

4.14 Deputy M.R. Higgins of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the importance of the duty of care to staff within the Children's Service:

What steps, if any, is the Minister taking to facilitate a meeting between the social worker and the vulnerable woman who had a previous offer of a meeting withdrawn or does she consider that there is a higher duty of care to staff within the Children's Service than the vulnerable people they are supposed to support?

Deputy A.E. Pryke of Trinity (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

While I am fully aware of the case that Deputy Higgins refers to, it would be wholly inappropriate to discuss in public the details of any case that could potentially identify an individual. However, on a point of accuracy in the case in question, the meeting was not withdrawn by my department. We have made it clear we are prepared to meet with the individual at an agreed time and location to have appropriate discussions and indeed, as I understand the Assistant Minister gave that offer again 2 weeks ago. What I will say, I repeat my response to the Deputy's written question, is that the Children's Service would and do whatever it is appropriate to meet with vulnerable members of society. Refusal to do so would only be where the circumstances of the individual case deem it inappropriate. I take very seriously my duty of care not just to our patients and clients but to the many staff within the department who work tirelessly to provide that care. That duty does not mean giving priority to one over the other.

4.14.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

The Minister, I think, has chosen deliberately to not answer what the question was about and she is fully aware of the circumstances. The meeting that I am referring to that was withdrawn was a meeting that was offered by a particular social worker to a vulnerable woman who needed to meet with her. The social worker promised to phone her at 10.30 the following day, did not phone her at 10.30 the following day, did never phone her at all, the woman phoned the department and has been fobbed-off ever since. What I am complaining about is her department are doing everything in their power to prevent that meeting taking place to help that woman who needs to understand why the meeting was withdrawn so she can move on to other people. For the Minister to say her department do everything in their power to facilitate this, they have offered lots of meetings with other officers but not with the social worker, so this person can get the answer they want. They are trying to know the answer. Why can you not arrange that meeting and enable this woman to move on?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I am not going to go into specific cases because I have a duty of care, as I said before. That offer was of a meeting with a director and/or Children's Services, and my Assistant Minister, Deputy Martin, did email with a view of a way that we can move forward. That offer still stands today.

4.14.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Where there are situations where for various reasons it is not thought, as appears to be the case here, desirable to bring 2 people face to face, does the department have a procedure where a third party could, in the presence of the 2 other parties, help facilitate the process?

The Deputy of Trinity:

Yes, there are different ways and we will try and get round the different ways as we see appropriate. That was what my Assistant Minister was trying to do at that level, but there are within the Children's Services a range of organisations such as the Board of Visitors, the

Independent Reviewing Officer, the N.S.P.C.C. (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) advocacy service and the guardian through courts.

4.14.3 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Just a follow up. Could the Minister outline the circumstances in which she thinks a third party would be useful?

The Deputy of Trinity:

Wherever way that we cannot find a way forward. But, as I said, the Assistant Minister has offered that and our offer still stands today.

4.14.4 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I am afraid this is another example of the many failings of the Children's Service and the Minister's department. We have already seen, for example, the Scrutiny Committee hearing evidence, including about 3 serious case reviews that no one knew anything about, and people have died before these reviews are taking place. What about all the other people who are being failed by the department? What I would ask is - going back to Deputy Le Hérisier's thing - if the Minister can facilitate a meeting with a third party and the social worker and this woman we can all move ahead and help this family that desperately needs help. Will the Minister arrange that meeting with the social worker and a third party so we can move forward?

The Deputy of Trinity:

First of all I would like to refute what Deputy Higgins says. The Children's Services work extremely hard with other agencies, both voluntary and the community to provide the best possible care for all children in Jersey. It is a very complex case and they do their utmost and they work extremely well with other bodies, and I really refute that. As regarding serious case reviews: that is the independent chair of the Joint Safeguarding Board. I would like to take this opportunity to, and I hope the *J.E.P.* will correct it, that the headline on Friday was totally, totally wrong. As regarding the third party, I am open to, and I will say that again, the Assistant Minister has offered a way forward and I suggest that Deputy Higgins and my Assistant Minister work together to find that way forward.