

3. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Minister for Home Affairs

The Bailiff:

We come now to questions to Ministers without notice and the first question period is of the Minister for Home Affairs and I invite questions.

3.1 Deputy F.J. Hill of St. Martin:

It was reported that over the weekend some 39 persons were arrested in town for disorderly behaviour of one sort or another. Are members of the public that unruly or is it that the States' police are adopting a zero tolerance policy?

Senator W. Kinnard (The Minister for Home Affairs):

Members will be aware that there has been public concern about disorderly behaviour in St. Helier. One of the ways in which we sought to deal with that is that the States of Jersey Police now have a 5-shift system, which means that there are now more police officers on the beat at the time at which there are likely to be more people on the streets of St. Helier. They are therefore in a position to apprehend offenders more readily and that seems to be contributing, I believe, to the higher number of arrests that we have seen of late.

3.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

There were a large number of staff recruited in a support capacity at the prison in order, so it was suggested, to reduce stress on the current staff and, in particular, to reduce the size of the overtime bill, the result being it would be a neutral budgetary effect. Can the Minister tell us whether the overtime bill prior to that has been reduced considerably since the advent of this group of support staff and what is the percentage difference?

Senator W. Kinnard:

I would need notice of that. I am afraid it is quite a detailed question but I would say that we have, of course, recruited a number of officer support grades and the reason for that is that they are less expensive to recruit than full prison officers and can deal with a number of jobs and activities that are required at the prison. But, in respect of the exact details, I think it is only fair that I require some notice of that question. I do not have the figures to hand.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Can we have that in written form, please, to Members?

Senator W. Kinnard:

Yes indeed, Sir.

3.3 Senator B.E. Shenton:

It was reported in the media that, with regard to the transfer of officers to the U.K., in fact we pay more for help from the U.K. because U.K. forces charge out for their mutual aid at 16-hour days, no matter how many hours their officers work, however Jersey will only charge for the hours our officers work. This seems like a great deal for the U.K. and a lousy deal for the Jersey taxpayer. Could the Minister comment on it?

Senator W. Kinnard:

I do not make the rules, unfortunately, as to how officers are charged out in the United Kingdom. All officers that are, if you like, requested by other forces have to pay for the 16-hour day and we are no different to whether it might Devon and Cornwall or anywhere else. I think the way that we charge out is the fair way.

3.3.1 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Could I just ask a supplementary on that question. Could I ask the Minister is it really going to cost the Island money to send our officers over to help the others or will it cost nothing?

Senator W. Kinnard:

No, Sir, it is not going to cost the Jersey taxpayer anything at all and, in fact, it is going to be an extremely useful training opportunity for our officers locally.

3.4 Deputy S. Power:

The Minister will be aware of reports of taxis and cars being hit by objects thrown on the main Quennevais road between Don Bridge and Belle Vue. The Minister may or may not be aware that at least 7 rank taxis and 3 private hire taxis, plus a number of private cars, have been hit recently by objects ranging from bricks, blocks, paving slabs, golf balls and, on one occasion, a house door was thrown in front of a taxi. What steps is the Minister taking with the police chief and the parish authorities to investigate who the perpetrators are and to increase patrols in the area?

Senator W. Kinnard:

Clearly whenever there is a hotspot that becomes known to the police then there is a focus on that particular area. But, of course, the police cannot be there at all times and I think this is where we have to say that all of the agencies that could be involved in addressing this problem must be involved. I gather that some of the problem results from some children from particular Housing areas and I do believe that the Housing Department has an extremely proactive and very good unit in dealing with these kinds of matters. Certainly what I would do is, I intend to speak to the Housing Minister to see whether or not we, together, can do something to alleviate this problem.

3.5 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Shortly, if not as of now - I am not certain as to when - the report from the Buncefield incident will be made available to the U.K. authorities. I wonder whether or not the Minister has received any such report as of this time and at what stage that report will be available, if at all, to other Members if she is going to receive it, and whether or not that report will be discussed at the Council of Ministers as to its implications?

Senator W. Kinnard:

The Buncefield report: I have no idea personally when that is going to be available. I believe it is fairly imminent. It is being consulted upon at the moment. Of course, it will go to the Fire and Rescue Service and all those services that are involved with community safety and it really, I think, is for those experts to consider the implications and to advise the appropriate Ministers on their conclusions. I am not an expert in this field and certainly I would not expect to go into detail in that report but rather to expect a report from my officers with expertise in the field.

3.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I refer back to a previous question earlier this morning and question the Minister's budget responsibility for the Jersey Field Squadron. It is my understanding that it forms part of a defence contribution and therefore belongs elsewhere. Has the Minister made any progress in transferring responsibility for the Jersey Field Squadron to the Chief Minister's Department where I believe it belongs?

Senator W. Kinnard:

The Deputy will be aware of this ongoing issue on Home Affairs from the time when he was a previous member of the committee. Unfortunately I have not had a lot of success in trying to offload that particular budget responsibility but what I will say is that the Department for Constitutional Affairs has already acknowledged the Island's request to renegotiate the inter-

governmental agreement and that was notified to us on 6th February. In fact, the basis of that is that there are going to be changes taking place under the Future Army Structures Review and that is likely to reduce the authorised establishment of the Jersey Field Squadron from 148 to 97. This, I believe, provides an opportunity now for us to look at the financial contribution that is made by the Island in respect to the Field Squadron in respect of the changes that have been made.

3.7 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

Will the Minister advise the House why there is a delay in bringing forward a Sex Offenders' Register for Jersey and how she is addressing the matter?

Senator W. Kinnard:

The Sex Offenders' Law, which is I think really where this lies, was signed-off by myself in June 2005 and at the time I wrote to the Attorney General saying that I agreed with the proposals in principle and would look forward to a re-draft. I have also raised the issue again in Law Drafting in 2006. I have not yet received any further information from that from the Law Officers' Department. But there is a link to the lists which exist in the United Kingdom and some of the new arrangements that will apply once the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act comes into force in the autumn of 2008. I believe that the delay perhaps in the Law Officers' Department may be connected to some of these developments.

3.8 Deputy C.J. Scott Warren:

Can the Minister give Members an update on the current educational programs available at the present, including for young offenders?

Senator W. Kinnard:

Yes. Sir, what we are doing at the moment is that there are interviews underway for the head of a Learning and Skills post because it is believed that, if we are going to deliver the most effective education to meet all of the needs of all of our prisoners, we really do need someone to fill that post and to advise on what sorts of teachers and what sorts of courses we are able to provide. The Deputy, because we have had correspondence about this, will be aware that there is some education that is offered by the Education Department in respect of some of our young offenders. We also have a number of courses that are available now through horticulture and we are looking as well to introduce courses through the kitchen and catering area as well as industrial cleaning. So there are a lot of things going on there. We are also recruiting many of the craftsmen in order for us to roll this out. So what I would say is this is very much work-in-progress and we are certainly moving full speed ahead. We hope to have a very good system in place by the end of 2007.

3.9 Deputy S.C. Ferguson:

When I was a Centenier - in a former life as one of my colleagues would say - any motorist stopped for speeding would usually appear within 7 days at a parish hall. Why is it now taking 52 days and would the Minister not think that the volume of offences which are being processed arising from the new car would skew the statistics so that a considerable number of offences will appear to have been solved and the real crimes are still unsolved?

Senator W. Kinnard:

No.

Deputy S.C. Ferguson:

Sorry, Sir, but I did ask why is it taking 52 days now?

Senator W. Kinnard:

That is an answer I cannot give. I know that when motorists are caught for speeding - which again is one of the highest concerns the community has about law breaking in the Island - that is notified to the parish hall and the parish hall decides how they wish to deal with it thereafter. So I suspect that it may be a question that may need to be addressed by the Connétables as well as by myself, but I am certainly happy to look into it.

Deputy S.C. Ferguson:

Can I ask through you, Sir, that the Minister does look at the system because what was a very... I would ask her to consider whether what was a very efficient system 6 years ago is now getting hopelessly clogged-up.

Senator W. Kinnard:

I think that the Deputy should bear in mind 2 things: (1) that is an assertion which has not yet been tested or investigated and I think she should await the outcome of my answer; and (2) I think that it is very important that we recognise that this is a serious concern that the public does take very seriously and I think that speeding is a matter that we, as the States of Jersey, should take seriously as well.

3.10 Deputy J.A. Martin:

It has been reported recently that the Chief of Police has had his contract extended for, I think, another 3 years to allow for succession training of a local candidate to be a new Chief of Police. Could the Home Affairs Minister inform the House whether this is best practice in the U.K., i.e. that an officer coming through the ranks then is head of that particular establishment?

Senator W. Kinnard:

It is generally the case - in most forces in the United Kingdom, in England and Wales, that is - that the police chief will come from outside the immediate area and certainly we have had that at present but we are very much concerned in the Island to try and bring forward local candidates. It is very important that our local officers feel that they are able to progress to the highest ranks and one of the ways in which we are able to ensure that they are trained to the appropriate standard is by ensuring that they have to pass sufficient tests so that they can stand their ground - stand their own - against any officers from the United Kingdom. I do believe that we have 4 candidates coming through at the moment as part of our succession plan and one of those, hopefully, will be successful. I do believe that any officer coming through the ranks will be equal to any officer that would we be able to recruit from elsewhere.

3.11 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Late last year, Sir, I did raise the question with the Minister regarding children and young teens acquiring alcohol and cigarettes. The Minister did state at the time that she would consult with her fellow Ministers, especially that of Economic Development. Would the Minister update the Assembly with any progress so far? Thank you, Sir.

Senator W. Kinnard:

Yes, Sir. This really is being taken on board by the Safer St. Helier initiative and I know that one of the areas that they are going to be looking at, if they have not already - my Assistant Minister is the person who sits on it - is licensing and particularly in the area of alcohol sales to young people.

The Bailiff:

That concludes the first question period.