



Health and Social Security Scrutiny Panel

Quarterly Hearing

Witness: The Minister for Social Security

Thursday, 16th May 2024

Panel:

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour (Chair)

Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade (Vice-Chair)

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter

Deputy P.M. Bailhache of St. Clement

Witnesses:

Deputy L.V. Feltham of St. Helier Central, The Minister for Social Security

Mr. I. Burns, Chief Officer, Customer and Local Services

Ms. S. Duhamel, Associate Director, Public Policy

[9:32]

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour (Chair):

We are the Health and Social Security Scrutiny Panel, and this is the quarterly hearing with the Minister for Social Security. Welcome, Minister. I will introduce myself and my panel. I am Deputy Louise Doublet, I am the chair of the panel.

Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade: (Vice-Chair):

Jonathan Renouf, Deputy of St. Brelade, vice-chair

Deputy P.M. Bailhache of St. Clement:

Philip Bailhache, Deputy of St. Clement.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter:

Deputy Lucy Stephenson, panel member.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Minister, if you could introduce yourself and your officers.

The Minister for Social Security:

I am Deputy Lindsay Feltham. I am Minister for Social Security.

Chief Officer, Customer and Local Services:

Good morning, I am Ian Burns. I am the chief officer for Customer and Local Services.

Associate Director, Public Policy:

I am Sue Duhamel. I am the associate director in the Cabinet Office.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Lovely. Thank you for your time and coming to the hearing today. We have some general questions, and we are going to start with the Discrimination Law. Minister, please could you update us on the progress of work in this area?

The Minister for Social Security:

The Discrimination Law is something that had previously been on the Ministerial Plan for the previous Minister to look at the area specifically with relation to religious and marital discrimination. Looking at the priorities and the workloads of the team, because I have a relatively small team of one policy officer looking at both Employment Law and Discrimination Law, it is unlikely that we will be looking at the discrimination legislation this year. However, it is something that J.A.C.S. (Jersey Advisory and Conciliation Service) has brought to my attention specifically in relation to the religious discrimination being missed from this legislation. But of course my priorities have to be decisions that have already been taken by the States Assembly, and I have prioritised work on the whistleblowing legislation, which of course has already been passed through the Assembly. So that needs to come first.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you. When you talk about religion as a protected characteristic, can you confirm that the characteristic would be religion and beliefs; that those with non-religious beliefs would also be protected by that characteristic?

The Minister for Social Security:

That would be my view, that that would be how that legislation would need to work. Obviously we would need to undertake full consultation around such a change to the discrimination legislation, which is why I am being quite honest around the resource requirements, because changing that kind of legislation needs to be done properly, it needs to be done with the right level of resourcing. That is why I have taken the decision that it is not one of the priorities for this year, but we need to look at it into the future.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Sure, but next year when you come to that, can you think of any reasons why you would not include “belief” in the religion and belief category to be protected?

The Minister for Social Security:

Not personally, no.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you. Can you just confirm the amount of months that the work is delayed by due to the reprioritisation? Is it a year, is that what you say?

The Minister for Social Security:

I think it will be at least a year. There are other areas of employment legislation where we do fall behind other jurisdictions. That is a piece of work, and I appreciate the discrimination legislation is separate to employment legislation but they both do tend to work together. The way that I am prioritising work is looking at the areas where we are falling behind other jurisdictions, and also the level of consultation required, and also the effect on employers as well as employees, to make sure that we take a balanced approach.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Not this year, but at least a year away. Could you say whether it will definitely happen within your Ministerial term that you would bring this?

The Minister for Social Security:

I cannot at the moment give a guarantee that it will be brought within this Ministerial term, and I am not in the game of promising things I do not think I can deliver.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

When you have spoken about - was it J.A.C.S have raised this with you - can you give us some indication of the issues that are being faced by people who do not have this protected characteristic as yet?

The Minister for Social Security:

They did not bring to me any specific issues in relation to that. They just raised it with me as what would appear to be an omission within the current legislation. It was not something that they brought to me because there are a number of cases involving that. It was in relation to the fact that they said it seems to be an omission.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

If significant issues did come to your attention, are you open to reprioritising your work as you progress?

The Minister for Social Security:

I would always be open to reprioritising if something came up that was a significant issue because I think we do need to look at issues as they come up. Of course, I need to be able to respond to the things that Scrutiny do. I do value the work of Scrutiny. Of course, if that was an area that Scrutiny chose to undertake a review in, I would be open to responding to that as well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

That is great to hear, thank you. In terms of protected characteristics, there are other gaps, I believe, that other jurisdictions have that Jersey does not. One of them is carer status. Is that something that you would seek to include when you do this work?

The Minister for Social Security:

If we were looking at changing protective characteristics, we would need to consider ... if we are changing legislation, we need to look at all of the areas that might change at the same time and undertake that full consultation in relation to that.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Are there any other protective characteristics that you would be minded to consider including?

The Minister for Social Security:

Because it is not an area that I am looking at, at the moment, it is not one that I have looked at in close detail, so I would not say that there would not be other protected characteristics, but again that would be down to consultation and also requirements and issues as they are raised.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Could I ask your officer, are there any other ... I am wondering, Sue, if it would be you leading; are there any other protected characteristics, perhaps from other jurisdictions, or any other gaps that have been identified?

Associate Director, Public Policy:

Last year, the J.O.L.S. (Jersey Opinions and Lifestyle Survey) asked questions about religion ... it was religion and belief, and then also about marital status.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

About, sorry, what was the first one?

Associate Director, Public Policy:

Marital status.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Yes, okay.

Associate Director, Public Policy:

Basically the question was: would you like to see this characteristic added to the Discrimination Law? Because they did not have carers in that time, so the emphasis at the time was a previous Minister interested in whether religion would have enough. The point is, what level of discrimination is there in Jersey that would need to be addressed through legislation? If it is a non-issue, perhaps legislation is not necessary.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Okay, thank you.

Associate Director, Public Policy:

But the marital status got a slightly higher score - people being interested - the scores were not massively overwhelming in either area.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Okay, thank you. In terms of other elements of this law, the amount that can be awarded at a tribunal, which I believe is £10,000, is that correct? Do you think that that amount is sufficient as a penalty?

The Minister for Social Security:

That is something that has been raised to me by employee representative groups. The Employment Forum is shortly to make its report and recommendations on the compensation awards regime. I am looking forward to receiving that so I can consider what legislative changes can be made.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Does that include this part of the Discrimination Law?

The Minister for Social Security:

In relation to compensation?

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Yes.

The Minister for Social Security:

I think it is in relation to the compensation that tribunals can award.

Associate Director, Public Policy:

It is one tribunal that covers both laws, so it is the tribunal's powers.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

When are you expecting that?

The Minister for Social Security:

That is ...

Associate Director, Public Policy:

Next week; very soon.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, by the end of this month.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Okay, and could the panel have the information on that as soon as that is available?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, absolutely. I am very open to providing the panel with as much information as possible, as early as possible.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Great, thank you. The length of time between when the discrimination occurs and when an individual can go to the tribunal, I believe, is 3 months, is that correct? Under the law, I think so. That is my understanding of it. Do you think that that time period is too short in terms of an individual might be feeling traumatised and not ready to actually report within that 3 months.

The Minister for Social Security:

I think potentially that is too short. That is something that the unions have raised with me. I have had discussion with J.A.C.S. around that as well. J.A.C.S.'s view was different to the unions. There are differing views being presented to me. One of those views is, as you say, it could be too soon before somebody is ready to put a case in for tribunal assessment. The other part of that, the other side of that view, is that the employer might well elongate its own processes in relation to any lengthening of the time period to put in a tribunal. I know unions are concerned that often employers may well have a longer process than is currently allowed time-wise before a case is put to tribunal. Should the process be able to be completed then it may well be that an issue could be resolved prior to it getting to tribunal. So there is some work to be done. As I say, I have one member of staff working on the policy in relation to employment and discrimination legislation, but that is one of the areas that I have considered for change as well.

Deputy P.M. Bailhache:

Is changing the protected characteristics going to lead to resource demands on the department? And if so, is that a factor you would take into account?

The Minister for Social Security:

It could do, but I think what I would say is if discrimination of any kind is happening, that is something that we, as a Government, need to be able to deal with through our legislation. But also we would hope that people would be more educated around types of discrimination and, in time, we would be able to eradicate such discrimination, to an extent. Yes, I cannot say that it would not lead to greater resource demands because it could lead to more cases that currently cannot go to the tribunal or the courts. It is something that would lead to more resource demands, and that needs to be considered.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Minister, given that you have outlined several areas of concern within this legislation, that you yourself feel are areas that need to be addressed, that J.A.C.S. feel need to be addressed and the employee groups feel need to be addressed, would you consider bidding for extra resource in the Government Plan so that this work can be tackled sooner given all of the concerns with it?

The Minister for Social Security:

I think, given the constraints on government finances, what I need to do is look at prioritisation of resources so that we can work within our means and prioritise as required, dependent on demands. I do have a small but dedicated policy team, and I have already been working with them to look at reprioritising work so that we can deliver on the decisions of the Assembly in the first instance. Because I was very conscious when I came into this role that the Assembly has made a number of decisions in relation to my remit, and it is the expectation of the public and the Assembly that I will deliver on those as priorities. There is reprioritisation that needs to happen and we also need to be cognisant of what it is feasible to deliver.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Sure. Is tackling discrimination something that is important to this Government as a whole across the Council of Ministers?

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Yes, it is. Of course I will be working with my Government colleagues, including Deputy Alves, who now has responsibility for diversity and inclusion as well.

[9:45]

Within my responsibility for the disability strategy, I also chair the Disability Strategy Advisory Group. I am very aware of types of discrimination. In addition to the legislative changes that we can make, I think there are also the leadership changes that we can make as well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

If, as you say, tackling discrimination is important to this Government, is there a possibility that there could be some resource reallocation from other departments that would not require any additional funding or additional resource, but if it is that important that other Ministers may work with you to reprioritise that this work can be tackled sooner?

The Minister for Social Security:

I obviously could not speak on behalf of other Ministers and other departments with regard to their budgets. We, of course, are due to commence our discussions on the Government Plan, but we are all acutely aware of the resources that we have and the funding pressures on the Government. So we are very keen to prioritise work but also be very open about what it is actually possible for us to deliver.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Is that a question that you will be asking other Ministers, if anybody would reprioritise to make this a priority so that the work could be tackled sooner?

The Minister for Social Security:

I would look firstly at my own resources and how I can prioritise my own resources before asking other Ministers to reprioritise theirs.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

If you could not bring the work forward with your own resources, would you ask other Ministers to share resources or reallocate resources, if it is a priority across Government?

The Minister for Social Security:

If I use disability as an example, disability access and inclusion is something that all departments should be cognisant of and working towards. Ian, of course, sits around the table at the Executive Leadership Team and I think that is his part of that role in talking about the disability strategy and every department's role in implementing inclusive and accessible services. I also have a role as a Minister to be the voice around the table, around that discrimination legislation, and remind other Ministers as well that all of our services should be accessible and lead in that way as well. It is not only just about financial resources, I think it is also about providing leadership and also bringing points of discussion to the table to bring awareness around discrimination.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

It is good to hear that you are that voice around the table. Just a yes or no on that question: will you be asking other Ministers to reallocate any of their resources that you can tackle this work sooner?

The Minister for Social Security:

At this point for this Government Plan, I am not planning to do that.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Okay. Thank you for your responses.

Deputy P.M. Bailhache:

Minister, you mentioned the whistleblowing policy or whistleblowing was one of your priorities. Can you give us a little bit more information as to how any statutory protection is going to work in practice?

The Minister for Social Security:

I will shortly be writing to the Employment Forum to ask them to undertake their consultative work around the whistleblowing legislation. The commitment itself to introduce whistleblowing legislation

was made by the Assembly last year because of a proposition that was brought by Deputy Alves at the time. That work is yet to start and of course I will update the panel as we go. But I will imminently, within the next few days, be asking the Employment Forum to commence that piece of work.

Deputy P.M. Bailhache:

Is that going to be a complicated piece of work?

The Minister for Social Security:

It may well be. I need to see the scope of work from the Employment Forum, but it is an important piece of work that needs to be done in order to provide protection to whistleblowers, but also in order to meet the commitment made by the Assembly.

Deputy P.M. Bailhache:

Is there anything that you can tell us about work progressing in relation to the living wage project?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, I am working closely with the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development. I am aware that as we move towards a living wage and make significant increases to the minimum wage, we need to ensure that the business community and employers are in a position to be able to deliver on that. So the economy team, and that is where the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development is involved in working on a package of business support measures. We also have had discussions around what the rate could be at the beginning of next year, and once we have come to an agreement we will be in a position to announce that publicly. But it is important that we do that in a way that gives confidence to both employees and employers about how we will be implementing the commitment to get to two-thirds of the median wage.

Deputy P.M. Bailhache:

Do you think it is going to put much business out of business?

The Minister for Social Security:

We are currently working on the business support, or I should say the Economic Development team are working on business support packages in order to mitigate the risks that may well be associated with increases in the minimum wage, and also increase productivity on the Island as well, so that, at the end of the day, we end up with a more productive workforce as a result of the work that we do.

Deputy P.M. Bailhache:

Is it going to make any practical difference; I mean in the sense that the minimum wage is supplemented by Social Security benefits?

The Minister for Social Security:

It will make a big practical difference, in particular to those people that currently do not qualify for income support. I think we must not forget that the current income support rules mean that people who have not lived on the Island for 5 years currently do not qualify. Many of those people may well be in those low-wage jobs and also those people will be living in registered accommodation as well. I think it will have a significant impact to those people, as well as some people that may not qualify for income support for other reasons and still be low wage earners.

Deputy J. Renouf:

You have identified 2 potential benefits of increasing the minimum wage to a living wage level. One of which is to obviously help people who are paid less, they will get more pay. The other is to drive productivity and to drive changes in business practices. With regard to the latter, does it trouble you that the incentive to increase productivity will be reduced if you simply cover the gap ... if Government simply covers the gap between the cost of the current wage and the cost of a higher wage?

The Minister for Social Security:

That is why it is important that the Economic Development team lead on that piece of work around what industry support mechanisms might well look like, so that whatever mechanisms we put in place, it is around both supporting the industries that are so important to our Island, such as agriculture, for example. But also ensuring that whatever we do is sustainable into the future and actually provides real outcomes for Islanders.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Does it not trouble you though that it could be essentially all we are going to do is shift money from Social Security, let us say, from paying wages to subsidised business to pay those wages? That we are not really changing anything.

The Minister for Social Security:

I think if you are on income support and having to go and apply for income support, the effect of that on people can be quite profound, and the idea of somebody that is living and working in a full-time job, potentially doing 2 jobs, not receiving an income that we would consider to be enough to live on the Island sufficiently, I think that it is much better for that person to be earning a suitable income rather than having to come in and rely on a safety net, such as income support and have to make those applications. People that make applications to income support, they often speak to me about

the process because it is not a comfortable thing to go into the government office and speak to somebody about your own personal financial situation. I think it is beneficial if people are earning the higher wages, and then that brings them out of the need to apply to government for income support. I think that is much better for families and working families and working people in general.

Deputy P.M. Bailhache:

The issue of supporting businesses is not really a matter for you or your department, it is a matter for the Minister for Economic, whatever he's called.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, exactly. That is why I am working very closely with that Minister to ensure that what we do, we are working together.

Deputy P.M. Bailhache:

To the extent that he is not able to bring in the necessary support for businesses, which do need to be supported, that is going to affect the ability of you and your department to bring in a living wage, is it not?

The Minister for Social Security:

I am confident from the discussions that I had with that Minister and the Chief Minister that we will be bringing packages forward to enable us to bring in a living wage. I think we need to be careful when we talk about the term "living wage" as well. The current States Assembly commitment is based on two-thirds of the median income. There is other work that needs to be done and again I have discussed this with other Ministers around minimum income standard so that we can truly understand what income people do require in order to have a decent standard of living on the Island. That will not only be able then to inform our discussions about future minimum wage increases, it will also be able to let us know whether the provision of income support is sufficient, it may well inform whether our pensions that we are providing are sufficient as well. That is a really important piece of work.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Just to clarify that though, you are still sticking with the two-thirds of median wage as your target for the living wage?

The Minister for Social Security:

That is still the target.

Deputy J. Renouf:

This other piece of work about minimum income is a separate additional piece of work?

The Minister for Social Security:

That is, yes.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

The allowance for businesses, is the plan to gradually phase that out?

The Minister for Social Security:

I could not really talk about it because it is, as Deputy Bailhache did point out, the remit of the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development and he is taking the lead on that, as is right and proper and correct.

Deputy P.M. Bailhache:

I have a question for you, Minister, which I am not sure I quite understand, but I am sure hopefully you will understand it. But so far as I understand it, the States at the moment supports people who are off sick, support their own employees, by continuing to pay the difference between the sickness benefit and the wages or the salary that they are entitled to. Is there any plan to extend that to the world at large?

The Minister for Social Security:

In terms of statutory provision of sick pay, that is one of the current omissions I think within the employment legislation, and that is something that I think we do need to look at because it is one of those areas that we are falling behind in relation to other jurisdictions. Of course, what I need to be mindful of is timings of such changes to the employment legislation around also other priorities, such as the introduction of a living wage. I need to be mindful of the timeline of making changes to employment legislation so that we avoid risks that may come up if we make too many changes too quickly and put too much pressure on the business community. But having said that, I would hope that good employers are providing some level of sickness benefit and sick leave at least to their employees. That is an area that I would like to improve within the legislation. I think also related to that, then when you start talking about statutory leave, we then get into the realms of discussing potential leave for carers as well. I know in the U.K. (United Kingdom) they have recently introduced statutory unpaid leave for carers. Again, I think that is an important piece of work that you would look at, at the same time.

[10:00]

I know from having lived in Australia, they have something that is called personal leave. So your sick leave and your carer's leave would be all part of that package. There are certainly things that we can look at, but we need to be mindful of how we progress and what we are introducing at the same time.

Deputy P.M. Bailhache:

Thank you.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Can I follow up on that in terms of the sick pay? You said you would hope that employers are providing that. Do you have any data on how many employers are providing this sick pay?

The Minister for Social Security:

I have not seen any, but of course if we have any, and I am looking at Sue.

Associate Director, Public Policy:

What you are talking about is a contractual obligation. So the Government, when it employs people, the contract you enter into gives you access to sick pay. But the Government does not have any data on the contractual agreements between private companies and private individuals.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Would there be a way of collecting that, perhaps with the employee returns, to establish how many? If you have information about how many people are employed, could you require employees to tell you how much sick pay they are providing?

Associate Director, Public Policy:

It would need to be a different type of survey.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

J.O.L.S. perhaps?

Associate Director, Public Policy:

You could do it through J.O.L.S. You could ask people if they got contractual sick pay; that would be probably the easiest way of doing it.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Is that something that you could consider doing?

The Minister for Social Security:

That might well be something that would be worth considering doing. I am conscious as well, because we are near full employment on the Island I would hope that also drives up better terms and conditions for employees, because employers are in a more competitive market as well. Perhaps that might be some work that I can discuss with J.A.C.S. around discussing ... I know that they do really good training around the employment legislation. They are also doing communication around employer rights. Obviously that is not a current employer right, but there needs to be some communication around what a good employment contract may look like, that may well be above and beyond the legislative requirements as well.

Deputy J. Renouf:

I am intrigued, listening to your answers here. I wonder if I could ask you to talk about your vision for the kind of economy that you would like Social Security to support. Because we have talked about moving to a living wage, that is a higher wage economy. We have talked about statutory sickness benefits and potential gaps there. We have talked about statutory leave for carers. Do you have a vision of the kind of economy that you would like Social Security to support?

The Minister for Social Security:

From my view, I think we need to be moving towards a living wage economy compared to what, for some people, may well be a poverty pay economy. Also, I think we need to be competitive in relation to other jurisdictions. We know we have got an ageing population. We need an economy that is also open to and competitive with those other jurisdictions so that we are able to compete with them and get younger workers and working families on the Island so that we have a better demographic going forward.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Can I clarify there, when you say "competitive", do you mean competitive in terms of benefits and working conditions or competitive in terms of an economy that competes internationally?

The Minister for Social Security:

For me and my perspective as Minister for Social Security, it would be competitive in respect of benefits and working conditions. Obviously, that is the view that I would share around the table, around the H.A.W.A.G. (Housing and Work Advisory Group) Plus Group when we discuss population policy. I think it is really important that we have a good mix of Ministers around that table. In fact we met yesterday. I can work very closely with the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, for example. Yesterday we were discussing how the current regulations around the courses ... what is considered to be an essential course for income support purposes and also contributions. Deputy Stephenson has asked me previously in the States around would I consider

having credits for longer courses, and that is absolutely the types of things that we are looking at now. Of course it would be foolhardy of me as Minister for Social Security to take that decision as myself, so I am working closely with the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning about what courses should be on such a list and also how long the credit should be in place to suit the needs of the community.

Deputy P.M. Bailhache:

So you accept that a balance needs to be struck because, as Deputy Renouf says, if you continue to increase all the benefits that you have been speaking about, eventually you will kill the goose that lays the golden egg and the economy will collapse under the strain of all the benefits that employers are required to pay out. There is a balance there, is there not?

The Minister for Social Security:

There is of course a balance that needs to be struck. We need to ensure that jobs are available for people and we also need to make sure that there are appropriate worker protections to avoid discriminatory practice or exploitative practice, which I am not saying is going on in the Island but we need to make sure that safeguards are in place to avoid that. Of course, I think, we learned through, I think, COVID at the end, that people started learning that to go into work when you are unwell or sick, you can then put your colleagues at risk, it can then lead to further illness and things like that. What we want to encourage is good practice across the board.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Just to follow on from the 2 questions we have had there and obviously take the points about balance and not wanting to overwhelm employers as well: do you think it may be helpful to develop a vision, a road map, for these kind of introductions? I am always aware that when it comes to minimum wage increases, for example, and I think you have picked up on this, employers say the more notice the better. If there was a vision that set out these are the things that we would like to achieve but we recognise we cannot do it all in one, people can plan ahead and think ahead; is that something that you may consider?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, I think that would be a very sensible way forward. I am very cognisant, for example, that businesses need a lot more notice around the minimum wage. That is one of the reasons that I will be lodging regulations so that I can set a minimum wage without having to go to the Employment Forum for consultation. That enables us to set that earlier. I have met with the chair of the Employment Forum and discussed that approach with her, and have confirmed that in writing, I think within the last couple of days as well. But that does not mean that I am not considering the effect on employers as well as employees when I am making that decision, and making that decision in an

informed way. I do want to give the panel confidence that despite not going through that consultative process with the Employment Forum, there have been other conversations happening, and of course I am not taking the decision around what that rate is on my own. I am also doing that in consultation with other Ministers, specifically the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development, which I think is really important.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

What was the response from the Employment Forum when you broke that news to them?

The Minister for Social Security:

The Employment Forum chair said in the meeting that they had always found it quite difficult to consult with a broad enough number of people. Not consulting with the Employment Forum was not raised as a particular risk by the chair. Also, I think what was interesting was the letter that the Employment Forum gave the previous Minister in relation to living wage said that is a policy decision, so it is a policy decision of Government and we cannot really comment on such policy decisions. But of course, they can give us indications around what mitigations might need to be put in place as well.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

I am interested to know why you cannot just consult with them earlier, why not just bring it all earlier?

The Minister for Social Security:

We could do that and of course this will be a temporary change. In future years it might well be that we go back to that, but it might also be that we end up, once we have done the work on the minimum income standard or even before, if we have a formula that the minimum wage is set to, and that is a policy decision; so, for example, the formula agreed by the States previously was two-thirds, we are working towards two-thirds of the median wage. Having such a formula, to an extent, then makes consultation about a rate null and void. It would be then around what does that new type of consultation look like, is it around more mitigation and checking around timelines and things like that? But there are other ways that I can consult as a Minister as well. I have taken time to meet with employer representative groups as well as employee representative groups. I think the opportunities for roundtable discussions and bringing all of those groups around the table would be beneficial and perhaps lead to the kind of roadmap or vision that you were mentioning.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you. Just staying on the area of employment legislation. Could you talk about the family-friendly legislation, please, Minister, and are you planning to make any changes or amendments to this area of policy?

The Minister for Social Security:

There is a change that I understand is currently with the ... is that the one with the Privy Council?

Associate Director, Public Policy:

Privy Council, yes. It has been approved by the States last year.

The Minister for Social Security:

That enables people to change their working pattern. I think it is twice a year instead of once a year? I am looking to see because this was done before I became ...

Associate Director, Public Policy:

The change that is - it is helpful to parents, but it is not a specifically parent-based thing - the decision from last year, which was that somebody with a set working pattern, which was not reflected in their contract, could require a contract which did identify that specifically. That was basically somebody ... the typical example would be a zero-hour contract person who had worked for the last 6 months, 20 hours a week on a Monday, Wednesday, Thursday or whatever. They say: "Well, I want a contract that says that because that is what I have been doing." You can give that stability. But the second thing, which the Minister was referring to, was that all workers have the right to request flexible working, so this can be very helpful to parents. At the minute you can make one request a year, and the change is to make 2 requests in any 12-month period. The employer does not have to agree to that request, but it must be considered properly, and there are only certain criteria that the employer can reject a request against. But there are quite a number of criteria that the employer can use. It was approved by the States last year, and it got stuck in the U.K. chain of command. It will pop off again. Hopefully it is the end of this month the Privy Council is meeting.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Great. Thank you. That is about flexible working, is it not? In terms of that specific area on flexible working, would you agree or do you have any plans that flexible working by default should be something that is explored within legislation?

The Minister for Social Security:

That is not currently within the plan. Obviously parental rights were improved quite considerably within the past few years and when I did the initial run-through of our legislation and where it sits with regard to other jurisdictions, we are in quite a good place with regard to that part of the legislation. There are other parts of the employment legislation, when I talk about prioritising and knowing, being able to prioritise resources, that we would look to before making any further changes in relation to that.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

In terms of the ability to access that parental leave, you have described the legislation as being in a good place. Do you mean in terms of the length of time and that both parents can take it?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes. I think it is pretty much following best practice internationally at the moment. What we found from the review that was recently done and was completed before I took office, is that the clear action that needed to be taken was around communication, ensuring that employees knew what their responsibilities are and also employees know what their rights are under the legislation. I know that J.A.C.S. has already started some work in relation to that communication, and I have also asked my officers to work with the officers within Health, because of course it is important that the team at maternity understand what rights people have. I know they are involved in the process when people are booking their parental leave, but it sounds like we needed to improve communications in relation to people understanding their rights, and that is what I have asked officers to do.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

When will we see the product of those discussions?

[10:15]

The Minister for Social Security:

So my understanding is that J.A.C.S. has already started doing some good work in relation to communicating that, and my officers are now also working on what government communication might be improved as well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

So when could you let us know when that is going to be possible?

The Minister for Social Security:

I will send you copies of what J.A.C.S. has already done, and I will also keep you updated as those conversations within Government are progressed.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

In terms of the review that you described, which was a survey that went out that families could fill in, what were the findings from that review in terms of could people access this legislation? Can they afford to take that time to be with their children given the pay is only, I think, 6 weeks per parent,

plus the 18 weeks of the statutory pay per parent? I am testing my understanding of the legislation. I am sure I will be corrected if I am wrong.

The Minister for Social Security:

You can run through it, yes.

Associate Director, Public Policy:

Shall I just say what the weeks are? As at 2020, it is 6 weeks paid leave for each parent from the employer. That is your normal rate of pay. Then there is, in addition to that, 32 weeks of parental allowance, which is paid through the Social Security Fund. That 32 weeks is shared between the 2 parents, if there are 2 parents. Each parent must take a minimum of 6 weeks, but then the remaining weeks can be shared out as the parents wish.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

That is 16 weeks each, not 18, that was close, was not it?

Associate Director, Public Policy:

Yes, it can be 16 weeks each, as opposed ... it used to be 18 weeks altogether. It was only the mother could ... previously it was only the mother who could access that part of it.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

So that's 12 plus 32, so that's 44 weeks total, 12 of which are at full pay, if it is taken consecutively, so that does not quite add up to the 2 years, does it, which is in the legislation?

The Minister for Social Security:

It can be taken in 3 blocks, so it is quite flexible in that circumstance. I take your point around affordability for parents and of course if people are earning a significantly higher wage that can then potentially ... that will be a financial decision and that is what we know, is that that is currently a financial decision. Obviously it would be good to remind people that if their income as a family goes down during that time they may become eligible for income support.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Will that be part of the communications around the parental leave?

The Minister for Social Security:

I will ask because I think ...

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

That is important.

The Minister for Social Security:

... that would be very important. On that point, I have actually ... one of the first things I asked officers to do was to look at ways that we can promote to people that they can apply for income support. I think that we need to tackle perhaps some misconceptions around income support. People thinking that working people do not claim income support when in fact the vast majority of people claiming income support are indeed working and working families. There is a gap, I think, for some people that I am cognisant of, which would be people who are currently paying mortgages, because a cost of a mortgage is not calculated within an income support calculation. So that is information that I have asked officers to look at for me. But of course, I am also aware of that gap that we discussed earlier in income support for people who have not lived on the Island for 5 years as well. Of course, filling those gaps also costs money.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Just going back to the family-friendly legislation and that gap between the time that our legislation permits parents to care for their children, which is 2 years, is it not, between the 2 parents or a year each and the amount of time that is funded? Can you talk about the gap there in terms of lower-income families being able to access that and what can be done about that to help those lower income families?

The Minister for Social Security:

I think that is something that we need to look at specifically in relation to lower income and probably middle income families as well. I think I have said before in the Chamber, I was very fortunate because when I had my daughter I was in a position where I could spend that time with her, and I do value the opportunity that parents do spend time with their children. Obviously we were talking about employment legislation. I think what we have veered into is benefits and other support as well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I think it is how people can access that leave and indeed if there is 6 weeks of the employer providing that pay, that would need legislation, would it not, to extend that to make sure that more people could access it? Is that something that you would consider in terms of plugging that gap?

The Minister for Social Security:

I think, given the conversation that we have had about other pressures on employers and other gaps within the Employment Law, that is not something that at the moment we would be looking to put that additional pressure on employers at this point to extend that 6 weeks of full pay within legislation.

Of course, some employers do go above and beyond that requirement, if they can. We also hear, and again coming out of the review, there are points of view on both sides. We know that some employers find the legislation a burden on them. We need to balance that out with the needs of new parents as well. I think where we are in the legislation is in a good place. To come back to the affordability of being able to take time with your children, I think that is something that we need to look at from a Government angle, rather than putting that burden on employers.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

So Government could potentially fund that rather than employers to avoid that burden on businesses?

The Minister for Social Security:

I think that is where we need to look at income support rules, understanding where gaps might well be and what gaps there might well be for families in that situation. But there is a lot of work that needs to be done within income support. My list is growing but I want to be very realistic around that.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

When will you be publishing the results of that review into the family-friendly legislation?

The Minister for Social Security:

That has already been published as an R.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Has it? Okay. I was not sure if we had had it in confidence or ...

Deputy P.M. Bailhache:

Before we leave employment legislation, may I just ask the Minister one question in relation to the qualifying period for unfair dismissal? What the 2003 law says is that the qualifying period is 26 weeks or such other period as may be prescribed. An order was made in 2014, which extended the period to a year. I am conscious of the fact that in the United Kingdom I think it is 26 weeks, and I think there are plans even to contemplate bringing it further down still. It is an area where a change could be achieved without affecting any economic issues, it seems to me, because employers should not, in any event, dismiss employees unfairly. Is any consideration being given to bringing down the period from a year to at least 26 weeks?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, that is something that I am considering at the moment. It is something that has been raised with me by the unions. It is also something that I am quite cognisant of in relation to the work that I did in Scrutiny on the work permit holders panel as well, because I am aware that a number of those work permit holders will only ever be on the Island for 9 months at a time, and then potentially starting new contracts, and then never qualifying for that unfair dismissal as it is at the moment. The other thing that I am considering in relation to that, and this was something that J.A.C.S. raised as something that could be very helpful, was giving people the right to request the reason for dismissal when they are dismissed. My understanding is, at the moment, some employers are not giving that to employees, which can cause issues.

Deputy P.M. Bailhache:

In writing, I hope.

The Minister for Social Security:

In writing, yes. Which can cause issues, both if that employee then has to apply for income support, and of course they get asked: "Why have you left your job?" But also in terms of potential tribunal cases as well, having that in writing would be very useful. That is something that I think, again, would be straightforward to bring in with that. I think with regard to reducing the length of time for unfair dismissal, I agree with your sentiments. That is something that I would need to do a bit more consultation on. My plan was to change the legislation in relation to the right to having the reasons for dismissal first, and then that enables me to do that bit more consultation with the Employment Forum as well on reducing that time.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I am just noting the time. I think we probably need to pick up the pace a bit. I am going to go over to Deputy Stephenson now for her questions on the ageing demographic.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Thank you. I will leave the childcare cost and come back to that one another day, on that note. Is it possible to please get an update on work to establish the Jersey pension saver?

The Minister for Social Security:

Because of other priorities, I have currently paused the work on the Jersey pension saver, so that I could free up the officers to work on other things that we have already approved and agreed as an Assembly. That said, I understand the importance of encouraging people to save for their retirement and also communicating the fact that a secondary pension is important. I was mindful in taking that decision that introducing the pension saver scheme at the pace that the previous Government were going to do may well have put an additional burden on employers at the same time as raising the

minimum wage. For me, the priority was raising the minimum wage. I think it would have been quite cold comfort to people on the minimum wage and on low earnings if I started asking them to save for their pension while they are struggling to afford bread for their dinner table. I want to also be able to put the possibility of a secondary pension saver scheme into context more broadly around the broader work we might do as a Government on the ageing population and also with regards to pensions. One of my own first questions when I got presented with the information on the schemes from officers was what is our understanding of what people are expecting from their States pension. I think that that would be a question if we start suggesting, for example, that there was a mandated requirement for people to start saving into a secondary pension. I think the first question a number of people will ask is: "Well what should I be expecting from my States pension?" So there is some work to do around that. But my priority was to implement the States commitment to the two-thirds of the median wage, and I did not feel that it was helpful to progress with the secondary pension at the same time as that.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

I think the previous Minister's plan was implementation in 2027 following what was called extensive consultation with businesses in 2024. It is fair to say none of that is going to happen.

The Minister for Social Security:

No. That is halted at the moment.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

If implementation had been for 2027 there is not going to be anything in this Government's term of office for the pension saver scheme?

The Minister for Social Security:

Not currently but what I do want to do is ... again this comes back to across government working around ageing population. The requirements, as we know is, as people age and we end up with more older people, the pressure potentially on our Social Security Fund. There is a much larger discussion that needs to happen, and those discussions will happen between Ministers.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Which brings me nicely on to the oversight group that was going to be established to bring together those conversations about actively planning for a changing demographic. Is that still happening?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, we agreed yesterday at the H.A.W.A.G. Plus group, which consists of the testing ... I know that Sue will put me right. The Assistant Chief Minister, Deputy Alves, chairs that. The Chief Minister is

also on that group, as is the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development, the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, the Minister for Housing and myself. Have I missed anybody?

Associate Director, Public Policy:

Justice and Home Affairs.

[10:30]

The Minister for Social Security:

And the Minister, of course, for Justice and Home Affairs. We agreed at that group yesterday that we would take that responsibility on and it was an important piece of work that we wish to progress.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Do you still think there is a place for a Jersey pension saver, or whatever it may be called in the future, at some point? Given I think all the explanations of it previously, certainly that I have come across, where this is a long-term strategic project as we talk about the ageing demographic and others, is there still a place for it?

The Minister for Social Security:

I think there may well still be a place for it, particularly for people who may work for smaller employers who may not be able to easily access ... their employer may not be able to easily access the employee pensions scheme. But that is something that we need to look at in the round, particularly if it was going to ever be mandated around compulsory contributions. I think at that point people will then start saying: "What am I paying my social security contributions for and what should I be expecting from my States pension?" So those discussions also need to be had. I have not taken that completely off the table. I understand that it is of course incredibly sensible to encourage people to save in a pension scheme for their future. There may well be other ways in which we can encourage people to do that, but of course the Jersey Pension Saver Scheme was one option.

Deputy J. Renouf:

I am quite surprised that the pension saver scheme seems to have been shed so easily. Can you articulate where the problems lie, where the opposition to it has come from? You say that it is too much in terms of a burden, in terms of also the living wage and so on, it is too much to ask at one point. Has that been articulated to you by other Ministers, by business groups? Why have you formed that view?

The Minister for Social Security:

I had to take a view on what my priorities as a Minister to deliver are, especially given the finite resources that I have. My priority was implementing a higher ... and it was a priority that had been set out by the Chief Minister as well to meet the States' commitment. I think fundamentally, given that we are talking about in all likelihood people on lower incomes and working for smaller businesses, that that does carry the greater risk of extra burden on those people if extra mandatory contributions into a private pension scheme were made. I wanted to take a more holistic view and of course that is a discussion that we can take within that H.A.W.A.G. Plus Group as we move forward with our discussions around the possible risks, issues and opportunities around the ageing population. But that is something that we need to do across Ministers.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Can I clarify then that the view you have taken around the additional burden is your view and is not the result of representations to you by anyone else?

The Minister for Social Security:

I have not had specific representations. When I have met with representative groups, we did discuss it informally, but it is not something that we have had formal discussions about.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Did it go to Council of Ministers for a discussion, or is it a decision you have taken as Minister?

The Minister for Social Security:

It is a decision I have taken as Minister around how I am prioritising my resources in order to deliver on States commitments and the commitments that we have made within the Common Strategic Policy.

Deputy J. Renouf:

The previous Government felt it could do both. Why do you feel it is impossible to work on a minimum wage and a pension saver at the same time?

The Minister for Social Security:

I think it is more complicated than an either/or of just minimum wage and a pension saver. There were other projects that were also lagging behind, other commitments made by the States, such as for example, the wound dressing commitment that was made. We have also got the support scheme for babies needing additional neonatal care; we had the whistleblowing legislation, that we discussed; we are also implementing vaccination services with G.P.s (general practitioners) and we have also got the free G.P. surgery visits for students that we are implementing. There is a lot of work there for a very small team, so when it comes down to prioritisation ... and I take the point

about that particular project being long-term and strategic, but when I have got other priorities that, to be quite frank, the public and the Assembly are expecting me to deliver on, I have to prioritise my resources accordingly.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Just moving on to carers, the panel has been made aware of some concerns around those who have worked as carers supporting partners, specifically, over the years and then become widowers before retirement age. There seems to be a potential gap of those before they reach retirement age and qualify for a pension. We are just wondering if it is an area that has been brought to your attention, if there is anything that may be on your agenda to look at, and could there be more support for those people? It is my understanding, for a bit of context, that the survivor's benefit that they qualify for, taking into account their partner's contributions, lasts a year but if they then do not go on to qualify for the survivor's pension there are some who are being left in limbo and struggling.

The Minister for Social Security:

That is not something that has been discussed at great length, but it is something that I was aware of. But it is something that I am willing to look at, so if you are aware of cases ... obviously when cases get brought to my attention and then I am able to see gaps in provision. That is always something that I am willing to have a look at and see whether there is a way of resolving issues.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Thank you. It certainly seems that we have mentioned carers already in a number of different contexts today; is it fair to say that in your priorities you are aware that carers need more attention in our community and particularly around social security and legislation and just recognition, really, and consideration along the way. Is that fair to say?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, that is fair to say. Of course, I did bring the amendment to the last Government Plan that was around providing support specifically to families with children with life-limiting or life-threatening illnesses and critical care needs. I am pleased to say that the officers are currently working on delivering that and, in the meantime, I am signing off on non-statutory benefits through Ministerial Decision to provide support for those families. As we become aware of more gaps, again, we can look at how we can resolve that. But I am very aware of the pressure and the financial pressure that can be put on carers, especially if they are of a working age and may need to reduce their hours, may need more flexibility in the workplace, and of course may be suffering a financial burden. I am also aware that a number of those people may well be homeowners, which might then have an effect on whether or not they can claim income support if they are unable to work. So there is a piece of

work to be done. I do have a long list when it comes to income support because there is a lot that needs to be worked through.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

That specific area on carers who have a mortgage and therefore cannot access income support, that seems to me like it is quite urgent. If you are in that situation where you are caring for somebody and you might lose your home because you cannot access income support. What level of urgency are you giving to that issue?

The Minister for Social Security:

I am currently going through the income support guidelines with the relevant policy officers and asking a number of questions around where we are sitting with income support and trying to make changes where possible. I think the issue with changing the guidelines around mortgages in particular is just how many people and what the overall budget and cost would be. I need to be realistic about how that kind of change would or could ... or if it could be delivered under current budgets.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

But starting with carers is possibly a sensible place to start.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes absolutely, I would agree with you there. So, there is ongoing work around income support.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

I would just add that the caring at the time is one thing, but it is also when the caring comes to an end, how it comes to an end and what happens for them after that - particularly if they have been long-term carers - is one of the things that as a panel we have heard can be particularly difficult as well.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, I can understand that that would be a very difficult transition and we have to look after people in that situation.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Clarifying question on that; so there is the survivor's benefit and that is a year, is that correct? Then there is a pension that comes after that. Am I correct in my understanding of that?

Associate Director, Public Policy:

Should I explain that just briefly? Survivor's allowance is payable to any working-age survivor; it is based on the contribution record of the person who has died. It is paid at 120 per cent of the normal rate, so it is paid at a higher rate than we pay other weekly benefits. That lasts for a year; that is paid regardless of what you are doing. Survivor can work, not work, it does not matter at all. At the end of the year, everybody used to move to a survivor's pension; that was changed by the States in the early 2010s to only provide support for a survivor who had young children. The survivor's benefits are based on the old-fashioned widow's benefits and it seemed to be a little bit old-fashioned in the concept of you were beholden to the dead man for your income. So we moved from a widow's pension to a survivor's pension; that was one thing. But then it was also thought that somebody who is of a working age, does not have dependent children, after a year following the death of their partner, probably that is time to move on and there is no need for the social security system to support them.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Okay, thank you.

Associate Director, Public Policy:

Obviously, there is absolutely access to income support, that does not change at all, but the survivor's pensions are now only paid to people who have got children - young children, including children up to university age.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you. So that year of the survivor's allowance, it is called, do you have Ministerial discretion if there are cases with special circumstances ... can people apply to you for that Ministerial discretion to extend that on the case-by-case basis?

The Minister for Social Security:

I would need to look at the legislation to know that.

Associate Director, Public Policy:

You cannot, no. The Social Security Law works on the strong basis that there are rules that apply to everybody and they are applied rigorously but fairly. So the survivor's allowance lasts a year; the Minister has no discretion at all within that law to extend that. She does have discretion in other ... she can help people ... the income support system is there to help people who have needs and that is how you would do that. So there is a route, but it is a route through an Income Support Law.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Okay, thank you for clarifying that.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

The last question is around the Care Needs at Home project; an update on that please.

The Minister for Social Security:

We have lodged the proposition to amend the legislation to give people who are on income support, who have somebody in the household with a care package for long-term care, an additional payment. I am hoping that that will go through the Assembly; it is in June scheduled for debate. It is a small amount of money per family, but the officer that has been working on that has worked incredibly hard directly with the families to try and come up with something that is appropriate and will be of help to them. Obviously, we are constrained by budgets as well and what budget is available, but I will be happy to see that pass through the Assembly.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

And that is the Care Needs at Home project? Is there more to it? Is that it and tick off the list, or...

The Minister for Social Security:

We have talked today about the complexity that faces carers. I am also mindful that I am expecting the LaingBuisson report to come through around domiciliary care and advice around that. Myself and the Minister for Health and Social Services have met with domiciliary care providers, so I am aware of concerns around that. Obviously, we do have the long-term care fund; people are accessing that. But also, I think it is important that people are aware of what they can access and when they can access it, so the communications information that is on the website has recently been updated. I think we have still got some work to do so that people can understand what an entry point to long-term care and accessing long-term care is. That can be quite complex. So yes, there is definitely some work to be done.

[10:45]

Deputy J. Renouf:

Can we move on to primary care services? The C.S.P. (Common Strategic Policy) obviously states that there is an aim to reduce G.P. fees by increasing the subsidy. Can you expand on where you are with that?

The Minister for Social Security:

We have already reduced the cost of seeing a G.P. for people that are eligible for the Health Access Scheme. That is already in place and I understand that that scheme is going down well. It is meeting the needs of the people that use it and the G.P.s are happy with that as well. I will be announcing

imminently a further a reduction to the cost of G.P. visits. We have agreed that with the G.P.s, so I will be able to share that with the panel very shortly, probably by the end of the day.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Could you not possibly share it now?

The Minister for Social Security:

I will share it with you after the public hearing.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Okay, all right, understood. But can I then clarify, the area of concern that sits around subsidies to G.P. surgeries is how much of that will be passed on to the public? How can you guarantee that that will actually be reduced fees and not simply used by the surgeries for their own finances, perhaps, or to cover previous deficits or whatever? What steps are you taking to ensure that that is used for the purpose it is supposed to be used for?

The Minister for Social Security:

I know that my team worked very hard with the primary care body around how the fees are used. But also, I think what we need to acknowledge is the fact that G.P. surgeries are private businesses. One of the things, of course, that people can access is the list of rates for all G.P.s on the government website. Part of the piece of work that we are doing is around ensuring that there is openness and transparency around those G.P. fees and the fees that private practices choose to charge. Of course, I would encourage people to have a look at that schedule of fees on the website so that they can understand and make an informed choice when they are choosing which G.P. to visit as well.

Deputy J. Renouf:

But can I just push you, if there is a decision to, say, subsidise fees by another £10 for each visit, the public would expect £10 to come off their current fee that they would pay. How are you ensuring that that will be the case?

The Minister for Social Security:

When we make an announcement, the public will of course know how much to expect to see their G.P. fees reduced by. I cannot legally bind G.P.s at this point in time to specifically not raising their costs, but because of the work that we have done with the primary care body, my understanding is that G.P.s will not just add that £10 to the cost of seeing a G.P. and of course ...

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Can I ask if that is a condition of the agreement with the G.P.s, that they do not do that?

Associate Director, Public Policy:

No ...

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I am just referring back to this hearing that we had with the Chief Minister and I questioned him on this subject, and he said to us that it would be made a condition of the agreement - of the additional subsidy - that the reduction would be passed on.

The Minister for Social Security:

With regard to things like the Health Access Scheme where we have a set fee, of course that is part of the condition to what has been agreed. The same of course with the free G.P.s for children and then the negotiations around the provision of free G.P.s for full-time students as well. But when it comes to those more general consulting fees, of course, the G.P.s are private businesses and do set their own rates dependent on the costs that they are seeing. But again, I reiterate the fact that we are working on transparency of those fees so that people should know what fees are going to be before they book their appointment.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

To confirm, the Chief Minister did give a commitment that it would be a condition in those agreements. So that is not in those agreements?

The Minister for Social Security:

It is in some of the agreements ...

Associate Director, Public Policy:

The contracts between the Minister for Social Security and the individual G.P. practices, the Chief Minister would not really have access to those commercial contracts. But the important point, what the Minister is saying, is that the G.P.s have committed to do this. If you look at the Consumer Council - so, separate from what Government is publishing - the Consumer Council looked at the fees before and after the £20 reduction last year and there was a very clear £20 reduction across all G.P. surgeries and it did happen. It is also true that G.P. fees will go up because they are businesses and they have got increased costs, the same as everybody else. So the £20 reduction was like ... and it is going to be that number for ever. It is still £20 below what it would have been. The Minister is going to announce an extra action in that area imminently.

Chief Officer, Customer and Local Services:

If I can, he said, yes, the agreement is they will take it off, but they are also allowed to increase their fees. So, I think from the first set of reductions, we did see reductions of £20 when it was put through the first time, so the evidence was that G.P.s did indeed do exactly what they said they would do.

Deputy J. Renouf:

I think the problem we are seeing is that there is very little safeguard here. The safeguard you are suggesting is that consumers can look around, can shop around. The onus is on them because you are saying: "We give them that; we expect to see the reduction, but within a short time period business costs, et cetera, could rise." There is nothing within the agreement that you are making that sets a time limit before you can put those price rises in or anything like that.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Did you or your team try to negotiate any such conditions like that?

Associate Director, Public Policy:

To be fair to this Minister, she is making an amendment to an existing contract that was negotiated last year with the previous Minister. The problem is it is quite complicated; there are 13 separate businesses that we are trying to do one deal with. As Government, we need to make sure that we can add a contract that goes out to everybody. So the complexity of how different G.P. practices arrange their increases over the year, sometimes they do one a year, sometimes they do 2 a year, some people had not had an increase for a couple of years. There was just a lot of complexity to it. So we moved to a more trusting relationship whereby the Minister at the time spoke to the G.P.s and we agreed that this is what would happen. The Government does have to have a trusting relationship with G.P.s; G.P.s are a really important part of our entire health service. There are bigger changes within the health service as a whole for the future, but in the short term this is the best that could be done last year and this Minister has not sought to spend even more time ... I think your point was to make action, yes?

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Given it is the same contract and the previous subsidy was largely absorbed, is that something you would expect to happen with this new subsidy as well? It follows logically that it probably will if it is based on the same contract.

The Minister for Social Security:

I do not think it was largely absorbed ...

Associate Director, Public Policy:

Sorry, I think you would have to say that, yes, the fees are £20 less than they would have been without the action of the previous Minister and the new Minister making another commitment to make that an even bigger reduction.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I think given the variation in the fees - I am just looking at the table - you have some surgeries that are charging £25 a visit and some that are charging more than double at £51 a visit. So I think it is fair to say that it is possible to keep those fees lower. I think, Minister, what we would ask of you is what can you do and what do you intend to do to keep the actual cost of those visits lower? To either keep them as they are and stop them going up or to actually lower them.

The Minister for Social Security:

I think it is about continuing a good relationship with G.P.s and the primary care body. But as well there is all sorts of other work that is being done across health and across work with pharmacies as well to potentially expand the types of services and provisions that could be met by community pharmacies. The provision of healthcare is of course something that I need to work closely with the Minister for Health and Social Services on. The Minister for Health and Social Services and I have scheduled regular fortnightly meetings so that we can discuss things that relate to both of our areas of work. I work very well with the Minister for Health and Social Services and of course ongoing health funding is something that we need to work on as a Ministerial team. But I am confident that we do have a good relationship with G.P.s. Discussions that we have had with the primary care body have been positive in that relation and they have committed to taking that off of what fees would otherwise be. Of course, the cost of living is rising and the cost of providing services is rising so, as Sue said, our expectation is that the fee would be less than what it would have been under other conditions.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Shall I move on to ...

Deputy P.M. Bailhache:

Can I just interrupt?

Deputy J. Renouf:

Carry on, I beg your pardon.

Deputy P.M. Bailhache:

I am very pleased to hear from the Minister and from the associate director that a sense of trust has been restored in relations with the G.P.s because it seems to me that is so important. It is all very

well to say that all the increase that is being given in benefit is to go to the patient and not to the doctor, but one has to recognise that doctors' expenses go up. They are running a business and they have to pay their staff, they have to pay their rent, and so on. I think the trust seemed to have been diminished as a result of a long period of time when the medical benefit was not increased and I hope that the Minister, perhaps this is a question for her, will keep the medical benefit continuously under review.

The Minister for Social Security:

I think that is important, and I also agree with you that it is important that we do have a good relationship and a relationship of trust with our general practitioners, who are providing an incredibly important service to the Island. I think that that relationship of trust is incredibly important and also looking at the package that we deliver with G.P.s and as well community pharmacies, how primary care ... then of course we know that better access to primary care then improves lives through prevention of more longer-term illnesses as well. I will do everything I can to ensure that primary care is as accessible as it can be, and I do value the work that G.P.s do in partnership with us to do that.

Deputy J. Renouf:

You mentioned pharmacies. How has work continued with community pharmacies to support the development and delivery of primary care services? For example, vaccination services, community dressing scheme and free G.P. visits for students, things like that.

The Minister for Social Security:

To take the pharmacy piece of work first, that is an ongoing piece of work that currently my team is working on. I do not know if Sue can give more of a technical explanation of some of the work that is ongoing.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I am just minded of time; we only have half an hour left in the hearing, so could we keep the answers succinct please?

The Minister for Social Security:

It might be worth us organising a separate briefing, because there is quite a lot ...

Deputy J. Renouf:

Absolutely, or we could take that one as a written response. I just wanted clarity around what is being done to develop that pharmacy service.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes. I am quite pleased ...

Associate Director, Public Policy:

There are several different things, so yes, we will absolutely give you some details in writing.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you. Okay, so is that the section

Deputy J. Renouf:

I am happy to just do that section. That section is finished.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I am going to move on from some of this next section, and would you move to this one?

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

To 23?

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Yes, please.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

We have heard that you are going to evaluate the period products scheme. Can you give us an update as to where you are with that? Have you evaluated it and if so, what is the outcome of that?

The Minister for Social Security:

The team were undertaking an initial evaluation as I took office. I was mindful that the scheme was not operating as most of us would have expected in the Assembly, and I also wanted to hear some more views from people who may use the scheme. So I asked officers to set up a series of focus groups so that they could understand more about what expectations of the scheme would be, how the scheme may work better. I have a meeting straight after this hearing to get the outcomes of those focus groups. One thing that I was particularly mindful of was that a lot of the products that were being put into public toilets were being damaged and very often people were going to those dispensers previously and they were empty. We took immediate action to replace those dispensers and put a more robust dispenser in so that you could get one product at a time, changing that offering around more about if you get caught short in the public loo, you can access a product. Unfortunately, despite those dispensers being more robust, we are still seeing some vandalism. My understanding from initial discussions - and I will find out more at my meeting later today - was that public toilets

were not necessarily the preferred venue for people to obtain the products and if they were to obtain their full supply there might well be better ways of delivering that. I am looking forward to the meeting later and then I can brief the panel on our next steps going forward. But it is quite clear that there are elements of the scheme working well; for example, where products are being delivered via the charitable sector and at community spaces. That is really valuable, but it is how we can provide free products to the broader population as well.

[11:00]

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

What timescale are you working to with getting this sorted, for want of a better description?

The Minister for Social Security:

I will be given a timescale, I hope, at my meeting this afternoon. I have said to the team it is a priority. Again, this is an Assembly decision to provide this, people are expecting that provision and they are expecting it to be done in a meaningful way. Also, part of the thing that the focus groups looked at was more sustainable products as well, the types of products ... obviously it is not a one size fits all and there are generational differences as well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Are you confident that there will be solutions to those issues of where people can access them and those sustainable products, including the reusable pads and cups and things like that?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, I am.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Was the timescale question answered?

The Minister for Social Security:

I hope that I will get a timescale at my meeting after this meeting.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Okay. Could you let us know as soon as you have that? Thank you.

The Minister for Social Security:

I will, absolutely. I know it is something that you are interested in as well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Yes, and if you could let us know what is confidential and what is public. There is very much public interest in this issue.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

You have previously said that you want to revisit the idea of just taking G.S.T. (goods and services tax) off period products as well and you were going to discuss that with Ministers. Have you had that conversation and what was the outcome of it?

The Minister for Social Security:

That conversation did happen at the Women's Health Advisory Group, which includes Government and non-Government members. Of course, the question around G.S.T. does not lay with me; it lays with the Minister for Treasury and Resources and those decisions are her decisions to make, not mine. What I can commit to is doing the best I can with the budget that we have got for the free period products scheme.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

With that said, is it fair to say that in this Government's term we are not going to see G.S.T. be taken off or proposed to be taken off period products?

The Minister for Social Security:

That is not a question for me, it is a question to the Minister for Treasury and Resources.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

But Minister, you had said that in your capacity as Minister you wanted to take that to a fellow Minister and try to work with her to see it taken off.

The Minister for Social Security:

I added it to the agenda for the Women's Health Group so that that could be discussed, but ultimately it is a decision from the Minister for Treasury and Resources and I need to respect her remit with regard to that. I also need to focus on delivering on the States Assembly decision to provide free products and make sure that those free products are available and accessible in a dignified manner.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Just for real clarity, it was a "No" from the Minister for Treasury and Resources that she was not willing to pursue that?

The Minister for Social Security:

That would be a matter for the Minister for Treasury and Resources to answer, not me.

Deputy P.M. Bailhache:

Speaking as a mere man, is it not better for women to get free period products than have the G.S.T. taken off?

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I think that is what this scheme is designed to do.

The Minister for Social Security:

That is what this scheme was designed to do. We should be doing it better than it has been delivered in the past. We will look at it and I am committed to meeting what that scheme was intended to do originally. We have the funding for it and we have the resources to implement it and it is a priority.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you.

Deputy J. Renouf:

A question regarding zero-hour contracts; are you planning to continue any work that may have started on reviewing zero-hour contracts? Are you doing any work in this area?

The Minister for Social Security:

I know that there is a recent legislation change that Sue mentioned earlier, so we will not go over that again. There are obviously other omissions within the Employment Law, which I would want to look at first, such as the transfer of undertakings, so protection for employees if the business they work for, for example, gets sold on. That is something that we do not currently have in the Employment Law. Zero-hours contracts and protections for employees are something that is important to me, but we need to have a look at what those priorities are, and the transfer of undertakings is something that I want to look at.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Did we ban exclusivity clauses? We have done that, have we not? Yes.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes. It was made better than where we were previously in relation to zero-hours contracts.

Deputy J. Renouf:

So there is no current review underway on zero-hours contracts? That is something that ...

The Minister for Social Security:

Not at the moment.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Okay, thank you.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Okay, thank you. Would you like to do ...

Deputy J. Renouf:

Long-term care, yes. Some long-term care questions. What steps are you taking to ensure the long-term sustainability of the long-term care fund?

The Minister for Social Security:

That is a big one.

Deputy J. Renouf:

In a couple of minutes.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes. I am awaiting the final version of the LaingBuisson report, which I understand will make some recommendations in relation to that. The long-term care fund is the fund that needs more attention than the other funds that I am responsible for, because we know that the longevity of the fund is not as secure as the others. I am waiting to see what that report does recommend and obviously I will update the panel as I get those recommendations, but at present there are no plans to increase contributions to the long-term care fund.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Do you believe that there is a problem that the benefits available to people have not kept pace with the true costs of care, and that that is a problem both in terms of the people who have to pay for care, but also in terms of the financial viability of companies providing care, that they are not getting enough money? In other words, that we are approaching a bit of a crisis in terms of that funding model.

The Minister for Social Security:

I am aware of that issue. Again, that is part of the reason for having that report produced. I want to see what that report says so that we can then look at how we may resolve some of those issues

around particularly the discrepancy in the payments that some providers are getting in comparison to other care providers. As I said, myself and the Minister for Health and Social Services have met with some care providers, so I am aware of the issues that they are raising as well. But I understand that I will be receiving that report this month, so that will be an important piece of work; then we will need to look at how we move forward with any actions arising from that.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Okay. There is also, I believe, work going on on development of a sustainable domiciliary care market. Can you update the panel on any of the work on that?

The Minister for Social Security:

That is all related to that specific report.

Deputy J. Renouf:

That is related to it. Okay. All right. Thank you. Do you know when you will get that report? And therefore, what timetable ...

The Minister for Social Security:

I have been told this month, so ...

Deputy J. Renouf:

It is going to be a busy month, by the sound of it. Good. One theory that might help in this long-term is telecare - using other technology, basically - to develop services that are currently provided in a labour-intensive way. What work is going on in Government to filter that into ...

The Minister for Social Security:

I know that there is a telecare project currently happening. I am going to look to Ian to update on some of the work that the department has been doing, because I think that would be helpful.

Chief Officer, Customer and Local Services:

Yes, we have been exploring the potential for telecare and, along with my colleagues in Health, their priority has been the alarm system for residents. But it is what else we can do beyond that. We have seen examples in the U.K. of where technology has been deployed to help people, but there are no real standards as yet. There are lots of different variants of it. In fact, Digital Jersey have just launched - I think it is part of their impact fund, if that is the right title - £2 million of - I think it is £2 million - for an open call for technological proposals and suggestions about how innovations and how technology can be used to help support care. So this is an area that clearly there is potential,

we can all think of potential, but we have to make sure that we move forward with it in a practical way, working with colleagues in Health and obviously also the care market as well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Happy with that?

Deputy J. Renouf:

Yes.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

That is the whole section?

Deputy J. Renouf:

Yes.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Okay, thank you. Could we go to the contributory ...

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Yes, absolutely. The WorkWell project or pilot scheme, I understand there was going to be an evaluation of it. Has work started on that, and can you tell us a bit about how it is going?

The Minister for Social Security:

I am trying to switch my brain because I cannot recall that I have seen a review of the work.

Associate Director, Public Policy:

You have not seen a review of the work.

The Minister for Social Security:

No, I have not.

Chief Officer, Customer and Local Services:

The pilot started towards the end of last year, and we are hoping to have an evaluation towards the end of this year on the progress. The latest information I have, which the Minister has not seen, is that we are getting referrals, it is working, and we are starting to record and monitor the analysis to help us build up that evaluation. For the P.O.W.S. (payment off work sick)(?) benefit, we get referrals from G.P.s when someone perhaps is unwell and we work with the employer and the WorkWell team and the G.P. to come up with a return-to-work programme that hopefully gets them back into full-time

work faster, but that generally would involve a graduated return which previously was effectively illegal in terms of sickness benefits, but now is legal and we are now practising that. Of course when you have someone back into work, it takes a while to see if they stay there, to work out if the evaluation is really going to be successful or not. So, that pilot is continuing at the moment.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

It is obviously voluntary, but the numbers that you are seeing coming through, are they numbers that you are pleased with, that you would expect?

Chief Officer, Customer and Local Services:

Yes, over 150 referrals so far. They have come from G.P.s as well as other health professionals, and we are working continually to make sure that health professionals are understanding how it works and they can act as that conduit. But yes, we have a body of activity now to understand how it is going.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Data is being collected. Give it a year ...

Chief Officer, Customer and Local Services:

It is still very early days, yes, but the team are working with G.P.s and obviously the Islanders to help get back into work.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Thank you very much. The Minister's delivery plan, although I recognise that it may have crossed over from before, talked about developing a revised assessment process around contributory benefits for those with long-term health conditions. Is there an update?

The Minister for Social Security:

That piece of work has been slightly delayed so that we could get the team working on the commitments that had already been made by the Assembly, but that will be continuing later on in the year. It is something that I am aware needs to be done. I have also raised it with our Disability and Inclusion Team as well, because I think it is important that they are also involved in that piece of work. Like I say, there is a stack of work for quite a small policy team, and that was one of the pieces of work that needed to be delayed in order to deliver on the other things such as the wound dressing and the support for parents with neonatal babies and everything like that. So, that has not stopped. It will continue, it is just delayed.

[11:15]

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Delayed, but until later this year.

The Minister for Social Security:

I am just going to have a look ...

Associate Director, Public Policy:

It is quite a big project, so we have just stopped temporarily. We will start again hopefully towards the end of the year; it will take some time to come to fruition. You have to assess. You want to look for a better organised way of assessing long-term incapacity. The current model is based on a rather old-fashioned way of looking at incapacity too medically based and not taking a holistic view of the person. So we are looking to do that, but that does require quite a lot of research, so it will not be quick and it is done. It will be during 2025.

The Minister for Social Security:

It certainly needs modernising and it is an important piece of work that needs to be done, and I think I will put it on record as well that I do not share the views that were expressed by the relevant U.K. Minister around long-term incapacity.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Could you share a few of your principles that will underpin that piece of work about what are you aiming to achieve with that?

The Minister for Social Security:

I think what we need to end up with is a more modern process that takes on more of the needs of people that is accessible and is better than currently what we have, which is ... I would describe it as a bit of a tick box where you either fit the criteria or you do not. It is around a more modern process for me and one that is understandable and fits for purpose as well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Can I just interject there? Given the resource challenges that you outlined near the beginning of the hearing, is it going to be possible to achieve your vision?

The Minister for Social Security:

That one will be a priority. I understand the limitations with regard to that current model of working at the moment and as well, because disability inclusion is important to me, that is very much related to that piece of work as well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Is your department sufficiently funded at the moment to achieve your vision?

The Minister for Social Security:

That will be a question I will ask the accountable officer. He is responsible for the budget.

Chief Officer, Customer and Local Services:

Well, I am responsible for the budget, Minister, you are absolutely right. In terms of the operations, Customer and Local Services, we are resourced; some of the challenges are in relation to policy work and that is in the Cabinet Office. So, that is ducking the question but that is not my responsibility. What the Minister has been very keen on is to get us to work collectively on a 2-year programme and try and make sure that the Minister's priorities are delivered in that 2-year programme. That has been obviously quite a unique situation, that we have not had a 2-year term of office in that sense before, and also we are already in traction with many things. We have tried to make sure the resources are being focused on the right things at the right time. But we cannot do everything at once, as you have heard from the Minister. So some things, like the impairment work, will be in the next year. It is still a priority. It is just an ordering ... making sure the right people are available to do that work. I think that we have a plan that can deliver the Minister's priorities that she has requested over the 2-year period.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Sounds challenging.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, it is a large remit and it makes a big difference to people's lives, so it is important that we take it seriously and do the work that needs to be done.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Given the importance of the remit and the size of it, do you think sufficient funding historically has been allocated to this department?

The Minister for Social Security:

That is something that I would need to do some more background. I am learning ...

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Just your view as you sit here today.

The Minister for Social Security:

I am learning all the time in my role as Minister for Social Security. As I have said, there are areas of income support where I think there are gaps that need to be filled. I need to see whether it is possible to fill some of those gaps within the current budgets and then I would be able to give you a more informed answer to the question.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

But it is possible that some increase might be required to fulfil your vision and your priorities?

The Minister for Social Security:

At the moment I am trying to look at what I can do within the resources that I have without putting further pressure on the public purse.

Deputy J. Renouf:

There have been a lot of things here where you have talked about some things being things that you are absolutely focused on and some things which are having to wait because of prior decisions by the Assembly and so on. Is your Ministerial Plan going to lay out the things that you are planning to do in a timetabled way so that we can have clarity on the things that are going to be actioned, when they are going to be actioned, and indeed the things that are going to be deprioritised?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes. We do have an overview of a timetable and one of the questions that I am consistently asking the senior leadership team that I work with is: do you have the capacity and resources to do the things that I am asking you to do? What do we need to prioritise? How can we prioritise? So again, I did share the initial draft with you; I will continue to share those drafts. I think it is important that you have sight of that so that you can plan your work as a Scrutiny Panel as well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Are they likely to be made public at any point like the Ministerial Plans had been previously?

The Minister for Social Security:

At the moment there is not the same plan to make Ministerial Plans public, but of course I could share them with you in a public manner so that you are able to hold me to account on my plans. I think that is a really important part of the process as well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

That sounds very reasonable, thank you. Have you finished your questions on that?

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Yes.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Okay, thank you. Would you like to ask ...

Deputy P.M. Bailhache:

Can we turn to the disability strategy, Minister? Can you tell us how work with community partners is going to refresh that?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes. We have a meeting this coming Monday, the Disability Strategy Advisory Group. I have, as Minister, taken over as chair of that group and I have visited a number of the organisations in the third sector that work with people with disabilities. The focus of the group at the moment is to agree on Monday some priority actions. The disability strategy itself was fairly broad and wide, so we need to develop a clear focus around what we can achieve. I think it is also important, as I alluded to earlier, that I take my role as Minister with responsibility for that strategy seriously and do provide that broader voice on the table around Council of Ministers. Also I would expect Ian to be that voice in the Executive Leadership Team, talking about disability and inclusion as and when appropriate. I think it will take collaborative efforts not just within the group itself but also with other government departments. We have seen just this week media interest in disabled parking; blue badge parking. I know that my team are currently working on a blue badge parking plan together with colleagues of course in the Infrastructure Department. In these areas collaborative working is really important and it is really important that it is not just seen as the work of the Disability Inclusion Team within Government but they are seen as being the champions within Government to encourage all government departments to take disability inclusion seriously.

Deputy P.M. Bailhache:

Can you tell us what the most important part of that focus that you have spoken of would be for you?

The Minister for Social Security:

For me personally, it is around true inclusion. When I talk about true inclusion, that is something that is embedded in what we do as part of our business as usual as Government. It should be a matter of we always think about inclusive practice no matter what we are delivering. Obviously, I can encourage my department to do that, to improve the provisions that we are offering. But also, I

think it is my role as well to speak to other Ministers around how they can improve access and inclusion. Of course when I saw Deputy Stephenson's proposition around the cash provision, for example, the first thing that I did was contact the Minister for Infrastructure and say: "This is really important from a disability inclusion perspective", and I was pleased to see that he agreed as well. We were able to support that and act on it as quickly as possible. It is very much a collaborative approach that I think is really important on that.

Deputy P.M. Bailhache:

Very good answer, thank you.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I would like to ask a follow-up on the disability strategy. Will there be a focus within that on neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism and A.D.H.D. (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), which the panel understands there are more diagnoses of those conditions?

The Minister for Social Security:

Autism Jersey is represented on the advisory group and I am pleased to have them involved as well. The focus areas will be agreed by the advisory group on Monday, so I think I should wait until the advisory group itself has come together and agreed to focus areas, and then I will of course share them with the panel.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Sure. Would you agree to take a look at those partners that are taking part in that group to make sure that there is also a group that represent Islanders with conditions such as A.D.H.D.?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I think there is more than one organisation. Thank you. There are some other questions ... do you want to just ask this one?

Deputy J. Renouf:

You talked about collaborative working; one of the big, long-term strategic issues facing the Island is healthcare funding. Are you working with the Minister for Health and Social Services on developing plans for long-term healthcare funding, and if so, what are you bringing to that?

The Minister for Social Security:

There is a Ministerial group that is set up ... I am looking to Sue to remind me who is on that Ministerial group.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

As briefly as possible, if we can, thank you.

Associate Director, Public Policy:

It will be the Minister for Health and Social Services, the Minister for Social Security, the Minister for Treasury and Resources.

The Minister for Social Security:

Like I said, I am absolutely committed to working collaboratively with the Minister for Health and Social Services. In fact, I am meeting with the Minister for Health and Social Services today to talk about our areas where we do have crossover of responsibility. We have those in the diary on a fortnightly basis and we will be working together on that funding.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

I think you said in the States Assembly - one of you, recently - the Health Insurance Fund was a discussion that needed to be had about where it sits and who controls it. It was in relation to the hospital pharmacy, but have you started those meetings?

The Minister for Social Security:

We had specific meetings around the hospital pharmacy and whether or not through the Health Insurance Fund and community pharmacies, we might be able to help with that. Obviously, as we now know, the electronic pharmacy system is now in place, which I understand has helped with the queues at the pharmacy. But we did look at ways that we could collaborate together in order to resolve some of the issues that were being faced in the hospital. You asked me another part of the question, I am afraid.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

The H.I.F. (Health Insurance Fund). I understand one of the challenges around using community pharmacies was who has control of the H.I.F. and can sign off how things are paid for, effectively. Do you believe control of the H.I.F. should stay with the Minister for Social Security or should it be moved to the Minister for Health and Social Services?

The Minister for Social Security:

I am open to conversation so that we are assured that we are being as efficient and effective as possible with our funds. Both the Minister for Health and Social Services and I have both been

briefed on the H.I.F. agreement within the H.I.F. and we are in constant dialogue around that and also areas such as our work on community pharmacy, our work with G.P.s, how primary care intersects with secondary care. So, that is an ongoing work in progress.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you. Throughout the hearing you have mentioned conversations and meetings that you have had with various groups. One of them was in pre-representative groups and J.A.C.S. and other groups. Could you outline any areas of concern that have been raised by any of those groups that raise issues that we have not covered in the hearing?

The Minister for Social Security:

I think we have covered all of them because we have been quite broad in this hearing, but I will undertake to go back through the notes, so if there were any additional areas of concern that I have forgotten about you can be briefed on that as well. But obviously I have been in the post a fairly short time; I have only met with most of those groups once and I need to go through another round of meetings as well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Okay. Is there anything that you would like to add, Minister, before we close the hearing?

The Minister for Social Security:

Just that I am looking forward to working with you as a panel. As I said before, I think the Scrutiny process is incredibly important and I hope we can work together to deliver special outcomes.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Likewise and thank you very much for your time, everybody, today and I will formally close the hearing now. Thank you.

[11:30]