

3.3 Deputy T.M. Pitman of St. Helier of the Minister for Home Affairs regarding arrests for violent crimes related to alcohol

Would the Minister advise the Assembly whether statistics exist for 2006, 2007 and 2008 to illustrate how many arrests/convictions for violence related crimes can be linked to the consumption of alcohol within pubs and nightclubs?

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

Figures are not kept in this form because of the difficulty of knowing where people have been and whether the alcohol which they have consumed in pubs or nightclubs has really caused some difficulty but I do have lots of interesting figures. For instance, so far in 2009, 52 per cent of all people detained in custody were under the influence of alcohol when arrested and 10 per cent were intoxicated, 79 per cent of people detained in police custody for violence or disorder offences were under the influence when arrested and about 18 per cent were very intoxicated. I would comment that there has been no significant change in recent years in the level, in terms of numbers, of violence or disorder occurring in the St. Helier night-time economy but there has been for a number of years and that has been exacerbated in the short-term by an increase in serious violence in St. Helier at night. That is an issue of some concern.

3.3.1 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I am sure that other Members find those figures absolutely shocking. Does the Minister agree that, in light of the reported huge increase in facial injuries resulting from assaults, this area is worthy of some targeted investigation for future response?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

As I have often said in this Assembly, the police do target resources, particularly on a Friday and Saturday night when there is a much higher police presence and police availability. The difficulty is that when assaults have been taking place ... in particular, we have had quite a number of very nasty incidents in recent months. It will be very interesting of course to see what the view is of the Royal Court when it comes to sentencing upon those matters although, of course, I have no influence there at all. But I think we have had somewhat of a blip, if I can put it this way. I have a fairly long experience of this. The general trend for serious violence is up. That is highly regrettable. It cannot be avoided but we then had something of a blip, I think, in a period of 3 or 4 weeks when we had a number of cases. I have met with the parents of one young man who had his leg broken in such an attack and both myself and my Assistant Minister take these matters very seriously.

3.3.2 Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier:

Given the reply from the Minister for Home Affairs about strict resources and trying to get a good police presence on Friday and Saturday night and that it is St. Helier nightclub culture - and most people do come into St. Helier now because all the out of town nightclubs have basically closed down - has the Minister any intentions of working with the Comité des Connétables to get some of their Honorary Police or the majority of their Honorary Police where the trouble spots are on a Friday night? A bigger police presence - Honorary or States - will help. Does the Minister agree and will he be working with the Constables?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

We have just in fact agreed with the Constable of St. Helier to set up a joint working group which will comprise both himself and St. Helier Honorary Police and also States of Jersey Police and Home Affairs. We have realised the point has arrived where we need to do something jointly but this is not simply an issue of police presence. There are major issues which this Assembly will need to address through the Licensing (Jersey) Law. The fact is that we have a nightlife culture which attracts many young people into St. Helier into a heavy drinking culture. Now I do not think that is a healthy thing whatsoever and I think that the time is well due for politicians to take responsibility in this area. Historically, I am not in any sense wishing to criticise them. Historically, the responsibility has been left to a great extent, in the making of policy, with the Licensing Assembly but these are fundamentally political matters. We must decide what sort of St. Helier nightlife we want. **[Approbation]** Having done so, we must then seek to take whatever measures in terms of amendments to the Licensing (Jersey) Law or other things as are necessary. This is an area that I am particularly giving priority to myself but looking at the licensing aspect. I do not want to be knocking the nightclubs and the pubs alone. There are issues there but, on the whole, they are pretty responsible. We have problems associated with people quite deliberately setting out to get drunk. It is a binge drinking culture or sub-culture and you get a situation where people will drink half a bottle of vodka or something like that before they go out on the streets at night. The answer is much too long, I apologise.

3.3.3 Deputy D.J. De Sousa:

Can the Minister inform the House if he thinks it would help to look at establishments and the figures for excessive drinking in those establishments and take action to close them down?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

There have always been difficulties in relation to obtaining successful prosecutions in relation to premises where there is drunkenness and that is partly a difficulty with the law because the effects of permitting drunkenness requires proof that there is knowledge of this. Now I, in the past, have come up with a variety of different ideas and no doubt will be floating some of these different ideas again but there are difficulties there. But I think we have to understand that there are major difficulties associated with the accessibility to alcohol generally; the number of off-licences we have got and how long they are open and things of this nature. We must not just be looking at one area but at the totality.

3.3.4 The Very Reverend R.F. Key, B.A., The Dean of Jersey:

Would the Minister agree that, if perception is everything, there is a perception that St. Helier faces a choice between café culture and yob culture and that for the good of our resident population and the tourist industry we wish to protect and to grow, it must be the café culture and responsible night culture that wins and that is a matter for politicians, community leaders and society as a whole?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

I do, in general, agree with that, although I would not limit matters purely to café culture. There will always be a demand for nightclubs as well but this is the point that I was trying to make rather powerfully, and perhaps getting unusually passionate about, that we must take responsibility for this area as politicians. It is long overdue.

3.3.5 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

The Minister may be aware that Milan has the same problem. The Mayor of Milan solved it by banning alcohol in the city centre. Would the Minister advocate such a response here?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

I think I need clarification as to what was meant by “banning alcohol in the city centre” because I suspect there has not been a wholesale closing down of cafés and other such things. We are not at that point yet. We want to achieve a situation in which people can enjoy themselves but without being in a culture of getting drunk and without being put at risk.

3.3.6 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I stand to be corrected on the figures but, given that I am told that this year police time has included retrieving more than 600 young people reported missing, which I believe relates to just 25 individuals, does the Minister believe that police time is being best utilised and is this having an impact on such matters?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

There is a problem with young people who have been reported missing from children’s homes and the correct figure has been given of 640 instances up to the middle of September involving 25 young people. Now, I want to work with other departments, particularly with the Children’s Service and Health and Social Services. We need to be redesigning work in this area to avoid this sort of situation. It is a massive draw and a massive waste of police time.