

4.6 Deputy J.A. Hilton of St. Helier of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the number of children on the ‘At Risk’ register:

How many children aged under 5 years, 5 to 11 years and over 11 years are currently on the “At Risk” register and, of those children, how many are known to reside with parents and carers who are known to the department to have a drug and/or alcohol problem?

Senator A.K.F. Green (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

Jersey has a Child Protection Register which currently has the names of 116 children or young people on it. The age distribution of these children is as follows: 0 to 4 years, 38 children; 5 to 9 years, 37 children; 10 to 14 years, 35 children; 15 years-plus but less than 18 years, 6 young people. There are 4 categories of registration. Parental substance misuse is not currently a category, and I will come back to that in a minute. But the breakdown is as follows: physical abuse, 9 children; neglect, 51 children; emotional abuse, 46 children; sexual abuse, 10 children. The number of these children with parents or carers known to have a drug or alcohol problem is not currently collated as part of the Child Protection Register although it is recorded within the child’s individual plan. I am looking at collating this information separately going forward. As the Deputy knows from her time as Assistant Minister in Home Affairs and Housing, child protection is everybody’s responsibility and I would remind everybody that we all have that responsibility to report any situation where we have concerns about the child. To this end, after this Assembly sitting, I will be reminding Members and, should they need it, their constituents, the contact arrangements if they unfortunately find themselves in this position.

4.6.1 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

I thank the Minister for his answer. One of the reasons I brought this question to the Assembly was because I wanted to draw Members’ attention to the quite appalling case recently reported whereby a 15-month old child was removed from a smoke-filled room while the child’s mother and her partner lay comatose from the effects of drink and drugs. The mother, allegedly, had 43 previous convictions and 4 convictions for child neglect. What steps does the Minister intend to take to address what appears to be quite serious failings in the monitoring of vulnerable children and their ongoing care?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

The Assembly is aware of the difficulties that have affected the Children’s Service and as the Minister for Health and Social Services I have made Children’s Service a priority. A number of legacy issues are still being addressed but progress takes time. Four audits have been carried out, by ex-Ofsted inspectors, who have highlighted a number of critical areas for improvement, both in practice and service delivery. Last year senior managers had to take urgent decisive action to make changes to the organisation, structure and systems in service. There is a service sustainable improvement plan in place and I take this matter so seriously I do not have an Assistant Minister responsible for Children’s Service. I oversee it with my 2 Assistant Ministers myself and I put in place a Service Improvement Board which I wanted an air of not only urgency but independence about it, and I am very grateful that the Chief Minister chairs that Improvement Board for me.

4.6.2 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

Is the Minister able to tell Members how many legacy cases are outstanding and likely to come forward? Also, is he confident ... he told us that Ofsted have reported that there are critical problems in practice and service delivery, how confident is he that the Children’s Service can address these very serious issues in a timely fashion?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

I will deal with the latter first. If I was not confident then I would not be standing here telling Members that we need to make changes. We are making changes. If you look at the Draft Medium-Term Financial Plan, in 2016 we plan to invest £1.9 million in the Children's Service alone. We have improvement plans in place. From memory - but I will come back to the Deputy and Members because I want to be absolutely accurate - I think we have got something like 20 really serious legacy cases but I would like to say there is a question mark on that figure, and I would like to come back to that. But we take this seriously. We have the Improvement Board in place. We have appointed a new director. We are out to appoint a new director of Children's Services and that recruitment is proving to be very difficult and I think that is partly because of the reputation that the Service has had in the media and that is making it difficult to recruit, although will not give up and we will not appoint somebody to this post for the sake of appointment. I want the right person in the post to take this service forward. It is too important to be a mediocre service.