

**2.13 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding the recent food poisoning outbreak at two local schools:**

Would the Minister inform Members whether a review was conducted into the recent food poisoning incident which deferred the start of the school term for many students and teachers and, if so, give details as to the outcome? Would he advise whether sufficient safeguards are in place to ensure that the standards of food hygiene are maintained in the provision of school food?

**Senator M.E. Vibert (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):**

The recent outbreak of food poisoning was closely monitored by a working group consisting of the Medical Officer of Health and representatives of the Education, Sport and Culture and Health and Social Services Departments. The working group kept under review the arrangements for investigating the outbreak, identifying the cause of the incident and determining an appropriate course of action, including the temporary closure of 2 schools. The measures taken by the working group were successful in containing the outbreak and it is proposed that this group should be reconvened in the event of a similar outbreak in the future. In addition, my department is in contact with its independent health, safety and environmental health advisor in order to review the handling of the outbreak and determine whether any further measures would be appropriate. I can advise Members that proper safeguards are in place to ensure that standards of food hygiene are maintained. These include a comprehensive range of requirements in the contracts with food suppliers together with regular audits and spot checks to ensure compliance.

**2.13.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:**

A supplementary, please, sir. Could the Minister indicate, if proper standards are in place to ensure food hygiene, how this serious outbreak occurred and would he further indicate whether it is his intention to publish the findings of the review that is being carried out?

**Senator M.E. Vibert:**

The investigation was primarily a public health one and it was a result of food contaminated by the Norovirus - a Norwalk-type virus - being supplied to 3 schools by a catering company and that had been supplied to them. I noticed even just today there was news of another outbreak - a salmonella outbreak - where a local company had been supplied with what was meant to be pasteurised egg product which was found to be faulty but they obviously used it in good faith. Unfortunately, these incidents do happen. We take whatever steps we can and I was very pleased with the co-operation we had from Health and the support we had. We will be looking into all this and with Health. I have no problem at all with publishing whatever can be published with data protection and so on. Yes, I think we should learn whatever lessons we can and ensure that we take whatever steps we can to prevent recurrences.

**2.13.2 Deputy S. Power:**

I wonder if the Minister could confirm whether the department has ever given consideration to being self-sufficient in food requirements at all Jersey schools and whether the kitchens in the secondary schools and/or Highlands could provide school meals for all Island schools?

**Senator M.E. Vibert:**

Many of the schools do have kitchens and catering facilities but most of them are run under a contract that is let out to various local firms because the schools are primarily there for education not for providing catering.

**2.13.3 Deputy J.A. Martin:**

I know it is very unfortunate and it is nobody's fault, and this food was consumed and prepared in good faith, but it did happen at the end of a very long holiday. Would the Minister look to discuss within his department some sort of fall-back, especially if these had been 2 primary schools that had been shut down, for the parents having to find extra care. I know many of the teachers were ill

and teaching could not have carried on but could the Minister research something that may give care to the children so their parents can return to work?

**Senator M.E. Vibert:**

If any parents have particular problems that they cannot deal with the temporary closures of school, we normally offer through the schools - they usually contact the schools - some sort of system by having children taken into other schools temporarily and we will always try and do that. Yes, we do have such contingency plans in place.

**2.13.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

The Minister mentioned that catering contracts were out with particular contractors. Will the Minister give consideration to adjusting such contracts with external caterers to enable schools to fully participate in the Healthy Schools initiative such that not only are they healthy in terms of the exercise that they do but in the canteen that healthy food is the major option available?

**Senator M.E. Vibert:**

The Deputy will be pleased to know we already include that in our contracts. In fact, one of the conditions we have in is a service provider who understands the importance of healthy eating and we encourage in all our schools the provision of healthy eating options. We have a number of schools undertaking special healthy eating programmes.