

**5 Deputy T. Pointon of St. John of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the Positive Behavioural Support Team: [OQ.20/2019]**

Will the Minister advise whether the Positive Behavioural Support Team is currently unable to provide support for children with learning difficulties due to staffing shortages; and if so, what action, if any, will he be taking to address this as soon as possible?

**Deputy R.J. Renouf of St. Ouen (The Minister for Health and Social Services):**

The Positive Behaviour Support Service is a small but very valued and effective service and, as a result, it is in considerable demand. In April last year, one of the 3 staff members moved on leaving significant capacity issues on a temporary basis. Despite 2 waves of advertising, the recruitment process to the vacancy took longer than anticipated due to the difficulties in recruiting to this very specialist position. During that time, however, services for children already on the case list were fully maintained. Children referred after April 2018 continued to receive advice and support but capacity for detailed assessment and intervention support for those children referred after April was temporarily not possible. Adult cases were prioritised due to an assessment of the risks presented. However, I am pleased to advise the Assembly that a new staff member has now been recruited and all services are currently provided once again, including full services for children.

**3.5.1 The Deputy of St. John:**

It is an established fact that vacancies are being held open across the States. Is the Government that claims to be committed to the idea of putting children first being fair to stressed families with children with learning difficulties by denying them crucial support in order to save money?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I can assure the Deputy and the Assembly that this post was not held over and was not a money-saving exercise. The post was advertised in 2 waves; 2 waves of advertising on-Island and in national publications. But those waves did not lead to any applicants who met the criteria for a very specialist role. There was a third advert inserted, which produced 2 international candidates who were both interviewed and, as a result, the new staff member has been recruited from that wave of advertising. So it did take some time but it was always sought to recruit to the role.

**3.5.2 Deputy M.R. Higgins:**

Can the Minister give us some indication in terms of numbers, the number of children who are and are not being catered for because of the lack of availability of the staff?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Thank you to the Deputy for his question. I have a figure of total persons supported, which were 90 referrals last year. The service began in 2001 with just 13 referrals so it has grown over its existence. I do not have a specific number for children. I can revert to the Deputy should he wish that specifically.

**3.5.3 Deputy M.R. Higgins:**

Just again, following up on the Minister's statement at the end, I would like him to get the information showing the figures and publish it to all Members, not just myself, and explain how many people have been unable to take advantage of the system. You mentioned the 9 people, we need to know those who have been denied access to this service.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Yes, I will obtain the figures for those referred to the service because the children were still referred and were receiving advisory help. It is the further detailed work that was temporarily unavailable, so I can certainly advise all Members of the number of children referred. We operate as a department so of course there were other areas where we were able to support these children. For example, the child development centre would have given them assistance, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, paediatricians, family nursing or educational psychology areas, all those services continued to be available to children in need.

#### **3.5.4 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Does the Minister believe that the provision of this service is adequate for the need for the service? If not, what direct action is he taking to increase the provision to meet the obvious need?

#### **The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I am advised that when fully staffed at 3 persons this team is able to support the need within the Island. But I am also advised that the team do train many other staff ... of any other States workers involved with children's work on understanding challenging behaviour. So all that is going on to ensure that there is a greater support throughout the States workforce.

#### **3.5.5 Deputy S.M. Wickenden of St. Helier:**

Are there any plans to increase the number of staff in this department to cover such areas like holidays or sickness or, if there is any increase in the need, are you looking to recruit a fourth member to this team?

#### **The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I think the situation is monitored all the time. But at the present time there is not any recruitment process for a fourth member of the team but that will be kept under review.

#### **3.5.6 The Deputy of St. John:**

Given that we are now 7 months into this new Assembly, why has responsibility for the service we are referring to, and also that of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, not yet passed to the Minister for Children, Young People, Education and Skills?

#### **The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

That is a very pertinent question and work continues to go on in both departments as to how this may best be arranged for the members of the public involved. This perhaps illustrates some of the difficulties in that we have a small service, which is providing a service to both adults and children because that is the training of those specialists. To divide that service simply based on an age-criteria may not work. These issues are being grappled with as to the wider issues around the mental health issues. Again, very difficult because those persons who are practising in that field are medical staff and very often there are serious medical issues involved. All I can say to the Deputy is that there are ongoing determined discussions to try and work out these issues.

#### **Information subsequently provided by the Minister for Health and Social Services:**

1. 21 children were referred to the PBS service during the time it had limited capacity to provide its services to children.

2. There are currently 7 children and 10 adults on the waiting list for a behavioural assessment. A number of these have been allocated to the newly appointed Behaviour Advisor.
  
3. Of the 90 referrals in 2017, 45 were children and 45 were adults.