

Will the Honourable Chairman of the Social and Community Development Committee say what progress has been made with the review of the Social Security Ordinance?

'Mr Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for this question.

I believe that significant progress has been made.

To put it into context let me take this opportunity to remind ourselves where we started with this, what is happening and what work needs to be done in the months ahead.

The present Social & Community Development Committee, which came into being in September 2017, inherited this piece of work from the previous Social and Community Development Committee.

From my own research I found that in their discussions in May 2017, some months before the General Election, it had been suggested on the one hand to bring in a consultant while another thought was that if they could pin down the issue, this work might be done on-Island.

Fast forward to when this present SCDC came together after the 2017 General Election. Once settled in, it noted that one of the outstanding issues brought forward included a proposed review of the Social Security Ordinance. We recognised that this was a complex matter and decided to set up a Working Group to examine how best this work could be taken forward.

That decision was taken on 11 April 2018 and a Social Security Review Working Group, under the Chairmanship of Councillor Cyril Leo, met in May 2018 to begin the process of reviewing the Social Security System.

In their Terms of Reference they were to scrutinise the current Social Security Ordinance and to recommend possible improvements and amendments in relation to Government providing a more appropriate, justified, fair and proportionate financial assistance and support for the vulnerable people of St Helena.

The Working Group was able to harness support as and when appropriate from throughout Government bearing in mind that those involved also had their everyday tasks to perform.

In August 2019 the Social Security Review Working Group (SSRWG) was finally able to present their recommendations.

I'd like to say here I am grateful to all those who contributed in any way to this comprehensive piece of work culminating in a 64-page document.

SCDC discussed those recommendations during the latter part of last year and also had a session with all Elected Members.

Our Committee later approved in principle the majority of the recommendations but then due to commitments by those involved including the Working Group members,

Elected Members and SCDC, we were only able to finalise all of the recommendations in May this year.

This means that all the recommendations made by the SSRWG have now been approved in principle and work is being undertaken by the Administration to produce policies for consideration.

As the Honourable Member should be aware there is general support from Elected Members to have the detailed proposals worked up and implemented as and when possible.

I'm therefore most grateful to Elected Members for their unwavering support because included in the Budget before the House during this sitting is a provision of £200,000 that would be available to kick-start the recommendations if possible. If you do approve that provision, which I recommend, it will signal a commitment for the future.

So in summary Mr Speaker, good progress has been made with the review of the Social Security Ordinance, the recommendations made following the excellent work of the SSRWG have been approved in principle and policies are being drafted, and some money is included in the draft budget that would enable a start on implementation.

Thank you Mr Speaker.'