



Health and Social Security Sub-Panel

Family Friendly Legislation Review

Witness: The Minister for Social Security

Tuesday, 15th July 2025

Panel:

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

Deputy K.M. Wilson of St. Clement

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

Witnesses:

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

Ms. S. Duhamel, Associate Director, Public Policy

Ms. H. Mangan, Head of Work and Family Hub

[13:04]

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

Good afternoon and welcome to the public hearing for the Family Friendly Legislation Review Sub-Panel. Today we are with the Minister for Social Security. I am Deputy Louise Doublet, I am the Chair of the panel; I will let my panel introduce themselves.

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

Deputy Lucy Stephenson.

Deputy K.M. Wilson of St. Clement:

Deputy Karen Wilson.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Minister, if you could introduce yourself and your officers.

The Minister for Social Security:

I am Deputy Lyndsay Feltham, I am the Minister for Social Security. I will let the officers introduce themselves.

Associate Director, Public Policy:

I am Sue Duhamel, I am Associate Director in the Cabinet Office.

Head of Work and Family Hub:

Helena Mangan, Head of Work and Family at Social Security.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you very much for making time to come to the hearing today. We are just under an hour now, so we are aiming to finish at 2.00 p.m. because S.L.C. (Scrutiny Liaison Committee) will be at the doors trying to get in. We do have quite a lot of questions, so we may need to follow up in writing afterwards. I apologise in advance if we are quite pacy and if you could assist with that by keeping the answers as succinct as possible.

The Minister for Social Security:

I will do my best.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Yes, you are usually pretty good at that. Minister, I am going to open by referring to you the letter that you responded to us on 24th March. We have made some requests for information around the outcomes of the Ministerial actions which were detailed in the Family Friendly Post-Implementation Review which I believe was instigated by your predecessor and then completed by yourself.

The Minister for Social Security:

That is right.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

In that letter you stated: "The overall effort between government and the business and advice sectors is working well." Could you elaborate on this, please, including what evidence that you have?

The Minister for Social Security:

I think the evidence that I have is based on the general take-up of the parental grant and parental allowance compared to the number of births. We know that the take-up is ... and I have got the figures somewhere but perhaps what we will do is send those to you in writing if you have not already got those. So there are only a very, very few people that cannot claim either. The department itself

also has data directly from the Maternity Unit when we have babies born. If then the department observes that a claim for parental allowance or parental grant has not been made, then the department will follow that up. In terms of the take-up, of at least the allowances and the grants, I think we have got data around that. Where we do not have data and evidence - and I think the legislation does not really exist or enable us to - is around businesses complying with the need to give people their family friendly rights, so that is one area where we do have less data. I know that we have also discussed the need for better communication. I am pleased to say that I now have a draft of a leaflet that the Government has done which will be given at neonatal appointments which outlines both the need for parents to know their rights and the relevant links there, as well as a step-by-step checklist of things that parents need to do as they have their baby and then obviously need to look at things like their parental leave. So I think the addition of a leaflet will be helpful to new parents and that checklist I hope as well will help people know what their rights are and enable them to have a good conversation with their employer as well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you, that sounds really good. We have got some questions in a minute about communication generally. I was going to ask you what is not working well and you have said communications and compliance around businesses. Can you just elaborate further on what is not working well in that area?

The Minister for Social Security:

When it comes to compliance I think my point is that the legislation does not provide for government to then collect data and enforce it in that way. The only way that we would know whether people have concerns around compliance with their employer is if they have taken a claim to tribunal because that is the right of recourse that people have under the legislation. If we saw a big influx of tribunal claims, then that would give me a cause for concern. Again, we have discussed around whether people feel comfortable or not going to tribunal. I am incredibly keen to see the results of your survey that is being done. I think the survey that you have sent out, and I shared myself on my own social media, will give us some really good evidence and some baseline information as well. So I welcome the work that you are doing in that respect.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you. That is really helpful and of course our aim is always to be constructive to the work that you are doing. So you have said the problem is that there is not an understanding of whether there is a problem with compliance because government cannot collect data. You have mentioned the tribunal process might be the only way but is there anything short of the tribunal process that either exists at the moment or could exist that could be put in place to have a better understanding?

The Minister for Social Security:

I think that is where you would perhaps get some data and information from J.A.C.S. (Jersey Advisory and Conciliation Service) around both employers and employees that have either gone to J.A.C.S. for information and advice. There may of course be cases that J.A.C.S. have dealt with that did not get to tribunal because they have managed to do conciliation around that. J.A.C.S. would be well placed to discuss with you around the queries that are coming to them. They would also be well placed to tell the panel about the organisations that are taking up their offer of training as well. So J.A.C.S. offer both online and in-person training. Again, I think the take-up of such training, the organisations that take that up, that is a good indicator as well where there are better practices or where we have got employers that are wanting to be best practice employers.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Yes, okay. We will be speaking to J.A.C.S. so I think we could put those questions to J.A.C.S. One more before I hand over to Deputy Stephenson. In terms of the intended objectives of this legislation, how do you measure whether it is achieving those?

The Minister for Social Security:

That is a good question because of course the intended objectives were to enable people to take the time off if they wished with their new babies. With regard to measure, as I said, we can, from a departmental process, know who is claiming allowances and the benefits, so I am confident that we do not have people underclaiming where they are eligible. Whether or not it is then enabling people to take the time off that they want to be able to take off with their children, I think that is where we currently lack some evidential data. Again, that is one of the reasons why I am quite keen to see the outcome of your public survey to see what we can glean from that, so I think this Scrutiny review is incredibly useful.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

So is it fair to say you would be open to considering ways that that data and that information could be gathered in order to assess the effectiveness of the legislation?

The Minister for Social Security:

I would always be open to looking at how that can be gathered. We know who the people are in this circumstance because we know who has had a baby or has adopted, so there is an opportunity there to gather data and information.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Yes. We have got some questions on data collection a bit later, so we will come back to that. I will hand over to Deputy Stephenson now.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

I just wonder if I could follow up quickly on, you did say you had some figures at the beginning but they might be best being sent. Do you have figures that show people are using their full payment allowances because that is somewhere you can drill into that data a little bit. You cannot see beyond the allowances but are you able to share any insight or is that something that would need to come in writing as well after?

The Minister for Social Security:

The full allowances ... I am looking at Helena because she has got the figures in front of her.

Head of Work and Family Hub:

We look at it by quarter, do we not?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes. I also had a conversation with officers just yesterday when we were preparing for this hearing around whether we had any data from H.R.P. (Home Responsibilities Protection) credits and things like that. That is more difficult to get because we do not know the individual circumstances of the people getting the credits. It is more difficult because some people may not be claiming credits for various reasons. We had a discussion around that component of paid leave and unpaid leave. That data around who is taking how much time and how much time unpaid as opposed to paid currently does not exist.

Associate Director, Public Policy:

I think the question is about parental allowance and whether people are taking the full 32 weeks.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, the full amount.

Associate Director, Public Policy:

I think that is something we can give you but I think we have it ...

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Can I just clarify, that 32 weeks' payment, people can only claim that if they are not working, is that correct?

Associate Director, Public Policy:

Yes. I think there is 70 ...

Head of Work and Family Hub:

One hundred and seventy babies were born ...

Associate Director, Public Policy:

No, "keeping in touch" hours.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Yes, it is 10 days, is it not?

Associate Director, Public Policy:

Yes, there are 10 days which I think is now 70 hours, so it is honestly counterproductive to keep you completely outside the workforce. The benefit allows for a small number of days for you attend a training course or like an annual review process or something which is important for you when you come back.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

But ultimately your data that shows people claiming that does reliably show that people are not working during that time because they have to not be working to claim, is that right?

Associate Director, Public Policy:

That is the Minister's point about H.R.P. Different employers will have different contractual rights with their employees.

[13:15]

Some of those will have very generous maternity/parental leave payments, so they are paying people during the time when they are not ... the fact that somebody is claiming a parental allowance and receiving a payment in their wages, which we see on social security, that does not mean to say they are breaking the law in any way, they are just being paid for their period of parental leave, so we do not know that. What we can do is we can give you the figures but I do not think we have them today, do we?

Head of Work and Family Hub:

Only the people who claim it we do but it is the period of time.

Associate Director, Public Policy:

But, no, how many weeks do they claim for?

Head of Work and Family Hub:

We have not got that today.

Associate Director, Public Policy:

No, we have not got that today but we can get that for you.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

I think it would be something useful to show people are using that full amount. For those who say obviously it is great to be paid in that period for lots of people, but some of the evidence we have heard so far is around that it is nowhere near enough to mean that it would cover their outgoings and their mortgage and things like that. So it may be that some people cannot afford to even take, even with that payment, that option. I think it would be useful data if we could have access to it, please.

Associate Director, Public Policy:

Yes. So the only time when somebody - there is a very specific rule around it - is the first 6 weeks post-birth which the mother must take as leave. Because the 6 weeks is paid leave, in effect that is her 6 weeks' paid leave but the father has got up to 6 weeks paid; well they are modelling up the paid leave as well.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Thank you.

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Could I just ask for a point of clarification? Are you saying that there are employers who pay longer than 6 weeks for maternity pay?

Associate Director, Public Policy:

Absolutely, yes.

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Do you have a view as to how long that pay continues for? Does it vary between employer to a great degree that one employee might be getting 3 months, another might be getting 6, another might be getting none? Which sectors does that happen?

The Minister for Social Security:

It will absolutely vary just like that. I think it will vary equally depending on which sector you are working in. I read some of the outcomes from your hearings yesterday and you have already heard that people in lower-paid jobs I think are less likely to have that affordability of the paid leave. Small businesses are likely to have less flexibility about what they can do than larger employers, for example. What we do not have is data around all of the different terms and conditions that different employers offer. Possibly trade unions might have some information from what they have managed to negotiate for their members. But aside from information about public employees, the Government would not have data around specific terms and conditions sets within different employers.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Thank you. Back to the questions. You told us about J.A.C.S. and the work that they do. They are tasked and funded to provide advice to employers and employees on all aspects of employment and employment relations law on behalf of government. That will include these family friendly parts of the law as well. Can you advise us how the effectiveness of this service is assessed, please?

The Minister for Social Security:

Obviously J.A.C.S. is an independent body. There is a board that is responsible for ensuring that J.A.C.S. is doing the work that it is doing; they also supply their annual report as well. Because of the legislation around J.A.C.S., my role as a Minister is, I suppose, quite finite because I have to acknowledge the independence and the purpose of that board as being responsible for ensuring that the organisation is doing what it should be doing and needs to be doing. I do have regular communication with J.A.C.S., as do my officers, around what they are doing in particular around what training they are offering. I know in relation to family friendly, they do have a specific leaflet around family friendly legislation but it would not be me that collects the feedback on how effective or how well understood that leaflet is. That would be J.A.C.S. itself and then the role of the board to ensure that J.A.C.S. is fulfilling its purposes and its obligations.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Thank you. That board, does it have anyone from government who sits on it or who maybe attends board meetings in like a watching capacity? "Watching" is the wrong word but you know what I mean.

Head of Work and Family Hub:

Oversight.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Oversight capacity.

The Minister for Social Security:

J.A.C.S. is an independent body, so much the same as the Comptroller and Auditor General's board, would not have a government representative on it to maintain that independence. That is also the case with J.A.C.S.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Thank you. During our last quarterly hearing of the Health and Social Security Panel, you mentioned ongoing work with J.A.C.S. to improve their communication methods, particularly their website. I think it was cited as an area for improvement for them in their own annual report for last year as well. Can you update on how those conversations are going, please?

The Minister for Social Security:

We are in ongoing dialogue with J.A.C.S. around those. I know that you have got J.A.C.S. coming in tomorrow. Obviously as they are responsible for their own website, I think the questions are going to be better directed at J.A.C.S. than myself. But, yes, officers are in ongoing dialogue and subsequent to that hearing did have further conversations around the website and improving accessibility and the Government's desire to see that website being accessible and also used as much as possible.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Thank you very much. Then still on the theme of communication and getting messages out there, we have had a lot of evidence about difficulty or people feeling like they are confused or maybe not finding the information they want in a timely way, or even understanding the information perhaps. I think J.A.C.S. have got a video on the website which talks about the changes that were made in 2020 and there is a downloadable document in 2023. Have you seen those resources and are you happy with them?

The Minister for Social Security:

I will have seen those resources. I know that I would have fed back if I thought that there could be any improvement but at the end of the day I am not a communications professional. My understanding is that J.A.C.S. work with communications professionals in order to update their information. Again, I think that is a conversation to have with J.A.C.S. and its board but also I would hope that J.A.C.S. would be open to any of the feedback that you are getting through the review. I think that we can all learn from the evidence that Scrutiny gets in relation to these things and we should all be looking at ways that we can improve things.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Because one of the pieces of evidence we heard yesterday from quite an experienced professional in the sector was that she had watched the J.A.C.S. video and was more confused than ever about what people were entitled to. Would you recognise, Minister, that it is not a good look, is it? If the professionals working in the sector cannot even understand it ...

The Minister for Social Security:

I would hope that the professionals working in the sector have provided that feedback directly to J.A.C.S. because I think to wait for a public Scrutiny hearing to give that feedback and not ...

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I think they did not realise. So what happened is the understanding that they gained from that, they thought it was correct and we had to kind of pause in the hearing and establish a shared understanding of it because what they had learned from that website was not correct.

The Minister for Social Security:

That feedback in that case needs to be given directly to J.A.C.S. so that those videos can be improved.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Minister, it is your department that has the relationship with J.A.C.S. though as well, is it not, on behalf of government?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

I think some of your comments previously have said you will work with J.A.C.S. Do you recognise it is a partnership?

The Minister for Social Security:

Absolutely. My officers work with J.A.C.S. on an ongoing basis, so it is always a partnership and I am always keen to work collaboratively with other organisations. It is important that that is done in a constructive way as well that is fair to that organisation, acknowledges the independence of that organisation, but also helps it to do its job in the best way possible.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Thank you. You also mentioned earlier some government communications that I think your team had been working on to put together. I think it may lead us on to a further question that comes up

later but can you just recap what you are working on? Did you say it is going to go into maternity packs?

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes. I felt quite strongly - I think I mentioned to you in the last quarterly hearing - that we should have a paper leaflet that gets put into packs. That is what Communications are working on at the moment and just in the process of finalisation. I have also spoken to both the Head of Communications and Digital Services about the website and the fact I think that the accessibility of information on the website can be improved, although I know that there was a great deal of work that was done when the legislation changed around improving the area of the website around having a baby. Again, it will be interesting to see the feedback that you get around whether that work achieved what it was set out to do and whether it is still as accessible as we would want it to be. I do not think all these people are looking out for websites. That is why I am so pleased that the proposed leaflet that is in development has a checklist in it of things that people need to be aware of and then act upon because I think that is incredibly important. I think also one of the reasons why people should not be slipping through is because the activation of the application for parental benefits is made at appointments with the midwives. Hopefully that process is streamlined through that. I think it is a good example of collaborative work across government departments as well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Just going back to the independence of J.A.C.S. and you have said you have that relationship which sounds constructive; that is good. In terms of the funding that goes to J.A.C.S., does that come from your department?

The Minister for Social Security:

It does come via my department, yes.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Okay. What kind of accountability is there attached to that funding and K.P.I.s (Key Performance Indicators) and things like that?

The Minister for Social Security:

Because J.A.C.S. is an independent entity and established via legislation, it is not for the Minister or the Assembly to set K.P.I.s, it is the role of the board to set those K.P.I.s for J.A.C.S. The legislation in itself kind of ensures the independence of that organisation.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

J.A.C.S. are accountable to the board?

The Minister for Social Security:

J.A.C.S. will be accountable to the board.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Who is the board accountable to?

The Minister for Social Security:

The board reports to the States Assembly and I present that as a report on an annual basis with J.A.C.S.' annual report.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

The money, I presume, is not in the legislation, so does the money come with any K.P.I.s or requirements like grant agreement?

The Minister for Social Security:

Because the legislation requires the Assembly to leave J.A.C.S. to be an independent entity, it is quite difficult then for a Minister to set K.P.I.s. It is very similar to when I was Chair of P.A.C. (Public Accounts Committee), for example, and had a relationship with the Comptroller and Auditor General, and at the end of the day the Comptroller and Auditor General reported to their board. Again, it is that similar kind of setup. I think if we wanted the ability for a Minister to set K.P.I.s for J.A.C.S., then we would need to relook at that legislation. Again, if the Assembly did not want J.A.C.S. to be an independent entity which it currently is, then it would be for the Assembly to look at ways of whether or not J.A.C.S. should be so independent. It would be interesting to hear J.A.C.S.' reflections on that but I do not think that that is specifically related to family friendly legislation, so perhaps that is something ...

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Just reflecting on the leaflet that you were referring to, that seems to be something that is under the remit of J.A.C.S. in terms of communicating. Obviously you have had to do it within your department, so it is clear that there is a problem there. What do you see to be the solutions to that?

The Minister for Social Security:

I think it is also my department's role to ensure that there is communication out there. The role of J.A.C.S. as a conciliatory service is to ensure that both employers and employees have a place to go to that is fully independent and that can advise on legislation. This communication is more than the employment legislation, it is about the whole journey that somebody might have becoming a new parent which falls outside of the remit of J.A.C.S. I do not think that me producing this leaflet is a

reflection that something is not working at J.A.C.S. I think that this is something that should and must be additional to the work of the Jersey Advisory and Conciliation Service. It is an advisory and conciliation service around employment legislation and employment rights.

[13:30]

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Can I just follow up? Do you think it is acceptable an organisation that is focused around that family friendly legislation that the communications on their website are out of date?

The Minister for Social Security:

I would not think it is acceptable for their communications to be out of date. That is something that needs to be brought up with the board itself. That is a conversation ...

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Who would bring that up?

The Minister for Social Security:

I would hope that whoever noticed that the information was out of date has sent that information directly to J.A.C.S. It is not my role to check on J.A.C.S.' website and the up-to-date nature of the website. If I did that, I think that would probably be a misuse of Ministerial time.

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

But it is more than that, is it not? It is about the oversight you say that you have of J.A.C.S. It is just that you made a comment about talking to them about some of their communications - I think it was in a hearing in June - and we wondered whether anything had happened on that basis since then.

The Minister for Social Security:

There have been some initial conversations that have happened. Due to unavoidable circumstances a planned meeting was unable to take place.

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

What will happen then?

The Minister for Social Security:

We will recommence that discussion with J.A.C.S. when we are able to have that meeting.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

If you could keep us updated, we would be grateful.

The Minister for Social Security:

I will do, yes.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you. Do you want to go to the next one?

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Minister, you stated that midwives are a key communication point for family friendly benefits, could you just tell us a little bit about how you ensure the consistency and the accuracy in the information provided at that stage?

The Minister for Social Security:

I know that our department had initially worked with the hospital and the Midwifery Department. I know that ongoing conversations will be had.

Head of Work and Family Hub:

You go to meetings.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, do you want to speak more to that, Helena?

Head of Work and Family Hub:

The midwives are very engaged with our team and working to help; we are supporting the same groups. They will initiate the application process for the parental benefits and then we also later on check that every baby born in that period has accessed appropriately the benefits as well. We have regular meetings with midwives.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

If you see that someone has not accessed, what do you do? Do you get in touch with them?

Head of Work and Family Hub:

We can reach out. Yes, it is a safety net.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Okay, that is encouraging.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Yes, it is.

Head of Work and Family Hub:

Yes, so that is done every quarter and checking in and following through that baby's journey.

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Thank you. Do you know if anyone is working with F.N.H.C. (Family Nursing and Home Care) from government to support communication to new parents, so moving from the midwives over through to the health visitors and other professionals?

Head of Work and Family Hub:

That is where we are using the leaflet. We leave the role of the leaflet to be able to promote the benefits and just those checklists that new parents can make sure they have covered everything.

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Do you think that health professionals need any more support to understand the basis of the legislation so that they can apply that consistency or do you think it is fairly straightforward?

Head of Work and Family Hub:

I think it has been communicated but we all do workshops with different teams, we go out to different groups, whether that is in Health or further afield stakeholders, and regularly do updates right across the whole benefits spectrum.

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

What is your plan with F.N.H.C. to support them in terms of some of this rollout?

Head of Work and Family Hub:

I will find out specifically on F.N.H.C. as a group; I have not got that information.

Associate Director, Public Policy:

The role of F.N.H.C. in terms of health is once the baby has been born. In reality, the midwife is the key professional contact here because - and I think I mentioned before - the parental allowance must be taken in the first 6 weeks after the baby has been born, which means that in reality in such situations the parents have communicated with the department before the birth. Therefore, the midwife holds the forms; usually you get the forms from the midwife.

Head of Work and Family Hub:

Absolutely, yes.

Associate Director, Public Policy:

So in terms of the parental benefits, pretty much the contact has been made before the baby's birth in the very great majority of cases, then has a tiny number each quarter which have not had something before the baby has been born.

The Minister for Social Security:

Also we must not forget adoptive parents as well.

Associate Director, Public Policy:

Yes.

The Minister for Social Security:

I know that the department has been working to improve the process in respect of that and working closely with Children's Services on that, so it is really important that those parents are not forgotten.

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Could we expect to see some sort of programme that makes sure that that consistency is being applied right the way across the contact points which are not just midwives, by the sounds of it, that there are other people as well? In terms of your leaflet - it is lovely and it is really nice - are you intending producing that in any other languages at all?

The Minister for Social Security:

I will ask because I am always very keen on ensuring that our output is as inclusive as possible, so yes.

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Obviously, I think we have heard through a number of Scrutiny committees the people who have hearing and sight impairment as well; that would be good to see that.

The Minister for Social Security:

I will say on that side, I do chair the Disability Advisory Group and we do have a meeting on Thursday, so I will take the leaflet to that group as well and see if we have got any feedback in relation to that.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

The checklist is really good on the back.

Associate Director, Public Policy:

I think the inclusion of the QR code means that you have got direct access to the website which would also give you access to alternate translation and larger vision for things like that. I think there is quite a lot of value in the QR code.

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Yes, super. Thank you.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

The aim is that that goes to people in their first booking appointment in the pack that people are given, do you know?

The Minister for Social Security:

That is my understanding. I have literally had the draft in the last few days.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

You get a big folder, do you not, with leaflets, usually?

The Minister for Social Security:

That is exactly what was going through my mind, what you need to know, the services that are available. Sometimes people do not know what they do not know and if you are just about to have a baby for the first time, or even your second or third child, things might have changed. I think people always welcome information, that they welcome being connected to community organisations as well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Yes, but that is a really positive step because obviously we have talked about the gaps. Having identified those, I do think that is really positive that you have been able to do that within your department and that that joint working is going well; that is really good to hear.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Some of the feedback has been that as early in the journey as possible because people, sometimes even before they are pregnant, are trying to make plans, could they afford it, what are the implications? Waiting until the 28-week appointment when you get your paperwork is far too late, people have already made plans, so I think that is really positive.

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

That was really just a question about the consistency so we are assured that there is a consistent approach. Could you tell us what guidance or career advice is provided by government for new parents who are re-entering the workplace? Do you provide that service?

The Minister for Social Security:

That is a very good question. It would be within our back-to-work service if people are going back into work from not working.

Head of Work and Family Hub:

So you do not have to work. You might be a mandatory jobseeker but if you have a child under 3, you are not required to work. Of course, we do have people that come back and want to engage sooner; we support them. It is a one-to-one meeting, it is with an employment adviser working through what area they want to work in. Maybe there are some skills gaps, do some training for interview skills, C.V. (Curriculum Vitae) workshops and just helping match them up to employers. Building up confidence, I think that is sometimes the gap, is it not, when you have been out for a little while? It is just bridging that confidence gap to have adult conversations again.

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Do you find a lot of people take it up?

Head of Work and Family Hub:

A lot. We have got people that do come to us who choose to and we do support those. Then we have those who are required to job seek by virtue of the age of the child and being in receipt of income support. We work with them but we work at their pace.

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Can you give us any idea, any ballpark figures, about the numbers that you deal with on an annual basis perhaps?

Head of Work and Family Hub:

We have, say, 100 people would come through as a new cohort at a time but then it varies, the year groups. The under-5s would be a new cohort but as they move up through their different hours that they are required to work, they are already engaged with the service, so it is just their requirement is increasing.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you. This career advice that is available, is there information about that in any of the leaflets that go out? If not, would you consider putting it in there?

The Minister for Social Security:

I think it is worth considering and thinking about it. Yes, we talk about income support and the services that are available via the department. Just thinking through the conversation that we have had as well around the timing, then about reminding people about that advice, might well then be as their children approach school age, there might be some work that we could do with C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills) - I am just thinking this through as we are having this conversation - around information that goes to parents as their children start school as well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I think it is worth considering, like Deputy Stephenson said, as early as possible because what we have heard from the pop-ups that we have done is that people make these decisions, like financial and career decisions, in advance even of becoming pregnant sometimes. Having that service there, even while they are employed but planning to perhaps not be employed, I think it could be really beneficial. If it is there and it is a good service it might just be about informing people. If you could consider maybe letting people know a bit earlier so they can access that.

Head of Work and Family Hub:

There is the balance, is there not, about reassuring them that that is there but not adding pressure that they have got to think about that. Yes, absolutely, we will look at that.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

I think we did start to touch on this at the beginning but beyond tribunal claims, are there any proactive mechanisms or plans to monitor compliance with family friendly legislation, particularly around job protection and non-discrimination?

The Minister for Social Security:

Like I said earlier, the legislation does not give me any kind of provision to make it incumbent on employers to provide me with information about how they are meeting that. Currently, the tool that I have got is any feedback that J.A.C.S. puts in its reporting around what questions and what it is being asked but also those tribunal claims. Like I said, one other further avenue that I can think of would be trade unions who may well have supported people through potential disputes or even just understanding what they are aware of for what they may have negotiated for them in different workplaces.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

We have written to, I think, most of the unions, some of whom are still yet to get back to us, I believe, so hopefully we will hear from them.

The Minister for Social Security:

Whether or not organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce and the I.O.D. (Institute of Directors) who also have a role to play in ensuring that their paying members are getting the right information and information that is relevant to their sectors as well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

It will be one of my next questions, shall I jump to that one, because I think we have probably covered most of those. You have mentioned in the past, Minister, that those organisations have a part to play. How do you encourage those organisations and support them with resources that they might need?

The Minister for Social Security:

I would encourage those organisations through any conversations that I have and correspondence that I have with them. Obviously, we are now in a position where we have got at least a draft paper-based leaflet. Again, I am happy to share information with those organisations as well. Obviously, I would encourage the membership of those organisations to ensure that those organisations are doing what they think they should be doing in terms of providing support and advice to the relevant sectors as well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Can they access this leaflet for their workplaces to have available?

The Minister for Social Security:

I am quite happy to enable access to leaflets for workplaces as well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Good.

The Minister for Social Security:

I think I have said before that it is the role of government to ensure that people know their rights but also that people know their responsibilities as well. I do think that there is a key role there for employer and employee organisations to ensure that their members have access to the right information too.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you. When you are talking to those organisations, what feedback have they given you on this law?

The Minister for Social Security:

I think it is fair to say that there is mixed feedback. I know that you have had some submissions from such organisations.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Yes, we have written to them.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes. The business representatives will talk about the pressure that the family friendly legislation puts on businesses. Obviously, part of what the parental benefit was set up to do was also to help support businesses because they can deduct the value of the parental benefits money paid leave. I know that it was discussed at your hearings yesterday around the length of the statutory paid component of leave and whether that is enough or not. I think if we were to ask the representative organisations of businesses and suggest that we should extend it, you would get quite a different answer from them as you would do the family support organisations. It is always that tension and balance, is it not, around supporting our economy but also supporting parents to make the right decisions for them and their child.

[13:45]

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Do you think that we have the right balance at the moment with the legislation or do we need to amend it?

The Minister for Social Security:

I am concerned that people who may want to spend longer with their child currently feel that they cannot do that. I myself was fortunate enough to spend an extended period of leave with my daughter. I also promote benefits of breastfeeding as well and I know how important time with a baby is if you are breastfeeding that baby. We need to balance that with what we can afford. I would encourage the panel, if you are making recommendations around extending provisions, it would be incredibly helpful if you also made recommendations about how you think that could be achieved as well in striking that balance between both supporting the economy but also doing things that are affordable and how we might support that as well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

That is my next question, is along those lines. If we were to improve things for children and families with this legislation, how could government better support businesses to be able to deliver those aims for children and families?

The Minister for Social Security:

I know that other jurisdictions have been mentioned in other hearings. I think it is important to note that those jurisdictions have a different approach to taxation to what we have, so what might be possible in other jurisdictions may not be possible here due to our revenue streams. I think we need to be alive to that as well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

What could be possible?

The Minister for Social Security:

I think that is what we need to look at, as to what is affordable with it. Currently our parental benefits are funded by the Social Security Fund, so that might well be a question when we are looking at our actuarial review around what is affordable and sustainable for the fund in the longer term as well. I also think that the flexible working - and again I note from what you heard in your hearing yesterday and I know anecdotally and through experience of other people that I know - it can be more difficult for some people in certain sectors to request flexible working than it can be in other sectors. I think that we need to carry awareness of that. Some sectors can do more than others and some sectors have more flexibility around what they can do. I think in terms of supporting employees, it is about government having awareness of all of those complexities and ensuring that when we are looking at legislation we consider that as well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Yes, we are very mindful of the need for that balance. Can we move to this one? Thank you.

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

You have previously noted concerns about employers reducing more generous parental leave policies in response to some of the statutory changes, how are you monitoring the trend around that? What protections have you got in place to discourage that kind of regression in the workplace?

The Minister for Social Security:

I do not think it was me that expressed it, I think it was somebody else that asked me the question. I said if that was the case I would be concerned.

Associate Director, Public Policy:

It was a comment from a respondent to the previous Minister's survey. Somebody mentioned that was their experience but these are contractual rights and, as we discussed earlier, the contractual rights are entirely at the discretion of the employer. The point about the Employment Law is to create statutory minimum requirements that everybody must keep and that is what the Minister's role is. We obviously encourage people to go over and above that but we do not have any control, nor would it be appropriate to do so, to have any control over contractual arrangements. Because if you wanted to control it you would do our pure statutory ones, would you not?

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Thank you.

The Minister for Social Security:

I think employers now are more and more aware of the need to be family friendly because we are in an incredibly competitive market for employees. I think this came through as well through some of the submissions that you have had around if we want Jersey to be a competitive jurisdiction and employers want to compete within that for talent, then they do recognise that being a family friendly employer is incredibly important because that is what younger generations are looking for.

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Offering an attractive package. Regarding government's employment practices, do you know if it is correct that the children of employees are not permitted access to the office areas of the new government headquarters in Union Street under any circumstances?

The Minister for Social Security:

I do not know that; that would be outside of my remit. That would be the remit of the States Employment Board but I am ...

Associate Director, Public Policy:

It might be health and safety, I do not know.

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Do you think that aligns with creating a family friendly working environment, supporting flexible, inclusive working practices at the heart of government?

The Minister for Social Security:

I would need to know what the circumstances are and what the reasons are. I can understand that there are very valid reasons why people might take their child into an office. Yes, it would surprise me to learn that they were not allowed to in any circumstances.

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

One of the things we wanted to know was whether or not managers have considered how the policy will work in practice for new parents attending the “keeping in touch” days who may have older children and no childcare in place.

The Minister for Social Security:

I am not a member of the States Employment Board, so I could not answer that question.

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Okay, but your view on it?

The Minister for Social Security:

I absolutely agree. I can see that there would be a difficulty for parents with their “keeping in touch” days. I can recall taking my daughter as a baby into my workplace at the time. I can see you nodding, yes. So I think we are all in a situation where we have probably all done it but I have not heard of that policy and I am also not responsible for it.

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Okay. So in terms of the legislation and the way government are adapting to the legislative framework, would there be anything that you might do as Minister to address those concerns that people have raised?

The Minister for Social Security:

I am quite happy to have discussions with members of the States Employment Board. I also understand that there are some areas of the workplace where it would be dangerous and very unadvisable to take children. I do not think that such an approach could be a blanket approach. There are some areas I think in the hospital and other areas where it would be completely inappropriate. But not being a member of the States Employment Board I could not say whether what you are saying about the policy is correct, and I do not have the advice that was given to them. There might well be very good advice and reasons around fairness but it is not my area.

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Thank you.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Just quickly on unions and the way they help to promote awareness among their members and bring up any issues. I think previously we talked about the time that union representatives get to do their work and whether they should have some protected time for this kind of thing as well. Are there any mechanisms that you are aware of or that you think could be used to help union volunteers outside of government employment who are trying to promote awareness of this legislation among their members?

The Minister for Social Security:

Obviously employers providing any kind of facilities, time and opportunities for their representatives to go and do training that might be on offer. That might also include the attendance at things like regional or national conferences around diversity and inclusion as well. I think that being able to tap into both regional and national opportunities not only strengthens both the knowledge but also their ability to help and advise and for us as a jurisdiction to make sure that what we are doing is best practice and we learn from other places as well.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Thank you.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Minister, we have spoken about affordability and you have said yourself you feel that parents who want to be at home to care for their children are not able to access that 52 weeks. In terms of plans to expand support to enable access to that, what might that look like?

The Minister for Social Security:

Currently we do not have plans around increasing access to that. I am always open to be informed by what comes out of this Scrutiny review but also, like I said, we need to be mindful of any changes around affordability and sustainability as well and also be mindful of the effect on the economy. Also I am not just the only Minister that can do things that help with regard to affordability. We know that housing, for example, is a huge cost demand on families. I have spoken before to you about the plans for the minimum income standard and my want to do some focused work there; we know that child poverty is an issue. I think that the approach needs to be multifaceted when it comes to supporting families. Support needs to be right through that journey as well. I think that is another important role that I play as a voice around the table of the Council of Ministers as well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you. If you were minded to increase the support to families, would you be more likely to look at increasing the portion of leave that the employer pays at full pay or are you more minded to increase the parental allowance which is currently the 32 weeks?

The Minister for Social Security:

I think ultimately those types of decisions are decisions that will be made by the whole Assembly if there were to be any increase. We would need to feel the mood of the Assembly as well in terms of that.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

You would bring that proposition, though, would you not, Minister, as the Minister of this area? So what might that look like?

The Minister for Social Security:

Although within this term of office, my work plan is absolutely jam-packed full and we also do not have any legislative drafting time available to make such plans, I am keen to see the results of this review so then that could inform any future plans and future Ministerial plans as well.

Associate Director, Public Policy:

Can I just mention, Minister, though, that you have extended H.R.P. so that is a timescale we have achieved.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, I have not been sat on my hands doing nothing in this area; I did extend H.R.P. I was very conscious that there were instances of parents having a second or third child that were not able to access parental benefits because H.R.P. credits were pension-only credits. So extending those to also cover parental benefits I think will be helpful to some of those families that are contemplating having another child that previously missed out.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I think that is a great example of Scrutiny working well with the Minister because I recall us questioning you on that. Obviously you have seen that through and that is a really good change for families.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes. While I have been able to make only what might be small changes, I think they are significant changes for those families. Hopefully the small changes that I have been able to make are helpful.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

When your work comes back on minimum income standards, do you envisage using any figures and data that it may have in it, or models, to look at policies like the payments that are paid to people on the parental allowance and saying: "Well how does this compare?"

The Minister for Social Security:

That is how I would personally look at that. But I would also look at what other levers government might have because I think what we are likely to find is that there are multiple financial pressures that we also get.

Associate Director, Public Policy:

Also about timing, as Minister you will not see the results.

The Minister for Social Security:

Yes, so the timing of that will be, I think, by the plans that we are looking at at that moment, we are more likely to get the results during the purdah period. I think it is still important to proceed with that piece of work because I think it is really useful information for our future Common Strategic Policy and I think vital information that Ministers should have in front of them as they are looking towards a new Common Strategic Policy for the next Assembly.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you. Minister, you mentioned poverty, and yesterday we had a hearing with Brighter Futures, and I think we were quite shocked at some of the feedback that we got about some of the situations that families are living in. What is your response to this rising economic inequality and how children are being impacted?

The Minister for Social Security:

As Minister what I do try and do is take time to visit organisations such as Brighter Futures. I have gone down and done drop-in sessions with families at Brighter Futures several times over the last few months and I intend to do the same during the rest of the year as well. That is important for me because it gives me insight into specific, almost like case studies and information around where families are specifically finding it hard.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

What actions do you take following that?

[14:00]

The Minister for Social Security:

What I do following that is, firstly, we look at what we can do for that specific family. I have spoken to you before about how I think that type of thing helps us identify where there are gaps so that we can then take quick action around guidelines if required and things like that and make processes better. Obviously if it is something around legislation, that is different and takes longer, but certainly what I do when I have had those conversations with families is take any issues that I think we can resolve quicker and take action. Obviously I do not want to talk about specific cases or circumstances right now but I do want to give people confidence that when I get information and know that we can change things for the better, we try and do that as swiftly as possible. As Helena and Sue both know, I am literally going through the *Income Support Guidelines* page by page with officers to ensure where updates can be made they are.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I am sure those organisations will be pleased that they are being listened to and that you are taking those things under consideration. We are at time now, we do have a few questions left which I think we will send in writing so as not to rush them too much. Is everyone happy with that? Yes? Okay. Would you like to add anything before we close the hearing?

The Minister for Social Security:

Not at this point, thank you.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you very much for your time and your officers. It was good to have you and we will keep you informed as to the progress of the review. Thank you.

[14:01]