

2016.04.12

4.9 Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for Home Affairs regarding harm reduction as the key focus of Jersey's drugs policy:

Does the Minister consider that the primary focus of Jersey's drugs policy should be harm reduction and, if so, what action, if any, is being taken in this regard in the Island?

The Connétable of St. Lawrence (Assistant Minister for Home Affairs - rapporteur):

I thank the Deputy for his question and interestingly the primary focus of the present substance misuse strategy, which is one of the 3 priorities of the Building a Safer Society Strategy, is in fact harm reduction. Action is being taken in a number of areas in order to ensure that Jersey's drugs policy results in harm reduction. For example, the Alcohol and Drugs Service ensure that young drug users who come into police custody, or before Parish Hall Enquiry, have access to treatment and support before they come into contact with the courts. Substance misuse education is a condition for all young people on a probation order. Drug awareness programmes are available for young offenders at the prison. The Prison Me No Way services, the police, customs, and the prison, conduct joint programmes for secondary school parents focusing on new psychoactive substances. Of course our law enforcement agencies will rigorously investigate offences involving all types of controlled drugs, but with a particular emphasis on Class A, as these are judged to pose the biggest risk to Islanders. The Building a Safer Society ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Connétable, if you could bring your answer to a conclusion please ...

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

Yes, I have done.

The Deputy Bailiff:

... you are well over the one minute 30 seconds that we would generally allow.

4.9.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

Notwithstanding what the Minister has said about much of the good work that goes on in this area, does she not agree that there is a risk that in her department specifically, and I am particularly referring to written answer 13 given today where 665 individuals have been arrested by the police for cannabis possession in the last 5 years, that far too much money and energy gets spent on what is a relatively - and I stress the word and use it advisedly - relatively less harmful drug compared to other legal and illegal drugs that we have in our society, and not enough money is spent on tackling issues where that money could otherwise be used in prevention or education?

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

I would disagree with the Deputy. I have just given examples of where money is being spent advisedly and in fact if the Deputy looks at the recent stats report, there is clear evidence there of how the strategy to reduce the harm caused by substance misuse is working. Of course, the decision, and I think the Deputy is veering towards asking whether cannabis and cannabis products should be legalised, the decision was made by the Assembly recently that it would not support that legalisation. The decision regarding the drugs that are classed as illegal is made by the Minister for Health and Social Services based on the advice of the Jersey Misuse of Drugs Advisory Council.

4.9.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

I think the point is that I do not think that many of the statements that I and the Minister have made today have been mutually exclusive; I would like to think that we are coming from the same direction, which is harm reduction. I am disappointed that a breakdown of costs that it costs to police cannabis in particular in the different domains of police, customs, court times and prison accommodation, could not be afforded, because my point that I am putting forward is that money, which will not be insignificant ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Deputy, could you bring this to a question please?

Deputy M. Tadier:

Yes. My point, and I am asking if the Minister, and the Assistant Minister in this case, would agree is that the very vast amount of money that is spent on dealing with this particular drug, which is relatively less harmful than many other drugs, including cannabis and so-called legal highs, could be spent much more effectively to supplement the already good work that is going on in her department. Would she consider that and take that forward for discussion with her Minister?

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

Yes, I am happy to take that forward and discuss it with my Minister. However, I would reiterate that of course the law enforcement agencies are required to undertake their work and cannabis at the moment is an illegal substance.