

2019.04.30

14 Deputy T. Pointon of St. John of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding respite care for children with severe special needs: (OQ.99/2019)

Further to his response to Oral Question 79/2019 and given the link between traffic emissions and respiratory illnesses, will the Minister advise what steps, if any, are being taken to remove polluting traffic ...

The Bailiff:

Deputy, you have hopped on one, question 15 you are asking of the Minister for Health and Social Services.

The Deputy of St. John:

Sir, I was under the impression that we have been restricted, I do apologise. I will ask the Minister ...

The Bailiff:

You might be restricted.

The Deputy of St. John:

Will the Minister advise whether the department is planning for respite care for children with severe special needs to be delivered directly by his department, rather than through third-party providers and, if so, whether that is due to difficulties in staff recruitment within the private and charitable sectors? Will he assure the Assembly that the provision of such care will become more regularly available as a matter of policy?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Sir, I will ask my Assistant Minister, Senator Mézec, to answer this question.

Senator S.Y. Mézec (Assistant Minister for Health and Social Services - rapporteur):

It is already the case that respite is and will continue to be delivered by both the department and other parties. There has been a reduction in capacity available from private sector and community and voluntary sector providers, due to 2 providers withdrawing from the children's short-breaks market and recent procurement has not been successful in securing the volume of support required. Children's Services is, therefore, developing its provision to be able to flexibly meet the needs of the children with the most complex needs, to supplement the current limited capacity of the approved providers and ensure there is enough capacity to meet the assessed needs of families. The challenge of staff recruitment for providers in the private and voluntary sector is, without a doubt, one of the key factors, which is limiting the capacity they can offer. It is an ongoing issue and is multifactorial, influenced by the current high employment rates in the Island and the relatively low salary levels for this sector, in comparison to other sectors, and availability of training to ensure that staff meet the requirements for regulation of care that are being introduced. I can say that Ministers and officers are shortly meeting with key community partners, to identify the challenges and consider how we address these. The department understands the importance of short breaks and respite for children with complex needs and their families. It is an area of priority and is part of the work the department is undertaking to develop early help services and support.

4.14.1 The Deputy of St. John:

Given the length of time that this difficulty has been apparent, why have not discussions with the private and third-sector providers commenced before now and what will be the objectives of those discussions when they do take place?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

It is the case that at the end of last year there was a consultation with service users and those who work in the service to look at what could be done to redesign the service. This was introduced in 2014 and the number of children that benefit from it has substantially increased since then. It is right that we look at whether the service is adequately meeting those needs and work out if anything needs to be redesigned, so that those needs can be targeted better. We have been in the early stages of seeking out providers under this new system and we are encountering problems, as has, I think, been well reported. We will be meeting on 14th May with people who are concerned about this, to look at what we can do to improve this. But, I accept that it will be very difficult, because problems of recruitment are difficult, I think, in many areas.

4.14.2 The Deputy of St. John:

Would the Minister agree that there would be a positive influence on recruitments within the private and third sector if employers were required to offer a living wage to their staff?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

That is absolute music to my ears; I absolutely agree with that. I think that, as a Government, we absolutely should be promoting the best working terms and conditions and pay for employees who do, what I would consider and, I think most would consider, to be a very challenging job. I think those people ought to be shown respect and supported in those jobs, to make it an attractive place to work in and, certainly, I would want that to be part of any discussion involving these sorts of careers.