

3.6 Deputy M.R. Higgins of the Chief Minister regarding whether he would investigate measures that would ensure an ‘equality of arms’ for parties involved with the Independent Jersey Care Inquiry to be able to respond to that report: [1(305)]

In light of the States expenditure on public relations consultants, legal representation and civil service time in preparation for the publication of the Independent Jersey Care Inquiry’s report, will the Chief Minister undertake to investigate what measures, if any, can be taken to ensure there is equality of arms for all parties involved with the inquiry to be able to respond to that report?

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

Equality of arms of course is a principle which forms part of the right to a fair trial and does not relate to a public inquiry. However I understand that the inquiry will treat all interested parties equally and provide the report to all parties at the same time, and I will consider any measures which might help support the victims and their families in responding to the report.

3.6.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Will what he is talking about in terms of support include some assistance with ... I believe everyone is going to get 2 hours’ notice of the report, no doubt the Chief Minister will have a range of civil servants or lawyers, each examining probably a chapter of the 500-page document so they can answer questions in no time at all, will the Chief Minister agree to some finance for, for example, the Care Leavers’ Association and others so they can get a similar number of people to examine the chapters so they can ask questions or respond to the report?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

It just goes to show how out of touch Deputy Higgins is with the amount of staff in my department that do this sort of work. I have agreed with a group of interested States Members that one of them, together with myself, Deputy Tadier - I hope he does not mind me mentioning his name - will meet with care leavers and consider these issues about what support and how we might offer support during this particular period.

3.6.2 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Just following up on the last comment on the level of support. Obviously the publication of the report is going to bring back some awful memories for some of the victims of abuse. Can the Chief Minister explain what he is going to do to try and help those who find it a traumatic experience and may need some counselling or assessments in other ways?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I know that these are issues that the Social Services Department are considering and putting in place. I know that some individuals who were entitled to money under the Compensation Scheme were also entitled to support of the nature that the Deputy is suggesting. So some may still have access to that, others may not and others may require more. I know that the Minister for Health and Social Services will look on those requests for more, and this will be part of the conversation that we will have with the point of view that it really is important that individuals are supported through what is going, again, to be a very difficult time for them as their stories are told in the public domain. Some of them for the first time and as they have to answer questions and then they look to life beyond the publication of the report.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I am looking forward to the publication of the report.