



Health and Social Security Scrutiny Panel

Quarterly Hearing

Witness: The Minister for Social Security

Thursday, 2nd December 2021

Panel:

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

Deputy K.G. Pamplin of St. Saviour

Senator S.Y. Mézec

Witnesses:

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

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

Mr. P. McGinnety, Director of Local Services, Customer and Local Services

Ms. S. Duhamel, Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department

Mr. M. MacGregor, Senior Policy Officer 1, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department

Mr. N. Turner, Senior Policy Officer 2, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department

Mr. M. Viney, Senior Policy Officer 3, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department

Ms. S. Sugden, Senior Policy Officer, Social Security Department

[10:11]

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

Good morning. This is the final hearing for 2021 with the Minister for Social Security. Thank you to those who are attending and apologies for delay. We are both in the building and remote, so the technical issues are always, as you know, a little bit hit and miss. I am going to ask those people who are going to participate to introduce themselves in relation to their name and also the post which they hold, and I will kick it off. Then I will ask the 2 people present of the panel to also follow me. Deputy Carina Alves unfortunately is unable to participate today. I will unfortunately have to leave

in about 40 to 50 minutes' time and Deputy Pamplin will take over from me as the Deputy Chair. I am Deputy Mary Le Hegarat and I am Chair of the Health and Social Security Scrutiny Panel.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin of St. Saviour:

Yes, good morning, everybody. Deputy Kevin Pamplin of St. Saviour District No. 1, and I am, as stated, the Vice Chair of the panel.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Good morning. Senator Sam Mézec, new member of this panel.

The Minister for Social Security:

Deputy Judith Martin, Minister for Social Security. Sorry, we are having some echoes here, yes. I am giving apologies for my Assistant Minister. He had already booked the planning bus.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Good morning, Ian Burns, Director General for Customer and Local Services.

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department:

Hello, Sue Duhamel, Head of Policy at Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department.

Senior Policy Officer 1, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department:

Good morning. Mark MacGregor, Senior Policy Officer at the Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department.

Director of Local Services, Customer and Local Services:

Good morning, everybody. Paul McGinnety, Director of Local Services.

Senior Policy Officer 2, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department:

Good morning, everybody. I am Nick Turner. I am a senior policy officer in S.P.P.P. (Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance) as well.

Senior Policy Officer, Social Security Department:

Good morning. Samantha Sugden, senior policy officer.

Senior Policy Officer 3, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department:

Good morning. Matt Viney, senior policy officer in S.P.P.P.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Okay, that appears that we have everybody. If we have missed anybody and they need to speak, just introduce yourself as we go along, reminding people that the same rules apply as if we were in the States Assembly. I am going to kick off with questions in relation to the impact on the H.I.F. (Health Insurance Fund). In the last Government actuary on the financial condition of the H.I.F. in 2017, at the outset it states that the fund is projected to be exhausted by 2035, 13 years' time.

[10:15]

This is 2 years before the end of the projection period 2037. While this was projected over 4 years ago, it was also projected that the fund would be around the £117 million mark in the mid-2020s but did not have the foresight of the future J.C.M. (Jersey Care Model) withdrawals. The next review is due by December next year. The panel know that P.102/2021 will the next substantial transfers be made from the H.I.F. in 2022 and credited to the consolidated fund to support the delivery of health and community services for the tranche 2 following similar payments for tranche 1. In the report accompanying P.102/2021 it is stated that in 2022 a full review of the future health costs across all areas will be undertaken and this will support future plans for a sustainable model for health funding. Please advise why a full review of health costs was not undertaken as stated by yourself and the Minister for Health when proposing the J.C.M. proposition and the first tranche funding proposal. I will quote the following before you answer from the 2020 Government Plan for an example: "Ministers are determined to make sure that the Social Security Fund continues to serve future generations and as a priority will undertake a full review of the various components of the social security scheme ahead of the next Government Plan to ensure the future balance is maintained at a fully sustainable level."

The Minister for Social Security:

Sorry, what was the question, Mary?

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

The question is last year Ministers said that there would be a review of the fund in order that ... to ensure that moving forward there was a sustainable fund, it was at a sustainable level. So what I am asking is: in the report of P.102/2021 it said that there was going to be a review. We are now moving to the end of tranche 1 in relation to the J.C.M. and so what I am asking is when ... or rather, please advise why a full review of the health costs was not undertaken by yourself and the Minister for Health when proposing the J.C.M. proposition and the first tranche of funding proposal. So why have we not had a funding review, an actuary review of the fund?

The Minister for Social Security:

The Minister for Health ... there was loads of funding we used before the J.C.M. was set up. We had an outside body ... who was it? PWC, et cetera, to find out mainly what money we had, the cost, et cetera. Then the Jersey Care Model has not for some reason ... well, it would be COVID, would it not? I mean, health was the biggest hit and officers ... has not gone as far forward as it wants to. So that is what Richard is doing. He wants to do a full funding review including the H.I.F. - the H.I.F. would be included - in 2022 to find out how much these funds are sustainable, but then I would imagine he would also need to look at what the costs are going to be because they are only going to go higher. The Social Security Fund I think I misled you ... it was not ... I thought all the funds were going to get an actuary this year or next year so they will all be ready for the new council, and the H.I.F. was not in that because it did not need to be, but now from your letter and request, absolutely we are going to do the H.I.F. as well. So they will all be nice, clean figures. But that is the H.I.F. and the actuarial reviewers do exactly what they do. They will tell you what money goes in, what it spent and how long it will go on for. I think what we are looking at, we have 2 different health models here that we are trying to merge. Will the H.I.F. look like the H.I.F. in 5 years' time? That is the question. Does it need to look like the H.I.F. in 5 years' time or will it be in all the health funding together because that is where all the health people are and that is who the people are going? It depends on doctors, taking doctors with us, et cetera. So, yes, it is a year behind, Deputy Le Hegarat, and that is really what it is.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Okay, thank you. A full review in 2022 may conclude that any of the costs earmarked to receive funding from the H.I.F. is a risk. A quote from our last quarterly hearing when the panel was advised that we need to make a decision about the H.I.F. but that it may not be ... it may be not very good value for money for the public to do an actuary review while the fund is in such a state of flux. If due to the current financial situation that the review does not represent good value for money, what are your views on this impact to all future transfers from the H.I.F. but that is still more crucial to do the review? So is it still more crucial to do the review? We are concerned ... let us make it quite clear. We are concerned as a panel that we did not do a review prior to the money going out to the J.C.M. and now we are asking about the fact that an actuary review still has not been done and we do not know what the value of it is and, as you rightly said, it is in a flux. So what I am asking you is: do you have concerns?

The Minister for Social Security:

No, Mary. The problem is that people have got fixated on the H.I.F. I am saying the money to fund the health, once we know exactly what we want, the H.I.F. can be used. We know we are dealing with doctors differently. We know they do not like the co-payment because it has been frozen. We are looking at all different funding streams coming in and we are then trying to cost it. That is going to happen. We will do the actuarial review but it is not going to tell us ... it is going to say: "This is

the money, this is what gets paid out normally, this is what it is for, and this is how long it will last.” They will not deviate to cost of the Jersey Care Model or anything like that because that is not their job. They are very figure ... you know, you put the figures in, you get the figures out and you get how long it will last into so many years. But we are going to do it. It is worth doing and we will do it. It is not going to cost a lot, under about £40,000, and then all the funds will be ready and will be at the actuarial review before the new council so they will have all up-to-date figures. That is what I thought we had agreed. Apparently, it was not necessarily the H.I.F. but we are going to do it anyway. All the funds will be up and ready for the new council; they will have up-to-date figures.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Can I just ask, Minister, have you and the Minister for Health actually had any ongoing meetings in relation to the funding in relation to healthcare? Have you had any meetings with the Minister for Health?

The Minister for Social Security:

Many, many meetings, Deputy, many, many meetings. We have discussed the future of the H.I.F. We have discussed the future of his budget. Again, the Jersey Care Model is looking like it could do things, save a bit of money, but not save enough. We are going to have to find a new funding stream. The new health tax lost by one vote last time and we are where we are, but with the ageing population and now people not wanting as many working people coming over with the population, we have to somehow raise some money even to cater for the people already here. Because the bulge is - and I am one of them, Mary - going older; 65 now can get your pension, et cetera.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Okay, thank you. I note in the chat that both Deputy Pamplin and Senator Mézec have a question so I will hand over to them briefly. Thank you.

The Minister for Social Security:

Thank you.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Unmute, Deputy Pamplin.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

There is a turn up for the books, but I am sure everybody was much happier to keep me quiet. That is my fault, apologies, everybody. I will start again. So, Minister, I have the last actuary review of the H.I.F. in front of me. It was dated 15th March 2019 and it was an actuarial review as at 31st December 2017. So, just the one thing I wanted to clear up and maybe one of your officers can

help: when exactly the report will be reported and when it will be published? Because obviously those things take time. Looking at the date of the last review, it was as of 31st December 2017.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, they pick a date, Deputy, and that is normally the date, the last date of that year. So they have to have a figure, so that is the figure that they pick. We will use 21st December this year and that is the figure that is in the funds now and that is what they do the actuarial review on all the funds.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Obviously, it is quoted in the report as well under current legislation at the time, unless things have changed, a review will be due no later than the end of 2022. In the actuarial review, and I quote, it says: "I understand that it is proposed to carry out the next review with an effective date 4 years after the current review but under current legislation the review would be due no later than the end of 2022." So it has to be done by the end of 2022 unless the law has changed since 2017 or when that reported was lifted.

The Minister for Social Security:

It does have to be done, but I think because we are now doing a 4-year political cycle ... so it will be done quicker, if you like. They wanted to do them so, as I say, C.O.M. (Council of Ministers), the new Minister for Social Security and Minister for Health know exactly where they are. They have up-to-date figures and they can work with that. So we do not have to wait, we will do them. We are doing them all on 21 December this year, yes.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Okay, brilliant, thank you. Senator Mézec has a question, I believe.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Thank you. I hope this is a clear question, Minister. In the work that you are doing with the Minister for Health to find this sustainable model for health funding, can I ask if you and your officers are giving particular consideration to the distributional impacts that different potential models may have? So, how different models affect different types of people based on what they contribute into that fund, be it if you are looking at a model that comes from social security contributions, if it is coming from other sources, what is the distributional impact consideration?

The Minister for Social Security:

Sorry, Senator, we are getting every other word. I am looking at my officers, the same. I am ever so sorry. I think I am getting the gist.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

I am going to ... can you hear me better now, Minister?

The Minister for Social Security:

Did you get the first bit?

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department:

He was asking are you going to include distributional impacts in your review. Yes, absolutely.

The Minister for Social Security:

Did you ask are we going to include distributional impacts in our review? I think we got that.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Yes, that was the gist of it. So is that a piece of work that you and your officers ...

The Minister for Social Security:

Absolutely, yes. My officers, absolutely, yes.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Is there anything you can give away about what you might be looking at there? I will just reference the question that I asked the Minister for Health on a similar angle to this. Because there was a previous funding model for health that was proposed in the previous States Assembly, which you might remember, which was the health tax. One of the reasons that that was thrown out by the Assembly was because in terms of its distributional impact it had a much harder impact on lower-earning Islanders than it did the highest-earning Islanders. So is that thinking part of what you are doing now with the distributional analyses that you will be doing?

The Minister for Social Security:

Well, the officers just said it is literally too soon but because exactly the reasons you have just explained, we need to make something that is fair for everybody so we will be looking at that. But the actual how and why, it is Richard's review, is it not? We are working with the Minister for Health, no need to point that out to him, and everything will be done like that so it is fair.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Okay, thank you.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Okay. Minister, the panel have lodged an amendment to the Government Plan 2022-2025 requesting that a specific consideration to repaying the H.I.F. from the consolidated fund for funding withdrawal for the establishment of the Jersey Care Model and its related digital strategies if no sustainable healthcare funding is operational by 2025. What mechanisms could be established to ensure that the H.I.F. fund is refunded if no sustainable funding is in operation by 2025?

The Minister for Social Security:

Well, I think you are asking if the H.I.F. ... if we do not get new funding can I replenish the H.I.F. back to what it is and it just stays the same, it just pays the doctors, is that what you are saying?

[10:30]

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

No, what I am asking is that as a panel we have put in an amendment in relation to repaying the H.I.F. What we are asking is what mechanisms are you considering to establish if there is no sustainable funding in operation by 2025?

The Minister for Social Security:

Well, I am not even contemplating that, Deputy. I am not considering that there will not be money. But what I am saying, there may not be a ... the H.I.F. has been working in the same way for many, many years and we are doing a complete review of the funding, or the costs and then the funding. They have to be done together. Where the H.I.F. sits in that just does not sit nicely with the new Jersey Care Model. We are going to ask doctors to do more but not for less because we want to do things out in the parishes, in the surgeries, and we do not want to take people into hospital. If I had to refill the H.I.F. it would basically be because the Jersey Care Model does not work.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Okay, thank you.

The Minister for Social Security:

I have your words in front of me, Mary, and I can see them now, Deputy, yes. I understand what you are saying, I do understand, but we are hoping ... well, no, everyone voted for the new care model. It does something completely different. As I say, 2 funds, health fund and the H.I.F. We are bringing doctors in together. We want to do more with doctors, practice nurses, physios, occupational therapy, et cetera, and we have to make this work. Maybe it will be called something else, but the H.I.F. as it works is just very, very tight to just pay a co-payment.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Okay. I think people voted for the care model on the principle that the Assembly would get some idea of how it was going to be funded in the future, but we are where we are. Okay. In 2015, the States of Jersey introduced the Jersey Quality Improvement Framework under which payments were to be made to G.P. (general practitioner) practices under a standard contract with the aim of encouraging high-quality outcomes for patients. All G.P. surgeries participated in the framework, which is reported to have distributed payments according to whether practices met some or all around 35 clinical and organisational measures. The amounts paid were around £1.6 million in each of 2015, 2016 and 2017. Can you confirm these payments are from the H.I.F. and, if so or if not, how and when were these payments made and if they have continued to be paid to date with a breakdown of yearly costs [off mic]?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, they were made from the H.I.F. because they were ... I think Sam ... oh, they are still going, yes, but there was a reason. The doctors had to get up to some ... yes, it was part of revalidation. I have Sam on the line, who actually I think drew up the contracts. But yes, it is still going and it has come all out the H.I.F., yes.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Okay, thank you. Since 2017 various other payments have been made by the H.I.F. under contract to G.P. practices and pharmacies for activities such as undertaking vaccinations against influenza. These amounted to around £350,000 in 2017. Payments for other activities were expected following that date. Can you confirm all activities since 2017 and their costs and also that the projected costs for primary care activities was £2 million a year in 2018 but was due to be increased in line with yearly R.P.I. (Retail Price Index) until 2021?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, we can do that. Sue is going to do that.

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department:

I can confirm that all of the contracts from 2017 are still running and we have a new contract for diabetic supplies, which runs through pharmacies, so that diabetics can receive free supplies of all the testing strips and things that they need to manage their condition. We do not publish all of the details of all of the individual contracts, some of these are commercially sensitive, but we could give the panel an overview on the total amount [off mic] there is a new contract on [off mic] with COVID doctors have been paid for doing telephone as well as face to face appointments.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Effectively, you can confirm that all of these payments have come out of the H.I.F. and they have continued?

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department:

Yes.

The Minister for Social Security:

What was the other big one we paid the doctors, £5 million for 3 months' work in COVID? That was another big one.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Out of the H.I.F.?

The Minister for Social Security:

[off mic] £5 million.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Okay, thank you.

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department:

In terms of COVID, we transferred some money from the Health Insurance Fund to the Health Department because the Health Department took out a direct contract with G.P.s over the first period of COVID in the spring of 2020. That finished in August 2020. We are now back to the G.P.s being paid out of the H.I.F. as normal, but [off mic] Quality Improvement Framework, that is the biggest individual contract [off mic] remote services contracts, and with the pharmacies they also do flu and they do diabetic supplies [off mic] pharmacies which does not come out of the H.I.F.

The Minister for Social Security:

From when I was at Health, Deputy, J.Q.I.F. (Jersey Quality Improvement Framework) was asked for by the G.P.s because G.P.s had realised that they would come in here and they were not getting the same validation, revalidation, and they were finding it hard to go back to the U.K. (United Kingdom) or anywhere, really. So it had to be done to keep their professional certificates up to date and everything else, yes, and other things that are done. I do not know the ins and outs but I do remember why they came and they needed it. It is something they needed that they had not needed before, but then these things move on. They have to be revalidated here so they can go there, et cetera.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Okay, thank you. In the 2017 review it stated that primary care activity related to cervical smears is expected to reduce the number of G.P. visits leading to a medical benefit payment by 3,000 a year from mid-2018. Can you confirm from your information that has proven to be correct and any other similar impacts that have been made since then?

The Minister for Social Security:

We did have a fantastic take-up, yes, it was really ... free and it could be G.P.s or Le Bas as well. If women did not have women doctors, they could go to Le Bas and it was free, a great thing. I think it dipped in COVID but I am 99 per cent sure we are back up to around the 90 per cent of people who get the letter are taking up the free smear. But I can check that. Sam might know the actual figure. That might be the wrong person but I will definitely get you the actual ... do you know the actual figures, Sam?

Senior Policy Officer, Social Security Department:

Yes, uptake did dip last year, so it has increased this year because I think people are catching up on screening that they missed. We look to be around about 4,000, 4,200 this year. That will displace some medical benefit claims. That analysis is very difficult to do to that degree of certainty because, of course, last year was phenomenally disrupted with COVID-19.

The Minister for Social Security:

Thanks. But that is the contract with the doctors, is it not? Yes, to do it for free, yes.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Okay, thank you. It is said in the 2017 H.I.F. review that gluten-free voucher claimants also come from the H.I.F. Is this still the case and how much a year is this following the tightening of these payments? Again, what is the yearly breakdown of costs of these payments?

The Minister for Social Security:

They have changed because we used to give them out to somebody who just ... then a year or 2 back you had to have a medical ... a coeliac, you had to be only coeliac, and the cost has gone down because, as I say, it was a much more general voucher to buy food. Then the other thing that happened, if you bought one of those loaves, they were probably £3. Now they are about the same in most shops, about a pound. So 2 or 3 things happened, but I can get that breakdown. It is a lot lower than it was, but it is still going on. You have to be diagnosed coeliac.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Is there any means testing in relation to getting these vouchers?

The Minister for Social Security:

Any what, sorry, Deputy?

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Is there any means testing in relation to getting the vouchers for gluten free?

The Minister for Social Security:

No.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Okay, thank you. As stated in the review in 2017, primary care activities are the lowest expenditure of the H.I.F. The next is medical benefits, but clearly the most expensive to bear is the full cost of prescriptions. With that in mind and hopefully continued income to the fund by social security contributions, which we note do seem to have decreased following a recent written request by Deputy Morel shows, what can be done to make better and most effective use of the fund to cover all commitments until 2025 and beyond?

The Minister for Social Security:

You were asking about prescriptions? I am sorry, I have really not been ... I did not understand what you were asking me.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Okay.

The Minister for Social Security:

I think there is a delay as well.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

The point that we are trying to make is that there seems to be a misconception that the H.I.F. is only used to pay G.P.s and the difference that we all receive in our G.P. visits, but clearly this is not the case. There are a number of other benefits which are taken out of the H.I.F. and we have gone through a number of those over the last couple of minutes. The final one I wanted to talk about was prescriptions. The most expensive part is the full cost of prescriptions.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

So what I was asking was with this in mind and obviously the fact that the social security contributions have decreased, as has been disclosed recently in a written question from Deputy Morel, what can we do to make this better so that we ensure that we are effectively using the money in the fund to be able to cover as much commitment as we possibly can beyond or at least until 2025?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, if you are asking me about prescriptions, I am not changing ... I have no idea to change the charge or anything at the moment. It has been mooted over the years but I do not have any ... but Sue can talk about the other charges. It is not just ... yes, people think it is just the med then but it is not.

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department:

So the panel is absolutely right, the cost of community prescriptions is the highest single area of expenditure out of the Health Insurance Fund and we are very careful in the way in which ... so Jersey runs a list of approved medicines, a white list, and that is run by the ... that is overseen by the Pharmaceutical Benefit Advisory Committee. So that comprises pharmacists and G.P.s, people from the Health Department and with an independent chair, and on that committee was also an expert adviser as well. So that committee meet on a regular basis and they are always looking to improve the cost-effectiveness of drug prescribing. So they will ensure that drugs added to the list are cost-effective and they would take careful consideration before they make recommendations to the Minister. So drugs are taken on and put on to the list on a regular basis [off mic] elements of the general health system. Therefore, [off mic] that review of costs and funding. So we are very aware of the costs of drugs and the importance of making sure that people receive the right type of medicine, community prescribed medicine, that the ... yes, [off mic] contributions have gone down [off mic] ...

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Can I just raise that ...

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department:

... very much a COVID issue and I think that will improve again in the following quarters.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Sorry to interrupt you, Sue, but we certainly are getting very broken answers. I do not know if everybody else is the same, but we are certainly getting some broken answers from Sue.

[10:45]

It has been okay when we have had the Minister but certainly some of Sue's answers are sporadically breaking up. So we need to be obviously mindful of that point. I am shortly going to hand over to Deputy Pamplin, but just before I do is there any further questions that Deputy Pamplin or Senator Mézec would like to ask in relation to the H.I.F.? Okay, thank you. I will now hand over the hearing to Deputy Pamplin.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Thank you, Chair, and hopefully everybody can hear me. So just to tidy up that first section and why we put those questions in there was as the Chair stated, there is often misinformation - we live in that age now, unfortunately - that the H.I.F. is only there to subsidise the G.P. visits. But as we have illustrated and as we did hear Sue say, we are right because it is not just that. As you said, Minister, it covers a whole range of things as we have illustrated for the last few years. So the point being in that last actuarial review, going back to the very first question, it does say that it will be projected to be exhausted by the year 2035 if it carried on as it found it in 2017, so that is 13 years' time. Obviously, the new actuarial review will give us a more up-to-date version of that and take into consideration all the payments that have come in and out since then but obviously now the new structure of the taking out of the triage payments will give a new outlook figure of when that fund will be exhausted. What it will also take into consideration is obviously the payments into the fund which Deputy Morel's question to you has highlighted. Obviously, there has been a bit of a dip during the pandemic and, as Sue was just hinting at, we hope that goes up as we progress next year. So the whole point we were trying to highlight for the public's benefit was the H.I.F. is a complicated fund, that it is used for multi-area things. Then to finalise, the care model has as part of the original proposition that it has to come back to the Assembly with a sustainable care funding model by the year 2025. So we were just trying to summarise all of this and what is happening because there are going to be 2 debates in the Assembly. If I have missed out anything there and if any of your officers wants to highlight what I am saying, but that is why we asked those questions. I hope that is helpful for everybody.

The Minister for Social Security:

No, thank you, Kevin, yes. Deputy, sorry.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

No, it is all right, you can call me whatever you like. So, moving on, I am going to start asking questions around the Government Plan and P.101 and its possible impacts on the Social Security Fund. Minister, in the report accompanying P.101 it is advised that if allocations are not made to the States grant, and I quote: "Borrowing will need to increase further over the period to fund expenditure plans." Was any consideration given to borrow additional funding in other ways instead

of pausing the grant transfers into the consolidated fund, a topic we have talked about over the last 3 years?

The Minister for Social Security:

Only borrowing from banks, I think. So we are borrowing from ourselves.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

There has not been an alternative discussion, okay, if that falls apart ...

The Minister for Social Security:

[off mic] we had a big lot of money we could have gone to banks, like borrowing for other things, but we basically borrowed from ourselves, yes. So that fund is ... and then we get it all back ... well, we do not get it all back, it goes back to the proper number, about a million ... hundred million in 2025 ... 2024, yes. We know that is a really strong fund. It is projected out for the next 70 years and we still have money coming into it, so it was something we could ... when COVID hit, from memory, Kevin, there was lots of different proposals and could this be done. Remember when we were up before, I wanted 3 years to be taken out and I think your panel called it in and said one year at a time and we will judge it. But it is, I mean, one year at a time is fine, if something happened and we did not need it, but unfortunately COVID has just cost, cost, cost, a hundred million, which we will not get back, to companies, quite rightly, on the co-funded and then other things, but we will get ... we have done deferrals on social security and G.S.T. (goods and services tax) but we will get them back. It just gives people longer to pay.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Okay. It also advised that, and I quote again: "The Minister will amend the law again to stop the States grant for 2023, provided that it does not affect the long-term sustainability of the fund." So when do you think a decision to stop the States grant 2023 will be taken? When do you think you will have that summary for yourself as long as you are convinced it will not affect the long-term ...

The Minister for Social Security:

It is in the Government Plan. It is one year at a time. Is it P.101 that I do after?

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department:

Yes.

The Minister for Social Security:

So it is in the Government Plan basically. You know that I have said not to do it, but because it is a separate piece of legislation ... and remember last year I had to do it as well. I lodged ... I think it

was the same number. I think it was 101 and 102 from memory. It is really weird. It just happened to be like that. They went through just after the Government Plan, but everything was sort of agreed in the Government Plan. If there were any amendments I suppose they might have to be rewritten very quickly, but they are just the legislation that makes the Government Plan in that part legal, yes, not the rest because that is all in the thing, it is just because it is a different law and I have to bring these 2 small bits of legislation straight after the Government Plan. I did it last year. I might have even done it the year before but I cannot remember. No, we did not do it, it was COVID then, was it? We took it out ... yes, that is what has happened.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes. So just taking you to the criteria, so you are obviously convinced it is not going to affect the long-term sustainability for this year. Again, this will probably be a decision that will need to be taken in a year's time again, depending on what happens next year and elections, yada-yada-yada. So what is the criteria that you have had to meet - just give us a little bit of insight - to be convinced for sure that it is not going to affect the long-term sustainability and give us a little insight ... because obviously this will be the decision next year unless something changes.

The Minister for Social Security:

Well, we will have enough money in there to do it. When you think we were ... I think we were just under or on the £2 billion, but the stock and what they have invested in has been so good, even with COVID, we have now £2.4 billion in there. So I am quite confident, as I say, even with the actuaries and they know that coming up ... the last actuary said: "You are coming up to a bulge of elderly, the most people who will take out pensions" and still quite happy projected into years to come. So it is just borrowing from us and not borrowing from a bank, really.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Okay. I am going to move now on to minimum wage increases. This is touching on P.98, obviously; everybody playing catch-up. So, Minister, you will obviously be aware following the States Assembly debate on 26th November in relation to P.98, the proposition to increase minimum wage as amended was approved by the States Assembly. Could you just advise what data in relation to the economic current conditions and competitiveness could affect the objective of raising the minimum wage to two-thirds of the median earnings by the end of 2024, if you are able to?

The Minister for Social Security:

That is basically a backstop. I am hoping, and the economy is going one way and that is up. Let us hope we have seen the last of COVID and we have people to do the ... we need people to do the jobs to earn the money to be able to pay the wages. I was taking soundings from the council. Every debate on minimum wage I have listened to, and also if you read the press release from chamber, I

think they are even of the mindset that it has to go up. So if you set it at the two-thirds ... and if it had been set 4 years ago it would have been £10.50 now but I do not think that the appetite was there 4 years ago. Then we had COVID, so we got to the 45 per cent of the average a year late and now we have set it up higher to get there by the end of 2024. They may get there sooner. The forum will be doing the work and that was in the survey, everybody wanted the forum back to do it because they are very balanced, employers, employees, union people, et cetera. They understand exactly the industries that they are talking to.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Of course. I do not know if you are aware but the Bank of England has released a survey. They usually do it at this time of year, and there was a lot of concerns obviously with the high inflation that the U.K. is seeing that obviously we are going to see some in the Island. Is part of that situation the knock-on effect? I am just skimming through the report. I have not had time to read it fully, but they are saying that again they are having the same problem, British companies are struggling to find the staff they need, an expected higher inflation as predicated at this time of year. We are seeing those similar things here in Jersey. Is this playing into the consideration? Because obviously part of the chicken and the egg syndrome is there is high inflation so i.e. the cost of living is going up, but equally people need people to work to keep certain jobs going, but certain people saying: "I cannot afford to take those jobs anymore." So it is a quandary but are you taking all these things into consideration? We appreciate obviously it is not easy.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes. It is, yes, but because as I say I did not ... to say a certain amount by October next year, I was even concerned that certain amount might be too low. There could well be a lot of employers out there ... so I had to do similar what was done before but make sure I was on a higher trajectory and make sure the wage will be going up. It went through quite quickly. I think the Bailiff cut a few people off who wanted to ask me questions. He was very, very strict last week. But yes, hopefully it is going to be going up. We always have to be mindful but I think Deputy Morel is on that, working with farmers and others, the ones that ... well, really, it is only farmers. The other industries are already paying, like hospitality are paying, but we all have to be fair in the game, do we not? If we know that we want those people who are bringing us a really nice meal being paid £14 and £15 an hour, we are going to have to pay more at the end. I think that is a fair compromise.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Okay. In the amendment also to P.98 the panel noted that you were considering consultation with the Employment Forum and other stakeholders you mentioned to examine the feasibility of devising a scheme brought to the States to convert the minimum wage over time to a living wage. Do you

believe that such a scheme should be introduced in line with the objective to raise minimum wage to two-thirds of the median earnings by 2024?

The Minister for Social Security:

I cannot hear you but I think your question is about converting the minimum wage to a living wage. Well, it was more to go out and consult. Again, Caritas set the living wage, completely do not ... there is no consultation, Kevin. There is an organisation that they follow from London or England and they do sometimes put a percentage on for Jersey. So I did not want that in there. I want the living wage to be a Jersey living wage, which as I say they do a figure and then they do something else. But if they came back in 3 years and the living wage was, let us say, £12.50 and the minimum wage came back at £12.55, I have achieved it, have I not? The minimum wage is higher than the living wage. I would not get too ... you know, which one it is, as long as it is a higher wage, if you see what I mean. It is higher than what we have now.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

That is fine. Just for the panel's benefit, aside from all the other things we are requesting this morning - I am sure somebody is taking a note somewhere - would you be able to just provide us a bit more information about the process and the stakeholders and all that sort of stuff? That would be really helpful to us as we go forward. I am just conscious of time. Also, it may help your end, because my voice is pretty loud, it may be distorting your speakers your end so it is just something I have had to learn to live with over life. I am going to move, though, on to the COVID-19 situation, and obviously given the current situation with the ongoing pandemic, the announcements made by Government in response to recently discovered new variants and other changes, we are keen to know about the impact that may be given to C.L.S. (Community and Local Services). So, following the increases of cases of COVID since October, are additional resources being made available ...

The Minister for Social Security:

Sorry, Ian, yes.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Hello, Deputy, sorry, it is Ian Burns. We missed the last part of your question but I think it was around given the concerns around the pandemic are we adding additional resources into the coronavirus helpline I think is the question. Obviously, yes, we are ... now totally on hold, in fact.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes, I mentioned it because obviously whenever we see new information ... are you still with us there, Ian? You just froze.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Sorry, apologies, we are in the government building and we are plugged into the network but we appear to be having some significant network issues. Hopefully you can still hear me.

[11:00]

I think the question is about the COVID helpline. Yes, we have obviously acted to ... given the pickup in cases ... I have gone again. Given the pickup in cases, we have added additional resources to the helpline and I am pleased that we have been able to keep wait times down. I think the average wait time for the last week is just over a couple of minutes, and indeed in about 5 of those days probably faster. So people should not have a problem getting through. Obviously, there are lots of questions about travel and also lots of questions about direct contacts and so on.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes, thanks, Ian, and well done for picking that up. Yes, so basically the follow-up question is, Minister, you as a Minister and to your officers with all their responsibilities ...

The Minister for Social Security:

[off mic] every 2 words.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Okay. Well, I can safely say that as I am working from home I think it is fine my end and hopefully those listening in the public I would assume ... could be a problem your end, so I will speak a bit more slowly and lower and see if that makes a difference. So, Minister, the question was what involvement have you and your department had in any of the winter strategy and the possible changes that happen either from the recent announcements or through that?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Deputy Pamplin, you are muted.

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department:

We are having real difficulty hearing ...

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes, I was trying to ... I am going to make a decision as the Chair to suspend this hearing at this stage. I think we have tried as long as we can but unfortunately this is not a good service to the public and those trying to transcript this recording. So I propose that we pause this hearing, give you the opportunity to try and get some I.T. (information technology) support to try and help you at

your end, and then if we cannot resolve this we will pick up this hearing at a future date. At that, I pause and suspend the hearing at this stage. Thank you.

[11:01]

(Hearing suspended)

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

This is just a quick update announcement for any members of the public who are still watching. We have had some technical issues with this hearing. That is why I suspended it while we tried to resolve that. We have been informed that the Minister and her officers are making their way to join where our officers are with Senator Mézec in the States building, so as soon as they are in and set up we will resume the meeting and we will pick up. So, just to give you an update that this meeting will continue and hopefully very soon, given the distance that they have to come to join my colleagues. So hopefully that will be very shortly, so pop the kettle on.

(Hearing suspended)

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

For the members of the public, that was just a little in-joke between the panel. We were taking requests because I felt like I was back doing some old jobs that I used to do, but I have been reliably informed that the Minister and her officers have made it to my colleagues in the States building so we are just letting them set up and then we will recommence this hearing in a couple of minutes.

(Hearing suspended)

[11:24]

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Okay, we are restarting our quarterly hearing after a brief pause to accommodate the technical problems that we were having during the hearing. But we are nothing but accommodating on this panel and we are grateful that the Minister and her team are joining my colleagues and we can continue. The question where we sort of paused around was around the recent COVID announcements. We were starting to hear some of Ian's answer but if he could just repeat what he was saying. The question was: given the recent changes and also the rising cases and the announcements made a couple of days ago, obviously a lot of information flying around, what has been the impact, if any, on the services that you provide, i.e., of course, the COVID helpline, et cetera? So if you could just re-answer that, that would be great. Thank you.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Thank you. My camera has currently not caught up yet so I will do this one just audio if that is okay. So, yes, obviously the increase in cases on the Island has caused an increase in activity on the coronavirus helpline and we have obviously recognised that and brought more resources in to help answer the public's queries and questions. That has worked because last week, for example, the average wait time was around about 2 minutes most days. At the weekend we would have thought that there would have been an uptick in calls but it was quite quiet at the weekend, even despite the Omicron news that is breaking across the globe. That was fine and we are obviously monitoring our resource levels to make sure that we can maintain a service behind this.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Great, thank you, Ian. A general question now. Minister and officers, what has your involvement and your department's involvement been in the Government's 2021 COVID-19 winter strategy and any other possible changes that may occur if and when needed? So what is your general input and involvement with the winter strategy that was published a little while ago and any future changes that may need to be happening because of what we saw in the last couple of days. Thank you.

The Minister for Social Security:

From memory, I think the winter strategy was put together by C.A.M. (Competent Authority Ministers) with medical advice and then it came to C.O.M. and we obviously discussed it. I do not think there was any reason to ask ... well, there was questions asked but I do not think we changed anything. That obviously came out before the COVID Omicron thing. So, yes, and then officers, obviously Ian, you implemented what they asked, really. Nothing really changed. It is still the helpline, et cetera, isolation and everything, all the same, yes.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Great. Can you also describe, any one of you, any changes in your approach to any responses during the ongoing pandemic as a result of the classic phrase of learning from the past? We are almost obviously a year ... very different because of the vaccine, obviously, but has there been any changes, anything where you have looked back and thought, okay, we will do things slightly different based on what we learned a year ago?

The Minister for Social Security:

No, I think the majority of the council - and I say majority, some have slightly different views - it has always been it has to be appropriate and proportionate, et cetera. I cannot think of anything that we know ... the question is about how bad it is, the new variant. Some people are saying it is very mild but it spreads quicker, et cetera. No, we might get to a point where the masks are compulsory, but

they have done that in the U.K. and no one is policing it so what is the best ... the massive Unite union has come out and said do not ask your workers to ask people on your buses and trains to wear masks. If you get out of your cab you are entitled to be fired. I think that is a bit extreme, but they are basically saying it is not your job to enforce masks, do not get involved, and 2 or 3 of the big supermarkets have done exactly the same. Ask politely and if they say no, do not have a row with them.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

It has been a curious part of the pandemic, the whole situation around mask wearing, but I am just generally interested also about ... because obviously things have changed since last year and, as we have seen, any time new information spikes people call the phone lines. There have been changes, obviously, but I am just curious obviously. Some of the testing has changed. We had the harbour and the airport. The airport was stood down. More people went to the harbour. There has always been evolving changes and given what Ian first answered about the phone lines, that is obviously the main issue here. But as far as we are all concerned at this stage anything we have learnt previously is in place and in terms of serving the public for their needs relating to COVID we are in a good place?

[11:30]

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, I think everything can be ... because of what we have learned, as Ian said, we can step up everything really quickly. If we have to start testing everyone again, et cetera, it can be all stepped up, can it not?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Yes. Operationally, clearly we follow government advice and this means that we obviously encourage people to do lateral flow testing who work for Customer and Local Services. We still have colleagues spread around different buildings to ensure that if there was an outbreak of COVID we would still be able to provide government services. We ask people, too, when they are moving around buildings from a different area where they normally work to wear a mask, and that has been the case for some time. So we were not doing lateral flow tests a year ago in that way so in terms of learning and changing and the advice that has changed, we are now doing that. We are still encouraging people and colleagues to work from home as part of our attempts to try and make sure we do not have an outbreak that takes out an entire team in one go. Some of those principles are still in place and some new activity as well, and that is the same across all the C.L.S. areas.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

On that, Ian, you have not been affected or any of your teams by anybody caught up with outbreaks? We saw in the latest COVID figures that obviously still in the school age, which is the highest, in terms of confirmed cases but equally, unsurprisingly, the 40-year-old bracket, which is obviously, we are starting to theorise, the parents. I am in that position again today for the fifth time with me and my daughter. Have you had any impacts across the whole of the department?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Thankfully, we have not had an outbreak as perhaps it could be described. We have had obviously COVID cases across the teams, but I am pleased that we have managed to keep up our basic hygiene and hands in face to face and social distancing in the department and avoid an entire portion of people being taken out at the same time. Obviously, people can work from home anyway. So even if they were isolating and were able to work from home, then they would be able to still maintain services. So we have not had that impact as yet but we are very mindful of it, particularly in very small teams where you have some specialists in there. We are very mindful to make sure that we look after them and make sure we can keep providing a service to the public.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Good news, long may that continue, especially over the next couple of months. Okay, moving on to a subject we have touched on many times in the last year or so, appointments with C.L.S. at Philip Le Feuvre House. The panel, as we know, C.L.S. remains open, is open for telephone and online enquiries, of course, but what steps - and this is the question we raised at the last quarterly hearing - are you doing to improve public awareness about the reasons for the general closure of walk-in services and obviously given the climate that we are in now, to remind people and keep up to date through public awareness schemes? Has there been any social media campaigns, all that sort of stuff that we have seen with the vaccine rollout? Are you finding ways to get that message across, because that was based on our last hearing when we had feedback from the public informing us that they were not aware?

Director General, Community and Local Services:

Yes, so obviously as you said there, Deputy, we are open and people can walk in and they will get served. There have been some good examples recently of where that has helped us identify issues with certain individuals and really provide a great level support for their particular issues. But most people will want to just pop in and drop things off and have a basic enquiry. As I mentioned last time, we were optimistic that we would be able to get online appointment booking live by the end of November. I was pleased that went live on Tuesday, so by the end of November. We are just up launching that, testing it out on the website and once we are satisfied that is robust, which, hopefully, will not be too much longer, we will be able to communicate that. I think that is what I mentioned last time, we wanted to have that in place before we can go out and help explain the message about

how we are now operating. If people can see there are appointments available, then I think it is a positive step forward, it makes it easier and more accessible to book appointments. Having said that, we have been operating appointments now for some time and when people call us up to book an appointment on the whole they will find they do what they wanted, what they thought they needed an appointment for online or over the phone, so they do not need to come in. We do have a low level of appointments at the moment, roughly about 20 a day. But we will be able to test out how that changes going forward with the availability of online appointments.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Are you hearing much of the same from your colleagues in tax because we are getting to that point of the year where people have to have their tax paid off and they will be getting their I.T.I.S. (Income Tax Instalment System) adjustments and obviously for next year's? Are they seeing similar numbers and turn up?

Director General, Community and Local Services:

They do operate appointments as well at the moment in Jersey and they will, I hope, in the future be joining the online appointments. They cannot for some technical reasons, just to carry on with the theme today, that prevent them from currently operating online appointments but I am optimistic that will be fixed shortly. But they do operate appointments. They also obviously would encourage people to phone first and speak to them on the phone. But there are, of course, challenges in terms of the volumes of that but also everything else they are trying to do around independent taxation. They are still obviously implementing their I.T. system and so on. They are perhaps more challenged than they would like. As for people calling Customer and Local Services, again, we are performing well, you can get through very quickly and get through to somebody typically in about 20 seconds. It is something that we have prioritised to make sure that we are accessible to all members of the public. I think I mentioned last time that we are still seeing as a benchmark in the library ... we are not back up to pre-pandemic levels of footfall in the library. There is safe space, it is big, there is lots of space and they are still running at about - I think it is slightly better now than it was the last time we spoke - 80 per cent or so of footfall. But that just shows that there are people who obviously do not feel comfortable coming into town, would not feel comfortable coming in as before but obviously can pick up the phone to us and get through and speak to somebody very quickly, so that is why we are prioritising that. As you see the pandemic, every time we think we are almost out of it, it comes back. As we are in winter now, I am pleased that we have prioritised that service because we can still provide a good service to the public. We have seen that this week, less people coming in and more phone calls, partly I am sure because of the weather, as well as worries about COVID.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes, I was going to say and that is curious about the library, is it not? Because obviously, yes, the weather has not been great but there still seems to be some parts of the community who we know especially enjoy it. I am thinking about the elderly and seniors and those students as well use the library, a lot of people use it for lots of reasons. But you are saying the footfall is still low but is there any sort of work going on, a bit of survey work to just touch base with people and get a sort of sense, is it definitely weather, is it COVID?

Director General, Community and Local Services:

We are obviously comparing ourselves to the library networks in the U.K. and we are significantly higher than those. They are still running at about 45 per cent to 60 per cent and we are about 80 per cent. We are confident that we are doing well, compared to that benchmark, and it has improved since we spoke back in October. The library, of course, it carries on and running some fantastic community events and doing a lot of work, of course, ready for Christmas for children and so on. They are doing everything that they can to promote the library and not only the main library but our branch library at Communicare. We would expect that to be as high as it possibly can. But I think the real point is that not everybody yet feels comfortable. Of course, the library does have online services. You can download books, you can listen to audio books as well and with magazines and newspapers all via the library app. If people have not signed up for that, I would strongly recommend that they do that because it is a great service and it is free.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Exactly and, of course, when benchmarked against U.K. libraries, our library is top quality and we are very lucky to have it. I would imagine that all of the things that have come out of the pandemic, life has changed, more people stay at home and stream than go to the cinema; it could be the same reason. But we also have the mobile library, which of course is very important as well, so maybe there are some adjustments. It would be good to see a bit of case work carried out to put some figures on that in the future.

Director General, Community and Local Services:

Yes, Paul McGinnety, he oversees the library with Ed Jewell. He just wants to add to that if that is okay.

Director of Local Services, Community and Local Services:

Yes. Since the pandemic online activity has gone up by about 180 per cent, so we are seeing people access books, as Ian said. We have improved our digital offer. The mobile library, again, it is meeting the needs of different customers, as you say, Deputy, and we get everybody from one year up to 100 years coming to the library from all sorts of background. It is a fantastic space and we are very fortunate. But then other people have a different way of accessing the library, whether they will

be going to Communicare, that has been very popular, but the online activity has been really popular and it is just a different way of people accessing it. One thing I would say, Deputy, is when we did the Summer Reading Challenge, we had an increase of 700 children participate this year because we aimed it and we were more targeted to children who maybe we do not normally see in the library. That was really good and we are going to build on that. As you know - as a shameless plug - we always have activities here that cater for everybody. Again, I think we are in a good place. Certainly, our chief librarian, the feedback we get from the libraries in the U.K. is they are learning from us, as opposed to the other way around. I think we can be very proud of the library service that we have.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes, I totally agree. I guess the worry is always not to be too cynical but there is job offering. When a service reduces it obviously could mean a shrinking of a service, but I think we need to protect that space and that library as much as possible going forward and I am sure that will be an argument that will come round the houses if it ever got to that stage. But I do not think it will, especially from what I am hearing today.

Director General, Community and Local Services:

We have expanded the opening hours of the library since C.L.S. started supporting there and obviously we have moved to improve the access of Communicare by moving the library there, which is a much easier place for residents around Les Quennevais to access with increased opening hours.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes. No, that is good. Very quickly on this, you said at the last hearing you were hoping to restart the Closer to Home programmes and get the services out and about the Island. Any update on that? Has that been able to happen?

Director General, Community and Local Services:

No. Keeping it short and sweet, no, sadly not.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

No, and I think we could probably all estimate why. Okay, thanks, Ian. I am going to move on to the disability strategy before handing to Senator Mézec. With reference to the recent disability strategy survey that we have discussed and obviously now published, could you just confirm where we are with things in terms of timing, when things are published and where we are, just a bit of an update of where we are since we last talked about this?

Director of Local Services, Community and Local Services:

Yes, of course, Deputy. We are looking to launch the report early next year, January. All the focus groups are looking at the data; that will include interviews, work of our civil society partners, and that is already feeding into our plans as we move forward. Working with the I.o.D. (Institute of Directors), raising educational awareness, and I am delighted to say that is a mirror, it is the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, which obviously started in 1992 by the U.N. (United Nations). We will be launching a campaign just to see what little steps Islanders can do to increase access, to reduce prejudice and learn and engage with disabled people. I think one of the big things that came through is that 80 per cent of disabilities are hidden. Again, it is those small steps. That campaign will run tomorrow. It is great to join a global movement and there will be adverts and comms going out tomorrow to mark that very special occasion. But in terms of moving forward the 788 people who participated, their views will fit into our strategy when we view what we are doing; we need to link in. The key themes that came through were around access. Transition is a key area and we are working right across government because it is not just about health, it is around housing, it is around C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills), it is around opportunities. Again, there were some hard truths in the survey but, again, got to take them on board, and as I think Lord Blunkett said at the event, there is also lots of positives and it is about having that narrative and that conversation and we are moving forward. We are in a great position with our civil society partners, we have the team on board and this really helps us to listen to Islanders and put forward and work on the key issues that impact them on a daily basis. That is the sort of timeline. It re-energises the focus, I think, Deputy, having Lord Blunkett come over, having almost 800 people take part in the survey, having a very good event. But it is not just about the event, it is what we do with the research afterwards and what we put into place, and the team and I are working on that right across government but, crucially, with experts, by experience and also our civil society partners like Enable, Mencap, B.S.K. (Beresford Street Kitchen), Les Amis, all the fabulous organisations that we work with.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Thanks, Paul, as ever. I know the survey is being published in January, as you say, but has there been any actions that have been immediately acted upon that came through and you thought we can do that straightaway, we could do that right now? Why wait, why wait for all that? We can do that now. Could you pick anything out or are you able to?

[11:45]

Director of Local Services, Community and Local Services:

This is about cultural changes, which sometimes take longer than one would imagine. For example, as I say, working with the I.o.D., so we will have 20 places for disabled people to sit on on boards. Again, that is a culture shift, it is getting people to think about that. We have had 44 government

buildings have been accessed for accessibility. We are working with the business community. We are working with the Royal Association for the Deaf. You will see the campaign tomorrow. Again, when we looked at the survey results, we are very confident that we have a fantastic community here and it is not malicious prejudice, it is maybe just not understanding and not knowing. It is asking people to take that little step just to understand a little bit more, speak to people directly, search online, what tools can we use? Yes, we are not waiting until January. A lot of what we were doing already has been reaffirmed by the survey, it has probably given us a better insight. But the same issues are there. Access was an issue before the survey, it is still in the survey now. We have probably got more granular detail about what that looks like. Prejudice and hidden disabilities, we knew that was an issue but, again, he can reaffirm that and we can take that forward. Transition, that is a huge issue. We talked to families and Islanders and that transition from Children's Services into adulthood is a challenge for us all but it is probably more challenging for the young people with disabilities. In terms of that we had a meeting last week where we are going to focus on that. We are not going to wait for the survey to be published. Hopefully, I will be the senior responsible officer and we will lead a team to look at transitions collectively right across the board. We are not waiting until January, we want to get cracking now. I think tomorrow having that as a sort of very important date in the calendar shows our ongoing intent to listen but also to act.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

A very good report. Through that about communication, was there talk through the strategy about forming an organisation, an umbrella organisation that amalgamates all the charities and all the groups to act as a voice for the community? That would be helpful for Government, implementing policy or if there are any debates or any public culture debates that pop up, so somebody could represent and bring all their voices as one loud and clear. There has been a couple of highly contentious debates in the Assembly of late where voices of people with disabilities was aired but no authority behind it. It was just plucking things out of the air. But if there could be a group that could be acting as their representatives, like a union or like an association, like chamber, for example, that their voice can pierce through and can be heard by the people who are at the top.

Director of Local Services, Community and Local Services:

That is very timely, Deputy, because we realised that we had different levels of engagement. We also have our team, our team comes in with all civil society, again we partner with them. There is the operational side but you are quite right, we need that sort of voice and that strategic overview, which I do not think can just be Government, it needs to be business, it needs to be right across the board. What we are looking at is developing an advisory group which will have key people across the Island who will be able to advise and represent people with disabilities and carers. Again, just a plug, there is a carers' event on Monday at the Royal Yacht relaunching that particular strategy. We see that as being a really good way forward to get that narrative and people's experiences on

the ground to go and write up to influencing policy and how we function. That is sort of the matters in train and the team are working on that as I speak.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

As part of the work, did the cost of care come through at all and the concerns voiced, especially as the generations above my generation grow up, the people who are the carers of their children are themselves needing care or maybe thinking about going into retirement homes or themselves needing care, then suddenly their role as being the carer to their child with a disability or living with a condition like Downs Syndrome, suddenly there is a growing pressure put upon that those people whose carers ... suddenly that role would need to be replaced and where would that money come from?

Director of Local Services, Community and Local Services:

[off mic] the financials but what I do know is that one of the big concerns from parents who care for younger people is what is going to happen when I am not able to care anymore? That is why getting the transition right is imperative. I think one of the other things that we really need to focus on, you look at the fact that we have some of the best connectivity, apart from Estonia, in Europe. We should be using technology a lot more to support independence. The sort of view that technology only supports people in maybe their later stages of life, that we could support a lot of young people to remain independent. We have seen some great examples, whether it be the stuff that you can get from J.T. (Jersey Telecom) or other providers that are available or Jersey Electric, stuff that you could get from the likes of Google, et cetera, can really be life changing and can prevent and support independence. I think there is a bit of an issue there. Obviously we know the labour market and I know that the J.C.M. is looking at that, it is a key component and we work closely with them. But I think it is that transition aspect that we all feel concerned about: what is going to happen to my loved one when I am not here to care? That is why it is fairly important that we get that transition pathway absolutely spot on.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Okay, thanks. But we look forward to all the stuff coming forward in January. That is it from me for now, I think everybody will be relieved to hear. But we are not done because I am going to throw back to Senator Mézec who is going to take on from now. Thanks.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Thank you. Most of my questions are about getting updates on bits and pieces that have been going on anyway, so just bearing in mind the time I will try and be concise about some of these. The autumn employer incentive that was launched, the last time this panel asked about that you said

that there had been 84 employees who had been taken up on that. Now that we are in December, are you able to give us updated numbers on that for how many were taken up through it?

Director General, Community and Local Services:

Yes, by all means. I am pleased to report that we now have 108; that is split through 3 different types of incentive. The main one is the 6-months permanent contract arrangement and that has gone from 72 to 81. Then the paid training, which is 12 weeks of financial support, which has gone from 9 to 16. The autumn incentive, which was the title of the question, that has gone from 3 to 9. We were quite pleased in some respects that the uptakes be higher in the other 2 because they are for longer periods and obviously the permanent contract one is our ideal situation and that is the maximum amount of financial support. Yes, good progress and that has been seen alongside a reduction and obviously the official employment numbers come out in January for the end of the year. But we monitor a daily ticker and we have seen some good progress in terms of reducing unemployment over the last couple of months and that helps and is supported by this initiative, so good.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Okay, thank you. In terms of the funding that was allocated to get this off the ground, how much of that was spent and is there anything left over from it?

Director General, Community and Local Services:

We have received permission to extend our business activity until the end of March and at the same time that is when we also got permission to change the scheme slightly. We are on track to spend almost a good chunk of it. Probably at the moment there may be some left, I think, but we would need to either go back to the Fiscal Stimulus Panel to ask how that could be spent differently or return the funds, yes, but we are doing very well.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

What would you say are the key things you have learnt from putting this together and the success that there has been and in particular getting people eventually into permanent work, rather than just a temporary thing? What are the key lessons you have learnt through it?

Director General, Community and Local Services:

The Back to Work has obviously got quite a lot of experience in this area. What has been different, I think, this time is the willingness of employers - and that is because of the latest market conditions - to give people more of a chance. When we did the employment incentives post the low value consignment relief at that sort of time when there were lots of lower skilled people coming out of the labour market at the same time, we did not have a great take-up. The labour market conditions at

the moment are encouraging people to support people who have been out of work longer than 12 months and that is very encouraging. We had some great feedback the other day from Liberation Group and they run job selection processes in Guernsey, where they have pubs obviously, and also in the U.K. and they were complimentary about it was the best sort of job centre type recruitment apparently they have ever had. That was very positive and the team worked very hard to motivate jobseekers to turn up and give it their best shot so they can secure some work. At the moment the labour market is very helpful in that sense. We are obviously making the most of the conditions, I think, is a positive outcome.

The Minister for Social Security:

You would know, Senator, it is much harder sometimes to get people back into work, even their confidence after they have been out of work for so long and also then say to the employer: "Confidence, we are going to give you some money, so there is that bit of confidence." Even then, though, as Ian said, we are always up for that but now, hopefully, that they will stay because it is the 6 months one, is it not? Yes, that they will stay and they will enjoy the work and the employer would realise that just a little bit of time and effort people will do the jobs and work. Some might want to know what industries mainly ...

Director General, Community and Local Services:

Yes, it is a broad range from construction through to retail and everything in between really.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Is there any sort of difference in terms of those that are only up being permanent, as opposed to more short-term ones? Is that evenly spread across the industries ...

Director General, Community and Local Services:

Yes, broadly it is spread across the main industries; construction, hospitality and retail, that is our target range really. We obviously do not have many of these type of incentives being used by finance. Obviously they do not need the extra funding in the same way but also perhaps the individuals we are now supporting are more suitable in terms of their job goals to work in hospitality, retail or construction.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Okay, thank you. A very quick one on everything that has gone on within minimum earnings threshold recently. Just now that that has been passed by the States and you gave your undertakings for what will be the next steps, could you just tell us about the efforts you have made in communicating that, not just other government departments that think it might be necessary but more broadly, what communications have you begun putting out in regards to that?

The Minister for Social Security:

I think we had to wait for the order to go. After the debate it was a certain amount of time and then we are going to go ... we have a full comms to get to the employee, not the employer because obviously that was a concern. A lot of the employers who know have told the employees but it is the ones, maybe the smaller ones, who are using a third party to pay the payee roll; they may be a small company and a lot of them already use a payroll. We have not done it yet but we have a big plan to go as soon as the order is out, yes, that is sorted this weekend, yes.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Okay. Since that became an issue and was discussed in the States, just have you had any extra feedback from anyone really that has noted the changes that you have proposed from where you were originally on it or is ...

The Minister for Social Security:

It comes in in January or February will be the time I think to law because that is the actual when it will ... employers, instead of doing 3-monthly, they will be doing everything monthly, will they not, that will pay into us? Then the employer, that is when the change ... it was already a bit complicated, some will probably be better off because they were just putting down the hours, et cetera. Yes, we need to keep an eye on that, sort of January, February and March, yes.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Okay, thank you. Moving on to the rising gas tariffs, at the beginning of October in a States sitting you said in response to an oral question that research was beginning to look into the amount of low-income households there are out there in Jersey who are reliant on gas. Obviously it is fairly quick to get that from the housing trusts and Andium but less so for those out in the private sector. Have you been doing that research and have you discovered anything through that in terms of the numbers of people out there who may be severely affected by this?

The Minister for Social Security:

As I say, it was very hard to get the private sector and the Chief Exec of Jersey Gas wanted to meet with us and they offered us a scheme where they can supply the money and they were also going to do an update. It would not be in Andium and it would be in the trusts. But some of these privates, you say they are going in and making sure that the weigh days are even, giving out the right amount and they are fit for purpose. They offered us this scheme because we were so low in the low income that we knew about in Andium, I think there was about 4 or 5 and, yes, very, very small, heating and gas, cooking and gas. This scheme, they contact Jersey Gas and then they will be assessed. I have not gotten into what the assessment if ... it is not in my rules, so it could be anybody. I am

thinking that it would not need the 5-year rule, I think, but Jersey Gas, it is their scheme. Citizens' Advice assess, then they will give them help, they will probably give them things but it is the money that goes around in a circle, it is a voucher from Jersey Gas to go and give back to Jersey Gas.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Okay. Is that in force now, are people physically going and getting those vouchers now?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, yes. The *J.E.P. (Jersey Evening Post)* published something yesterday and asked for my officers to go straight back and say ... put out again what they can do.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

That was going to be my next question along the communications of that. You mentioned the *Jersey Evening Post*. Is there anything else you are looking at?

The Minister for Social Security:

We did everyone. Channel 103 followed me over the weekend to ask how it works and talk them through it, which was done.

[12:00]

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Are you able to do any direct communications with people who you are pretty sure might be eligible for this? I know that it is not many ...

Director General, Community and Local Services:

We are requesting Jersey Gas also include this in their own communication to the customers. We have sent something out recently, have a regular weekly community update that goes through charities but also the parishes, and this week it included a reminder of the scheme that is on offer and the support that is available for people. It has only got colder, we do not want people being worried about that if the support is available.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Okay, thank you. In the States in September you were asked by Deputy Doublet about menopause support in the workplace and you expressed interest in Deputy Doublet's suggestion of a workplace menopause policy for the Government. Is that something you have had an opportunity to look at, since it was raised in this debate?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes. Initially, myself and Deputy Doublet had just a one-to-one meeting, wanting to find out more. Then probably 4 weeks ago we opened our door to women States Members; a good few came, the Constable of St. Martin, there was about 5 out there, Deputy Gardiner was out, Deputy ... might have been there and we had Patricia from J.A.C.S. (Jersey Advisory and Conciliation Service) and there were some brilliant things to do. She said: "Do not get hung up on policy, just get some practical things in." We were going to have another meeting this afternoon. One of the practicals was to approach the Bailiff about the toilet upstairs for women. I mean, it is just a thing but it is a thing. I cannot go, I have a funeral and Louise could not chair, so it is in train. I must go back to the Radio Jersey, 2 women yesterday morning, was it, talking about 14 points? They advised all companies, they had a good 14 points that would help women through the practical things again. No, absolutely, what we can do and that would obviously branch out to the whole of States workers. I think a lot are doing it, you can ask for flexible hours, et cetera, but ...

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

I think that was the next point then, which was to say if you think you have made some good progress on that in the Government, have you begun thinking about what you might want to do then to encourage other employers to start adopting, whether it is those practical things or some best practice you might be able to find somewhere?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes. As I say, I think I need to talk to the 2 ladies who have already been and they never said who they were working for. You know we have something like a law at work and that and revising all different things. I never got the name of the company but they were very, very good and they were dealing with companies. We will do our bit but they roll it out. Obviously it is not legislated for but I am told there is enough in our Employment Law like the flexible hours, et cetera, and now rest breaks and that, that it should help if you are having a really bad day through your menopause that they should help. Definitely I think it is something we can have a really easy win and get it out there to other companies and they should take it on board. Obviously if you are construction and they are all men and they are not going to bother, I suppose. But if it is a company that the top are all men, they are the ones you have to convince. That is who you have the conversation with, yes.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Okay, thank you, so more to come, hopefully.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Moving on to the Jersey Dental Fitness Scheme, are you able to tell us how many children have been involved in that scheme this year in 2021?

The Minister for Social Security:

It has gone right down, has it not? Yes, I think 2021 623 and that is ...

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Sorry, can you repeat that, sorry?

The Minister for Social Security:

Sorry, Senator, 623 and did it start in 2012?

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Performance and Planning:

I think it has been going quite a long time.

The Minister for Social Security:

Okay. We have figures from 2012 and that was 1,209. Yes, go on, if you want to ask this question.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

What would you attribute that drop in numbers to?

The Minister for Social Security:

To get on the scheme it possibly could be your teeth have to be of certain fitness.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Right.

The Minister for Social Security:

Apparently it is complicated. We are launching today or tomorrow, so what we want to do if you can give us 15 minutes, all of you, at the end we will tell you what we are doing. We have a scheme to go for low-income children. It is so near that we are talking to dentists now but we want to give you a proper overview, if you have 10 or 15 minutes at the end.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

We will see.

The Minister for Social Security:

Okay, yes.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

But that would be helpful either way. Some people would find what you were almost suggesting at the start of that answer to be concerning, that for the Jersey Dental Fitness Scheme to get on it you do have to have a basic standard of health in your teeth to get on it in the first place.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

The number has dropped considerably.

The Minister for Social Security:

It has halved, I think.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Are you suggesting it is possibly because the general health of young people's teeth has got worse in that time, so they are not qualifying on that basis? Because that would obviously be something to be very worried about.

The Minister for Social Security:

I have Sam on the line who deals with all this. I think it is a complicated scheme as well and that you get free dentists if you go to the hospital up to year 11. Sam, can you answer the Senator's question? In fact, if it is what I have said it is and if it is not, it is not, thanks.

Senior Policy Officer, Social Security Department:

Yes, there is a requirement to be dentally fit before you join the scheme and then the scheme helps people maintain dental fitness. But the dental department at the general hospital do help children attain dental fitness. There is a separate part of the scheme that is kind of a pre-entry thing where children can be brought up to dental fitness. I think the scheme itself has been in operation for quite some time and is due to have a good review about how well it is working. There is an income bar that is quite high, it is up in the £50,000s but there is also a requirement for people to pay themselves to top up the amount. I think with those elements involved, I think all of it needs to be looked at again. I think also the Minister would probably mention that we have the oral health strategy coming down the line and there is a slight sort of pause to see what that is going to recommend before we would be able to make any wholesale commitments about what the Jersey Dental Fitness Scheme

should look like. It is running at the moment and we heard that there are some grains of value in that that we can pull out for the future when we have the oral health strategy.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Thank you. That was going to be my next question about that strategy and what the Minister for Social Security and C.L.S. is doing alongside the Minister for Health and Social Services in developing that. Some reports have been said about the co-payment, which can be difficult for some people in these services, and basic dental fitness for young children. We know that for lots of those children before they reach the age of this particular scheme have long waiting lists for dental treatment as well. Are you able to update us on where the oral strategy is and what you have done to contribute to that alongside the Minister for Health and Social Services?

The Minister for Social Security:

It is the Minister for Children and Education, Scott Wickenden, as well. Obviously we met and I thought we ... when will it be released, Sam? We met only 2 Fridays ago but it was in between those I think in the ...

Senior Policy Officer, Social Security Department:

Yes. They are looking to publish in March. They have done a series of workshops, it is something that is being led more by health colleagues. There has been a series of workshops with clinicians and with high street dentists, just putting together the kind of options to consider in that strategy. I believe it is an entire all-health strategy, so it will be looking at older ages where there are children, access, all aspects of that. I think there was a briefing a couple of weeks ago just to bring the Minister for Children and Education and other people up to speed with their process and their progress.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

I might be asking you to predict the future with this question but when that strategy is complete and available, do you anticipate that that would lead to some quick changes to the schemes that are in place or is it likely to lead to a more long-term transition perhaps to something else? The reason that I ask that question is just because if it is a more long-term thing then perhaps some thinking about how you promote the current scheme may need to be thought about as well. I say that because I look at the website page on it and some of it is a little bit confusing when you look at it and that could have an impact on take-up because of it. Do you think when that work is done it is likely to lead to quick change or is it likely to be a more long-term transition to perhaps something better?

The Minister for Social Security:

I think it is going a bit quick ...

Director General, Community and Local Services:

Yes, there is obviously money in the Government Plan under the heading of COVID recovery to address some children's dental health issues. There is money there, albeit under COVID recovery decree action as well and that, I am sure, will be in line with whatever the oral dental strategy comes out with. Certainly, the feeling I am getting from health colleagues is that there is energy behind it, yes.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Okay, thank you. Financial independence in old age, I was not a member of the panel at the time but I know in the Government Plan public hearing in October when that was raised you mentioned D3P Global Pension Consulting were looking to finalise and publish their report on this and you were hoping to get that by the end of the year. Is that still on track, the end of the year for that?

The Minister for Social Security:

It could be on track but it would be really late in December. People are saying it is best published ...

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

A nice Christmas present.

The Minister for Social Security:

We still want to know what was in it because January and February brought Deputy Tadier on board but they need to update it, it is over a year old now. I could push it but then it is going to come out right when the Government Plan are all away. We are probably now looking at the first week or 2 in January, only for the practicalities really. Everyone can start fresh and read it and the work has to go back to ... get on with it. My officers want it, I want it, it was always going to be tight, unfortunately, with COVID; it is going to go really well.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

That engaged your attention as well.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, absolutely.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Just on that then, can you just advise whether your intention is to give this panel access to that report as soon as possible and the free thing and the rest of it?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, yes, definitely.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Okay, thank you. My last one before handing back over to Deputy Pamplin. You issued a response to the petition recently about the repeal of the overlapping of benefits order and in that you do mention an intention for a new tax-funded payment, which would be created to provide extra financial support for family carers in the Government Plan. Can you update us on work that has been done for that and what are you looking at delivering through that?

The Minister for Social Security:

That is the one that has been put back again. I know you have not been on this particular panel but it has been put back, it is clearly to home and it is for quite vulnerable people who spend a lot of time in their home and their carers. But individuals have to go into their home. It got put back, people did not want them in their home in COVID. It started again. Is it under a different officer now, I think, or ...

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Performance and Planning:

Yes, it probably is, yes.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, yes. It is looking like it will be rolled out early next year.

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Performance and Planning:

Yes, as you talked about with the closer to home, the ability to kind of get into the community has been really compromised recently. But, Senator, it is a joint project between C.L.S. and S.P.P.P. and also health officials but planning to make the visits soon. Obviously Omicron has rather kind of caught us by surprise, so we will see what happens. But assuming that nothing else comes our way in terms of COVID, then those meetings will start to happen imminently, probably not immediately, probably after Christmas now before Christmas holidays and things. But that will lead to gathering really good detailed data from individual households and the types of costs they face. Then that will lead to the, probably to start with, individual packages kind of on a case-by-case basis and then following that to a more organised kind of a benefit. There is money in that next year in the Government Plan. We have been delayed because of COVID but it was so inappropriate because these are some of the most vulnerable people in society and there was no justification for going to

people's homes when people were so upset about things. As soon as we can get going again we are hoping to get ...

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

When would you anticipate that being finished?

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Performance and Planning:

I think it will take most of next year to work through all the evidence and come to the kind of conclusion but that does not stop some people getting some help during the year but that is all. But until we have gone out and done some of the visits it is too hard to really kind of give a definite date for that at the minute.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Following on from that, do you have any idea at this point how much extra financial support you will be looking to provide through this?

[12:15]

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Performance and Planning:

I do not have it in front of me ...

Director General, Community and Local Services:

I think, is it £550,000?

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Performance and Planning:

Something like that, yes, it is about £500,000 we split. It is the full budget.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, how many families is there?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

That is my next question. Around about how many do you think it might be? Are we talking dozens or ...?

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Performance and Planning:

I think the scope of the scheme eventually will have reached 100 but it is starting with a small group of younger people because they are some of the biggest challenges. But the intention of the scheme would be to go out to older age groups as well. There are several hundred people we assume with

care packages through the long-term care scheme. Not all of them would need this kind of extra financial support because it is more about people who cannot afford their domestic costs. But it is just buried under the desk at the moment. We have been really held up by not being able to get into people's houses and take on the initial research. That is our first step, it has to be that.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Going back to the petition, which was very specific in what it was asking to be done, if you were to repeal the overlapping of benefits order, do you have any idea of what the cost of that would be? I know there is stuff in the response about the I.T. difficulties and what that would be, but do you know what it would cost if that was what you decided to do?

The Minister for Social Security:

Clearly, no, but you could say for about every benefit at the same time and it could cost £1 million.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Actual millions, not hundreds of thousands or ...

Director General, Community and Local Services:

If you think about a single, this type of benefit is worth about just under £11,000 a year.

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Performance and Planning:

Yes, yes.

Director General, Community and Local Services:

Yes, so it would only take 10 people to get to £100,000 a year, so that is people claiming more than one contributory benefit, so it would be in the millions definitely.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Do you get much feedback from people who have difficulties when they are transferring from receiving support through one benefit to another benefit? One of the cases that has highlighted this issue for the petitioner were people, as they become pensioners and not being eligible for other types of support that they were before, do you get feedback about people who struggle at the point of transition in terms of paperwork and delays and that sort of thing?

The Minister for Social Security:

Transitioning from one benefit to another should not really be because that is what we do, less than great but have the paternity and the short-term sick, long-term sick. If you get 100 per cent they are all the same rate, to the penny on a pension. There is pennies in it, is there not?

Director General, Community and Local Services:

Yes. There is no delays in moving people's pensions and obviously the real important issue is that at the same time people retire they may also lose their income, their wages if they decide to retire, and obviously there is income support with this but it is a means-tested benefit. That is the level of support to make sure that people maintain an income.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

But just looking at it from the point of view of the receiver, do you get feedback that they find that easy? Also, because it can be complicated to understand some of the technicalities behind these schemes, just asking from their perspective, do you get feedback from people saying: "We found this difficult" or is it genuinely seamless to everyone who comes to you?

Director General, Community and Local Services:

From all capacity that we get and had, I cannot recall a theme coming through there to say that this is what the Government has to do something about this. From that perspective obviously we say no. I am sure there have been some but not to the extent that it is consistent.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Okay. That is all I was going to ask, so I will hand back to Deputy Pamplin who has some questions that came through from the public.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes, thanks, Senator. Similar to our other hearing we did recently with the Minister for Health and Social Services, we asked members of the public to give us any questions they would like to put to the Minister, so that is what we are about to do, so here we go. First up we had this one in: "Minister, the payments of class 1 social security contributions is currently capped at the maximum of £986.75/month of a person's earnings at or above £21,030 per week, per month or £250,000 or thereabouts per year. What consideration has been given to increase the amount paid by class 1 social security contributions earning more than £252,000 per year?" That is their question.

The Minister for Social Security:

I put it up to the £250,000 but I did a lot of research and I needed the money for the parental benefits. I have not really considered it much more because I have the money I need.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Okay. There has not been any other considerations after that to raise the cap limit, is what you are saying, other than what you previously did earlier?

The Minister for Social Security:

No.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Okay.

The Minister for Social Security:

I think there is an amendment in but I am literally able to say I have about 10 minutes. I know we had that interruption but we were 11.50 a.m., but literally we have done 10 amendments at C.O.M. and then there is another 12 or 15. I have not discussed any of the ones to do with the cap yet with the council or treasury.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

No problem, no, that is fine. You are quite right, we did start late and then we ran over late, so we have a bit of time. Okay, so that was that question, I hope that helped the person who asked it. Next question: "Minister, on 8th June 2011 a proposition, P.58, submitted by the Minister for Social Security to amend the state pension age from 65 to 67 was approved by the States Assembly. This proposition enabled the pension age to increase from 65 to 67 from 1st January 2020." This person asks: "Please can you advise whether the Minister for Social Security is required to undertake any consultation, legal or otherwise, in relation to changes to the state pension age?" They ask.

The Minister for Social Security:

I do not think we are required. Obviously it was debated a long time ago to give a good warning in that it would be going up. We do a couple of months for each year much better than the U.K. I think we have handled it much better. Yes, obviously consultation, I would imagine not many people wanted to work longer. I am told 60 is the new 70 and I am feeling great, halfway there. But, no, it was done legally. I saw somewhere to say was it done legally. Yes, it was done legally a long time ago but I was in the Assembly at the time and we saw it coming down the line. It will be for the next Minister to decide and it may even need to rise again. It can only go one way; bring in more money and work longer.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Indeed, it does feel like a long time ago now when you think about it, when you look at those dates. But, again, the person who lodged the question, we thank them for it. Next one: "Minister, what work, if any, is being undertaken to introduce efficiencies or reforms to simplify the administration of the various elements of the current social security schemes?" I think we could all testament because we had many discussions of late when we were talking about the minimum earning thresholds and

I lost count about how many times we all said it is very complicated and that is at our level. I think this member of the public is saying what can be done to make it even more simpler.

The Minister for Social Security:

I think that was the only one that has sort of been there since social security came in that was an odd one. Go back to just the pension one, you can go in, you put your date of birth, you know exactly the date you are going to get your pension. You do it a couple of months before, you get your card that allows you to start getting your bus pass, et cetera. I am not sure what you think we are very complicated ... it might be if you have never been ...

Director General, Community and Local Services:

While overall it is a straightforward concept, items of the benefits and the waits and so on, there are the edges of complexity most definitely. The example of the minimum earnings, it is one of those. Obviously the social security scheme was set up many years ago and the principles behind it do exist. We consulted with the public in 2017, Sue, I think, yes, 2017, 2018 and there was a great deal of support for the current contributory system. Therefore, the concept that you pay in and become entitled to claim benefits way of contributions was a popular one. We have consulted but obviously we can make things simpler. We very much strive to ... the mantra around the Minister to make things easier for customers is what we try and do. But of course some of these rules exist for specific reasons and to remove them would have unintended consequences that sometimes are not obvious at first light.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, I think it is that people understanding that when we ... 70 years ago in September, was it, the social security thing?

Director General, Community and Local Services:

Yes.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes. But the pension thing, people's pensions, they have started collecting money and paying out straightaway, so it is the younger generation paying now to hopefully me very shortly, et cetera. The states grant, it is like if you are paying your full contribution on a lower-paid job and other people are paying more, the states grant used to be called supplementation, it tops your pension up down here. It does not matter if you have been in lower paid work but paid all your contributions, you will get the same pension as Mr. Bloggs who is on £100,000 a year. That seems complicated but at the end of the day I like the scheme that if you are earning lower but you get the same pension as the other one. But that is why we also need the private pension or workplace pension, so that will be your

part and you can put as much in it as you can afford and you can see it grow, et cetera. It is working well in the U.K.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

It could be just a generational thing. There has been a lot of changes, as we have said, since 2015 but it is still embedding in people's minds how these things work. But maybe because of the pandemic and maybe because of this high inflation that we are probably going to see next year, again Bank of England say 4.2 per cent, people are going to feel the pinch next year regardless of pandemic or not or where we are, and we are in a good upwards trajectory, hopefully. Do you feel more of these questions may come through because now people are going to absolutely look at every single penny in and out of their own person? They are going to look at things that they may have just not thought about for the last 5 years and suddenly looked at it and went: "That does not make sense." Do you think that could be a reason why people are maybe now piping up and wanting to know what this means and could this be simpler? Because people are now focusing on how it works.

The Minister for Social Security:

I do not really know; yes, maybe.

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Performance and Planning:

I will make a comment about complexity, if you like, that a few years ago there was a significant increase in prices and they would go above earnings. We have made the system a little bit more complicated by allowing pensioners each year to get an upgrade based on ... yes, when interest is high, when prices go above earnings the pension operate flips to matching R.P.I. Pensioners are never worse off because of high inflation. That is where this is meant to be more complicated but it has also meant that pensioners are guaranteed to see that prices are not going ahead of their pension. Complexity is sometimes important. Our job obviously, as office administrators, is to make sure it is easier for people to claim the pension. Claiming the pension is extremely easy and then behind the scenes there are some more complicated things going on that mean that your pension each year is keeping up with your prices but also affecting the general working economy in good years. Those are 2 sides of the dynamic I think.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes. No, it is good to air both sides. I guess, as we are hearing, the best thing to do if you have any questions, phone the phone line, they are waiting and ready to take anyone's calls. That wraps up that part of the hearing. We thank the members of the public for their questions and that is it. As the Chair said, this is our last public hearing of the year, so we would like to thank you, Minister, and the Minister for Health and Social Services, your officers that are with you today and those who are

not with us, are busy, we thank you for that. We would like to personally thank our officers for all their hard work this year publicly and we will be back next year for our last year of quarterly hearings before we hand the baton over. But on that note we would like to thank members of the public.

The Minister for Social Security:

Kevin, can I just interrupt 2 secs? Did you want that briefing on the dental? I have to go but I have Sam and Ian could do it. I do not know if you can because ...

Director General, Community and Local Services:

Yes.

The Minister for Social Security:

Okay. It will be interesting. It is going to go live tomorrow and I feel really ... we try to give you the heads up with everything, it is moving so quickly.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes.

The Minister for Social Security:

That will be fine. Also, just on record, I really wanted to thank you and everyone for their support in P.79 - you did a brilliant speech - as the Bailiff would not let me speak. I think he was out of order myself but there you go. But thanks again, it was very complicated and we got there in the end. I absolutely should not have put people in that position, as Deputy Morel said. But, yes, thank you, thank you for your support in the end, thanks. Have you got 5 or 10 minutes? It is just really ...

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes, I can if you allow me just to put the kettle on, I am all yours.

The Minister for Social Security:

Okay then.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

But thank you very much to the members of the public ...

The Minister for Social Security:

Are you happy with that?

Director General, Community and Local Services:

Yes.

The Minister for Social Security:

Because I have to ...

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Okay. This hearing comes to an end for members of the public. It will be made available on the website shortly as available. Any questions you contact us but I do draw this hearing to an end.

Thank you, everybody.

The Minister for Social Security:

Thank you.

[12:29]