

3.13 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the number of children on the Child Protection Register:

How many children are currently on the Child Protection Register, how many of those have child protection plans and how many of those include ongoing police involvement?

The Deputy of Trinity (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

I will ask the Assistant Minister who has special responsibility for children's services to answer Deputy Le Claire's question.

Deputy J.A. Martin (Assistant Minister for Health and Social Services - rapporteur):

As of yesterday there were 32 children on the Child Protection Register, all have active child protection plans and there are 10 that include ongoing police involvement.

3.13.1 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

I looked through my files when I was doing the X children report and I came across a file I received from the Health Committee in 2000 which were Jersey Child Care Protection Committee, Child Protection Guidelines and Priorities. It identifies the priorities of the Honorary Police, the children's police, the Jersey Police, the nursing home service, the probation service and a range of other departments in relation to their duties and responsibilities. As part of this folder, it says that the duties and responsibilities of the police are to attend the initial child protection case conferences and share information and views and work co-operatively with other agencies to ensure the short and long term safety and welfare of the child and families involved. How is it that only 10 cases are involving the police, this document would seem to indicate that all of such cases should involve the police.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

The Deputy's question was ongoing police involvement. In fact I was shocked to learn today that the increase from the Public Protection Unit from the police has risen from 147 cases last year to 411 cases this year. This I would say, and I have asked the department, goes to show that the police are actively involved. There are other agencies all going through the police now that would not and, after initial and a lot of extra work that is put in, there are still only 32 children needing child protection and active plans and 10 of these are ongoing with the police involvement, so the work is being done. There seem to be a lot more agencies involved but, as I say, to date we still only have 10 that are ongoing with police involvement.

3.13.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

I wonder, although not strictly within the question, could the Assistant Minister outline whether the number of children on the protection register is increasing and could she indicate who vets and approves and, if necessary, countermands the child protection plan?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

The child protection plan is signed up by many people; the social worker, the family, the child even signs up. Sometimes it will involve Education and many other players. The increase; are the numbers on the increase? On an average, no; the highest figure

in January 2004 was 54 cases on the child protection register and, as I say, at the moment there are 32. These are not, of course, including children that are looked after by the department; these are children for whom there is a concern out in the community.

3.13.3 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Just a supplementary; I wonder, could the Assistant Minister confirm, she mentioned Education was sometimes involved. Is she aware of the very worthwhile experiment of having social workers in school, in fact, there was one in one school and this post has now been removed? Could she comment on whether the removal of social workers from schools is having an impact on the kind of feedback necessary for running child protection?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

There are many ways that social workers can help and we at Social Services, or me as the Assistant Minister for Health and Social Services, would like to see a social worker not just called in when there is a problem with a child. But, obviously, yes, I thought the social worker at the particular school was doing a good job. This has been rolled out in the U.K. and it is also now being rolled back so we are sort of following along the lines but we only have a few schools. We have a really good network if it is working correctly and if it is staffed correctly. We are under-staffed in child care officers and we are under-staffed in social workers but, to answer the question, in my own opinion, I think of course, a social worker who is a direct connection with the secondary schools with children, early intervention and before there is any physical or mental or sexual abuse, will always be a good thing, thank you.

3.13.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Has the department investigated, and if so, does it have any evidence that, at a time of rising demand and with social worker shortages, that the threshold level of reporting has been rising over recent years, in order to put somebody on a protection register?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Yes, I do not know if the Deputy was listening when I said that last year, through the police alone there were 147 cases referred and this year there were 411, so I would say the threshold is very, very high. What I am saying is things that maybe would have not been reported before the new Children's Law and the new protocol that was put in by the police and other agencies 2 years ago may have never got reported to Social Services. The fact that these have gone up I say is a good thing because then they are all investigated. Some will be dismissed and if there is ongoing work that needs to be done, it should be done.

3.13.5 Senator S. Syvret:

Will the Assistant Minister recognise the fact that merely because a child is on the at risk register this does not guarantee necessarily the safety and protection of that child, given many horrific failings that are well documented in the United Kingdom, and would she also accept that it is entirely feasible, indeed it most certainly has happened in the past, as we have discovered all too tragically in the last 2 or 3 years, that children can in fact be in States of Jersey care, States of Jersey homes and most definitely be at risk in those circumstances?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

I thank the Senator for his question. Of course Professor Thoburn said there will be cases where children will slip through the net, at risk. In the system as we have it at present, and the Senator well knows, we had too many children's homes that are too large, staff working with the children at risk are under severe pressure, the children are not getting the one-to-one with the key workers, which is frustrating absolutely for the children and we are just passing them on through the system. The age groups that are most vulnerable and in care are between 10 and 17 and then after that, basically, they are out on their ear, and I do not think that is a very good advertisement for Jersey. If anybody would like to come with me to see the children's homes, to see the adolescent centre which is for care leavers, please ring me or contact me and I will take you there because, if anything really does need to be improved and to be implemented after Scrutiny, of course, and hopefully with even more radical changes, it is Williamson or something very similar.