

19.6 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour of the Chief Minister regarding the reference to child poverty in Jersey within the United Nations Economic and Social Council's concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. (OQ.52/2026)

Will the Chief Minister advise whether he is aware of the reference to child poverty in Jersey within the United Nations Economic and Social Council's Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and, if so, what plans he has to address the concerns raised therein?

Senator L.J. Farnham (The Chief Minister):

I am aware of the United Nations observations on the United Kingdom's seventh periodic report. These observations relate to the U.K. as a state party and include matters relevant to the Crown Dependencies and the Overseas Territories. Jersey has also provided a formal response. The committee raised concerns about child poverty and the impact this can have on children's rights and life chances. These are concerns that the Government shares. The Government recognises that growing up in a household experiencing financial hardship affects children's health, education, well-being and future opportunities. Tackling affordability and improving living standards are therefore central priorities for this Council of Ministers and will form an important part of the forthcoming Common Strategic Policy. We have already begun discussions on further measures to support families, building on existing initiatives such as expanded childcare support, reduced G.P. (General Practitioner) charges, school meals, housing supply and measures of targeted increased income support. Ultimately sustainable reductions in child poverty require both support for those most in need and a strong, growing economy that creates good jobs, rising incomes and opportunities for all families to thrive. To that end, we continue to work across Government and with Scrutiny and Members to improve outcomes for all children and young people with the aim of eradicating child poverty in the fullness of time.

19.6.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I thank the Chief Minister for his answer. I think it is clear that this issue is important to him, and I hope important to all of the Ministers. It is really positive to hear that it is going to be one of the key priorities within the C.S.P. (Common Strategic Policy). With that in mind, would the Chief Minister agree to meet with myself and with the group behind the letter that was sent around today, I believe, which all Members will have had, which outlines some of the issues in this area and asks for a meeting to make an action plan to tackle it?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

Yes, and I thank the Deputy for sharing with me that letter earlier. I had received it but basically, for Members' benefit, the letter reported that many families are struggling with the cost of living, including housing, childcare costs, incomes not keeping up with inflation. The letter stated - I am not sure if this is true - that one in 4 children are in relative low-income households and more than a third of households are experiencing financial difficulty. The group also argued that current support systems are fragmented and difficult to navigate. These are things that we need to address as a matter of urgency. I and the relevant Government Ministers will be pleased to meet with all stakeholders who can help us deliver the solutions we need.

[15:45]

19.6.2 Connétable I. Gardiner of St. Helier:

It is very well known that a high proportion of child poverty are St. Helier residents. Would the Chief Minister engage with myself and the Parish to ensure that he will tackle this as a targeted support for St. Helier residents as well?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

Yes, of course we will meet with the Constable. I am not sure we can give a separate or targeted report on a Parish-by-Parish basis because I think we have to look at the problem Island-wide. The Constable can rest assured that the Government will work closely with her and relevant parties.

19.6.3 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Since I was elected I have received several communications from the families that they have not been receiving income support for various reasons, including not eligible as they are less than the 5 years in Jersey but the families are still experiencing the same difficulties with the cost of living and living in poverty. Is there anything that the Council of Ministers have considered to look at for the residents that have children and they are less than 5 years in Jersey?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

I am looking to the former Minister for Social Security; that is something that has certainly been discussed but I need to pick that up with the new Minister. I think when it comes to supporting or getting behind our commitment to children, we need to consider all known cases of child poverty or hardship regardless of particular status that can prevent its own challenges. I think this Assembly has undertaken to put children first at all times.

19.6.4 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

One of the points outlined within this letter was understanding where the current systems are falling short. Indeed, the Chief Minister mentioned some data, around a quarter of children living in poverty, and he was not sure if that was the case. I can assure him it is indeed the case. Would he commit to including in this work some data collection because I am aware that Jersey does not collect and have the same measures that other jurisdictions do. Therefore, this problem is largely hidden, so would he make sure that understanding the problem in terms of data collection, that is part of the work in this area?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

Yes, we do not have I think a legal definition of child poverty. Statistics Jersey collect stats that we use but they could be better designed to target the problem. I think in any challenge in any problem, the way to solve it is by understanding it fully. We do not fully understand the child poverty issue in Jersey as yet, although we are making good progress. To solve the problem we have to fully understand it; I agree with the Deputy.