

2019.12.10

5 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the funding levels for the Jersey Women's Refuge: (OQ.297/2019)

Given the latest Jersey Opinions and Lifestyle Survey showed that 82 per cent of Islanders think it is important for Government to provide support for those suffering from domestic abuse, will the Minister agree to review the funding levels for the Jersey Women's Refuge

The Deputy of St. Ouen (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

I thank the Deputy for her question in relation to the vital services that the Jersey Women's Refuge provides and I am conscious of the continual challenges faced by the Refuge, in terms of potential gaps in funding, attracting staff and a challenging charitable sector environment. I can confirm that, as part of the development of the Jersey Care Model, we are working with all of our partners - and that includes the Jersey Women's Refuge - reviewing current and future provision, to ensure alignment to the Jersey Care Model and, in this case, also to the domestic abuse strategy, which was launched in April this year. Indeed, prior to the development of the Care Model, a review of the Jersey Women's Refuge was undertaken and this will inform future decisions and address key concerns, such as the sustainability of the Refuge.

[10:15]

3.5.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

The review that the Minister mentioned, which was published in February, one of the findings was that: "The current funding, provided by the States of Jersey, only covers 45 per cent of the running costs and that this is not sustainable." I am quoting directly from the report: "Although there will always be an element of charitable funding, it is a difficult subject matter for many to embrace, which means that the Women's Refuge does not generate the amount of funds other organisations do. The States of Jersey are signatories to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and [and I am still quoting] Article 4 says: 'The States should include in Government budgets adequate resources for their activities related to the elimination of violence against women' and there was a recommendation that followed this and it was to recommend an increase of the funding to £400,000 *per annum* for the next 3 years." Why was this recommendation, within a report that was commissioned by the States of Jersey, not taken forward for 2020's funding?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

My Department has recently extended the current contract with the Jersey Women's Refuge for 12 months and there is a potential for an extension for a further 24 months, all subject to the development of the Care Model. The 12-month agreement has provided a financial increase for 2020 and my Department and the Refuge have signed a partnership of purpose, to continue to work under the current funding, but I would stress that the Refuge is the final point at which domestic abuse victims find themselves. We really want to address the question of preventing this occurring in the first place and, so, the domestic abuse strategy is about much more than providing a refuge. It is about working with troubled families, treating the persons who might be prone to deliver the abuse, treating the people who suffer the abuse and that includes children in the household, treating, by all sorts of therapies and educational provisions, to prevent this occurring and, if it does occur, to prevent its reoccurrence and to stabilise that family. This strategy does not only sit in Health, it spans other departments, including, principally, the police service and much work is going

on and will continue to do so. Within my Department, we will continue working with the Refuge and the police to do so.

3.5.2 Deputy C.S. Alves of St. Helier:

Does the Minister recognise that services like these need stability to provide their services and, therefore, need advance notice of funding and guarantees, in order to plan for the future? Being told in November that you have funding for the following year in January is just not acceptable.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

There has been good engagement with the Refuge and, indeed, all the charitable organisations the Department works with. I have been informed by so many of those charities that they have appreciated the better engagement the Department has been giving over the last year. I am unaware of precisely when the contract was signed; if the Deputy says it was November, then that is the case. But we are working closely with the Refuge, to determine their need for the future and how their work will enmesh with the Care Model and then, when the Care Model is fully rolled out, we will know exactly what the position is, including funding requirements.

3.5.3 Deputy I. Gardiner:

Following the indication that the funding has been increased, can the Minister please advise what percentage of the funding it is now? Because, it was 40 per cent previously, following the increase what will the percentage of funding be for the Refuge this year?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

The increase has been an R.P.I. (Retail Price Index) increase, so the increase in the grant has been from £209,000 to £215,000 for 2020. During 2020, we will discuss the further figures and any enhancement to that grant.

3.5.4 Deputy I. Gardiner:

So, basically, we are still at the funding of 40 per cent. Would the Minister agree that the staff at the Refuge are better off to support the women, the people in the Refuge, than to run fund-raising campaigns to raise the extra 60 per cent of the funding required to run the Refuge?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I think that the Department currently funds more than 40 per cent, so I am advised that the Women's Refuge has a total budget of £400,000. My Department's grant is £215,000, so that is a little over 50 per cent. The Deputy raises a point: so many of the charities that work in the Island provide essential, vital services to the Island. If Government was to fund every single service, such that the charitable sector was not needed, that could be done. But then just what sort of increase would we need to apply to tax rates to fund those services? So the charitable sector has, I believe, a vital role to play and it wants to play that role. There is much social engagement and a sense of community and contribution in the volunteers that work in these charities and I would hope that charitable sector would continue to thrive. I absolutely acknowledge that a charity, like the Jersey Women's Refuge would find it difficult to raise funds, because it is not that cosy, warm ... it is not the charity that gives someone a good feeling when you put some money in the collecting box generally and it requires some dedicated supporters. Many other charities are in that position, that they find it hard ...

The Bailiff:

Minister, I must ask you to bring your answer to a halt, I am afraid.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I think I will leave it there.

3.5.5 Deputy K.F. Morel of St. Lawrence:

Further to Deputy Alves's question, while acknowledging the work the Health Department are doing to move to a preventative situation, rather than caring after the fact, it is a sad reality that the Refuge services are needed now and will continue to be needed. Does the Minister think it is appropriate, given that we know the Refuge's services will be needed, to only deliver funding for 12 or 20 months, rather than giving them the security of knowing that they have funding for the next 5 years?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I have said previously that I do not like grant funding a year at a time and I want to move to a situation where we provide long-term funding, which I think should be at least 3 years, for periods of at least 3 years, perhaps more. But, just at the moment, when we are trying to remodel how we deliver care in the community and to place a greater emphasis on prevention and our primary care services, it would not be responsible to increase this grant to the full amount of the budget for the charity. So, we have had discussions with the charity, to agree that for this coming year, 2020, they will continue to work with the little-over-50 per cent that the Department provides and that charity has agreed to that. We have an agreement to provide their services for 2020 and an agreement to look at what they are providing during next year, with a view to improving the situation in 2021.

3.5.6 Deputy K.F. Morel:

With that in mind, will the Minister confirm to this Assembly that he will give more than one or 2 months' notice this year, at the end of 2020, to the charity, in order that they may make provision for the following year?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I think we are in very regular discussions with the charity, because we are asking them to engage in the development of the Jersey Care Model. Those discussions will be continuing, so it is not just a case of approaching them at the end of next year and saying: "This is a *fait accompli*."

Deputy K.F. Morel:

For clarification, is that a 'no' then?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

The questioner was asking what period of notice would I give. I am saying that we are in continual discussion with the charity. The agreement we have, the ones I have seen - I am not sure if I have seen the specific agreement with the Refuge - does not usually provide for a strict period of notice.

3.5.7 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Can the Minister inform Members whether his budget for grants to charitable bodies has been subject to an efficiency saving, either in 2020, or the years beyond that?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

It is not. In general, all the funding to the charitable associations, funded by H.C.S. (Health and Community Services) has increased by that R.P.I. figure this year of 2.8 per cent.

3.5.8 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I wanted to ask the Minister again Deputy Morel's question, because I do not believe that was answered. Can the Minister give a commitment, I think 6 months is reasonable, not to be having conversations, but to have, on paper, a commitment as to what the funding will be for the following year? Can the Minister agree that 6 months before the end of 2020, that the Refuge will have, on paper, an agreement as to what funding they will have? I would also like to ask the Minister to reconsider the funding levels, given the report that was commissioned by this Government and could he possibly look at under-spends and see if there are any funds, that could be diverted to this essential service? Although we have many important charities, this one is often a life, or death, last-chance facility for many families.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I fully support what the Deputy is trying to do, to secure the good work of the Refuge, but I do not think she and I can get involved in contractual negotiations and agree that in June, next year, a period of notice will be given, or a certain piece of information will be to hand. As I said, I commit to continual engagement with the Refuge. We have a good agreement for next year and ... sorry, I am just trying to think of the further questions. Yes, the charity has agreed the funding for next year. We are working well together, we are engaging with the charity and I would wish to engage with the Deputy, throughout the next year and update her, but I cannot commit to a contractual term, on my own, without those discussions with the charity going forward.