

2.11 The Connétable of Grouville of the Assistant Minister for Health and Social Services regarding precautions to safeguard the health of the people who live in close proximity to mobile phone masts:

Would the Minister reassure the Assembly that all precautions have been taken to safeguard the health of the people living in close proximity to mobile phone masts and confirm that should evidence be presented to indicate serious associated health risks the masts would be shut down?

Deputy C.J. Scott Warren (Assistant Minister for Health and Social Services):

I can most certainly assure the Assembly that all precautions are being taken, and will continue to be taken, to safeguard the health of the people who live in close proximity to mobile phone masts. The Connétable will hopefully take comfort from the way in which planning applications for mobile phone masts are sanctioned; a licensed company must make applications through the planning processes laid down by the Minister for Planning and Environment. Each mobile phone mast planning application must take the form an individual application, and when such an application is received by Planning and Environment it is referred as a matter of routine to the Health Protection Team and proficient officers from that team then undertake a site inspection on every occasion. The officers consider each site application against the international standards laid down by the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection. To date, all such applications for the installation of mobile phone masts have complied with these standards. It need hardly be said that the Health Protection Team will continue with these practices to ensure that the potential risk to Islanders is fully assessed on each and every occasion that a mobile phone mast planning application is made. I am currently considering the review into the perceived effects of mobile phone masts, which was presented to the States on 20th April by the Health, Social Security and Housing Scrutiny Panel. At first glance this Scrutiny report is of a high standard and would appear to strike the right balance between scientific opinion and public anxiety and disquiet. I am particularly mindful of the recommendations within the report as to how health monitoring might well be enhanced. When I have obtained advice from my professional and technical officers on this matter it may well be that we can enhance the level of health protection even more from that which currently appertains. Finally, I can most assuredly confirm to Connétable that should evidence be presented to indicate serious associated health risks then I would contact the Minister for Planning and Environment immediately, and I have no doubt that advice to decommission such a mast on health grounds would be acted on immediately by my fellow Minister.

2.11.1 The Connétable of Grouville:

I thank you for your reply, which is quite all encompassing, but is the Minister aware of the O2 closing down a mast in Warwickshire where a cluster of cancer-related cases was found in the area around the mast?

Deputy C.J. Scott Warren:

Yes, I am aware of this. A correlation obviously may or may not relate to health impact, but I would say to the Connétable that before us I feel we have an excellent Scrutiny report and it does... the whole basis - and people can take also comfort from reading page 103 and 104, the Assistant Director of Health Protection's report in it - if there is any evidence comes to light we will, as I said in my reply, act upon it.

2.11.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Following on the Constable's question, could the Assistant Minister please explain to the House how that particular bit of evidence will be assessed and whether it is being actively assessed given the assurances she has just given us?

Deputy C.J. Scott Warren:

The Health Protection Team - obviously they are aware of this report - will be looking at any and every piece of new evidence that comes, and that is what is recommended as well in the Scrutiny

report. We have 6 weeks to analyse and get back regarding the Scrutiny report, which as I said I believe is an excellent way forward, so I can give an assurance that nothing that is of concern will be neglected by our department.

2.11.3 Deputy S. Pitman of St. Helier:

Would the Assistant Minister not agree that there is, as yet, no international or national consensus on whether or not mobile phone masts affect human health? For this reason does she not agree that precautionary principles should be applied when current planning applications are received to install these masts in highly populated areas, which is the current policy of the Education Department, who will not permit their installation in close proximity to schools?

Deputy C.J. Scott Warren:

Our department does support the precautionary approach, which is also outlined in the Scrutiny report, and obviously that approach was recommended in the Stuart report in the year 2000. All new data will be reviewed. I am aware of the situation regarding the siting nearby schools in Jersey and I will give the assurance that the Health Protection Team, as I have said previously, will be looking at all these issues in conjunction with studying and making comments on the report.

2.11.4 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

So perhaps the Assistant Minister might ask her department to comment upon the practice of keeping these masts away from schools while allowing them to be sited at Fort Regent over the heads of those people participating in sporting activities and over the heads of a private nursery school which is a matter of yards away from one of the largest antennas that I have seen on the Island and one of the most powerful ones. Would the Minister undertake to investigate with her officers whether or not there is an overall encompassing policy between States and private provision of safeguarding young people in these situations?

Deputy C.J. Scott Warren:

I will obviously take these concerns that have just been expressed by the Deputy to the Health Protection Team. This is, overall, a matter of managing risk in the best way possible in the light of current evidence and future evidence, but certainly those comments regarding the nursery school will be conveyed to the Health Protection Team.

2.11.5 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

As the Deputy is aware, there has been a total relaxation as part of this contradictory view society has of mobile telephones within hospitals. Many Trusts are now allowing the use and are now saying it does not interfere with hospital equipment. Could the Assistant Minister tell us, as I am sure she will have studied this development, what decision has now been reached in regard to their use in the Jersey Hospital?

Deputy C.J. Scott Warren:

I know that there was a restriction on mobile phones. In fact, I was once told off by a doctor for having a mobile phone as I went into a lift. I have seen a mobile used by a member of staff in the Jersey Hospital but I will come back with a definite answer to the Deputy this week.