

2.1 Deputy F.J. Hill of St. Martin of the Minister for Home Affairs regarding Operation Blast:

With reference to Operation Blast, will the Minister advise Members what motivated the States Police to create the files and cease the practice last November, and who was responsible? Was there any political involvement, who gave consent for the searches to be carried out on States Members, and what internal disciplinary investigations have taken place to date?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand (The Minister for Home Affairs):

This is a very similar question to one which I answered 2 weeks ago. As I indicated then, the answers to these questions are now subject to investigation and I am not going to prejudge the outcome of the investigation. That also applies to disciplinary investigations as well as other matters.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

I was not aware of any answers given 2 weeks ago. Can I ask the Minister, were the answers given to my particular question, because the question was never formally asked?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

The answer to that is I had a very, very similarly-worded question I think from Deputy Le Claire, but I do not blame the Deputy of St. Martin for his second question.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

Could I just press the Minister? I do believe there are some questions in my question here that could have been given an answer to and I just ask the Minister that maybe he can give us some indication how soon some of these answers can be given?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

I am hopeful that the investigation I am talking about will be concluded by the end of September. I cannot be sure of that date, but I am hopeful of that.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

Can I press the Minister again? Has any Member of the States Police yet been suspended for this particular action?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

The answer to that question is no, but suspension is under consideration for one particular individual.

2.1.1 Senator S. Syvret:

Could the Minister for Home Affairs inform the Assembly whether the investigation that has taken place will examine whether in fact the Operation Blast files and the whole exercise was completely lawful?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

The investigation will consider as to whether criminal offences were committed in relation to Operation Blast.

2.1.2 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier:

Will he also confirm that his investigation will also examine the motivation underlying the need for such files?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

That is correct.

2.1.3 Deputy T.M. Pitman of St. Helier:

Could the Minister also clarify whether he is aware of any substance to rumours circulating that the files are much wider and apply to people who are politically active, but not necessarily yet elected?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

As I indicated, when I answered questions on making the initial statement in the House, one of the first questions that I asked was: "Is there anything more?" In other words, were there files in relation to other people? No information has returned to me to the effect that there are. That is a matter which the current acting senior officers will continue to monitor.

2.1.4 Deputy M.R. Higgins of St. Helier:

Could the Minister advise us whether the Data Protection Commissioner has commenced investigations into the Operation Blast? Is he aware of any progress on that?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

I am not aware of any involvement of the Data Protection Commissioner in relation to this. If criminal offences have been committed then they probably would be in the area of data protection.

2.1.5 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire of St. Helier:

I wonder if the Minister could tell us whether or not his investigation will consider the implication of the invasion of privacy, as this does extend from the outset to all States Members, Senators, Constables and all Deputies? It is yet to be established whether or not that constituted or comprised of family members or associates, et cetera. As there are issues in the U.K. (United Kingdom) relating to invasion of privacy right now, I wonder whether or not he can comment if the investigation is going to look at whether or not that has stretched into that area in Jersey?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

The investigation will look into 2 areas: firstly, in relation to possible disciplinary matters concerning various individuals, and secondly, in relation to whether or not there may have been criminal offences committed. It will not, at this stage, go beyond that, but of course once the facts are known, other considerations can be looked at.

2.1.6 Deputy P.J. Rondel of St. John:

Within the current files - and yet I have to go myself to police headquarters and inquire, but hopefully the Minister might be able to answer the question - on States Members, within a file of any particular Member, are the antecedence files attached to it? If so, what action is the Minister taking to make sure that those files also are disclosed to the States Member, or the persons nominated on that file?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

Just to clarify, because people have used different terminology in relation to this - particularly the press, which is very confusing - my understanding is strictly speaking there are 2 files, but those files contain sections on each person who is a States Member. My understanding is that each of those sections contains a full criminal record check, which the Deputy of St. John has of course referred to as antecedence. The existence of those files, of course, and the record check, is part of what the investigation will look at. I may have lost the final part of the question.

The Deputy of St. John:

If I may come back? Yes, within the antecedents files, historically, in my time within policing, it would also encompass known associates and members of one's family, in part. Could you answer that?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

I do not know the answer to that because I know that in relation to certain individuals there is very limited information there, but in relation to others, much more extensive information. I am not sure of this, but I do not think that we retain the information about members of family and contacts was there.

2.1.7 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

Given that everybody who seems to be asked about the existence of the files or involvement with the files has denied any knowledge of that, what tools does the Minister have at his disposal to get to the bottom of what happened and who was involved?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

That is going into speculation as to how the investigators would proceed. If I were them I would start with the people in Special Branch who told the Acting Chief Officer about it and I would also look at who had requested the criminal checks, because normally there is a name on that, and I would work my way backwards from there. It is entirely for professional police officers at Wiltshire to decide how best to proceed.

2.1.8 The Deputy of St. Martin:

I am rather disappointed that the Minister feels that he cannot give a report to the States until the end of September. This has been known since November what was going on and I really am disappointed. But can I have an assurance from the Minister that although he did say that he would have a report by the end of September, can I ask that it be ready by the beginning of September? I would have thought 6 months would be an ample time - even 8 months would be an ample time. It is of even more significance because on 22nd September we are due to debate Deputy Higgins' report and proposition on the matter, and I think it would be very helpful if we had as much information before we have that debate. Can I have an assurance that it will be ready by the first sitting in September, which will be 8th September, or whatever the first sitting is?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

The answer which I gave relates to Operation Blast, in terms of timescale; it did not relate to other matters being looked at by the Wiltshire Police and I will answer that question shortly with the question from the Connétable of St. Helier. I cannot control the speed at which investigation is taking place. The procedure is this: that I ask the

Chief Executive of the Council of Ministers for a report. He has in fact delegated that for good reasons to his Deputy Chief Minister. He then decides how to proceed. He, in turn, has asked the Wiltshire Police, so I am not in control of the investigative procedure, as far as disciplinary matters are concerned.