

2020.07.13

11 Deputy K.F. Morel of the Chief Minister regarding not sharing STAC minutes: (OQ.203/2020)

Why are minutes of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell or official advice from the medical officer of health not shared with either States Members or the public?

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

I do thank the Deputy for his question because it allows me to clarify the position, but obviously, as well, it does form part of Deputy Pamplin's debate later on in this sitting, so I will keep the answer short. We are very happy that the S.T.A.C. (Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell) minutes and papers are released. That was established in the terms of reference that were published on 3rd June, which was added to the code of management strategy. We welcome the intent and direction of P.88 and we do anticipate that the S.T.A.C. minutes, supporting papers and advice minutes will be published soon. It is worth making the point that the medical officer of health advice has been regularly available to States Members and the public. The medical officer of health, Dr. Susan Turnbull, the deputy medical officer of health, Dr. Ivan Muscat, and the medical director and chair of S.T.A.C., Patrick Armstrong, do participate in States Members briefing and media engagements regularly and are very well received. So there has obviously been direct access to members of S.T.A.C. but the point, going back to the minutes, is that they will be published publicly soon.

3.11.1 Deputy K.F. Morel:

I thank the Chief Minister for his answer. Would the Chief Minister confirm whether advice from S.T.A.C. and from the medical officer of health is provided in an official written format? To my knowledge, neither Scrutiny nor the public have received official advice in a written format. Rather when it has been provided it has been in a more informal format.

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

In terms of in a particular format, S.T.A.C. advice is supplied in general to the Minister for Health and Social Services. I believe it may have also been at times provided to the Minister for Education. I can certainly say that I have seen at times the advice provided to the Minister for Health and Social Services and it is in the form of a formal letter.

3.11.2 Deputy K.G. Pamplin of St. Saviour:

The Chief Minister recognised the chair of the United Kingdom's equivalent, S.A.G.E. (Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies), where the chair of that, Christopher Vallance, explained that that board has no role in the delivery of the N.H.S. (National Health Service) or any services. Obviously the equivalent set-up during this pandemic, as we know now as S.T.A.C., is very different. Will he be undertaking a review of how the Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell has been put together at the earlier convenience?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Without going into all the details, I think the general set-up in the U.K. is different to ours. Do not forget as well, we are dealing with a small if not perfectly formed community over here and, therefore, we have different pressures and different resources. What I will say is that I remain absolutely satisfied that the S.T.A.C. in Jersey have performed exceptionally well in providing their advice to us. Certainly as Chief Minister, and I know ... well, I cannot speak for all the Ministers but I know I do speak for the Minister for Health and Social Services. We remain absolutely satisfied with

the advice we have been receiving and I can adhere to that advice all the way through. In terms of looking forward, I am sure we will be holding some meetings next week to look at areas identified, lessons we can learn and planning for towards the end of the year. Therefore, I am sure we would be looking at structures. In the longer term, I have got no issues with looking at the structures and seeing if there is stuff we need to change. What I would say is that even though we are low risk and low numbers, now is not the time to change a structure that has been working very well to date. I am very happy in the longer term to see if there are any lessons we need to learn and then look at that, for the sake of argument, at the beginning of next year.

3.11.3 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Given that the advice is provided to the Minister for Health and Social Services in a written letter, would the Chief Minister commit to the Assembly to request the Minister for Health and Social Services to provide those letters to Scrutiny so that we may see the official written advice as presented?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

The position I am in is that I have got absolutely no problems with that going to Scrutiny, and the reason I just pause is it is my understanding that at the very least some of that correspondence - I cannot vouch for all of it - has already been provided to Scrutiny, is my understanding. I am very happy to be corrected if that is not the case and we would obviously make sure that is rectified rapidly, but my understanding is that quite a lot of that information has already been shared.

The Deputy Bailiff:

The Deputy of St. John has rejoined us and so, while it is fresh in our minds, we will go back to the supplementary question on question 9 that he was asking the Minister for Health and Social Services with regard to family therapy.

The Deputy of St. John:

Just to explain, there was an image of Deputy Higgins' access hiding my mute button, so I could not get back in if I wanted to. I have had to completely go out and come back in. My supplementary is this, and thank you for inviting me to offer it. Given there are a number of qualified family therapists practising in the Island, why have the courts not agreed terms with those practitioners as they have so done with interpreters, both skills being deemed essential where needed for the best interests of the parties concerned?

The Deputy of St. Ouen (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

The Deputy's question is why have the courts not agreed terms. Is that the case? This is a service that is largely delivered by C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills). As I understand it, if an assessment is made and a clinician agrees to treat then that service is made available to those people who need it. I am not aware of any barriers and I suspect that the Deputy's question arises out of a constituency issue or perhaps some personal knowledge he has obtained and if he wishes to come and speak to C.Y.P.E.S. or to me about any specific concern we will try and iron things out. But I regret I cannot help the Deputy any further on a generalised discussion of the subject.

The Deputy of St. John:

I have to confirm it was a constituency issue.

The Deputy Bailiff:

You can take that up with the Minister in the way that he has suggested if you wish.

The Deputy of St. John:

I most certainly will that do that.