

3.11 Senator P.F. Routier of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the enhancement of the Social Worker provision available to children and adults with special needs:

Does the Minister consider that there is a need to enhance the social worker provision available to children and adults with special needs, together with their families and carers? If not, would he explain why and if the answer is yes, would he explain how he would address this matter?

Senator J.L. Perchard (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

The social work service for people with special needs comprises of 2 registered social worker posts for adults and 2 for children. One of the adult workers has been absent from work for an extended period due to ill health, which has unfortunately resulted in a significantly reduced service. To help meet the increased pressure which has been created, a temporary post for the further part-time qualified social worker has been created from within existing resources. In 2009 an additional post will be created, again from existing resources. I want to say that there are 3 problems which I need to advise the Senator and the House of. Firstly, social workers generally are in very short supply. Consequently, recruitment is extremely difficult as today's answer to the Senator's written question makes plain. This inevitably impacts on the Social Services Department, on our ability to always be responsive to clients, which of course includes special needs clients. Secondly, the Social Services Department is subject to considerable stress, given the intensiveness of the risk environment in which social workers and practitioners undertake their work. Members will not be surprised to hear that the intensity of the stress and risk has been exaggerated massively of late. Thirdly, it is clear that the existing social work provision for special needs is overstretched and this means that the needs of individual clients and families have to be prioritised regularly. It would be easy, for me to make a gesture and wave a magic wand that somehow solved these problems. However, as a guardian and the needs of patients and clients across the entire spectrum of Health and Social Services, I have to prioritise the use of our resources available. Having said that, there are plans for future investment in Social Services, in the Children's Services, which are currently being considered by the Council of Ministers.

3.11.1 Senator P.F. Routier:

I do not know if the Minister is aware that a question in the House of Commons to the Secretary of State for Health was recently asked about how many social workers per head of population (a) there were in 2007 and (b) there are in 2008. The answer that was given was that the most recently published figures for the number of fulltime equivalent social workers per 100,000 head of population was 86 in 2007. Does the Minister accept that if Jersey was to reflect the same level of social worker support, we would have approximately 80 fulltime equivalents, as opposed to the 48.5 given in the answer to the written question this morning, and does he accept that there should be a re-prioritisation of his department's resources to enable a more appropriate service to vulnerable clients?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

Taking the last point first, no, I do not accept there should be a re-prioritisation of our department's resources. Our department is extremely stretched with regards to resources. Double figure drug and blood project inflation, coupled with the high cost of new cancer drugs will cost my department in excess of £2 million extra in 2009, so

if Members will be aware ... indeed my commitment and promise to bring the Williamson Implementation Plan to this House for consideration. The plan includes 2 fundamentally important proposals that are relevant to the special needs service. Firstly, the plan proposes to restructure the whole of the Children's Services to create a single Children's Directorate and that is where the Special Needs Service for children will sit. Secondly, the plan includes proposals for extra child social workers to be employed, along with the necessary resources, and taking specifically the point raised in the question by the Minister, the plan would be Lord Laming compliant. Lord Laming produced a report after the Victoria Climbié tragedy where he indeed specified the minimum number of social workers that should be engaged per case load, and the Williamson Implementation Plan which will include, as I say, all children's services, special needs services as well, proposes to be Laming compliant.

3.11.2 Senator P.F. Routier:

The Minister mentioned about the sickness and absences in the service of his department. Does he consider that there are any human resource policies which could be reviewed so that a satisfactory service could be given to vulnerable people within our Island?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

On a small service like the Special Needs Service where just 4 people are engaged in social work, if one is off on long term health, that is a reduction in service of 25 per cent. I cannot unilaterally rewrite the States employment regulations and rules with regards to sickness and absenteeism. I agree the impact on a service like the Special Needs Service is massive when one person is off ill and I wish we could do something about it, but independently it is not within my gift.