

21.03.02

1 Deputy K.G. Pamplin of St. Saviour of the Minister for Children and Education regarding the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the implementation of the recommendations of the Independent Jersey Care Inquiry (OQ.34/2021):

Will the Minister update the Assembly on the impact, if any, that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the commitment made to address the recommendations of the Independent Jersey Care Inquiry and its follow up report in 2019?

Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour (The Minister for Children and Education):

I thank the Deputy for his question. The commitment to the recommendation to the Care Inquiry, as laid out in P.08/2017 have not changed and therefore the commitment is still there. Of course various workstreams have been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, I am pleased to say that some other workstreams have still managed to progress, despite this. The Deputy will be aware of the progress being made by the Youth Parliament and, of course, I believe last week I was able to announce the e-learning module on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has rolled out across the Government for States Members and for staff. There are other workstreams which will be coming to the Assembly this year, so I hope that gives comfort to the Deputy that the commitment remains.

3.1.1 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

I thank the new Minister for his answer. I am more interested in what has delayed. Can the Minister address the first part of his answer there and give us an outline of what work has been delayed, what extra work and effort will be put in place to get that back on track?

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

As you know, there are about 8 different workstreams coming from the Care Inquiry as well as the follow-up report. For example, things that will be coming to the Assembly are around things like the Corporate Parenting Board where there will be a framework in order to give duties on the States and Ministers, for example, and establish that in a firm legislative framework. That has been delayed but we are pressing through with that. For example, there are other aspects, such as the indirect incorporation of the U.N.C.R.C. (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child), which again has been delayed but we are now getting that back on track. I am happy to write further to the Deputy if he has any specifics which he is concerned about.

[9:45]

3.1.2 Senator S.Y. Mézec:

When it comes to recommendation 7 from the Independent Jersey Care Inquiry, can the Minister tell the Assembly whether he considers the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic a greater risk to fulfilling recommendation 7 or is the greater risk the political commitment to fulfil it from his ministerial colleagues?

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

One of the key ways in addressing recommendation 7, the "Jersey Way", is to progress the public sector's ombudsman. We had that debate through an amendment in the Government Plan last year and the amendments were successful. That work is progressing so there is work going forward on that particular recommendation.

3.1.3 Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Of course that was not the only part of recommendation 7, there was substantially more to it than that. Does the Minister feel any confidence that his Government colleagues understand the seriousness of addressing recommendation 7 and the “Jersey Way” and does he believe he will have the full support of Government Ministers when it comes to implementing its recommendations, not least of course the recommendation on the separation of powers, which is fundamental?

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

There have been several debates in the States Assembly because the Care Inquiry recommended further consideration of these types of matters, and the Assembly itself has continued to consider this particular aspect. I know, for example, previous Chief Ministers have brought propositions to the Assembly, and the current one, which ultimately have been unsuccessful. This matter will continue until the Assembly is able to resolve the matter.

3.1.4 Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier:

With regards recommendation 6 around corporate parenting, what is the Minister’s view and what he sees as the notion of corporate parenting and what it means to us? What has progressed in this area to enable this recommendation to be enacted upon?

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Yes, this manifests itself in the Corporate Parenting Board and the aspect around that will be that there is legislation coming to the Assembly to put that on a statutory footing. Of course that is about putting responsibilities and duties on Members and officers within the government, so things like a duty to disclose; all those types of things will be wrapped up in that legislation, which will be coming forward.

3.1.5 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Does the Minister have a date for that legislation? Can he summarise how that will improve the safety of our children and ensure that our children are genuinely put first, as the Government has claimed to do?

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

I do not have a date with me today but I am happy to respond to the Deputy with those types of more detailed questions.

3.1.6 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

The Care Inquiry had quite a lot to say about the lack of affordable housing for children in relation to poverty and creating a precarious situation, which was not helpful for children and families. Despite the States decision in 2018 to end the discrimination against children being able to be part of a family renting private property in Jersey, the decision still has not been brought forward by his colleague, the Minister for Social Security. Will the new Minister for Children and Education be putting pressure on his fellow colleague to make sure that this is brought to fruition so that recommendations can be brought forward in a timely fashion?

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

As he says, I believe this is a workstream which, in the Government Plan, is due to be worked on by the Minister for Social Security this year. I am happy to take the Deputy’s point away and have discussions with my colleague in order to accelerate that, if needed.

3.1.7 Deputy M. Tadier:

Would the new Minister for Children and Education give an undertaking to make sure that this happens? He is the Minister for Children and Education and if, at the end of this term, this piece of work is not done then I think it reflects badly on him and the whole of his Government.

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

I am more than happy to talk to the Minister for Social Security because I believe it is the legislation that sits under her, under the discrimination law. I cannot give a commitment if something is subject to the approval or rejection of the Assembly. But of course I am happy to work with my colleague, Deputy Martin, in order to bring that to the Assembly for debate.

3.1.8 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Returning to my original question, the things that are delayed by the pandemic, will the Minister be looking at extra resources and funding to ensure certain things will be achieved in the last year of this political term, including C.A.M.H.S. (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services), which is part of his remit.

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

There is quite a considerable amount of resource to these various workstreams in the Government Plan. It is about making sure that officers have the time because now that a lot of the pandemic issues are obviously relaxing it just means that there is manpower in order to progress different things, such as the legislation. As for the matter of C.A.M.H.S. I can definitely give the Deputy the assurance that is now a standing item on my Minister for Children and Education agenda. We also now have the Deputy of St. John appointed who specifically has responsibility for C.A.M.H.S. The Deputy is absolutely right, we know that mental health across the board has obviously been largely increased due to the pandemic, *et cetera*, so, yes, this is a big issue which is definitely on one of the highest points of my radar.