

6. Questions to Ministers Without Notice - The Minister for Health and Social Services

6.1 Deputy J.A. Hilton of St. Helier:

It is my understanding funding for the Jersey Psychology Service was promised and assured by the Chief Executive Officer in May 2008. I understand the funding has been withdrawn. Can the Minister explain how he came to this decision and whether he is prepared to change his mind in light of the appalling impact it will have on the Island's most vulnerable adults and children?

Senator J.L. Perchard (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

I met with representatives from Autism Jersey last week and informed them of the financial dilemmas and prioritisation process that happens within our department. Unlike the suggestion made by the Deputy in her question, there was no promise made. Having said that, there is a general acceptance by my department and certainly me that psychological counselling services for autistic young people and adults is a priority. We need to find the resource to enable this provision. There is no immediate source available. I will endeavour to work with my department to access such a resource so that we can deliver this very important counselling service. I have been working closely with Autism Jersey on this and it is my intention to try and assist, but we are limited by resources. We do not have an unlimited financial resource.

6.1.1 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

Just as a follow on, is the Minister able to give an assurance that he will come back to the House within 3 months and indicate whether or not he has found where he is going resource this very important service?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

I will give an assurance that I am going to do my utmost to find the necessary resource to supply the service and I intend to do that. I understand. I have worked closely with autism. I understand the problems they have. I have done the S.P.E.L.L. (Structure, Positive, Empathy, Low Arousal, Links, Attendees) training with Autism Jersey. I want to support those with special needs and autistic people and disabled youngsters in their transition from Mont à l'Abbé into Adult Services. We just need to find the resource.

6.2 The Deputy of Trinity:

Does the Minister and all his officers meet regularly with the board and Chief Executive for Family Nursing Services? If they do, was the issue of transfer of health visitors to Health and Social Services discussed?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

I have not met, since becoming Minister, with the board of Family Nursing and Homecare, probably for obvious reasons; they have been otherwise occupied. I have, however, been in regular communication, either by email or on the telephone, with the Chairman of the Board. I am not prepared at this stage to discuss contractual relationships with the Deputy across the floor of the Chamber. They are relationships that I will have with Family Nursing and Homecare when they are appropriately geared-up to have proper service level agreements with our department.

6.3 The Connétable of St. Helier:

On a related point, the Minister recently attended an extraordinary general meeting with his Chief Officer called by Family Nursing and Homecare members and he will be aware that several million pounds of States expenditure goes into that organisation every year. Would he give a view on the prolonged suspension of the Chief Executive on full pay and without explanation of the grounds of that suspension? Will he be doing his utmost to bring about a speedy resolution of this deeply unsatisfactory situation?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

The Constable is aware that I was at the extraordinary general meeting called by certain members of the Association and heard the arguments being promoted. Health and Social Services allocates an inflation-proof grant each year to Family Nursing and Homecare. In 2008 the grant was just over £5.8 million. Yes, I am aware that the Director of Family Nursing and Homecare is currently suspended from duty. It is for the management of Family Nursing and Homecare to manage this matter. I do not consider that there is a role either politically or managerially for me or my department in this matter.

6.4 Senator S. Syvret:

The Minister is shortly going to publish his departmental response to the Williamson Report and perhaps the Howard League as well. Could he give the Assembly an assurance that these policy proposals will be published firstly in Green Paper form and that after a suitable period a public consultation and scrutiny the new policy package will be brought to the States as a projet for debate and approval?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

It is my pleasure to inform the Senator and Members that tomorrow the Williamson Implementation Plan will be laid on Members' desks. I am delighted that we have after this long haul reached a document where it has the approval of Mr. Williamson himself; Professor June Thoburn, the Chair of the Jersey Child Protection Committee; approval of the Council of Ministers; and yesterday I met with Scrutiny and we went through the document in some detail. It will be on Members' desks tomorrow. I am absolutely delighted. There is a proposal being lodged also tomorrow for the Minister for Treasury and Resources to bring forward funding proposals for 2009. We intend to instantly kick-start the reaction to the Williamson Plan, subject to States approval. We should be debating the resource implications for 2009 by the end of March or the very first week of April.

6.4.1 Senator S. Syvret:

A supplementary; I really have to press the Minister. What he has just suggested about a debate for funding is putting the cart before the horse. I do not think the Assembly, nor the public, given the controversy, really need a debate about the funding at this stage. What we need is, firstly, debate on the actual policy proposal package. Will he answer my original question and say will he bring a new policy package to this Assembly for approval?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

The Williamson Implementation is a structural reform of the Children's Services, which was long overdue. The consequences of the reforming of the Children's Service means a total reform of Social Services. It is a departmental decision that I will make. In my duty as Minister for Health and Social Services it is a departmental decision that I will deliver.

Senator S. Syvret:

To be clear, the Minister is saying that he is not in fact going to bring this policy package for remodelling of Children's Services and Social Services to the States for approval, which is quite an extraordinary state of affairs.

6.5 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister confirm whether *New Directions* has become mis-directions or old directions? Does it have any life in it? If so, when will it surface in its regenerated form? Thank you.

Senator J.L. Perchard:

The *New Directions* policy has suffered as a result of changing Ministers and more recently of course the global economic downturn and the fear of the cost of its full implementation on Jersey at this time. Having said that, *New Directions* is divided strategically into different sections and there are some sections which will undoubtedly be addressed in short order, particularly that of long-term care for the elderly. I am delighted though that as we unroll our initiatives or develop our initiatives for the Strategic Plan, much of *New Directions* will be sitting in the policy, which I hope the States will approve when we debate the Strategic Plan.

6.5.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Could the Minister inform us, for example in terms of the credit crunch, what parts of *New Directions* have been dropped, for example?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

None have been dropped, but the consequences of investing now to save later are not quite as attractive to the Council of Ministers when we discuss the full implications of the financial downturn. It is not a 'never say never' situation; it is just we are trying assess the full consequences of the financial downturn on Jersey's income in 2010, 2011 and 2012. Unwarranted expenditure or unnecessary expenditure will have to be considered very, very carefully. I can assure Members that this will not be the last time they hear of these types of pressures on different subjects that they may wish to invest in.

6.6 Deputy A.E. Jeune:

This morning the Minister advised us that he will be instigating independent inquiry following the recent Royal Court case. Could the Minister now please inform us when this is likely to start and when the outcome is likely to be known and will it all be made public and does he know at what cost?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

I will be making a statement under agenda item K, which I think will follow immediately after this moment of questioning time, with regards to the exact questions posed, and others, by the Deputy. I hope that the statement will satisfy her when read.

6.7 The Deputy of St. John:

A senior member of medical staff has been suspended for nearly 2 years. When will the case be dealt with? Does the Minister accept that having somebody suspended for such a long period of time not only affects that person's health, but also the health of his family? All of the other parties involved are also under a lot of stress. Given you are in the medical profession, or you represent the medical profession ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Through the Chair.

The Deputy of St. John:

... can he please get these cases resolved so that the Island do not have to pick up additional bills for looking after the people who are suffering with stress caused by these long delays.

Senator J.L. Perchard:

I agree with the sentiments raised by the questioner. I consider it completely unsatisfactory that the judicial process has taken so long. The questioner and Members must understand that it was impossible - it has been impossible - for my department to conduct any internal review or consider any disciplinary action or any contravening of protocols and work good practice while there has been a judicial process. We simply had to sit on it. Now the judicial process is

completed I will be making an announcement, as I keep telling Members, in a statement as to what happens next.

The Deputy of St. John:

Will we be permitted, through the Chair, to question the Minister after his statements?

The Deputy Bailiff:

As the Deputy will be aware under Standing Orders there are 10 minutes of questioning the Minister after that. Senator Ferguson?

6.8 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Since the States pay taxpayers' money and they pay the bulk of the income of Family Nursing, something at the last count when I looked at it, around about 75 per cent or 80 per cent, will he ensure that the accounts are presented formally to the States rather than Members having to go around digging for them?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

I consider that to be a very reasonable request and I will request, when the Family Nursing and Homecare have sorted out their internal problems, that be the case. I think it is perfectly reasonable as that so much money is being invested in the service, taxpayer's money, that Family Nursing and Homecare should be accountable for it.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Very well. I am afraid that brings questioning of the Minister to an end.