

2.8 Deputy T.M. Pitman of St. Helier of the Chief Minister regarding his confidence in the Minister for Health and Social Services:

Notwithstanding the recent personal statement of the Minister for Health and Social Services in the Assembly, does the Chief Minister still retain full confidence in that Minister and, if so, why?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur (The Chief Minister):

Yes, I have full confidence in Senator Perchard as Minister for Health and Social Services. The Minister is an enthusiastic and caring man who I know works very hard for his department, just as he works very hard among his other Ministerial colleagues within the Council of Ministers. He has been in this role for 3 months now, having been elected by a majority of Members of this Assembly after he had served for a little over a year as Assistant Minister. He has always been a strong champion of Social Services and as Minister he has driven forward much needed reforms in the area of child protection and has followed all the recommendations put forward by Professor June Thoburn who is an independent chair of the Jersey Child Protection Committee. Furthermore, he is driving forward the proposal contained within the Williamson Report in a manageable way and over a short timescale. More generally he has reviewed the long outstanding proposals contained in *New Directions* and will be bringing forward realistic proposals from implementation and funding of major initiatives such as the care of the elderly. He has also agreed that Social Services will be independently inspected by the Scottish Social Worker Special Agency. This agency will be visiting Jersey in April in order to plan this work. His policy direction is one of prevention and risk reduction rather than reaction to subsequent problems. This is evidenced by his approach to issues such as vaccination and immunisation, as well as reducing the harmful effects of drugs, tobacco and alcohol. He has been very supportive of a dedicated team of staff who often have to work under extreme pressures. As an oral question, I am inevitably constrained by time as to what additional evidence I could produce by way of testimony to Senator Perchard's skill, dedication and enthusiasm; characteristics which surely we can all recognise. The accomplishments which I have cited are merely a snapshot of some of his work which I deem to be particularly relevant and which give me great confidence in him as a Health Minister.

2.8.1 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

A supplementary, Sir. Although it was a secret vote, I have to point out that I did vote for Senator Perchard on the strength of his presentation so I bring this without any malice. Could the Chief Minister say what this says about accountability in the response he has just given? I do not think he is really facing up to the issue.

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

The question asked whether I had confidence in Senator Perchard. I do because the Senator has admitted that he made a mistake. He has apologised for that mistake. He has received comments from me that I do not approve of behaviour such as has happened. But in view of his apology, he committed to learning from that error. I believe that we should accept that apology and that we should take the matter forward, recognising his abilities as a Minister.

2.8.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

As a practicing Catholic does the Chief Minister agree with the words of proverbs 14 verse 17, Good News version: “People with a hot temper do foolish things. Wiser people remain calm”?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

Yes, I do and I try to put that into practice myself and remain calm. Equally I believe in the practice of forgiveness and charity. [Approbation]

2.8.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

I would venture to qualify that and go further and say selective forgiveness and selective charity. But that raises the question does the Chief Minister, therefore, think it is wise to have people who do foolish things in his Cabinet?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

None of us are perfect, myself included.

2.8.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Notwithstanding the skills, the determination and the enthusiasm of the Minister, does the Chief Minister accept that his Minister for Health and Social Services’ remarks on self-harm have in fact damaged the confidence of the public in the said Minister and what steps will he take or what advice will he give to his Minister to restore that confidence which has been so sadly damaged?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I acknowledge that some people will take offence at the remarks that the Senator made and which I regret and which even more so he regrets making. I believe it is up to the Minister to demonstrate by his abilities as a Minister that he can repair that damage and he can indeed work very hard to support those with similar sorts of problems. I look forward to the Minister working even harder now to demonstrate his abilities.

2.8.5 Senator S. Syvret:

Could the Chief Minister provide for the Assembly an estimate in his view of how many modern, respectable Western democracies would retain as a Health Minister in their government a person who advises others to commit suicide?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I do not think it is realistic to provide any such estimates. I have no grounds on which to make that calculation. Fortunately though people do not make a habit of making remarks like that so I do not think it is particularly easy to quantify.

2.8.6 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I just wondered is the Chief Minister completely confident that his Minister for Health and Social Services did not mislead the House in responding to the alleged statements made?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

Yes, the Minister has made a statement and made the position quite clear.