

2.8 Deputy J.M. Maçon of the Chief Minister regarding the consultation process associated with the terms of reference of the Committee of Inquiry into historical child abuse:

May I begin by thanking the Chief Minister for his written answer to question 4 today? Will the Chief Minister give an undertaking that there will be an official consultation process with a clearly identifiable point of contact to ensure that interested individuals and groups are able to contribute to the Committee of Inquiry into Historical Child Abuse's terms of reference and are kept regularly informed of the committee's progress and if not, why not?

Senator I.J. Gorst (The Chief Minister):

In a written answer I have provided to the Deputy on this subject today, I have given an undertaking that I will arrange for interested individuals and groups to be consulted on the terms of reference for the Committee of Inquiry into Historic Child Abuse before they are submitted to the Assembly for approval.

2.8.1 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Yes, but this question was more so about the process, about how individuals will be updated, what the mechanism will be and who will be made responsible for that process. Could the Chief Minister please respond to that part of the question?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Yes, sorry, I thought it was implied in my answer that I will do just that. I have written yesterday, I believe it was to the Care Leavers' Association inviting them into a meeting so that they are aware of whom the contact person will be. Ultimately what I intend to do, as I have said before, is publish the result of that alongside the Verita terms of reference when I ask the States to make a decision about the terms of reference on the Committee of Inquiry.

2.8.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Chief Minister acknowledge that what is causing great consternation among various groups is the enormous, almost interminable time that this is taking? Could he identify for the House what are the obstacles to achieving a speedy resolution of this matter and setting up the Inquiry, as this is dragging on for an awfully long time?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I do appreciate that and the Deputy makes a very fair point, it is disappointing to me as well. But the Deputy, when he has questioned me on this subject before, has asked me how I was going to ensure that the Committee of Inquiry was appropriate, did not cost tens of millions of pounds and did not drag on for many years. It is a very difficult process to come forward with a Committee of Inquiry which addresses the issues, allows people to have their say and yet, at the same time, does not become a Committee of Inquiry like, for example, the Bloody Sunday Committee of Inquiry, because we are talking about a long period of time. I want to be able to present to this Assembly a terms of reference that I hope everyone is going to be able to support because it is important, in my opinion, that we have a Committee of Inquiry and it is in balancing those considerations that is taking longer than I would have liked.

2.8.3 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Could the Chief Minister tell us when he does intend to bring these terms of reference to the Assembly?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I have intended to be in a position to do so within the next couple of weeks so that it could be debated prior to the summer recess, but Members will be aware of the requests for further consultation that I have received and that the Deputy has articulated, and I think it is right that I

see to that and go through what I hope will be a short process. Some interested Members of this Assembly have already met to consider those terms of reference so I hope that it will not take too much longer. It might be that Members feel that once I am in a position to lodge it, and it is lodged, that they wish to take it in a slightly quicker fashion than Standing Orders allow, so that we can get on with it and have the matter resolved prior to the summer recess.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Deputy Le Hérisssier with his supplementary asked my question.

2.8.4 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I appreciate that the Chief Minister is the third Chief Minister since the origins of this sad and sorry saga began. What I would like to know is what assurances can the Chief Minister give to the victims that the key issue here, which for many is the political holding to account of decisions that were made in the past, will not be watered down or even eradicated? Can he give those assurances?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I believe that I can. One of the difficulties is that including terms of reference along those lines is appropriate but we, as Members, must be aware that when we look at Committees of Inquiry across the world elsewhere, getting to the bottom of those issues in a satisfactory manner can be quite difficult. So it is appropriate to have that term of reference but resolving that issue, in hindsight now 20, 30 or 40 years after an event, can be quite difficult.

2.8.5 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

This is in connection with the last part of my original question. I asked about how individuals and groups will be kept informed regularly. Will the Chief Minister give an undertaking about a process of perhaps fortnightly, perhaps monthly, that an email will go out to interested individuals in order to keep them informed? Because at the moment, the understanding and the communication about what is happening with the Committee of Inquiry and what will then happen, has not been good enough for interested individuals and I hope that we can put a process in place in order to cope with this. Does the Chief Minister agree and will he give that undertaking?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I shall certainly try to ensure that communication is better than it has been in the past. I suppose I have wrongly assumed that statements that I have made in this Assembly are part of that communication process. I think what the recent letter that we have had and the issues the Deputy raised have shown is that that is not a very good communication process and that it should be much more direct.