

2024.04.16.

4.17 Deputy C.D. Curtis of the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs regarding oversight of court processes (OQ.68/2024)

Will the Minister advise what oversight she has of court processes, in particular the timescales for bringing prosecutions to court, for trial or sentencing, and how, if at all, the victims and their families are kept informed of the status of their case by the Minister's department?

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat of St. Helier North (The Minister for Justice and Home Affairs):

I thank the Deputy for the question. The courts are independent of Government in accordance with well-established principles of justice independence. Members will be aware that the Law Officers Department acts as the prosecution service in Jersey and, equally, are independent of Government. That said, it is recognised that interests of justice are best served by all parties within the criminal justice system working together in partnership. Members of my department sit on the Criminal Justice Working Group, along with other entities that make up our criminal justice system. Support and services to victims can be provided by a number of agencies, depending on the nature of the case. Some of these fall within my area of responsibility while others are provided by valued third sector partners. Victims are kept informed of the status of their case by the officer in charge of that case and their independent sexual violence adviser, if they have consented to having one. Jersey Domestic Abuse Service support victims of domestic abuse and/or sexual violence through the Independent Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence Advisory Service. These advisers are the main point of contact for victims while their case progresses through the criminal justice system. They provide them with regular updates and also support them through the court process. Victims First provides support to all witnesses and victims of crime with the exception of victims of domestic or sexual abuse whom J.D.A.S. (Jersey Domestic Abuse Service) support. Victims First will complete a needs assessment to provide tailored support through the entire criminal justice process.

4.17.1 Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Does the Minister believe there is sufficient accountability and governance of court processes?

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

I do believe that there is sufficient governance in relation to the court process. However, as a result of the Violence Against Women and Girls Taskforce, I have agreed to continue with the recommendation which talks about an independent review of the criminal justice system, which should be conducted in relation to domestic violence, rape and serious sexual offences to determine whether current arrangements deliver the best outcomes for victims, defendants and justice. The report did not define in precise terms what the review should look like. In my response to the taskforce's report, I committed to undertake detailed discussions with the relevant stakeholders to establish the best and most appropriate method of fulfilling this recommendation for Jersey. I want to make sure any review is focused on improving outcomes for victims and does not unduly distract those working in the area from their important day-to-day work. I am looking forward to working with the Attorney General and others so that we can ensure that from the start of the process to the end of the process that our criminal justice system and our delivery for justice, but in particular to victims, is first class.