

2024.05.21

Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity of the Chief Minister regarding the development of a strategy for older people. (OQ.92/2024)

Will the Chief Minister advise the Assembly whether there are any plans by the Government to develop a strategy for older people before the end of the Government's term; and if not, why not?

Deputy L.J. Farnham of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter (The Chief Minister):

The Government are focused on delivering practical actions and have no immediate plans to develop a new overarching strategy. Over the next 2 years, Ministers will be working with representative groups to ensure that the policies in relation to this subject are properly co-ordinated. This includes liaising closely with the Older Persons Living Forum and the Older Persons Cluster, both of which raised pertinent issues. To give some examples, the Older Persons Living Forum has currently been discussing new healthcare facilities, eligibility for free T.V. licensing, dementia strategy, disability and inclusion, C.L.S. (Customer and Local Services) pensions and care hub, closer-to-home events, women's health preview, community transport scheme, and assisted dying proposal. The Older Persons Cluster met in January and are doing some important work. Impact Jersey are launching a £2 million grant programme aimed at encouraging businesses from Jersey around the world to develop and deploy technology for older persons and their carers. The officer group on Ageing Well is looking at financial security and economic participation, healthy ageing and access to services, diverse housing choices, participation, social inclusion and accessible environments. That is an example of some of the work going on. We are going to stick with that programme rather than introduce a new strategy at this stage.

3.1.1 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

I thank the Chief Minister for that long list. But how will the Chief Minister ensure that Government is maximising impact and not wasting money if there is no strategic vision that can unify the approach of also its partners and with no mechanism to identify needs that are not being met?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I think there is a strategic vision; that vision is shared by the Council of Ministers. The responsibility for senior citizens is cross-cutting across a number of Ministries. I think just picking up on some of the work started in the previous Government, especially with the Older Persons Forum, is the way forward. We have an officer group that is working to co-ordinate all the work, and I think that will be more effective and deliver support more quickly than spending time on a new strategy.

[9:45]

Having said that, I will undertake to ensure that the Assembly will be updated and progress will be addressed in the annual report on the Common Population Policy, to keep Members informed and up to date.

3.1.2 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier Central:

Let us play some policy bingo for the moment. Will the Chief Minister, from that great long list of things he wishes to achieve, name his own priority personally on the list?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I did not read out a list of things we are hoping to achieve. I read out a list of work being undertaken by the organisation and groups who are taking responsibility for supporting older people on the Island. I would have to think about it, but I think off the top of my head right now the most important thing we need to do, not just for the elderly but for all Islanders, is to work on the health service and deliver our new hospital.

3.1.3 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:

There is no strategy coming but there is a strategic vision, according to the Chief Minister. Can the Chief Minister summarise that strategic vision?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I think the vision is for us to make sure we provide the appropriate support to make sure senior citizens, as we do with all Islanders, are properly supported, which is why we are picking up on the work that established the Older Persons group, the cluster group, and the officer group, which co-ordinates all the work. The vision is to make sure that work remains co-ordinated and we start delivering. We start putting some of these actions and these aspirations into practice, rather than spending time on what could be an expensive new strategy.

3.1.4 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

It is absolutely correct that different Administrations can choose to prioritise different sections of society. Previous Assemblies and Ministers have decided to prioritise, perhaps, putting children first. We are seeing legitimate questions about older people now being raised. Does the Chief Minister recall that earlier in his term I asked about an Equalities and Human Rights Commissioner and does he think that it is time that we had somebody who is perhaps slightly arm's-length from Government that we could refer to who would look out for all of the sections of our community, not simply the ones that come up perhaps sometimes politically conveniently and disparately?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I do have some - I am not sure if sympathy is the right word - but I do understand the request for that. I am also minded that with statutory bodies and commissioners, we tend to run the risk of making heavy weather of things. It is the responsibility of this Assembly and the Government to ensure Islanders are properly cared for and looked after in every aspect of life, so while I understand the Deputy's question, there is no plan for this Government to introduce something like that at this stage. But that is not to say that the door will for ever be closed on it, and we continue to monitor the progress we make as an Assembly and as a Government.

3.1.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

I understand the position that the Chief Minister finds himself in, but would he then perhaps give consideration to giving more overt Ministerial responsibility to perhaps one of his Ministers or Assistant Ministers to look at the whole piece around communities, human rights and equality and how it affects everyone in our society, and what Government could be doing more if that does not exist? But if it does, could he give more scope to that individual to bring that forward?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Yes, and we have started discussions in that direction with the Assistant Minister, Deputy Alves, and we will update Members in due course.

3.1.6 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter:

The Chief Minister referred to providing an update as part of the Common Population Policy. Does he believe that this is the appropriate place to provide such an update and a strategic vision on the work being undertaken for older people in our community, especially when older people are often referred to or phrased within the challenges of an ageing population within such reports and discussions? Is that an appropriate place to provide such an update?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Sorry, was she referring to ... I said the Common Population Policy?

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Yes.

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Because I feel one of the biggest challenges coming our way is the demographic challenges which are well understood, that is the certainty that we are going to see a growing ageing population. It is estimated that by 2040 there will be twice as many of us living into our 80s. So we are going to have to be prepared for that in society and that will be addressed in the Common Population Policy, in the first instance. I do think that is an appropriate place, but then I do not want to divert again from all of the work that is being done by the

officer group and the cluster group and the Older Persons Living Group. That is gaining momentum, bringing forward some good ideas, and is leading to some action. But in relation to the growing ageing population, I think it is appropriate to update Members in that report.

3.1.7 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Does the Minister not accept this is about more than just a population issue? Later today or later this week we are going to be talking about dying well, should we not also be thinking about living well as people get older?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Absolutely, and that is what all of the work that is being carried out is aimed for. It is aimed at helping not just the elderly but all Islanders to improve the quality of life. As I said before, there is a multi-faceted challenge we face here. Part of it is population related, the other parts are improving the well-being of Islanders, especially our senior citizens. That is why we have the Older Persons Living Forum, the Older People's Cluster, and we have Statistics Jersey doing a lot more work so we understand the statistics and challenges better. We have Impact Jersey and, again, we have the officer group which is co-ordinating all of that work. I think it is good work, it is delivering and it is something we are going to continue with for at least the short term.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Do you have a question, Deputy Gardiner?

Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:

No, I had my light for some time; I thought that you had seen me. Apologies. I have my light for some time.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Sorry, I did not spot it. Do you want to ask a question?

3.1.8 Deputy I Gardiner:

Yes, please. Thank you for the Chief Minister saying that living well is important. Would the Chief Minister agree that the ageing process is predictable, gradual, and to follow this we can have an adaptation plan than to face a crisis in another 20 years?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Yes, I think that will be an essential part of the planning process. We want to make sure we are prepared to changes in demographics across the Island. I think at the heart of that work is to make sure we are prepared.

3.1.9 Deputy I. Gardiner:

To follow this, would the Chief Minister explain how to be prepared does not include a strategic vision, which will have a detailed planned phased approach? If the Chief Minister does not like the expression "strategic vision", would he accept "strategic framework" to ensure adaptation for the population change in another 20 years?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

We tend to have created a culture of strategy after strategy after strategy. We have so many strategies we do not really know where to begin. There are too many. They are not delivering. They are costly. What Islanders want to see are actions. What is currently in play now is action. Various groups and a co-ordinated officer group delivering actions. Now, of course, we have a vision and a strategic vision for the future, otherwise we would not have Statistics Jersey and the other groups looking forward to these challenges; so we know what is coming.

3.1.10 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

If there is no intention of building an older person strategy that in part would tackle stigma, indirect social pressure and ageism - and I did not hear this on the long list of the Chief Minister - can the Chief Minister advise how he will ensure there are safeguards written into the assisted dying legislation to guard against the concerns around indirect social pressure on older people who feel a burden on their family?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I think that this Island community will not accept or tolerate the sort of stigma and challenges that Deputy Jeune mentions. I think it can go without saying that we will always do whatever we can to ensure those do not exist or we push back hard wherever we find them. In relation to the assisted dying debate, I think I can make my points clear during the debate, but of course the legislation that we are going to bring forward to cover those issues, I cannot simply answer complex questions off the top of my head,. But we always rely on legislation in such matters. I know we are breaking new ground with this, should the States agree to go forward with it but, as I said, I think all of those important issues have to be dealt with following the debate