



Health and Social Security Scrutiny Panel

Quarterly Hearing

Witness: The Minister for Social Security

Tuesday, 22nd February 2022

Panel:

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

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

Senator S.Y. Mézec

Deputy C.S. Alves of St. Helier

Witnesses:

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

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

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

Mr. M. MacGregor, Senior Policy Officer, Government of Jersey

[10:08]

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

Good morning everybody. Welcome to the Scrutiny Panel quarterly hearing with the Minister for Social Security. We have still got a couple of people online by way of officers but with us this morning we have the Minister. I am Deputy Mary Le Hegarat and I am the chair of this panel.

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

Good morning. Deputy Kevin Pamplin, the vice-chair of the panel.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Senator Sam Mézec, a member of the panel.

Deputy C.S. Alves of St. Helier

I am Deputy Carina Alves, and I am a member of the panel.

The Minister for Social Security:

Judy Martin, Deputy for St. Helier No. 1 and Minister for Social Security. I would just like to give apologies for my Assistant Minister who already had this week as a holiday booked.

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:

Good morning. I am Sue Duhamel. I am head of policy at Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department.

Senior Policy Officer, Government of Jersey:

I am Mark MacGregor, senior policy officer, Government of Jersey as well.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

If that is everybody, we will start. It is nice today, we have most of us within the States building, which is nice to get to some sort of going back to normal business. A reminder that this public hearing abides by the same rules as within the States Assembly. I am going to start this morning and I will ask, as we have already discussed, people to put their cameras on if they are going to be speaking or asking questions. First of all, we would like to start with the follow-up in relation to the Government Plan review. For the public record, please could you confirm which public funds under your remit will be receiving actuarial reviews in 2022 and advise when these will start and when the findings reports will be published?

The Minister for Social Security:

It is all of the funds, which is the Social Security Fund, the Health Insurance Fund and Long-Term Care Fund. They will definitely start this year and hoping the results will be in this year to inform the next Government; late this year or very early next year.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Just to clarify, will they be all done at the same time? Is there a plan for when they are going to be done? Whether it is going to be March/April or is there any sort of timescales that you have got when they are going to be starting and whether or not their findings will be reported sort of as we go along through the year or are we going to have to wait for the end of the year for all of them?

The Minister for Social Security:

Mark can answer that, he is doing the work on the actuaries and things.

Senior Policy Officer, Government of Jersey:

We are obviously in the planning stage at the moment but the intention is to carry out the work during the year and for all 3 reviews to be based on the year end 2021; so that snapshot. All to be published at the end of this year or very early going into next year. The aim is for all 3 to be published at the same time going into the new year or the end of the year, that sort of time period, so that the actuaries can carry out their work and their calculations, et cetera, during the year.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

What population assumptions will be provided to the actuaries that you are going to undertake during the 2022 review?

The Minister for Social Security:

From memory - Mark might want to correct me, or Sue - actuaries work on what has happened in the last and they project it forward. Then they can go up and down. They will go below. They will do actually the import. I think there is 750 we are based on. Then they can do more or less. So we do not make up a figure. They look back and the figure that has been the immigration ... the people have come in or what the population is, because that is what they based their last one on 4 years ago.

Senior Policy Officer, Government of Jersey:

That is right. They base their work on what has happened in the past experience. For example, they will use a scenario of net plus 700 inward migration, which is the experience we have seen in recent years. They will also do higher and lower scenarios to help inform the Island and Government, et cetera, on what the impact of that would be on the funds going forward and on the breakeven contribution rates. Finally, historically they also provided a net nil scenario as well in kind of older reviews. Not the last review but reviews prior to that. So basically they will do a range of population scenarios using up-to-date data and if there are any other particular scenarios that Ministers or the Island wants to see then they are able to kind of report separately on those once the actuarial reviews are completed.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Will that be on the 2021 census data then?

Senior Policy Officer, Government of Jersey:

That will build in that data as and when it becomes available and updated population projections as well.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

What work is being done to assess how the common population policy will affect the Social Security Fund in the future?

The Minister for Social Security:

I think it was the one of first States Members' briefings I had. It was in that room there. The actuaries came over and showed us all the charts projected into the 4 years and they have done different figures for us. They used the figure of 750. We know on that figure, which probably is not sustainable population-wise, but we know on that figure the funds work through to 2070, or something, as being a very good state.

[10:15]

But we know the Island cannot sustain that sort of population 750 net inward migration a year. So obviously this time, as I say, they have done it all before, I think we need to ask what nil looks like. Then they will tell us. They will just tell us: "That is your population. If you want to carry on with that that is what you have to charge." It is no rocket science.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

We will move on to the Health Insurance Fund. Are you able to confirm when the transfer of funds out of the Health Insurance Fund for the purposes of funding the Jersey Care Model will happen?

The Minister for Social Security:

We are not ready yet. They have not happened yet. We are still waiting for a few. We will not transfer the funds until we are 100 per cent that everything fits and we know exactly where it is being spent, and they have not gone yet. I cannot say when. We are working with them closely but I have not transferred the money yet.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Is this likely to happen within the first quarter this year?

The Minister for Social Security:

Possibly. Near the end of February. So you are talking end of April, first quarter. Should be done.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Can I just jump in? Another part of the H.I.F. (Health Insurance Fund) was the actuarial review for the H.I.F. That process has developed I would imagine Can you just break down the process for those to understand how it works and when that will be reported by?

Senior Policy Officer, Government of Jersey:

I covered it generally for all the reviews so it will be similar for the Health Insurance Fund review as well. As we go into quarter 2 and quarter 3 this year they will have the admin data that they can use to update their projections. As we go through the year there is more data available in terms of the census and other data that they need to do their work. We will discuss and agree any kind of assumptions that they want to make to come up with their projections and then they will carry out their work and they will write a draft report, final report, and that is how it flows through then to a published document.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

I guess you would not in the past estimated when it would be reported and made available to the public and States Members.

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance:

If you look back 15 years or so you will see they took years for the actuaries to come through and we had tried ... Mark and other people have worked really hard to get that process much slicker. So we should now be trying to do it within a year. There are special issues this year around the census data because we do not have the census data and we do not yet have any date from the census people as to when that date will be. That is a real unknown from our point of view. Obviously the Statistics Unit has to be completely independent of Government so there is no way we can ask: "Can you hurry up a bit because we are trying to get this stuff out at the other end?" That will happen when it happens. The census data is one thing, that will give you the point in time figures for March 2021, but what the actuaries also need is a population model. That is another piece of work after the main census is finished. That has to be done as well. This year, I think it will take a bit longer than, for example, it took last time because of the extra publications. There is a discussion to be had: do you plan ahead for the old numbers to be quicker or do you wait for the new numbers to be more accurate? There is a bit of a balance there to be had. I think our current thinking is that we should try to be more accurate because that would be better really, and for the sake of a few months it will be sensible to do it properly. The actuarial review is not something that you do all the time. You are using experts to do it. It is quite complicated so you do want to use the best data. That is kind of where we are at the minute. I think this Minister has not made a final decision yet. But I think it is probably more likely to be the beginning of next year. But the big picture stuff, these are long-term funds. They are not going to suddenly get much better or much worse than they are today. We always have figures that ... the figures from last time are not going to be that different going

forward. It is important to do it but it is also important to use the best possible data. So the census timing is perhaps not ideal from our point of view but we are looking at it.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

From a political sense a lot was talked about last year at the beginning of the Care Model about how the H.I.F. fund would be used and there were promises made about that there is money available to this. There is still an argument around the money coming out of the H.I.F. fund, so a big part of some of the ... especially the work that we did on the Care Model was the accuracy of the data, the numbers. So if that political decision was to be challenged by the next States Assembly to go forward, keep taking money out of the H.I.F. fund, to finally have the data of the actuary reviews. It is going to be really important to the continual funding of the triages of the Care Model. Am I right in saying the triage one payment still has not gone through?

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance:

We have not made the 2021 payments yet.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Why is that?

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance:

Because, as per the Government Plan commitments and the Scrutiny amendment, the Minister is making sure that she has full data as to how the money was spent. We know the numbers are kind of there but it is just getting all that detail into the report so that it is accurate.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Sorry, just not to quibble on this, but what is still outstanding considering a lot of the work has been done because we scrutinised that Care Model to an inch of its life last year, so I am just curious? What do you not have yet to convince you to pay the money?

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance:

It is literally just getting the wording in the report right so that it makes sense to everybody, for non-technical people as well as the technical people. It is that kind of work. It is not kind of like: "Oh my goodness, what is this £1 million for?" We are far beyond that. I think we know the numbers are contained ...

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Just cross the Ts and dotting the Is.

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance:

Absolutely, to get it right. Can I just make one more broader point about the Health Insurance Fund? Another thing, not the Minister for Social Security but the Minister for Health and Social Services, is a thorough review of health funding. So that is really important part of it. It is when you talk about the H.I.F. and the transfers out of the H.I.F. those are important but at the end of the day there is a new project going on now, which is a big important project which is the Health Department and the Minister for Health and Social Services are just going to be looking at the way in which the cost of health overall in the future. That is again another Government Plan commitment for 2022. That work is underway at the minute and that will all feed into ... so by the beginning of next year the new Council of Ministers, the new Government, new States Assembly, will have the results of that review, the results of the Health Insurance Fund, actuarial review, so they will be in a much better position then to see the big picture.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

That is really important because obviously there is an election coming and this is the time period when things are bandied about, so the sooner we get our percent ... is there any chance of a pre-review of the state of play because there is going to be a lot of misinformation flying around, passionate speeches, electioneering going on, and that is quite dangerous when these reports are not going to be, as you say, ready and in the public domain until next year. Is there any way any time you can put forward something into the public and say: "Here are the facts" as opposed to what we are hearing already with people saying: "Oh, they are throwing way money. There is no money in the H.I.F. fund" all that sort of stuff?

The Minister for Social Security:

We know what is in the H.I.F. fund and we know what the last actuary report, they are all out there. What the people do not like, and you can understand why, it is based on the 750 population increase a year. I will check, but I think that we did ask them to do some extra work on the 325, did we not, and is that maybe any different? The H.I.F. again is making sure Health are doing their overall funding, who is in it, who gets what and then what role will the H.I.F. play in that? Will it be changed, et cetera? But we would not be bringing ... I think you are asking would I bring an actuarial review.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

No.

The Minister for Social Security:

No you are not.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Just indicators in some ways when people go on a website and say: "Here is a snapshot and the actual is coming. We cannot give you the full picture because we do not have it until next year" I think would be helpful to everybody.

Senior Policy Officer, Government of Jersey

The last Government Plan has some tables in there which show the expectations around income and expenditure and the funds, the balances for the Health Insurance Fund for the next few years. So that, together with the last actuarial review, will ... basically short-term numbers and long-term numbers, which you will be able to look at.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Very quickly from me. Census: is this the longest it has been delayed? It feels like it is taking a bit longer than normal. I am just going by your experience, Sue, as somebody who has been here longer than me.

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance:

Census was March 2021. I cannot comment, I really do not know.

The Minister for Social Security:

I cannot really remember and I have been through 2, I think.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Just curious because there is a big Island Plan debate coming up. There have been some figures that are coming up. There is a lot of population policy that we do not have this critical component.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

There are more returns to count.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes, let us hope so. I just thought I would throw it out there because I am curious as always.

The Minister for Social Security:

I think there was a written question, was it to be out by the end of March? Or maybe I made that ... it is for the Chief Minister.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Long-term care. Minister, what work has been done since the last actuary review of the Long-Term Care Fund as at 31st December 2017 to collect data and review the long-term sustainability of the fund?

The Minister for Social Security:

We have ongoing work. Obviously the Long-Term Care Fund will be going in an actuarial report. It is a very young fund. It did not start until 2014, so we are 2022. It is working. We went for 1 per cent and got 0.5 per cent. But that gave us about 10 years so far to make sure that it will still be sustainable. I cannot really say much other than that.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Regarding the long-term sustainability, the last actuary review specifically noted that the fund would be unsustainable beyond the immediate future without changes to its operation; for example, it stated that delaying action until crisis point in time could disadvantage the current younger population to the benefit of older age groups. Is there any work that is being done in relation to be able to address this point?

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance:

I think the Minister has just noted that the Minister sought to put the contribution rate up to 2 per cent from 1 per cent. So that does address the sustainability of the fund. That proposition was defeated and an amendment to put it up 1.5 per cent was put instead. So that is what the actuaries are saying, they are saying the more money you collect now the better it is for everybody. If you do it bit by bit it will take longer. There will be less money in the funds and you will have to put the rate up again in future, which is probably going to happen anyway. So the Minister has tried her best to put the rate up to 2 per cent. It has gone up to 1.5 per cent. The fund is very sustainable at the minute. It is collecting some extra money from it but the contributions we make will need to go up again to maintain the sustainability going forwards. Obviously that means that younger people will be paying a bit more proportionately. That is what the actuaries were referring to.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Okay, I just wanted to clarify that. Regarding the data in relation to the long-term care, the Long-Term Care Fund stated: "We recommend collecting more detailed data on homeownership property type and property value for individuals entering care so that this assumption can be defined for future actuary reviews." Has this data been collected ahead of the 2022 actuary review?

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance:

Yes, there is better data now. So that will feed into the next actuary review.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

But the data in relation to homeownership and property types, et cetera, has all been collected so when the next review is done that data is all available.

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance:

It has passed the calibre of the system.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Okay, thank you. How many properties does Social Security hold a hypothec over?

The Minister for Social Security:

Sue will have to explain to you what a hypothec is, so she will have to explain it to you and how it actually works.

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance:

It is a Jersey name. It is just another name for a mortgage, it is called an hypothec and there are 40 currently that are outstanding. So there are 40 properties allied against them.

[10:30]

A hypothec is just another word for a charge or a bond, so if you borrow against your house to put your kids through uni or to build a conservatory or something you can take a loan against your house and you can pay it back. So it is just one of those. It has a couple of special characteristics which is unique to Jersey. One is that, unlike all other Jersey property loans, it can change value. So the whole idea is that you do not have to say: "Oh, I think my care costs are going to be £10,000." The value of the loan builds up over time so it only equals the amount of money that you have spent on your care. The loan just sits against your house and it attracts a very low rate of interest. I think it is 0.5 per cent above base rate, which is very, very good from a commercial point of view. It is much cheaper than trying to get a commercial loan. Then it only becomes repayable when the person who was having the care dies or sells the house and their spouse or if there was a carer living in the house, perhaps a son or daughter who was living with you, if that person is in the house which you have the charge against, that person would also have to want to move out or whatever. So when there is nobody left in the house or the house has been sold then the loan becomes repayable. So that typically would be inherited by children or whatever. They would inherit the house, they have full ownership of the house, there is no ... dependent on the house, as it were, it is their house to sell or whatever. If they want to keep the house then they will have what is probably a relatively small loan to make it mortgage against with a bank. It allows houses to be passed down with very

little impact on the family as a whole. It never requires a house to be sold. It is quite a generous way of supporting homeowners with positive care.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Thank you. I am now going to hand over to Senator ...

Deputy C.S. Alves:

Sorry, can I just ask on that? Let us say in the past couple of years, how many times has it been that these houses have had to be sold and the department has gained that money from those house sales? Is that something that happens commonly or is it normally that families take over that debt?

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance:

No, because if you think about it ... so far as the scheme is concerned there is a debt owing on the house and the debt materialises following something else happening, the death of someone, and then all the department needs to know is that the money gets repaid. Now the department will not know whether money has been repaid by the family kind of like making their own mortgage or by them selling the property. We would not know that. I can probably try and work out backwards through the Royal Court records but there is no particular reason why we would need to track that either way. But I mean I think we can say that the loans are not an area where people have lots of issues or queries that prevents that. We know it is an area that works quite nicely. I am personally not aware of any issues with loans.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

I will now hand over to Senator Mézec, who is going to start questions in relation to COVID.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

To start off, could you let us know what sort of demand you are currently getting for the COVID helpline?

The Minister for Social Security:

Ian has those figures.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

At the moment we are getting about 500 to 700 calls broadly split between concerns about contact tracing or isolation guidance and recovery letters. About one in 4 of those sort of calls. Then vaccinations being the next biggest group. Then finally sort of travel queries at about 15 per cent. It has changed significantly since we last met, along with the change in the landscape around COVID on the Island, and that has meant that our resources have been able to provide a very good service,

calls get answered very quickly. It has also meant that the contact tracing activity that has now fallen away, we are handling more of those sorts of calls that perhaps would have gone to contract tracing. That is allowing them to change the way they operate as well. Overall we are operating a service that is more relevant to the current climate and we are obviously expecting that the requirement for having a helpline to reduce gradually in the months ahead, and that is line with the Government Plan funding arrangements where we have approximately £500,000 for the year but only as we need it. At the moment, I would expect that we will not need all of it.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Just on that point about the months ahead, when do you anticipate getting to a point that service is stepped down?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

We will be looking to see how we can absorb the calls into business as usual. At the moment we are 500 to 700 calls per day. Sorry, I think earlier on I said per week but 500 to 700 calls per day. That is, if I give the comparison, probably the C.L.S. (Community and Local Services) calls on 444 444 are about 900 calls a day. So it is quite a significant volume, so it is not quite yet at the stage where we can take it in. We will just look and see over the rest of the year, I think. Obviously at the moment we have a team of 23 advisers; they are covering at the moment throughout the day and weekends. We might look to change some of those opening hours as a general gradual reduction, depending on customer volumes. Obviously also reduce the number of people and we would do that, and hopefully absorbing some of those individuals who want to work for Government, moving them from the helpline to other parts of Government as vacancies come up. There is no timeline at the moment, Senator. We are playing it sensibly, trying to make sure that we are not surprised suddenly if there was an uptick and we then become overwhelmed.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Just on what happens to those staff as this is downscaled over time. How many of those working for C.L.S. or another branch of government before coming into that role and what proportion came to this as their first job with government and what is likely to happen to them as the service is stepped down?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

In the beginning, back in March 2020, the COVID helpline was staffed up entirely from people who already worked for government and we pulled people from C.L.S., Back to Work, support centres and so on. As things progressed, we were then able to bring in and train up people who had not previously worked for Government, so that people can go back to their other roles and provide those services as the pandemic allowed. At the moment, apart from perhaps the leadership team, almost

everybody in that team are new to government and therefore are working flexibly, but of course some of them will be happy with that and some of them will want to secure roles in government. They of course have the option to apply for roles, and many of them have done. I am pleased that we have actually recruited quite a few into Customer and Local Services as well. That will continue, I am sure, in the months ahead as we seek to wind down the service and make it part of business as usual. We have made some good decisions recently, so previously if you were positive, if you had a lateral flow test positive, you would have to get a phone call from contact tracing, go through your direct contacts, get a P.C.R. (polymerase chain reaction) test booked. Now you can book the P.C.R. test yourself and that is reducing the number of steps that members of the public have to take to make sure they get the appropriate testing regime. The indication from public health is that will change hopefully before the end of March. People will not have to isolate in the same way they have done previously. That will also change the volumes of activity coming through the Healthline.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Those who need to go and get a P.C.R. test with a change in the locations of testing centres, I am getting calls from people who are concerned about transport. I did not want the Island not to have a way of getting to the airport but are concerned if they take some sort of public transport, they might inadvertently be spreading COVID-19 as they do it.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

I am not responsible for the testing centres. I know we had the airport testing centre originally, so that is nothing new in that sense, so these issues would have been around before and I think Islanders have managed to find a way to get to the airport testing centre, made a switch to the airport and the harbour, then the harbour and now it is back to the airport testing centre. I am not saying that is right but that would be a question for the COVID-19 safe contact tracing team who look after the testing regime.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Before you briefly mentioned about flexible working for those running the Healthline. Do you mean zero hours?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

We have mainly been able to resource the helpline through agency recruitment and therefore people are working for an employment agency and we have had all sorts of different people coming into work; students, university returners, and we are grateful for their flexibility. That team has also needed to flex with the peaks and troughs.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

My question was quite specific: are these zero hours contracts jobs?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

They are employed by the agency and we have them placed through a temporary agency so their employment contract is with the agency.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Okay, thank you. Is the Connect Me service still receiving inquiries and requests for assistance? If so, what numbers are coming through and what types of requests?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

The Connect Me service has tailed off significantly. We get very few requests now for support through that service. In the beginning there were lots of calls. Overall, we supported nearly 800 calls through that service over the length of the pandemic. Most of those happened at the beginning. Many more services can be delivered now through deliveries, so a lot of the Island businesses and other community services have all responded to the pandemic, so Connect Me has become less important. One of the biggest queries we have always had throughout this has been around dog walking and we have done our best to help support people make connections there to ensure their pets. But Government also changed the policy to allow people to be out for 2 hours a day, even if they were isolating, so that also helps solve that issue that was an issue in the first few months. The service is not staffed up particularly. It goes through to colleagues who work on it in the library so from that perspective it is already part of business as usual and there is no need to unwind that with resources.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Thank you. This is for the Minister specifically. With the Government's move to a de-escalation strategy, how have you specifically been involved in framing that and making sure the provision of these kinds of services, the Healthline and Connect Me, are being thought of as you plan for that de-escalation to make sure there is no shortfall anywhere and it is accounted for?

The Minister for Social Security:

It is more of a 2-way street. Ian had told me that this is not being used as much or this is it. I have a 2-hour Social Security meeting every Friday and then the medical teams are ... I am not on that competent authorities per se. I do go in sometimes when there is an issue that might affect all the staff working at C.L.S. but I am not really on it. They will decide this is where we need to go medically, et cetera, and then it goes down if you need to consider this. Is it being used much, et cetera? That is where the conversations are had.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Have you ever had occasion to proactively approach them to say: "I would request this specific area to be considered" in how you time the de-escalation, because of pressure there may be?

The Minister for Social Security:

No, because the 2 things, the helpline is needed, but the helpline is that anyone wants to do with COVID-19, it could be co-funded. That is not, it is the other line. But they may ring there first of all. When it is not being used, I cannot think of anything that has not been thought of under my remit that we are going back to what the word is normal, if you like. Some people think that is political. Some people might think it is going to be too quick or not quick enough. No, there is thought being given all the way along. There are extra services we have put on and what is being provided, where. We will get there.

[10:45]

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Thank you. Is there anyone else on that particular point?

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Just quickly, I know it is not published yet but as Scrutiny we have looked at some areas. There were some elements that were not as tight as I thought there would be around mental health provision and the knock-on effect to people in isolation and people claiming their isolation benefit and not needing support. As part of the de-escalation we were looking also for what could be switched back on quickly if, let us hope, touch wood, we do not find ourselves dealing with another dangerous variant. From your point of view, are you satisfied that in the de-escalation, if needed to, things could be quickly brought back into play again?

The Minister for Social Security:

Absolutely. I was the chair of the community taskforce and we have some lessons learned, and we know where to turn them on and we would be able to turn anything on quickly; the isolation benefit who, how. It was very early on. It was February last year, when I said there were 4 countries that were coming back, I think it was Hong Kong ... just phone up, do not use a doctor, you will get an isolation benefit, it was called a sickness benefit still then. It was thinking ahead because we could see the rest of the world, and that went on that quickly and it could go on again. Now we know how to do it, we do not want to have to use it again but, yes, absolutely.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Also, interesting hearing there from Ian the figures about the Connect Me service. I thought one big positive that came out of the whole situation, the way services came together. That has been a problem and I will get to the business plan later, the pathway of the journey, the customer or the patient. I am curious about the things that did work out with Connect Me service, you and the Deputy of Grouville and others were involved..

The Minister for Social Security:

Constable, yes. We co-opted Malcolm Ferey.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

It would be a shame to lose that. Is there any way you could make sure that does not disappear just because it has gone back to normal; that there is something there to be done?

The Minister for Social Security:

Overnight we had 2,000 volunteers and that was done for a different stream. Obviously again, working together. We could not find work for them. It was so quick. Also on board, Government was bringing post office to deliver and taxi drivers to deliver medicines and it worked brilliantly but we were in a state of emergency, if you think about it. People could not go out of their homes. Somebody has to bring ... somebody has to walk the dog. It is a worry, if you have a dog, when you want to go out, you cannot, the dog has to be walked. It is there. It can be. People are not ringing it. They do not need it and there is other now, most supermarkets are delivering, you get deliveries here, there and whatever, so it is not needed.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

It is interesting because a big part of Customer and Local Services, when I think about that, is having, and that is the aim of this, is it not? One shop where people come in, get help with all sorts of things and through the pandemic that happened naturally. We will have other events, bad winters and all sorts of things.

The Minister for Social Security:

I think they were getting more things, were they not, that they could normally source themselves? Then obviously, because they could not go out, or they were ill, even worse, they needed the community to come together and it came together very quickly. It worked really well. We were doing this and other people stepping up. Talking to Jersey Post, they were doing brilliant delivering. I think they were going to get the prescriptions.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

That involved lateral flow testing, which is a great system that is in place. I am thinking specifically again about mental health in terms of when people are in a crisis, they just want to phone one number and it will be signposted the right way. Is there anything we can salvage out of the Connect Me service that might be able to work there to put in the department?

The Minister for Social Security:

I see your point now. I think they would have to talk to, they would have to see if that pathway would help and if it could it would, but obviously you would have to talk to the people running the service, but yes. Most people want one phone call. If it is directed in that area but they would make that initial one phone call and they are talking to people all the time. It might be a different person in 10 minutes' time but they are the person they need to reach. Yes, that is a good point. We can look at that.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

I am creating my question based on his plan but I just wanted to ...

The Minister for Social Security:

No, that is fine, Deputy.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

The actively seeking work figures, what is your assessment of where we are at the moment?

The Minister for Social Security:

It is brilliant news. We are at the lowest actively seeking work people since income support started keeping figures in the way we keep figures, which I do not think was when it started in 2008; it was probably a few years later. It says we have 810 active seeking work but 290 of those are actually doing work and it is the school start so a lot of the children went back to school in September and then their parents would have been asked to work a few more hours. So, they are working but we call them actively seeking work. If you have to do 20 hours, you are only doing 15, or 25 and you are only doing 15, you are not doing an extra 10, so they still come under that figure, which I do not particularly like but it is the way it has always been presented. So it is around 500 people who are doing nothing.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

What is the proportion of those who have been registered as seeking work for more than a year?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

It is about 300. Out of the 800 it is about 300 roughly who are long-term unemployed. Many of those will have some part-time work so the actual question is: how many of the long-term unemployed have no work? I can get that figure for you, Senator. I think it is about 170. Of the 300 people who are long-term unemployed, about 130 have some part-time work or are looking for more hours, which leaves us with 170 individuals who currently are long-term unemployed. They do not have any work and they are our priority for back-to-work. We are pleased that the number has come right down from 450 at one point, all the way down to 300 and I hope it continues to go lower. They are our focus for our back-to-work employment advisers to help support them and help set realistic job goals and help them get some work to get them back on the ladder and move from there.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

At the last hearing we spoke about the autumn employer incentive. That was meant to target people who have been unemployed. What is your assessment of where that is and how successful that has been?

The Minister for Social Security:

We have a couple of schemes and there are 112 on those schemes, which is more than we expected. The biggest one is up to 6 months and that is full-time. The employer must give them a full-time contract. Apparently, the ones that started early are still there. They have stayed in the job, which is really good. Some do not carry on after that. We have another one running, is it an 8-week scheme or a 12-week scheme, Ian? Those figures are in that 112.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

The way the autumn employer incentive is worded is to make the people who have been unemployed since before May last year. I am working out if that correlates to the actively seeking work figure where you can still be registered as actively seeking work even though you have a bit of work. Was that purely for people who have no work whatsoever or was it also to help those who already had work but could have done with extra work?

The Minister for Social Security:

You would concentrate first on the never worked and then if we could not go any further, we worked on the people that were only doing a few hours.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

It was available for everybody who had been out of work, however it is classed, because if you have a job of 15 hours but you are looking to work for 35 and there is an opportunity that comes up under the scheme to get 35 hours a week for, let us say, construction or something, then the scheme would

support you in moving across or adding another 20 hours on a permanent contract to your existing hours.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Of those that do not have work, what numbers are you talking about that are skilled or unskilled, and if they are unskilled, what processes are put in place to get them skilled in certain fields?

The Minister for Social Security:

That is what Back to Work do. I do not know if Ian has the number for skilled and unskilled but there are soft skills as well. People might not think they need a skill to work in wages or retail.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

You need a skill for everything but what I mean is—

The Minister for Social Security:

Do we know the skills? They might come in and say: "I want to be a plumber. I am a plumber. I need to be a plumber." There are no plumbers but we would help and work with them to do something else. There probably is a plumber. I am probably picking the wrong job, industry. I have forgotten the question. So, the skill, Ian can answer.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

I do not have the figure for skilled and unskilled. We make an assessment on a R.A.G. (red, amber and green) status, and it is about people's propensity and ability to get back into the labour market. Generally speaking, if somebody had skills, if they were already a plumber, they would clearly be very green by our assessment and they would perhaps need very light touch support, if any, to get back in the labour market. However, if you are amber or red, you are further away from the labour market, maybe because of the time you have been out of work, maybe because you do not have transferable skills, maybe it is because of other issues, your health or addiction and so on. We make an assessment around that and we focus our effort on the reds and ambers far more than we would on somebody we classed as green. Approximately, it is about 40 per cent are red, 40 percent are amber and 20 per cent green, very roughly. That is where we dedicate our time and support. We provide some small training interventions and some courses, like advance into care, which we have been running for some time in collaboration with the care homes. We also listen to business and business said to us over the last few years that rather than we train people, they would rather train people. Therefore, one of the fiscal stimulus programmes we had was an 8-week training contract effectively, where for 8 weeks we would pay the wages and the particular business, hospitality, would train the individual, the idea being that once they have trained they would then take them on and keep them on. That was one of the principles of the fiscal stimulus programme to help that

happen. We found that there was more demand to take people on for 6 months rather than the shorter term but those 6 weeks will also still include training and development. Either way, we are trying to help people move into the labour market and then stay there, and we have a good percentage of people who get permanent jobs who are retained by those employers after 6 months and we are quite proud of that performance. We continue to provide in-work support for those individuals once they have started those sorts of jobs to make sure any bumps in the road we might have with the employer-employee relationship we can help iron things out as best we can, having established a relationship with the unemployed individual over the time of their employment support.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Thank you. I think that answered it for me.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

What can you tell us about the training, the Skills Jersey programme? How has that gone in terms of sign-up and any potential going forward in terms of work placement? Is there a high increase? I am curious over the last 2 years what the uptake was. Do you know those figures? The training programme that replaced the old Trackers programme.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Skills Jersey does not come under me or the Minister. I thought Trackers was still carrying on.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Okay. I thought it had come up before. It is not essential. I just thought I would try it out. For another hearing.

The Minister for Social Security:

I know in a sense somebody said about Trackers the other day, that somebody from Trackers ... A couple have applied to go on Jersey Overseas Aid so Trackers is still going in some form. That is where I have heard it.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Let us move on to the children's dental scheme, which we spoke about at the last hearing as well. Can you update us with some figures of take-up for this scheme so far and, in particular, how many children have been treated under this scheme?

The Minister for Social Security:

The way the scheme works is we send the letters out. We just re-sent some letters. We have also included in those letters a letter to the child in the house, because 11 to 16 we want them to know

that they could have this money to go to a dentist of their choice. We were a bit dubious to send it to the child and tell them they live in an income support house in case they did not know, but we want to get there somehow.

[11:00]

We are talking about some social media or something directed at that age group without mentioning exactly. Just you find out. Once the child goes, they pick the dentist, once the treatment is finished, they will send us an invoice. The invoices are quite low at the moment.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

In terms of the number you are receiving?

The Minister for Social Security:

We have 45 invoices back but we are chasing the dentists because we know all the dentists on the Island. One of my officers chasing the dentists are saying: "Have you taken on this?" The letter is very self-explanatory. "Have you booked one of our children?" They will probably do a check-up, then a clean, then maybe an extraction or a filling, and when will we get the thing. We know that child is in so we are trying to find out. We have estimated and budgeted for an 80 per cent to 90 per cent take-up and I want 100 per cent some time and get those kids there but there are other reasons obviously. It is not just the money. This officer tells me if they have never been before, if mum has not encouraged them. I do not know how we get round that but it is there.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

They are like me and just find it scary.

The Minister for Social Security:

Exactly, Senator. Myself, and that is another thing you want them to hopefully, the older age group, have a good experience. We are trace, trace, trace, but about 750 children I think it is.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

On that basis it was due to run until the end of June this year. If the take-up is not where you want it to be, would you think about extending it?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, we will. Everything, the money is there, is it not, so, yes.

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance:

Absolutely. Can I make a point about the way the department knows how many people are on the scheme? We do not know because the whole point is to make the scheme extremely easy to use. Therefore, a parent does not have to do anything. They just have to tell the department what is going on. Literally, the parent chooses the dentist, they have the choice. It goes to the dentist, all the dentists know all about it, and so we only know right at the very end. Although we have a certain number who come through to the very end, that is the end of the treatment, we have no idea how many people are in the pipeline. We are encouraging people we know and sending out some reminders, but we do not have lots in the pipeline already yet, so it will take us some time to know how many we have in the whole scheme because we did not want to create another form to fill in or you had to do this, that and the other to do it. We wanted it just literally here to just extend the scheme. You choose your own dentist and you go and the dentist does it all for you and the dentist then, at the end of the day, gets the money back from the department. It is a scheme that has been aimed at being easy for the parent to use. It is not aimed at allowing us to get lots of the data halfway through. That is why we are not quite ... we are just a bit more circumspect than we perhaps would be normally.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

My follow-up question was going to be, and I suspect I know the answer, based on what you just said, is were you picking anything up from feedback on this in terms of the effect on the health of young people's teeth through the pandemic? Were you getting any feedback that when they were going to the dentist they were discovering there were higher incidences of needing fillings and that sort of thing or is it not built to pick up that kind of data?

The Minister for Social Security:

We want to get the children's teeth dental fit so obviously we have a set of money and if there are other issues we do not want not to do anything. They can come to us and we can top that up. We went obviously to the parents, we have now set the number allowed. We are now going to the dentist to find out who is in that pipeline already. I would love to come back and say they have all got a few hundred; that would be brilliant. It takes a month. If it is not done by the end of June ... we have made it shorter so it does not hang on, so we can keep pumping away and going: "There is a scheme, please use it. Your children need it. Inquire about it." There was no end, we did not think the urgency would be there, but we literally just wrack our brains to find out how the best way to get to 11 to 16 year-olds ... on some sort of social media, I think. We will find a way.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

We will know at the end, Senator, whether there are any emerging issues or trends. We have allowed for an amount of treatment and the dentists know if there is treatment required above that they can put together a treatment plan so we all know if there is a lot of activity taking place or being

requested above and beyond the fluoride paste and polish. We may not know that until towards the end of the programme when those treatments come together and are completed.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Thank you. I have nothing else on that, unless anyone else does.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

I will ask some questions about working with other departments. Since January this year there has been a requirement for employers to switch over to complete the combined employer returns. Can you explain how this is working operationally with Revenue Jersey?

The Minister for Social Security:

Politically I had a couple of things to do and that was changing hours to the monetary and then last time I changed, that will go up by the cost of living each year. Then it has taken over ... everything that I do has been taken over by Revenue Jersey. The day-to-day operation has gone to them. It is working well, apparently. It will do. It is still early days. It only started on 1st January, was it not? Or they were collecting contributions.

Senior Policy Officer, Government of Jersey:

Yes, the integration of contributions is happening over the course of the year, and you are right. Employers were providing their information monthly for income tax and contributions from the end of the year, and they had a new, simpler form to provide all their information once rather than across different forms. That also included information about manpower as well, so it is bringing it together and streamlining it. Revenue Jersey will continue to make changes, improvements over the course of the year and we will support them with any changes relating to contributions.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

Have there been any early troubleshooting issues with the combined returns or has it gone quite smoothly?

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance:

One of us is responsible for the operational arm, the system, but I had not confirmed that there were some ... on the first day it started the supplier loaded some incorrect data and created quite a lot of fuss and bother on the first day. But that was literally the wrong file had gone into the system, so the right one in the second day. So now the operational issues are about just people running with the new system. I, for example, got income tax with a very long number for the first time ever. Those long numbers, we all have to have one of those as well as a social security number going forwards. Getting all those numbers right in the system will probably take months. You always can expect that

with a new system. It will be much better going forwards because you will have the employer doing one process each month as opposed to one for I.T.I.S., one for social security and another one for manpower. It has been all the point about making it simpler for the employers to keep up to date. I think it will take a few months for the data to mature in terms of the use the other end of it and maybe really think about it. But by the end of the year perhaps we will start to be seeing the benefits of having that monthly feed of data and be able to use it better. It is one of those things where you have got to kind of take that leap into getting it started and inevitably there are a few teething problems the first month or so. It will take a full year for all the I.T. (information technology) to be fully functional. So most of it has started but not everything has started just yet so it will take a bit more time for things to be completely working. But it is now a Revenue Jersey operational system; so it is not run by C.L.S., it is run by Revenue Jersey. The Minister for Treasury and Resources is really the Minister who will have political responsibility for the system as a whole. We will collect social security data on it.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

I am not sure whether that makes my next question redundant because I was just going to ask: have you had any feedback from Islanders or staff on the operation of that? But if you guys are not really responsible for it, then ...

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance:

I do not think that C.L.S. would get Revenue Jersey feedback, would they? I am not sure that we would know.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

No, we have not, no. But also Revenue Jersey would escalate if there was a problem. We are involved, we have members on the board that oversee this programme. The issue would be escalated because obviously it would affect the collection of contributions, so the Minister would be made aware. I think it has gone well. I think the tax identification numbers are the thing that is causing the most issues so far, as Sue described, but of course once it is sorted once it can be sorted out again.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

Okay, brilliant, thank you. You mentioned there about all departments sharing data and that is kind of what is helping with this move. We understand that the Government is creating a data linkage infrastructure to link administrative data sets held by different departments. Please could you provide an outline of the work C.L.S. is doing in relation to that?

Head of Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance:

Ian, I do not know if you can talk about that, that is M. and D. (Modernisation and Digital) ... it is a really good project, an M. and D. project.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

I would say that it is very important that Government looks after their public data very carefully but it also allows ... it should not use data as a barrier for making things easier for our customers. It is the customers' data at the end of the day but if Government holds it in different pots it can make it very difficult for the customer to access it but also for us to do things appropriately with the customer. But as we are set up at the moment it is by no means perfect. One of the things that has come across, I think, during the pandemic is there has been data sharing taking place, appropriate data sharing in line with the G.D.P.R. (General Data Protection Regulation), all the necessary steps. But it has been helpful in terms of accelerating improvements to service. We would be fully supportive of a programme that takes steps to improve that data sharing but also the visibility of their own data to the public, and that is very much what we have been trying to do and trying to support. I have not got the detail of the particular programme you are referring to, Deputy, but we would be supportive of it in principle. We want to make things easier for customers and better, more organised data sharing, more accessibility to the customers' own data, makes those things more easy. We would be fully in support of it.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

Okay, thank you very much. Moving on to communication and accessibility, please could you confirm whether it is the policy of Customer and Local Services to have publicly available information, leaflets, et cetera, translated to other languages?

The Minister for Social Security:

No, I do not think we do, Ian.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Yes, in terms of benefits we operate in English, as the benefit system operates in English. Obviously if we keep the language simple it makes it easy to translate. We do operate a Big Word translation system, so that we can have a translator available. We also have colleagues in the department who can speak more than one language and are able to help support members of the public as well. Obviously members of the public also come in with friends, relatives and support who can also help translate. We have discussed and thought about whether that is right and whether we should be operating a benefit system that operates in multiple languages. Of course the issue is, is that it is not just about when you apply for a particular benefit, it is about the changes you make to that benefit, it is the redetermination process and the appeals process. It would be quite difficult for us to sustain, given the size of Jersey, a benefit system, particularly we are thinking here of income

support, in multiple languages from start to finish. Potentially, you could end up in a tribunal and having to operate that in a different language could be quite difficult resources wise. It is a measured approach, I suppose, in terms of making sure that we provide services that allow people to translate and support to enable people to translate where we can. I think the services that we have got around Big Word and also our sign language and other such things we have introduced recently, they are all things that do allow people to gain access to our services and also access to benefits with the appropriate level of support. Clearly, it is by no means perfect. If you cannot speak English you would need to translate or use the Big Word translation service or speak to a colleague at C.L.S. who can help translate for you. Of course which languages?

[11:15]

We do not cover all languages in that sense. The Big Word translation system will but we do not have colleagues who can speak every single language that we might be presented with. But I think that is the position which we ... a room we have tested it out ourselves and considered whether it is possible and at the moment that is our position.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

Okay, thank you. You touched on there about the sign language. My next question is about are you able to provide us with further information about how information is made accessible to individuals with additional or special needs? Obviously you have mentioned there sign language but are there other kind of formats and ways that information is made available for those with additional needs?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

We try and keep our language as best we can online as simple as possible to make it easy to translate or easy to listen to if you are having it read via audio. We operate the British sign language tool. I cannot quite remember the name of it at the moment but we operate that tool. We obviously are communicating that out through our network of community clusters to make sure that the right groups are aware of those services. Where we find that there is not, perhaps there is a gap in our support, where we can address it, there was something the other day where we realised we did not have hearing loops in one of our buildings, so we very quickly took steps to address that. We also of course operate appointments which does allow people to come in and be able to have an appointment and they can specify before they come in if they have any needs that particularly need to be addressed in terms of communication so we can try and organise that in advance. That is one of the advantages that we have, I think, under that system.

Deputy C.S. Alves:

Okay, that is great, thank you. I do not know if my colleagues have got any other follow-ups. No, okay. I am going to hand over to Deputy Pamplin.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Thank you very much. As teased earlier, we are going to just spend a little bit of time on the business plan that was published earlier on 10th February. There is a reference in the business plan to the Government of Jersey customer strategy. Can you just provide some further information on the back of that and what it means by the disengagement with C.L.S. and is this the transformation programme that you referred to in your opening introduction, Ian, I guess?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

When Customer and Local Services were set up in 2018 one of our responsibilities was to help establish and drive forward an improved customer service across Government, both in terms of listening to customers and developing customer insight but also making sure that we can share best practice across the piece, listen to customers properly, deal with complaints properly. We set about, as part of that, to develop a customer strategy internally, that we gained agreement from all departments to be part of and also it was supported by the Council of Ministers. We have a customer strategy that, I think, went live in December 2019, set out some actions over the next few years and we are proceeding to develop those actions and deliver them. The pandemic has of course, like everything else, got in the way but we are making good progress. I think some obvious examples of how we have made some good progress have been in our complaints process. It is much more easy now to record complaints and investigate complaints and we have been training up colleagues across the Government in how they handle complaints to ensure we try and resolve things very quickly. We have a common policy that is also available to the public and they can see how that complaint should be handled, so there is a good example there. The other example is, is that we really now capture a significant amount of customer feedback about our services. So almost real time we can see how well we are doing as Government, how satisfied customers are, how easy they think their services have been and how they feel about transacting with Government. We capture that by various sources, from, yes, the web forms, you can rate the web form, you can leave us feedback after the end of your phone call and you could also click on an email link, if you have an email and register and tell us what you think from that. We now get a tremendous amount of feedback to know how well we are doing, and that is a really important part of one of the key planks of our customer strategy. There is lots more in customer strategy that we hope to advance and complete before we ... perhaps towards the end of this year, which will be 3 years after we started, start to refresh the strategy for the next 3 years and that is our plan at the moment, as well as looking at the complaints policy this year.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes, sure. Could you give us an example of a customer complaint, an Islander has brought something, that you can specifically give details now that was taken on board and changed something that is different since receiving that feedback? Is there an example you could give us there?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Yes, I probably can think of some. I am just trying to make sure I do not reveal anything on behalf of the customer. I will come back to that specific question in a second, Deputy. More generally our complaints for Government, the main complaints are across 3 key areas; one is around process, i.e. the process is very complicated; it did not work very well, one around error and then perhaps another around in terms of the quality of service or interaction with colleagues. They have been pretty consistent and we try and find ways of improving that service based upon that feedback. Obviously many of the feedback goes back to individual people and individual members of staff or individual processes and the like. Your question is around a specific example; the only one I can think of that comes to mind was ... there are lots of course but the only one I can think of on the spot is one that happened in COVID where we were of course asking members of the public to sanitise and wear masks, and that was a fairly common occurrence and you think nothing of it so far. But of course there are some individuals who could not use sanitiser, the alcohol rub and, therefore, it was unfortunate that we are asking people to do that, where the member of the public would not want to do that and they felt bad about not being able to do it or doing it and causing themselves discomfort. That is a good one, it is a simple one, it is simple to understand and articulate but what happened from that that customer complained. We were able to give out direction across Government, not just in that particular area, to say need to take it on board, please bear in mind that not everybody wears a mask, has to wear a mask. Please bear in mind not everybody can use that rub, alcohol gel, without causing themselves harm, so they may not use it. That might seem like a simple one but at that particular time that was something that was shared across Government and, hopefully, made a difference and made things slightly easier for those members of the public who were having discomfort. That was quite early on in the pandemic, as I recall.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes. Sorry for putting you on the spot but I guess it is the purpose of the Scrutiny but it would be interesting, as you say, was it 3 years since this, 2019 did you say?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Yes, at the end of 2019 we had the customer strategy agreement in December.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

I guess this is a formal request, if we could see some sort of data, some outcomes and provide us stuff.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Yes.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

That would be great because I guess we want to see the progress ourselves. I guess the other thing is, I used to be a customer services manager for the largest theatre company in the world and sometimes it is the culture and the environment in the moment and it is case by case. It is difficult, is it not, because case by case it has got to be dealt with in that way? There is a cultural tone. How do you turn the culture of tone from a negative one to a positive one? Because, generally, the people complaining is not done in a jolly nice way but there is a cultural perception of how people view Government and how their complaints are handled. I note in your opening to this plan you talk about hurdles to overcome. Is that what you are specifically referring to or is there anything else you can pinpoint of what those hurdles are?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

I think you are referring to my foreword to the business plan.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

I am referring there to the hurdles in 2021 of COVID really that kept going away and coming back. In the middle of last year we had quite a high level of cases that damaged our ability to provide service to the public quite significantly. You saw that from the views of the public who were much less happy in June and July than they were before and after. Because obviously not only were there a high number of cases on the Island but also that was affecting the service that could be provided by Government. So that is an example of what I was referring to, your question there about complaints. Going back maybe 5 to 10 years, so the first few years I was in Government, complaints were seen as a very bad thing; that getting a complaint or even acknowledging something was a complaint, potentially, could be bad. There were States questions around the number of complaints for each department and whoever was top was criticised for having complaints. But complaints are really a good thing; recording complaints is very positive because it allows you to learn from that experience. It gives you the confidence that you can record it, listen to the customer, take action and make things better and see what trends are occurring. I am really pleased, particularly in the last few years, that we have been able to break any conception around that and that we now have

a fairly consistent level of complaints being recorded. That is being helped by the fact that customers have got a much easier policy, they know exactly where to go and that there is also an online channel available to record complaints; that has helped. Culturally we have helped train people, we have helped provide training on how to handle complaints, how to handle complex complaints. Team Jersey has also been running alongside at the same time. Team Jersey of course helps colleagues across Government, its cultural change programme that helps focus on our values, our values of course one of which is about being customer focused, being respectful and so on. There is a lot of complimentary activity taking place already within Government to help change and support the culture. But one of things that you will hear me regularly say is that we are of course all customers of Government and we experience services like members of the public do and we also can, therefore, try and take our experiences to try and make things better and we hear things from our friends and family and so on. I think it is really important that Government continues to learn from that feedback and makes things better. It is fairly straightforward. Most customer-facing in all of this, I am sure yours, Deputy, was as well, would learn from complaints and make improvements.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

You are right. To pick up on your point about the handling and the culture complaints and seeing it as a negative because you are right that is how we learn. But most of the ways of doing that is to do it publicly, that breeds transparency and trust, so you are being open. I think we see the same sort of chatter and feedback that people talk to us as a Scrutiny Panel, that you and the Minister and everybody else sees, there is still a journey to go. Yes, we are much better at it but there is still this issue of transparency. The way you can be more transparent with complaints and say: "We have received this, we have received a few in the same area, here was the complaint, here is what we did about it." People can see that more transparency, that would give your colleagues across Government to say step up and be brave and face up to the public. There is one good thing us talking about this here, people want to see the complaints, the journey of the complaint and the outcome publicly.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Yes. We have been publishing, of course, this data and indeed our customer experience, complaints and I should not forget the high level of compliments we get in Government. All that information is being published each quarter during 2021; so that is available to members of the public. It is on gov.je, if you just type in "performance measures" it should come up. Alongside those measures you have also got all the other departmental measures and key goals that are in the departmental operational business plans. The customer complaint data is by department. Last year Government had 1,300 complaints overall and I think ...

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Sorry, you are quite right. Where I am getting to is how do you then translate all that data and the reporting into a communication piece where it is easily accessible and understood in a 30-second soundbite, in a social media campaign, on a Facebook page: here are the level of complaints? Is there a specific example of something that was going wrong and, by the way, is easily digestible for members of the public, our customers, who do not have time to read all the data and information? Make it more accessible in that sort of way, I guess, is what I mean.

[11:30]

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Yes. We are developing some material I think possibly for next week that might start to go out. But we are obviously trying to make sure that the public have that confidence, that they should feel comfortable, it is worth complaining, it is worth raising an issue with us. I think some of the most important complaints, where somebody says: "I want to complain", that is a rather obvious flag and that would probably be recorded as a complaint. The same thing can be said but without using the word complaint; would that be registered as a complaint? The same thing can happen to a customer without saying the words: "I want to complain, I want you to fix this, I have a problem." But it is still something has gone wrong, potentially, that needs to be fixed and we need to capture those as well as complaints because, ultimately, they are. There is lots more to do. Communicating and examples of what our analysis is around complaints is, I think, something we have planned, although perhaps we are behind schedule compared to where we would like to be in terms of doing that. The key thing has been getting public information out, alongside the other quarterly information to begin with. But we went to the Council of Ministers in January to present the overall customer experience data and the complaints for 2021, as well as E.L.T. (executive leadership team). The data internally has a very high level of awareness now that perhaps it did not have in the past; these are all good steps.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Specifically in your foreword - thank you for that word, I was trying to think of it - where you say: "In 2022 we will launch our new Transform programme which aims to fundamentally change and improve the way our customers transact and interact with Government. This exciting but challenging programme will have many hurdles to overcome." In that context of the Transform programme, what are the hurdles that you are referring to with that programme?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Yes. Just to take a step back and explain, we have an I.T. system which is called Nessi, and this operates most of the benefits that come under the Minister for Social Security. This system is robust, it is absolutely sound at the moment but clearly it is already getting on to be heading towards to be 20 years old. We do need to replace it and we have taken that opportunity to consider how we want

to go about replacing it and that is why we have called it the Transform programme. Because it is much more than just replacing an I.T. system, it is also changing quite a few other things. We have started that programme, it is in the Government Plan. Money is allocated to it from the Social Security Fund, capital expenditure. We are going through it at the moment working out our requirements. By doing that we are having a look at things, such as customer journeys, life events and blending in views of customers and also of course of colleagues about how we might want to operate things going forward. Then we will go out and seek to procure something that will deliver the experience we want to deliver. If we can find the right set up or combination of systems that will do that, then we can move forward to implement those changes, along with, of course, the other cultural and structural changes that that may require. We do spend a lot of time at the moment ... there is nothing wrong with Nessi, it is fast, it is reliable, it is safe and secure but there is a lot of manual activity that takes place, with typing in information in more than one place, the same information, manual checking of things. Obviously customers have to claim for things, they have to request. If we think through simple life events, the obvious example is perhaps around a maternity payment. Government knows the baby has been born, we know where that baby is going to be born, we know a baby has been born and yet we perhaps still ask the family to apply for something and then make a payment to them. If we can design things in the right way that should just happen automatically. It is a very simple example to share and that still provides the financial support but it is one less thing for that family to worry about, having to request at that particularly very busy stage of their lives. You can think of those examples also if you think of other life events, like starting your first job, where some member of the family passes away, losing a job, marriage, divorce and all those sorts of things. You think about those life events, we can bring together services that can happen as much as possible, as automatically as possible. But also it means that the teams who we have supporting the public can spend more time with those customers who need that time being spent with them, rather than doing the more mundane transaction stuff. The colleagues we have recruited in C.L.S. are excellent and we have recruited them for their people skills and that gives us the best chance to be able to use those skills most effectively without having to worry about using multiple systems or complicated processes and the like. The hurdles thing, I guess, they are referring to, Deputy, is the fact none of that is particularly easy. Any I.T. project in Government has a level of risk attached to it and there are many stories of successful projects and there are many stories of ones that are less successful, and we want to be one of those ones that is successful and delivers against our vision for services.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes, I think that answer we already knew. But the question, I guess, you have highlighted there is the Tax Department, when they changed the system over, encountered quite a few issues and obviously that was pre-COVID and in COVID. It put a huge strain on that department of going from one system to the other and there were more problems as they went through, as with any new

system, until it is finally operational and you find teething problems. I get part of your hurdle is how do we learn from your colleagues' experience to find something that is suitable, it works and gives all the things you are asking for but is not counterproductive and puts pressure and strain on your staff and resources?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Yes. We have been involved in the Revenue Jersey project and so we have been learning as we have been going along, and obviously they will issue, I am sure, various lessons learned documentation at some point. But we are also obviously working with M. and D., who are experienced in delivering projects. We are taking advice as we go. It is a bit more than just the I.T. system; I think that is the point. This will also mean changes to the way we work and the structures and how we maximise the time we spend with those who need the most support. There may be some other really good things to come out of this and as we go through the programme we will work out a phased implementation. We will obviously need to get, potentially, people testing the system while us operating business as usual and, therefore, make sure ... some of the costs involved in this project will be having the capacity and resources to make sure we can deliver both. Because the Minister would not be happy if we are unable to support, for example, new income support claimants, be able to open up new claims because we were testing a new system. That is what we need to juggle and that is some of the cost that will be involved in double-running and having that capacity to do that.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes, and approximately in the last Government Plan was around £25 million estimated up until 2040. That number has not changed and where are you at the moment with things or a projection of when those stages may be ...

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Yes, at the moment we are operating to plan. As I say, the key thing will be when we have completed our requirements and we then need to test that, whether the market can deliver our requirements. Because it may be that what we would like to happen is something that there are lots of people who can do it and it is very straightforward and they are products that already exist. It may be that what we want to be able to do cannot be done, and we might have to make compromises there. We have got to try and do all of that and also fit it into a financial window. Yes, we have said we have estimated £25 million. Obviously we would all like to hope it would be less than that but based upon our advice that is the estimate we probably need to work towards. But, again, a lot of that will be buying a system, buying licences, the implementation of it but also the resources that will be required to double-run while we train, test and get ready for a live. We might do a service at a time, we might

do it all at once but we do not know until we understand what we buy and the implementation timescales.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

I guess thinking of the customer ahead obviously it is value for money to the taxpayer of course and justifying any sudden increases would put more pressure on the current Ministers.

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Yes. The Transform programme will have political oversight through the Minister for Social Security and the Assistant Minister for Social Security and also the Assistant Chief Minister, who has got responsibility for technology projects. We have got oversight. I think the first of those meetings happens this Friday or the Friday after but it is happening soon. We have got that set up and we will proceed. I have got some good people on it and we hope that it will be a successful project.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Good stuff. Very quickly, in the business plan also there was a reference to the digital first approach. We have obviously been talking just now about the behind-the-scenes system stuff but I guess it is also referring to the digital approach for doing things online, doing things on mobiles and that sort of stuff, I would imagine. But how are you going to ensure that, as that is the future, is where we are going, we do not leave behind all those people where obviously digital is still alien to them, do not have that accessibility, so it is still an equal service for everybody, despite the advancements of digital forwardness in evidence?

Director General, Customer and Local Services:

Yes. In our customer strategy we talk about A.C.E. Plus, which stands for accessibility, consistency, easiness and thinking ahead; that is the plus. We want to be able to ensure that we deliver those promises by making sure that we remain accessible; so that is where digital first comes from. We are not saying we wish to develop services that are exclusively digital, that cannot be used by people who do not have access to digital services or who will therefore be excluded. We want to make sure that the majority of the population want to do things online, they can do things online. We should design a service that allows that to happen but still allow all Islanders to be able to access that service in some way. That may be a digital-assisted service where we can help do that for them. We have that already, for example, particularly for food cost bonus or community cost bonus, as it is now called. Pensioners can call us up, we fill the form out for them online but that is a service we have designed. So it is there for digital first but pensioners in that example can still use that service and we just fill the form in for them. It all goes into one system then and all the payments come out the other end. That makes it very straightforward for everybody, otherwise they would be filling out a paper form, posting it in or bringing it in and so on. It is easier to do things in that context, so either

online or on the phone. But that is the principles we have got and that is the principles we are working with and that is the principle that, as I say, exists within the customer strategy, that we want to be able to move to services across Government, are always accessible but digital first in the sense that most people want to do things online for transactions, not for all services but for transactional services; that is why we should be doing things online and making sure they are designed in that way but keeping options open.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes, and also telephone, going right back to the beginning of today when you talked about the numbers still phoning the COVID helpline. Obviously people in those scenarios, they want to speak to somebody because the issue is happening now and filling out a form when they want to speak to somebody. It is finding a balance that anybody has a way in, phone, walk off the street, whatever, I guess is what you are saying there. Ian, I will just give you a break. Minister, incapacity benefits review. I know we were talking about that earlier but with a reference to the report that you published relating to the review of Jersey's incapacity benefits, one of your recommendations is: "For officers to investigate potential models with the provision of a new work and health support service." Could you just flesh that out a bit more and what that could potentially mean with some information around that?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, if we had not had COVID this would have been coming to the Assembly probably last year. It is so old-fashioned and L.T.I.A. (long term incapacity allowance) especially, how it is assessed, et cetera, et cetera and as well S.T.I.A. (short term incapacity allowance). If I am sick, let us say I break a leg, I mean my mind is quite fine, I can do everything but I am on S.T.I.A.; I cannot go to work. I cannot have any contact with my work really. I could contact but I cannot do any work. Sort of the premise is: how many days work is lost? I think it is 500,000 days on short-term incapacity. We want a system where employers work with the employee, make sure it is about their well-being, make sure they are okay. If they need a bit of extra occupational therapy, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, that they can get back in.

[11:45]

Then it is looking at we are too rigid - I think they are too rigid - when they are ready. It is not forcing them back when they are ill or anything like that. It will be interesting in that we make it a lot more flexible. Again, the L.T.I.A. is just one of those; it is based on what you cannot use or something and a percentage. We have people who have got 100 per cent L.T.I.A. who work, we have got some people who feel they cannot. It is not right or wrong; the whole scheme is wrong. It has been a big piece of work. Deputy Southern has been interested in it for quite a while.. There was before me -

under Deputy Pinel's Ministry - there were 2 big reports; one was an academic and one was a ... but they came up really with the same. You have got 2 different people with different expertise and they came up with very, very similar: "You would not start here and this is what you need to do." It is going to be a really good, interesting piece of work for the next Minister. Is that the report is out there and the people that work with us, hopefully, met local companies, met local doctors, met all different people and, hopefully, them or someone similar will take it forward.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes, because we had a briefing on 13th January, it was published in December and, you are right, we picked up on that, that this is a continuing piece of work. So it really was impacted by the pandemic is huge.

The Minister for Social Security:

Absolutely, yes.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

But, interestingly, I guess the bigger question is because of the work from home world that we now have found ourselves, is that going to be included into this? Where people, for example, have COVID they can still work from home, as we have seen, will that be included in this continuing piece of work? I guess that is one for the officers.

The Minister for Social Security:

I made a comment the other day in a different meeting, I am not sure if it was in that work because you are either sick or you are not - I would not want anybody to feel under pressure - but that is the other question: are you sick and working from home and your boss thinks you are sick but you can work from home? But your doctor says: "I want you to turn the computer off, I want you to have 48 hours rest, get on these antibiotics and then if you are no better in 48 hours come and see me." The tension there: is our Employment Law up for it? Because we can ask for flexible, we have got to work in when I am sick, you know what I mean. Not just so you think it was not in that, it may need to go in but there needs to be something looked at, at that crossover. Because I feel people may feel more pressure being sick and they can quite easily work from home.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

That is why I asked you because ...

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes. No, I absolutely understand.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Because the pandemic has changed though in that stuff and I thought it was a little bit ... and obviously because it is a big piece of work that is going on. I guess the question will be, I guess for our counterparts as well, that needs to come through as soon as possible because we are still in that transition of proving people who are in that place: "Am I going to be pressured into working?"

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes. They should not, they really should not. They think they have protection because their workplace is in their home but I just think with culture as it is and people out there are: "Well I am not too ill; yes, I could do 2 hours." It is their judgment. But I do not want anyone to feel pressured to work when they are not well.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

This needs clarity, standing up against the Employment Law, because I remember having constituents or parishioners phoning us saying: "I have been made to come into work but I am vulnerable if I got COVID." There was all this sort of dialogue going on and people were falling through the cracks and their employers were: "I do not care, you have got to come in." It is a big piece of work for this; sorry, I am going off a bit on that. Okay, that is helpful. Final one from me: financial independence in old age. The panel recently received a briefing from your officer on the report, it has been prepared by the independent pensions experts; talking about another big piece of work. Can you provide an update on when that report will be published, the recommendations that you are providing for the next Minister, I suppose, and the directions you will be providing to officers to address?

The Minister for Social Security:

I definitely wanted Scrutiny to see it and that is fine. We thought about just publishing it with nothing else. But then talking to my officers and my Assistant Minister, I think we need to give it a bit of direction really, we do not know how far yet. We say independence in old age and people just say: "What about his pension?" It still is not necessary that way when you see the whole report. We are meeting again, trying to have 2 or 3 quick meetings with D.P.3, is it not? Myself, Mark and Jeremy, my Assistant Minister, and then we can publish it with some direction. But then I do not want to be rigidly saying to the next Minister: "You must do this" but it would be nice to get a bit of direction. Because they have done a lot of work when everybody is in different places and different populations, et cetera, et cetera. Just put a bit more meat on the bone. If I say by the end of March, mid-April, that is when it should be out then and we have done that work, yes. If it is earlier it would be great.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes, of course. One issue that came for me at that briefing is how it sits alongside everything because when you think about pensions, we have also now got the long-term care and incapacity, which we were just talking about. How can we get these all aligned along each other that is simple for the customers we have been talking about and the pathway, and it is understandable where they would fit and what they claim but, equally, how they sit alongside each other? I know it is different when you have to be here. It is a very important point that you will be saying that these are the areas we need; these are pretty important.

The Minister for Social Security:

No, that was literally the discussion we had to have last week or the week before when we met last week, I think, with D.P.3 on Friday. How does it sit? How does it work? Does it compliment? Who does what? How do you ask people to enrol and things like that? Then the bigger piece is our pensions started collections and then started to paying out. How does that all interact? That is probably a bigger piece but these people are very ... what they do not know about what goes on around the world that could probably go on the back of a stamp or ...

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

It is a big piece of work.

The Minister for Social Security:

It is a big piece of work.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Huge and ...

The Minister for Social Security:

We have had a pandemic, it was one of the first things I took on. I wanted to do, I knew Guernsey was a couple years ahead of us at least and I do not think even now they have introduced it; I do not think, no. They were literally at consultation, et cetera, said they had a plan and COVID put that ... we knew and after trying to meet in 2020, in March and then April and online and it was not good. There was just so much going on that other officers ... one office had to be somewhere and doing like COVID. But it will get there, it needs to get there.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

I have one final general question from me, a bit of a feedback-theme, Minister, and I guess Ian will chip in because we were talking about complaints and tone and culture, is of late because, as people come out of the pandemic, there have been a lot of people - I am using examples here and not to mention specific cases - where a single parent was on income support but working to maintain their

hours that they need to keep up to get their income support but equally then got COVID, so planning the income support component. Then there was a miscalculation somewhere or a bit of information missed and they were chased for it, they felt second rate; to use the people I have been supporting. I guess there has been a lot going on and it has been busy for everybody and we are trying to get back to normal. Do you still think there is a piece of work there for people who, using those examples, real people I have been supporting, who still feel like when they pick up the phone to talk about their situation they feel unworthy, I guess? Do you still think there is a bit of work to do to make sure when we are dealing in case-by-case scenarios, if somebody, like those examples - real people I am referring to - feel like: "Okay, I may have made a genuine mistake or it may have been the other side" but the cultural tone is: "I am being chased and harassed and it is my fault, I have done everything wrong." If we are going by the customer is always right, it is a balance, is it not, to make sure that people do not feel that at the end of the day? I know there have been loads of success stories and I am using a few real-life cases but ...

The Minister for Social Security:

Income support and housing was my bread and butter for 15 years; I know exactly where you are coming from. It is sometimes a shock, they get a letter, they think they owe this money. If I was going with them we would have made an appointment and so that is great, I did not have to sit down and go through all those complicated things with 50 people sitting behind me, so they could hear everything. John ran off with Janet and Janet is now living with ... really. It was a small, small area down there but it should always improve. We have training, I do not want anybody to think that. I always look at income support, it is a time in your life when you need it. These stories that people sometimes think there is ... we opened up in 2008 and we have still got the same people on it; it is mental. It is churning all the time because most people may need it for a while ... yes, we have got those long-term unemployed people and they will have other issues and even then we are working with them. Obviously we are all trying to do our thing since we have now got the officers they deal with, like pensioners. Then there is the working in that spot, so they are getting a lot better, the training is better, they are getting a lot better in their bit that they know about. Obviously we do hear ... I cannot help how people feel and I think they must be horrible to you but someone just made one flippant remark on the phone and that will live with you for the day, it might even live with you for a long time. I am sorry to hear that but ...

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

It is just again we could all drag out examples but I just feel that for the last 4 years, I know we have got one more quarterly hearing, I am just using real-life examples of people. There have been good success stories too where we have supported ... all of us have had those constituents who have gone through.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Would it not be great if those people did not need to lean on their local Deputies and they did not feel that they needed to have that extra support? If you are a single mum who is making hours that she needs to do to ensure she gets the income support, the child is still under school age and she can only do the hours? Then suddenly gets a tone or being chased: "You have done something wrong, you are the person that is wrong." I know it is a balancing act and I know you have got to keep a fine line because there are people who may want to do something that they should not be doing. But I think it is still a journey but I just raise all that as just ...

The Minister for Social Security:

It is a journey. As I say, I always say if you are not well: "Well I might need to tell that, I am not sure." I do not know, Deputy. As I say, I find it has been an improvement. I will say this, the way it is working now with a separate room where you can discuss your intimate ... I kid you not. I was not a Deputy and you sat in there like with 50, 60 people who would hear everything. Husband has left me, someone is very ill, someone is this, they want a name, everyone could hear everything. It was not the best. Me and Deputy ... it was Deputy Southern, we begged him to do something about this for a long time and this is, to me, one of the great things or good things that have come out of COVID. The welcome desks are back, people know what they want, they can phone for it, they will be dealt with, they just want to bring something in, it is there. Yes, well that is sort of part of our ... not part of our job but it is something we say if somebody has not got confidence, do not know where to go, we will be ... the local Deputy ...

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes, of course, it has always been like that, it has always been ...

The Minister for Social Security:

People seem to think an ombudsman would stop that, I am not 100 per cent that they would, I do not know.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Yes, and we might get into all these things in our last quarterly hearing but I just want to pick it up now. That is it for me because I have just caught the time.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, thank you.

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Perfect. There is nothing further, I would like to thank the Minister and the officers for attending this morning and we look forward to seeing them in April, I believe, for the second quarterly hearing of 2022. Thank you all very much.

The Minister for Social Security:

Thank you.

[11:58]