

2017.06.20

3.11 Deputy M.R. Higgins of the Chief Minister regarding the common failings identified by serious case reviews: [1(370)]

Will the Minister advise Members of the common failing to identify to date by serious case reviews and will he explain what steps, if any, he is taking to ensure that lessons have been learned and that there is not another serious case review which will highlight those same failings, and it should say "in the pipeline".

Senator P.F. Routier (Assistant Chief Minister - rapporteur):

Serious case reviews identify a number of common failings. They include assessments that are not detailed enough, poor record-keeping, a lack of understanding of the silent disclosure of abuse, a lack of management oversight and a risk that staff do not respond to changing clients' circumstances. A number of reviews also note the challenges of information sharing and a lack of professional challenge between different agencies. This is not unique to Jersey. A recent review of 300 reviews in England found the same common failings because these are the most challenging issues to address. In saying that, I do not put that as an excuse. It is a matter of fact. We are working hard to improve practice through training, new policies, procedures and legislation and extra resources. We have more social workers now, more family support workers and increased capacity in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub.

3.11.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I know the Minister has said they have put in all these extra resources but at the present time I am still having trouble getting information from members of the department. In fact, I might even add that a lawyer who was working on legal aid for one of the people I am helping waited a year to get information. In fact, that particular lawyer did not even get the information from the legal adviser who was acting for the Health and Social Services Department and in fact it took another lawyer in almost one year exactly later to get some of the information and some of the information is not there. If the department is going to be transparent and is going to make sure that all the failings have been looked at and dealt with, how does the Minister equate that sort of obstruction and other obstructions in trying to get information to help people? What I am questioning is: are any lessons really being learnt, because I do not believe they are.

Senator P.F. Routier:

I am not aware of the detail of the request that the Deputy has made. No doubt when dealing with a specific case it can at times lead to a difficulty for information to be shared. We have to recognise and accept that there are times when information is personal and it is not appropriate to share that. But if the Deputy has a particular question in relation to the work of departmental officers, there is a process to be followed. If the Deputy is having difficulty with that, if he wants to share that with me, I would be happy to look at it, but as far as the sharing of information is concerned, particularly in these circumstances with regard to caring for vulnerable people, it is vitally important that information is treated very sensitively.

3.11.2 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

A previous head of department in the summer of 2015, when reporting on a serious case review at that time, spoke about legacy cases and the number of legacy cases. Is the Minister able to tell Members whether indeed there are legacy cases still outstanding and whether currently the Safeguarding Board is looking at any other child abuse cases?

Senator P.F. Routier:

From having only recently met ... and the Deputy was there at the presentation from the chair of the Safeguarding Board, in her annual report she explained that the situation with regard to safeguarding has improved considerably in the last year or so. With regard to latent cases, I am told that there is nothing outstanding and there have certainly been no reports that are requiring a serious case review for the first 6 months of this year. To my mind, obviously there have been cases put forward to the Safeguarding Panel to look at but there are no serious case reviews which are being put in place.

3.11.3 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Again, referring to one case I was helping with - and it comes down to the information sharing that the Assistant Minister has been talking about - it found that there is inaccurate information with the M.A.S.H. (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) body. He asked the various parties or 2 of the parties to change it. He had a big battle, it has taken years, and it turns out that in the end the document was shared with the panel, which they did not have the right to have because it should have gone through the court first and they avoided going to the court, someone just gave a copy so they discussed it, and it had to be regularised by the court afterwards. When these practices go on, what confidence can the Minister give us that the records are accurate, that people are sharing information and if they make a mistake they will own up to it?

Senator P.F. Routier:

As the opening question was about the issues with regard to information sharing and record-keeping, there has been in the past no doubt a serious matter that needs to be improved upon. What I hope I am able to do today is to give some assurance to the Deputy and to Members that because of all the serious case reviews that we have had in recent years that have been looked at and have identified areas where there has been learning that needs to help us to improve the way we deal with these matters, things have dramatically improved. In saying that, I do not want to give the impression that we will never have a serious case review again, because unfortunately in every community there are times when things do not go right for a family and for vulnerable people. There needs to be the process in place to ensure that we have the right checks and balances and we are able to ensure that we can call people to account and that is the purpose of having all the structures we have in place around the Safeguarding Panel that will ensure that we can do the very best for our community and to ensure that we do enable people to live safely within our community.