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Changing payment for lone parents 'costly'

KATHRYN HAYES in Limerick

MINISTER FOR Social Protection Éamon Ó Cuív has said he will “carefully” study a new report which encourages reform in the social welfare system to encourage unmarried parents to live together.

The unpublished report by the Oireachtas Committee on Social Protection recommends the existing lone parents’ and “qualified adult” social welfare payments should be replaced by a single parental allowance payable to all low-income parents. This is aimed at removing disincentives to cohabitation and marriage.

“I think it is an issue that needs to be looked at and my department is looking at this issue and I do think there is an issue worth debating here,” Mr Ó Cuív said.

He said there would be a “considerable cost involved” but he described the issue as one which was “worth looking at in the longterm”. “I will look at the report very carefully but there is obviously very significant cost involved,” he continued.

He also pointed to the fact that there would be some savings arising out of the new Civil Partnership legislation.

“At present people of the same sex living together whether they are a couple or not they were treated as two singles. Under the Civil Partnership legislation two people of the same sex living together will now have to be treated as a couple and that will reduce their payment,” he explained.

He made his comments in Limerick last night where he was invited to participate in a debate at the University of Limerick.

Organised by the UL Debating Union the motion of last night’s debate was “This House has no confidence in the Government”.

Speaking against the motion Mr Ó Cuív outlined the decisions the Government has taken to tackle the current economic crisis, which he said were the “only rational decisions”.

“I am not saying every decision was right but I think all the major decisions were right . . . We’ve had to be very courageous in what we’ve done,” he argued.

He admitted the past two years have been “incredibly difficult” for people but insisted the Government was focused on creating employment and rebuilding the country.

He said the Government had to introduce the bank guarantee scheme to save the depositors. “I believe when history comes to be written in 20 years time Brian Cowen

and his Government will be seen as a courageous Government who took the right decisions,” he said.

Arguing the case for the proposition, UL student Darragh Roche accepted the present Government had a mandate from the people but argued that: “We live in a different society and people want change . . . We have no confidence in the Government because they give us no reason to believe in them.”