

2018.06.26

Deputy R.J. Ward of the Chairman of the States Employment Board regarding the report by The HR Lounge on bullying and harassment in the States: [OQ.70/2018]

Further to the release of the report by The HR Lounge on bullying and harassment in the States, will the chairman assure Members that any recommendations will be adopted as a matter of urgency; and will he explain how the situation will be monitored to ensure the development of a culture in which staff feel safe to voice their concerns?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré (The Chief Minister - rapporteur):

Yes, I can assure Members that these matters will be looked into as a matter of urgency. In a modern working environment the practices highlighted are completely inappropriate and change is essential. I will be asking the new States Employment Board to prioritise these matters and ensure they are remedied, and the importance I place on this is hopefully demonstrated by the fact I have asked, and I think Members have now received, the report to be circulated to all Members.

10.3.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:

May I ask: will there be an addressing of the situation for States workers who may have left their jobs because of bullying and because of the culture that they existed in, and therefore may have lost their livelihoods? Can we look back at that and can you ensure that will be something that is addressed?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Procedurally, I cannot guarantee anything at this stage, but I do take the point made and, as I said, the States Employment Board will be asked to look at this and I am sure, on the basis the matter has been aired, they can therefore address the matter when they do look at it. I would ask obviously the Deputy to make sure that his concerns are forwarded to the new S.E.B. (States Employment Board) when they meet.

10.3.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

May I just lament the late publication of the report to us; I hope that does not set a precedent for this particular Council of Ministers, as it apparently did for the previous one. But, having said that, has the Chief Minister had time to examine some of the alternative ways in which other people deal with this issue and is there a model or are there indicators of successfully negotiating or managing this issue?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Just to answer the initial question, I think I became aware of the matter when it was in the media last week. I received a redacted copy of the report on Thursday, I think along with Ministers. Obviously, I have been out of the Island representing the Island on the British-Irish Council on Thursday and Friday, and I have received an unredacted version of the report, or mostly a complete report, yesterday. So the short answer is I have not had time to fully consider everything on the matter. It is important; it is going to be a very high level of importance for the new States Employment Board; and I can say that there is a plan for implementation being put together and my understanding is that all recommendations are being adopted.

10.3.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The issue I think in terms of whistle-blowing is one of safety and that to my mind indicates one of privacy and confidentiality. Does the Minister consider those 3 factors are the critical ones?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Personally, yes, I do consider them important and, as I said, the whole thing will be a matter for the States Employment Board when they are constituted.

10.3.4 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

With his other hat on, does the chairman of the States Employment Board ... can he assure us that all Ministers are on board with dealing with this problem of bullying and harassment in all departments?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I can certainly give my assurance that I am on board in dealing with the problem and I would be astounded if any Minister was not.

10.3.5 Deputy R. Ward:

Can I ask, as a matter of priority, that one of the changes that is addressed... and I would give an education example but I know they exist elsewhere in the States. In the informal disciplinary policy a head teacher can both bring the informal disciplinary and then decide upon the outcome, giving themselves what can only be called an existential dilemma as to whether they know they are right. Can we please address that as a matter of urgency as a suggestion?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Again, a matter for the States Employment Board and I am sure they will take that matter into account. What the Member is saying appears, on face value, to make absolute sense, but it will be a matter for the Board when they consider it.