

2024.04.30

3.14 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the Women's Health Strategy (OQ.78/2024)

Will the Minister provide an update on the development of the Women's Health Strategy and confirm when this will be published?

Deputy A. Howell of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity (Assistant Minister for Health and Social Services - rapporteur):

If I am able to respond on behalf of the Minister because he has given me a delegation for Women's and Children's Health. The Minister has proposed that officers do not progress the production of a standalone unfunded women's health strategy. This decision was supported by the Women's Health Political Advisory Group that are meeting in early April. The group recognise that there are limited staff resources to allocate to the development of a standalone strategy and agree to focus on work that is already in train. This work includes a review of the Termination of Pregnancy Law and funding for I.V.F. (in vitro fertilisation) and contraception services. The group also decided that once we have an opportunity to reflect on the findings of the ongoing Women's Health and Well-being public consultation, we will publish a statement of intent setting out other priorities that we will seek to address once we have supported delivery of our current activity.

3.14.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Please could the Assistant Minister outline which areas will not be progressed?

Deputy A. Howell:

It is very hard to say at the moment because we have not at the moment received the result of the Women's Health and Wellbeing consultation.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Sorry, could I clarify, I meant the areas that were being considered by the W.H.A.G. (Women's Health Advisory Group) to go in that strategy, which of those areas will not be progressed?

Deputy A. Howell:

I think I explained what we are going to be doing and what we will be taking further when we have the result of the consultation.

3.14.2 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

Does the Assistant Minister not agree with me that to be able to bid for funding, including when the Minister is trying to get funding for women's health within the Council of Ministers, that a strategy would be a good idea, a document to understand the way forward for women's health and therefore be easier to get funding than to stop both?

Deputy A. Howell:

I believe that Deputy Jeune is also a member of my Women's Health Advisory Group, and it is across the States Assembly, this group, and we will be deciding together what we should be taking forward and what we should be asking for further funding for.

3.14.3 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

I thank the Assistant Minister for reminding me I am part of that group. Unfortunately, I have not yet been able to meet that meeting and, of course, I would like to put on the record I would not have agreed to this ...

The Bailiff:

No, this has to be a question.

Deputy H.L. Jeune:

Yes. But I would not have agreed to that decision.

The Bailiff:

Deputy, really ...

Deputy H.L. Jeune:

So will the Minister explain ...

The Bailiff:

A political statement cannot be made, you should ask a question.

Deputy H.L. Jeune:

Yes. So will the Assistant Minister explain what concrete steps she will take to reduce the concern by Jersey women that women's health, yet again, is being kicked down the road and not given the necessary priority or funding?

Deputy A. Howell:

The decision not to develop a standalone strategy does not equate to a failure to recognise the importance of women's health; the opposite is the case. The Minister and I want to focus limited resource on delivering real change in key women's services as opposed to producing yet another unfunded strategy. The Women's Health Advisory Group supports that position and I welcome the fact that Deputy Jeune will be part of the next meeting.

3.14.4 Deputy I. Gardiner:

Does the Assistant Minister agree with the process to make sure that you need a strategy which will link to the plan, which will link to submitting a business case to ensure that the funding cannot come before the strategy? Does the Assistant Minister agree?

Deputy A. Howell:

We will be meeting very soon for our next group and we will discuss all this but we will be asking for funding for further things for women's health going forward.

Deputy I. Gardiner:

My question was not answered. My question was: does the Minister agree that the strategy will need to be able to produce a business case to be able to find the funding? This was the question.

The Bailiff:

Yes, I understood the question, thank you very much, and that was the question. It is: do you accept that the strategy must come before the funding?

Deputy A. Howell:

Yes, I said that we will have a strategy but it will not be a standalone strategy.

The Bailiff:

Then I think I have a supplemental question, do you not, Deputy, or have I already asked that? No, I mean Deputy Gardiner. You had asked already.

Deputy I. Gardiner:

Thank you, Sir,

3.14.5 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Could the Assistant Minister please inform the members of the public that are filling in the currently open consultation on women's health and who are expecting a women's health strategy, what form this statement of intent will take, what it will look like, how long it will be, how much detail and, critically,

will it be an evidence-based approach that can secure funding to make the real changes that women of this Island need in their healthcare?

Deputy A. Howell:

We are very minded that we should listen to the voice of women and girls on this Island. As a group, we promise that we will be really prioritising all that they say in their responses to our consultation; we take it very seriously and we are very grateful for all of those who are filling in the survey as we speak. It goes on until the end of May - May 21st - and then we will analyse what we are being told. It will be evidence-based going forward and I really prioritise women's and girls' health on this Island.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Sorry Sir, my question was what form will the statement of intent take, what length will it be and what will it contain?

The Bailiff:

Are you able to answer any of those things?

Deputy A. Howell:

I think we just will have to work as an advisory group. I cannot give you the detail at this time.

The Bailiff:

Very well. We come to Question 15, Deputy Jeune will ask of the Minister for Health and Social Services.

Deputy H.L. Jeune:

Sir, the Minister is not present.

The Bailiff:

The Minister is about to become present, it seems to me. Minister, you will not mind me saying, I am sure, that it is the responsibility of Ministers to ensure that they are present when their questions are asked.

[11:30]

Deputy T. Binet:

I do apologise, Sir.

The Bailiff:

Yes. Would you like to ask the question, Deputy?