

2015.06.02

4.2 Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré of St. Lawrence of the Chief Minister regarding the Dame Heather Steel report:

Could the Chief Minister provide an update as to when the Dame Heather Steel report will be released?

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

In the terms of reference for the Steel report, the Bishop of Winchester undertook to supply a copy, when he received the report, to the Bailiff, the Dean and the United Kingdom Ministry of Justice. Terms of reference also provided that the report or a summary of its findings would be published. The Bishop of Winchester has not yet supplied the Steel report to the Bailiff, Dean or the U.K. Ministry of Justice so it has not yet been published in summary or redacted form. I will say, however, that I am greatly disappointed that this matter has not been brought to a swift conclusion. **[Approbation]**

4.2.1 Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Just for the record, could the Minister confirm that the Bishop has received the report?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

As far as I am aware that is the case.

4.2.2 Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

For the purposes of fairness to everyone who has been involved, does he think that the report should be released as soon as possible and what measures is he going to take from now, within his powers, to secure the release without further significant delay?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I am not sure that it is in my power to force the Bishop of Winchester to release the report or I do not believe that there are necessarily mechanisms in place. I would have thought that the undertaking in the terms of reference and verbal conversations that I have had with the Bishop of Winchester previously, not necessarily about this report, about openness and transparency, making sure that the way that the church was acting was shown to be open and transparent and was shown to be undertaken in a timely manner would indicate that the Bishop is going to comply, I hope now speedily, with the terms of reference in that report. I should say this is not the only report. We of course then wait for the publication of the Gladwin Visitation report. Once those 2 reports have been published I understand that the Archbishop of Canterbury himself will then be setting up another commission to come and look at the relationship with the church, so this is part of a process and it needs to be got on with as swiftly as possible, and the undertakings in the terms of reference ought to be met as soon as possible.

4.2.3 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

Given that neither of the 2 main witnesses, the church warden or the complainant, HG, were called as witnesses to give evidence or gave evidence, does the Chief Minister agree that the report cannot be said to be a full account of what happened and is itself therefore discredited?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I have not seen the report. I have not been part of the methodology used in the report. The report was commissioned by the Bishop of Winchester in an independent process, so I have got no grounds to accept the comments that the Deputy is making.

4.2.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Chief Minister agree that generally, in the sense of natural justice, one would have expected in an investigation which was looking into abuse of a vulnerable person by the church in Jersey, one would expect both the alleged abuser and the abused person to have been called to give evidence and where that evidence has not been given the report at least must be said to be faulty.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The Deputy seems to be drawing conclusions prior to the publication of the report. I am surprised to hear he does know what is in the report. I suspect he does not. The previous report written by Jan Korris was published, as I understand it, almost instantly that the Bishop received it. That set off a process. That report made claims and accusations that need to be appropriately addressed. I hope that the Steel report, followed by the Gladwin report, is going to address those issues so that the church and the community in Jersey can move forward.

The Bailiff:

Deputy, your question contains a statement which arguably could be criticised for misinformation. My understanding had been that the report was not into whether abuse had taken place but into the processes of the church in relation to the question, which is a different issue. It might not be necessary when looking at the processes of the church to ask the original complainant to give evidence. Is that a shared impression that you have? If so your question does not seem to be quite appropriate.

Deputy M. Tadier:

I am sure your intervention will be of interest but my point is that in the global context it is as a result of alleged abuse that had happened in the church, so globally I think the points are valid.

4.2.5 Connétable J.M. Refault of St. Peter:

I would just like to ask the Chief Minister that given the concern shown by Members here this morning raised by this question, the ongoing concern within the community of Jersey, and particularly within the church community of Jersey, and also in part of the church community within the United Kingdom, there is ongoing concern about the lack of this report being aired and is leaving Jersey still impugned in some regards with regard to the lack of the detail coming out. I would ask the Chief Minister: is he prepared to commit to use his best efforts to try and bring this matter to a conclusion?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I am not the only one who is dedicating to endeavour that the terms of reference are adhered to in the way that was initially understood. I understand that at the heart of these reports are a vulnerable individual and their concerns must always be thought of, and the concerns remain. But the continuing lack of release, a lack of movement, is not helping, I do not believe, anyone or the church importantly, because it is not just about individuals, and ultimately therefore our community to move forward. These reports must be released so that we can all, if we need to, learn. If apologies need to be given they can be given so that we can all move forward.

The Bailiff:

We come to question 3 which Deputy Mézec will ask of the Minister for External Relations. Chief Minister.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I did want to ask this to the Minister for External Relations not the Chief Minister so I would like to withdraw it then.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Can I ask on a point of order again? When did we know that the Minister for External Relations would not be here for question time because if we do know these things in advance we should not be able to put questions to a Minister who we know is going to be absent? It happened last time with a different Minister [**Aside**] ... same Minister in fact and it is courteous for Members to be able to know in advance.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

My experience is it is a jolly good bet that the Minister for External Relations might be out of the Island and not necessarily in the Assembly. I think I am right in saying that the duties of the External Relations Ministry are undertaken concurrently with the Chief Minister and therefore it should not matter whether it is myself or the Minister concerned answering the question. But I appreciate the concerns of the 2 Deputies. I understand that there is a protocol in Standing Orders that when those asking questions make it explicit that they would like to ask the question of the Minister then that question may need to be rearranged accordingly.

The Bailiff:

Greffier, was that notice given in this case? Deputy, on another occasion if you wish a particular Minister to answer the question then may I suggest that you give the Greffier notice. It is more difficult in the context of external relations because the States of Jersey Law does indeed provide that the Chief Minister has the responsibility for external relations as well.