did not open the ports until I think 12th July and some of the other countries are a lot more ... you know, they have to get to wherever they have to get to, so end of August seems to be working okay. If something really curveball comes from somewhere, I have permission from C.O.M. (Council of Ministers) to look at it again, but it is going the right way that we thought it would and most people can leave and the majority are getting the jobs that they came here for or that they have been doing the last 2 or 3 seasons.

The Deputy of St. John:

Okay. For those that are in jobs or were claiming C.R.E.S.S. or are claiming C.R.E.S.S., do you know how many of those people are accommodated by their employer at all?

The Minister for Social Security:

I do not. Ian, is that the sort of thing we keep when they apply? Is it on the application form?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

We would have had their address, yes, and some of those addresses would have been registered with hotels or accommodation, but I do not have that with us. We have been asked this question previously in a more general sense and it has been very difficult to ... well, we have not been able to get the information because many of the addresses just look like normal addresses but they are in sort of tied accommodation. Sue has her light on, though, so she is perhaps jumping in.

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

I was going to say when we did try to look at it, I appreciate what you have just said is that you cannot tell all of them, but about one in 5 people were, as you say, obviously in staff accommodation, but Ian's point is absolutely important that you cannot necessarily tell by looking at somebody's address.

The Deputy of St. John:

Okay. The follow-on from that is: are you aware of anyone that has become homeless because of their inability to work and the inability of C.R.E.S.S. to support them to a level that may keep them in accommodation?

[15:15]

The Minister for Social Security:

Not at the moment. We had meetings with the Minister for Children and Housing and his team through the community support group in the height of COVID. Do not forget, the rents and the restrictions are there until September. Again, a lot of this is tied accommodation and it does not cover the Residential Law that Sam is working under, so you cannot evict. But I have heard there ... I think there are a few people who have become homeless, not because they were not on C.R.E.S.S. or they were not working, but they are very individual cases. So, to us, no, but there are some but you would find out more detail from the Minister for Children and Housing and the team. As I say, there are different issues. Some of these people have different issues, though they still need a home.

The Deputy of St. John:

Okay. Now that the ports are open and the scheme ends at the end of August, are you anticipating a significant number of people leaving the Island yet again?

The Minister for Social Security:

So it was 470 and we have 120. Some would have just come off of it and started work. Some would have just come off of it and gone home if they have saved the money or the family might have sent them fares. We have had a few who have literally ... I think these are the people who did come here, could not work so they had no money other than C.R.E.S.S. and they were on a lower amount, that we have repatriated. Everyone has looked into their finances and they want to go home. But it is not in the hundreds, is it? It is a handful of people.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

I think, Minister, you have supported roughly 25 to 30 people, I think, to get home financially, but obviously of the remaining people left, the general consensus is they want to stay on the Island and they are obviously keen to find work. We are helping them find work as well, but I do not think, from the latest intelligence from the team, that there are many people planning on going home, although that clearly is an option and there is no current travel restriction stopping people going home.

The Deputy of St. John:

Okay, thanks for that. Of those people that you did repatriate, did the funds come out of the funds available to the C.R.E.S.S. scheme?

The Minister for Social Security:

They were special payments. They have probably come out of the Social ... it would not have been the C.R.E.S.S. scheme. It was Social Security budget.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Yes, I think that is right.

The Deputy of St. John:

Okay.

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

Yes, there is an ongoing process whereby we help repatriate people on a very low level all the time and they are processed through the income support budget and they come out of the ... and they are paid for through the income support budget.

The Deputy of St. John:

Thanks for that. Do you have any predictions about how many of the people who are currently receiving C.R.E.S.S. are likely to still be unemployed at the end of August when the scheme finishes?

The Minister for Social Security:

I would say no. As Ian said, they are all looking at the moment. They are looking for work. They obviously would be confident ... what have they got? Just under 4 weeks now until the money runs out, the scheme finishes. So, I do not know and, again, how far do you push someone? You do not want to be saying: "Are you working? If you are not, you have to leave." We cannot do that and would not want to do that, so they must have a plan, I am presuming.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

One of the things about the C.R.E.S.S. scheme, of course, is that unlike income support it is not means tested. The Minister has put this scheme in to help provide a level of financial support but we do not know the backgrounds of individuals. They may have other incomes, other assets, that they can sustain themselves even if they do not have work. That is one of, I suppose, the challenges of doing a scheme like that and trying to keep it simple and do it very quickly is that we have not done the same sort of means testing as we would do for somebody who has been here 5 years and on income support.

The Deputy of St. John:

I appreciate that, but there are going to be some people, are there not, who are not going to be able to support themselves? Are you going to be able to offer some support under a different guise or are you going to be able to assist people, even when the scheme is finished, to repatriate?

The Minister for Social Security:

Well, the repatriation has been there, as Sue has said. It is one of those things, for different reasons over the years people find themselves destitute in Jersey and they want to get home. Look, before COVID it has been the hard 5 years. I have supported and represented people over the years. Sometimes 6 months before and different circumstances, I have got the department to agree to income support. That is the law. That has been the law since it came in in 2008. It was the same under welfare, the certain amount of years before you get a penny from your parish. So, I have said to the officers these 120 people, they need to be being told exactly what they are going to get at the end of August and it is what they would have got with no COVID. Unfortunately, Trevor, that is nothing.

The Deputy of St. John:

Yes, I accept that.

The Minister for Social Security:

I am not saying there are not other places. I know people who stay in Jersey and they live and they get support. It is not unheard of but it would not be income support, no.

The Deputy of St. John:

No, but have you had any concerns expressed by current recipients about the 31st August deadline? Have you had any feedback from people who will be losing that financial support?

The Minister for Social Security:

I have not personally. I do not know ... as I say, the department wrote to them all and they are in contact on the phone. Because we are concerned. I do not want them to turn round and say: "Oh, we did not know this." They absolutely know because they are spoken to. Not just the letter, they are spoken to. As Ian has just said, have they got money or some sort of other income that might be able to keep them here after, or a partner that is going to support them? All this because it is not means tested, it was put together quickly, it did exactly what we wanted it to do, make sure people had enough money for a roof over their head ... well, obviously, you know, but food on the table, that was the main thing, that they could survive those COVID lockdown months. Ian might be more ... oh, he did turn his light on; he has turned it off again. He might know, but I am not sure we would go down in that far detail, as long as we are making sure they know it is finishing.

The Deputy of St. John:

Yes, okay. Finally, have you had any complaints about the scheme from the general public or from the recipients of the scheme?

The Minister for Social Security:

Me personally, no, and I have ... people, the general consensus is: "I am so glad that this" ... well, not the Government, the States of Jersey helped. When you look around the world and saw people were literally put on the streets in countries because they were not from there, disgusting. That was never going to happen with me and it was not going to ever happen under the rest of the Council. It was one of the very high-level decisions we made very early on. How we were going to do it we did not know, but they all came together. But there might be an individual, Ian, that ... not particularly, no, not at all, really. No one has come to me about the C.R.E.S.S. scheme, as the Minister, and said: "Oh, this is absolutely terrible." Again, Ian might want to elaborate on that, but definitely not as a Minister.

The Deputy of St. John:

Okay, thanks for that, Minister. I am going to pass you over to Deputy Alves. She gets a second go at this.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

Yes, sorry, my dog is going a bit crazy in the background. Okay, so I am going to be talking about the co-funded payroll scheme. Do you have a breakdown of the participating companies that provided employer accommodation?

The Minister for Social Security:

I do not run the co-funded payroll scheme, but Ian does.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

Okay.

The Minister for Social Security:

So, yes, I think he will probably ... I have not got that information because I did not know how detailed you were going to go. Your question was the companies who provide accommodation who are on the co-funded scheme. I do not even know if Ian would have that, or I doubt if he would have it today but he might be able to get hold of it. Ian, do you?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

No. So, the businesses who are claiming, of course, are claiming as the business and they are claiming for individuals based upon what they have paid for people. They are not claiming ... it is not the individuals themselves who are claiming. So, that is the first thing. The Minister is right, it is not the Minister for Social Security's scheme, it is the Minister for Treasury and Resources' scheme and Customer and Local Services are administrating it on the Minister for Treasury and Resources' behalf. As we mentioned earlier, the level of information we have around tied or staff

accommodation is not very good. We have been asked the question before and not been able to provide an answer. There is no law that requires the registration of staff accommodation specifically and, therefore, we do not have a register that we can verify it against. So, unfortunately, we do not have that information, Deputy.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

Okay, thank you. So, do you have forecasts for unemployment rates resulting from the phasing out of the co-funded payroll scheme employer subsidies?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

We have the latest Fiscal Policy Panel forecasts that have come out yesterday. They talk about the changes in employment. That does not necessarily result in unemployment but there is a suggestion there that unemployment over the winter would increase. Obviously, we are not seeing that at the moment. We are seeing a reduction. The original forecasts we had from the previous Fiscal Policy Panel predictions from the chief economist suggested that the unemployment would be high, much higher than it is now, much higher than it got to, and also it would still be very high at the end of this year but would have reduced. So, we are yet to have an updated unemployment forecast based upon yesterday's figures but you would expect with all the measures that are taking place one would hope that things would continue to improve, although the Island does tend to have a bit of seasonality in terms of its unemployment, which tend to see more people being unemployed in January and February time after the Christmas season and also in and around October/November time when the summer season ends. How that works this year is difficult to predict given the coronavirus situation, but it is just pleasing to see unemployment dropping every week and that is very positive for those individuals and their families.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

Okay, thank you. My last question on this section is: it was recently announced that the scheme will have an estimated cost of £93 million by the end of August. It was further announced that it would cost an additional £26 million to £53 million up until March 2021. So, if the scheme costs an additional £53 million, is it correct that this will bring the potential total cost to £146 million?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, I think that is ... if you add those 2 together, I think the scheme, what it was budgeted ... so when the original scheme was budgeted for, it was budgeted for lots more people to be claiming, I think. So I think those 2 figures added together are more than the original but they are not so scary as the officers or the Ministers had sort of looked at. Ian, is that right, £146 million to the end of March next year if everyone claims, that is, again, or is that just an ...?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Yes, I think the forecasts have ... you are right, Minister, that the original forecasts were much higher based upon a much higher level of claiming. We have seen each month so far that the actual number of people claiming and the amounts has reduced slightly, and that is positive because that shows that the scheme is working and the businesses are able to get back into their normal operating positions. The forecasts going beyond August have been perhaps more realistic than the original ones based upon obviously a number of months' operations, but they are still forecasts and forecasts are often proven to be wrong. Obviously, also forecasting with a different scheme - the scheme does change quite a bit in the next 6 months - and obviously we all hope that businesses do not need it because if they are doing well and the economy is recovering, then hopefully very few businesses will end up claiming it.

[15:30]

But ultimately I think the numbers you have quoted are the numbers that were issued in the press release, I think.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

Okay, thank you. My final couple of questions are on the family friendly legislation, the Appointed Day Act. Please can you provide an update on the implementation of the family friendly legislation since it was brought into force on 28th June this year?

The Minister for Social Security:

Well, it was only able to be brought in because we are doing a secondary non-statutory scheme to pay the employer the 6 weeks' wages for dad, and that is going okay. I do not think too many have applied but it is there if they need it. That is the reason I could get the scheme in. I asked yesterday; yes, all the things, the 32 weeks, the new benefits, are being worked on and again we want to get that to you first, lodged probably late in the year, could even be December, and the debate early January. I checked; we are still on that timescale which I told you last time, I think, but I had to check myself because now you think COVID is over but there is so much to be done. But yes, the law draftsman has got on it and it is being worked on, so it is all on time.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

Okay. Have employers or employees reported any issues with the operation of the new legislation in practice?

The Minister for Social Security:

They would normally go through J.A.C.S. (Jersey Advisory and Conciliatory Service). I have not heard anything because it is so new. The scheme seems to be working fine but that is all about pay. I suppose you are talking about antenatal appointments, breastfeeding and everything. I have not. Sue might have a bit more of an update but, as I say, I have been off the Island for a couple of weeks. I have not personally, no, Deputy. Have we got an update, Sue?

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population:

I cannot give you any more update than that. Issues would come through J.A.C.S. so all I can tell you is negative news, i.e. we have not heard from J.A.C.S. about anything which is causing a problem. So, we assume that things are working okay. It is obviously very early days and we will just keep the situation under review.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

Okay. Finally from me, at the last quarterly hearing ... sorry?

The Minister for Social Security:

Can I thank all the panel, because I have not seen you all together, for supporting all of that to go through in the middle of COVID? It was really, really refreshing. I have not been able to thank you all separately, so I am thanking you all together. Thanks so much for that support. Thank you.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

Thank you, you are very welcome. So, just finally, at the last quarterly hearing on 5th May, you stated that there were no plans to introduce any additional benefits to parents who give birth after July 2020. Is this still the case?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, because ideally everything would have come in together but that work with the law draftsman and everything just completely fell away. So I could have waited and then nobody would have got the year and it would have ... or do the small scheme, but that will all be in the legislation that is coming to you. You will see it first, yes.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

Okay, thank you, Minister.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Sorry, I was just going to say we have got a couple more questions which we are going to ... if it is okay with you, Minister, we will send them to you for written responses. Because I am conscious of the time and we have another briefing at quarter to. I know that Deputy Pamplin wanted just a final

question in relation to a matter to clarify something, and if there was anything else that anybody finally had a question or query on, then we could take those and then finish, if that is in order.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, there is a meeting going on, but yes, a couple of minutes. It is my fault we started late; I had no camera. So, yes, absolutely, Deputy Pamplin.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

I just want to pick up, Minister, on what I was talking about earlier on targeting extra support. I mentioned earlier income support ... long-term capacity, did I not, earlier? Another issue that is coming along - and I have had a couple of these and a couple of States Members have also raised this with me because they knew today we were having this - there are people that fall into this bracket, people from 18 but under 25, who are at home with their parents and for whatever reason have either not found employment or have lost jobs but equally may be suffering from long-term physical or mental health, and equally the parents, because they no longer can claim child relief tax because they are over 18, and let us say the working parent - in this case a single mum in the case I am thinking of - she has had a reduction in her wage at the same time but is struggling to support. So I am just wondering if there is any work or any scheme that you as a department could look at to support these brackets of people where these 18 to 25s are living at home, being supported by their parents for whatever the reason is but the parents are in financial hardship, even though they may have an income and it may just slightly put them over the threshold for income support but are starting to feel the pinch. Is there anything there that could be looked at in supporting those families?

The Minister for Social Security:

Well, I have had this question I think in the Assembly and I have had this question before. Now, funnily enough, when income support came in, it did give some money to ... I think were they just income support? So every child 18 to 25 who were on income support would have got the ... the family would have got the extra £100 or they would have got it. I think my answer is, Kevin, you have seen how much the budget is out of what it should have been. It will just either keep the same budget and spread it slightly thinner or I decide that the parents of the 18 to 25s, which is just above, support them, and there are many out there. I am not looking at anything because, as I say, the money will have to come from somewhere. It might spread thin, take it away from Peter to give it to Paul. But look, you are not the first person. Deputy Morel asked me this question. Deputy Ward asked me this question. If this is a massive issue, can you get together and get me some evidence? I do not need the names, I just need to know the problem. I really need to know the problem because I cannot solve a problem for 4 or 5 families. Are you talking 500 families, 100 families? Do you see what I mean, Deputy?

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes. I mean, I think that is the thing. Again, you know me, if I have a case ... and your department have always been very good like this. I have a couple of people who fall into this bracket and if it is something you would look at specially ... this one family, she is a single mum. She is working. She has just lost £600 per month because of the increased tax payments. The poor child has severe ... a situation with her mental health and suddenly she has to support her because she cannot get out of the house, she cannot work. So if there are these cases that are coming about because of this unique situation we find ourselves in that you will look at and see if there is any support that you can find. Maybe, as you say, it is not a wide thing but these families really are saying: "Look, we have never asked for handouts before but we really are in a situation." Will you look at it?

The Minister for Social Security:

Deputy Pamplin, yes. Look, now you have explained, if each case you send that case to me and copy in Kim Baker, we will get it to the right people. It might not be just financial help, there might be something else that is out there that we do not know about it; absolutely look at that. I know the question and it is just one of those, and a lot of these 18 to 25 year-olds are even maybe over from ... not the 25s, but possibly coming home from uni this year, their summer jobs were not there. The absolute COVID message was roof over head, food in ... I know, and now that things are opening up, these youngsters are maybe the ones that are not ... but we are doing a lot of work to make sure that the businesses can take on these youngsters. They do not need to have been actively seeking work for 6 months, so they can take them on now. So let us hope that helps, but that specific case that you describe seems there would be complications in. I do not like to get into too many individual cases in a hearing like that, but absolutely we will talk to you. I can meet with you or whatever, no problem with that at all.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Okay. I think if there ... because we do not know - we do not have a crystal ball - what is out there, and I think that is a good message to put out. Thank you, Minister. Thank you, good to see you, and that is it. I will hand back to the chair to wrap up.

The Minister for Social Security:

Thank you.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Okay. Well, thank you very much for all those questions and answers and for your contribution this afternoon, and no doubt look forward to seeing you in another 3 months. As I said, we will put the final 3 questions that we wanted ... matters we wanted updates on in a form of writing in order that we can get a response from you. Thank you very much, all.

[15:39]