

2.10 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding procedures for dealing with complaints against senior members of the Health and Social Services Department:

Would the Minister advise Members what procedures, if any, are currently in place to deal with complaints made against senior members of his department?

Senator S. Syvret (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

In September 2005, Health and Social Services adopted its Service User Comment and Complaint Policy procedure, or complaints procedure, as it is known more prosaically within the department. This procedure is comprehensive and applies to all staff regardless of role or seniority. The procedure seeks to resolve complaints from clients and patients and to offer learning for members of staff arising from any errors or omissions from the department. I expect that complaints will be dealt with directly and as expeditiously as possible. It is also my responsibility to ensure that staff - including senior members of staff - are protected from frivolous and vexatious complaints. Also, there is a need to protect them from attempts to intimidate, such as placing pressure upon them to agree to forms of treatment which are not clinically indicated or proven. A complaint is dealt with by the manager of those members of staff who are complained about. It follows, therefore, that any complaint against a senior officer of our department will be investigated by the Chief Officer himself. If the complaint is against the Chief Officer, then he will step aside and will inform the Chief Executive of the States of Jersey, who will then conduct the inquiry and complaints procedure.

2.10.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Given the extremely sensitive nature of some of these matters and given that there might be a feeling that civil servants are investigating civil servants, would the Minister outline to what extent he or his Assistant Minister become involved in the process, given these kinds of complaints?

Senator S. Syvret:

During my time at Health and Social Services, I have very rarely - if ever, in fact - had a direct involvement in investigating or determining complaints made against the department. It really is not my role to do that. There is a set procedure across the States of Jersey, it has to be said - not just within Health and Social Services - for conducting complaints against senior civil servants. If the Deputy is asking me: "Do I consider that procedure satisfactory, adequate and effective?" I would have to say no. Clearly, it is not satisfactory to have senior civil servants investigating their friends and colleagues who are other senior civil servants. How can we expect people to be rigorous and strong against a person who they probably routinely have dinner parties with? I remain of the view that in principle we need a new procedure.