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3.7 Deputy J.A. Hilton of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding babies born to mothers with substance abuse issues and their placement on the Child Protection Register: [1(362)]

Will the Minister advise whether babies born to mothers with substance abuse issues are immediately placed on the Child Protection Register and, if not, will he explain why not?

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

Generally there is no single parental issue that means the automatic placing of a child's name on the Child Protection Register. Each case is considered on an individual basis taking into account the risk and protective factors. A child's name goes on the Child Protection Register when a child is considered to be at risk of significant harm and this requires the support of a multi-agency child protection plan to work with the family, to reduce the risk posed to the child. Specifically the Deputy asked me about alcohol or substance misuse. Where concern becomes evident before the birth of a child for reasons of alcohol or substance misuse then a pre-birth pathway where an assessment is carried out on a multi-agency basis, if necessary, and a case conference if required, will be held and the unborn baby can be placed on the register.

3.7.1 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

Numerous studies have been carried out which clearly outline key indicators present in the majority of child abuse or cruelty cases involving drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, poor housing, numerous partners, et cetera. Why does the Minister believe that a parent who like the one whose children were subject to the serious case review published last week, and who presented with a majority of these indicators, does not warrant the closest of scrutiny which would have been provided by being placed on the Child Protection Register?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

I do not think I said that it warranted the child not being put on the Child Protection Register. I gave the outline as to how that might occur. The case that was published recently, the latest serious case review, was back to 2005. I do apologise for what happened in that time and in the intervening years. Three children were not protected as they should have been. Opportunities to intervene were missed and no one can say otherwise. But we now have a new Jersey practice model where we continue to share the way that we work, making sure, for example, agencies are using the same language so there is no misunderstanding. Using the same assessment tools, using the same assessment and planning formats. This makes for a much better effective system for our children and families so they do not have to keep telling different agencies in a different way the same thing.

3.7.2 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Does the Minister not agree that these kind of issues are best prevented rather than reacted to?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

Yes, absolutely. Paramount must always be the care of the child. In the case that we were just talking about, one child is still with the parent under close supervision and that seems to be working well. It is a shame that the close supervision was not there 10 years ago.

3.7.3 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Does the Minister believe our current drugs policy is working if we are not able to prevent these types of issues happening? Would he not agree that perhaps a system where there is more rehabilitative care for drug users might improve the system that we have?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

Our alcohol and drugs prevention programme is working but it is not as thorough as I would like it to be. It is something that we are continuing to work with and why we have, for example, M.D.A.C. (Misuse of Drugs Advisory Council), the council that advises me on the abuse of drugs and alcohol.

[10:30]

3.7.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

With regard to support, does the Minister believe there is enough support being given in terms of resourcing for drug and alcohol areas? Can he confirm that the drug and alcohol budget was cut recently and not increased or maintained?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

I cannot confirm or deny the drug and alcohol budget. What I can say is we have put £5.5 million extra into supporting children. We have nearly doubled the number of social workers. The alcohol and drugs is about rehabilitation. It is also about advising me and officers on the best way forward to ensure that children are kept as safe as possible and that parents are also supported appropriately.

3.7.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

Getting back to the point, is it not equally or perhaps even more important to support vulnerable parents in the first place, perhaps before they even have children if they are struggling with addiction so that we do not get into this situation in the first place? Is there enough being done?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

For once I totally agree with the Deputy. That is part of the 1001 Days my good friend the Minister for Home Affairs is leading on.

3.7.6 Deputy M.R. Higgins of St. Helier:

Following on funding for drug addicts, my understanding is for those who are on the methadone programme there is funding for 100 but 150 people are trying to get on to that scheme. Sorry, some of them are already on it but there is at least 50 who are not and who are trying to get on that scheme. Will the Minister undertake to go and look at that and see about increasing the funding and come back and tell us in this House?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

I will not do the latter but I guarantee to have a look at it and then decide what needs to be done.

3.7.7 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

We have been here many, many times before when serious case reviews have quite clearly pointed out the failings of various government departments. Even the chair of the Safeguarding Board herself said last week: "Some parents, despite their best intentions, will never be capable of looking after their own children", and that was a quote from the chairman of the Safeguarding Board. Does the Minister, hand on heart, really believe that somebody who presents at maternity with a heroin problem is best placed to look after their child when it is born?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

No, I do not, but I cannot undo history. That is why we have the new Jersey practice model where we work with families when it is appropriate to do so, where we have an opportunity to put children on the at risk register before they are born. But you have to allow the professionals to do their work. They have failed on occasions in the past, that is admitted and accepted, and that is what the serious case review showed. We have invested £5.5 million into making that change and I believe the change is coming.