

2019.10.22

12 Deputy M.R. Higgins of the Minister for Home Affairs regarding the manner in which the States of Jersey Police dealt with cases in which people were unable to secure help from mental health professionals and who therefore contacted the Police: (OQ.264/2019)

How does the States of Jersey Police deal with cases in which people, who are unable to secure help from mental health professionals to respond to a family emergency, are instead required to involve the police, by making allegations, in order to ensure that the family member who is mentally unwell is taken into custody to receive the care they need?

Connétable L. Norman of St. Clement (The Minister for Home Affairs):

Demand for mental health services across the Island continues to grow. The Government is responding to this growth in demand by increasing investment into mental health services. The police and wider criminal justice system increasingly find themselves dealing with mental health cases that transcend both health and criminal justice. These can be particularly challenging and complex cases with many facets. The States of Jersey Police work closely with a range of partners through a range of forums when dealing with apparent mental health incidents, to ensure the most appropriate response for the individual, the family and the wider community.

3.12.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Obviously my question was asking how they deal with it. We have families who are being asked by the police, when they contact the police, are being told: "There is nothing we can do, unless you make an allegation against the individual." People have been making allegations simply to get mental health professionals involved through the police. What is the attitude of the police with regard to these allegations, which are not accurate, but are being made simply to get medical assistance?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Any allegation of a criminal offence will be dealt with depending on its own circumstances. There is no policy of dealing with criminal offences. If there is a criminal offence reported to the police, the police will investigate it and deal with it appropriately.

3.12.2 Deputy J.H. Perchard:

Can the Minister confirm whether members of the police force are given any training in the identification of mental health issues and any support when having to handle individuals, who are clearly suffering from a mental ill health episode?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Yes, significant training in all these areas is provided to the States of Jersey Police. In fact, the States of Jersey Police, as far as mental health is concerned, has sadly become the service of, not only last resort, but the service of first resort, and that is why - I see the Minister for Health and Social Services - the Government is investing significant sums into mental health facilities, so that everybody can access the services that they need and not simply use the expedience of the States of Jersey Police.

3.12.3 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

This is obviously a situation, which is not one the police want, I accept that, but we have a situation where families are withdrawing the complaints after the person has been detained and are getting medical attention and yet the police, or the prosecution service, are pursuing them and yet there is not a genuine complaint. I wonder whether we are serving our community well by forcing trials, for a start having trials on matters where people are not going to give evidence against the person; they were seeking help. Does the Minister think it is satisfactory that people have to go through this and they have to go through the court process, just to deal with mental health problems?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

If that were the case, of course it would not be acceptable. But the reality is that the police have to, if the police have a complaint of a criminal allegation, they have a duty to investigate it and they investigate all complaints of criminal activity fairly, properly and without fear, or favour.