

2017.03.14

4.9 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding a service level agreement in respect of funding for Family Nursing and Home Care: [1(165)]

Will the Minister explain why, despite negotiations, he has not yet secured a more detailed service level agreement covering the £6 million of block funding for Family Nursing and Home Care? Will he further advise what engagement, if any, he has had with that organisation's management about using its staff this year to assist the transition to the delivery of home care under his new policy?

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

I am pleased to advise the Deputy and the Assembly that a contract has been agreed and signed by both parties last Friday. My department will be funding Family Nursing and Home Care to the tune of some £7 million. It includes full funding for district nursing, children's services, rapid response, reablement and sustained home visiting. As I have said consistently when asked about employment matters for Family Nursing and Home Care, that is a decision and a matter for the management and the board of Family Nursing.

4.9.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is the Minister aware that some 60 of the healthcare assistants have been put under notice to sign a new contract - with vastly reduced terms and conditions - by the end of March, or face 3 months' notice of redundancy? Does he not think that should this reduce the number of these highly skilled healthcare assistants, there will be disturbance of the 160 people that they care for, as continuity is not maintained?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

I am aware that Family Nursing have put some staff on notice for change of their contract and possible redundancy, but it is entirely a matter for them how they are going to deliver a modern service. This is a changing environment, there is a lot more competition out there for Family Nursing to compete against, and they have to respond to that marketplace. But how they do that - as long as they do it properly, in line with employment law - it is a matter for them.

4.9.2 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

The Minister mentioned there is a great deal of competition out there. Can he confirm whether his department has been talking to other providers of family and home care?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

Not directly, because we have this contract with Family Nursing, but there are other aspects that we do not have a contract with Family Nursing that other services are providing. But they are normally provided directly to the individual, funded by long-term care.

4.9.3 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

The Minister has said, in this line of questioning and in others before, that the employment terms and conditions for those organisations contracted by the States of Jersey, or in particular his department, are a matter for those organisations. Does he not consider it to be both a matter of good economics and ethics that the State should be supporting good employment practices and terms and conditions in the businesses and organisations which they contract with, and that they should not be doing what his department is doing, which is forcing through a race to the bottom which ultimately we will all suffer from?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

I dispute the fact that there is a race to the bottom. The fact is that we have very comprehensive employment legislation in Jersey and I would expect anybody with a contract with Health and Social Services to comply with that. That is exactly what Family Nursing are doing.

4.9.4 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

How can he dispute whether or not it is a race to the bottom when the terms and conditions being offered to these workers are objectively, by any standard, vastly inferior to the ones that they currently have? Does he not think - on a point of principle - that States departments should be able to say: "If we are contracting you to do an important service on behalf of the public, we want you to be treating your workers properly and giving them good security in work, good pay and good terms and conditions" and hope that sets an example across the board, so that all Islanders might, one day, benefit from improved terms and conditions at work.

Senator A.K.F. Green:

As I said, the wage scales, providing they comply with the law, are entirely a matter for the employing organisation.

4.9.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister then undertake to open talks with the management of Family Nursing and Home Care, in order to ensure that continuity of service for the 160 clients, who may be affected by the changes occurring between now and the end of this month and onwards is maintained? Will he seek to maintain continuity of support with family nurses?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

The Deputy knows full well that has already been done and I have given an undertaking that if, by any chance, we do not achieve what we wish to achieve - in terms of an extra component through my good friend, the Minister for Social Security - if we do not achieve that in the time and manner that I hope we will, that we will ensure continuity of service. That has never been in question.