

2.15 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the reform of the Children's Service:

Given the multitude of reports on the subject of the Children's Service, what are the Minister's key objectives with regard to reforming the service?

The Bailiff:

I gather the Assistant Minister is to answer this one.

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

I thank the Deputy for his question.

[11:45]

Yes, nothing stands still and since the Care Inspectorate was over early last year the Children's Policy Group has seen an early draft and has pulled together 45 recommendations up to now but when we presented, the other day, to States Members there was a suggestion from Deputy Hilton that we should look at the courts. This will be discussed by the Children's Policy Group. As to the key objectives I think in the reports that have looked into different services there is one overlying issue which is early intervention, meaningful communication and definitely cross-departmental working and I hope to do that with the questioner very soon.

2.15.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

In the report, quite rightfully - and people may gulp at this point - there is praise placed upon the Minister and the Assistant Minister for their energy and enthusiasm which is excellent news. But there are some very worrying comments about the support from this Assembly, about the fact that there is a punitive approach taken by a minority of Members to the service, for example. Would the Assistant Minister explain how she and her team intend to redress this issue and to start getting this Assembly onside and behind the Children's Service?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Yes, it was quite worrying because when I speak to individual Members I find that they have knowledge, and maybe this was not captured by the Care Inspectorate, but there is definitely room for improvement. The Minister, me and the officers have already discussed induction looking across Health and Social Services. Everybody knows what the hospital does. We have had people around the hospital. We need to do exactly the same with Children's Services and we are planning to do that very soon.

2.15.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I have 2 questions here about the Children's Policy Group Improvement Plan 2011 to 2013 and when it says recommendation 25 ... compliance, it has yes. Is it not the case that ... **[recording inaudible]** too expensive and has been abandoned ... **[recording inaudible]** ... and on the following page, page 10, it talks about recommendation 31, which talks about 2 more centres such as the Bridge and N.S.P.C.C. (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children). It says final completion date quarter 1, 2012, i.e. in the next 2 months. Are you sure that that is going to be

achieved, 2 more centres like the Bridge and will be achieved in the next 2 months. I do not believe that is a realistic plan.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Yes, we have taken on more social workers and I am not sure, I will get back to the Deputy, whether that does make us Lord Laming compliant. Yes, I was reading this earlier and we are definitely not going to have another Bridge but we are working closely with the Bridge to improve their services. So, I think, it was being discussed, being on a small Island, we do not need 3 places where they are doing the same work but we do need to concentrate on the work that is being produced at the Bridge and the N.S.P.C.C.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

May I come back with a further question on recommendation 30?

The Bailiff:

Well, I am sorry, then, no, that is another question. Other Members want to ask supplementaries.

2.15.3 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Could the Assistant Minister give us some assurances on the urgency in which they are tackling advocacy for young people because I know when I think back to the Vulnerable Children's Review which I did - Senator Breckon was chair with Deputies Le Hérissier and Southern - it was one of the things we were pushing for and yet we seem to say the same things again and again. Could the Assistant Minister just give us some hope for the future?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Yes, I can. I was at a presentation with the Care Inspectorate and the advocacy provided is from the Youth Service and we are planning - it is in the recommendation - early on in the Service Improvement Plan, to work with the Youth Service to have a dedicated officer for a youth forum which includes all children. I must just say that all these reports were not into Children's Services, they were commissioned by different departments - Education, the Chief Minister - and so the recommendations we have pulled together are high on the "looked after" children and again it does come down to working across all departments for all our children.

2.15.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

Following on from the various reports, can the Assistant Minister explain what discussions are taking place between the Minister for Health and Social Services and the Minister for Home Affairs on the issue of females under 17, who are offenders, being housed with adults at the prison?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

This, again, is one of the recommendations. The Minister for Home Affairs is on the Children's Policy Group and these issues do arise. It was a recommendation from the ... I think it was the Howard League for Penal Reform that recommended this. Again, we need to work together and if it is feasible we do need to do something.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Supplementary, if I may?

The Bailiff:

I am sorry; we are just coming up to the end of time, so I am going to ask Deputy Le Hérissier whether he wants a final question.

2.15.5 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

In reading the report it is very much like the curate's egg; there were some good things, there were some not so good things. The thing that I think will puzzle any reader of the report is its great intentions, a long list of reports, as the Assistant Minister said, but a history of non-completion in crucial areas. What are they putting in place that will stop a repetition of what appear ... in some areas there has been excellent work, but in some areas there has clearly been a false start and there, clearly, is not the right across the board political support to move this forward. What is the Assistant Minister intending to put in place to overcome this?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Well, I think I have already started with the Assistant Minister for Education. We put 4 social workers in schools. I met with him and the Chief Executive of Education who is going to do a dedicated piece of work on what are these 4 social workers doing and are they in the right places. So, as I said at the beginning, it is all about communication, working together, getting the support of States Members and we will only get the support of States Members when we fully get the situation across. There are problems in Jersey, severe problems faced by some families and this has a very, very damaging effect on some children and we need to get that across to everybody. Those are the people we are working with, with the help of Education, Home Affairs, Social Security, I have already met with them. It is definitely a joint effort. I hope that I have allayed the Deputy's fears that while this team is on the case we are moving forward. Thank you.