

22.04.25

9 Deputy K.G. Pamplin of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding improvements to support and remuneration package for HCS staff (OQ.63/2022)

Will the Minister advise what consideration, if any, has been given to improving the support and remuneration packages for Health and Community Services staff in light of the immense pressures under which they have worked and served the Island in recent years and the public recognition they have received during the COVID pandemic?

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

As the Deputy will know, the question of remuneration packages for staff is a matter for the States Employment Board and I cannot speak for that board, but I do have information that all H.C.S. pay groups have settled for 2022. The nurses are in the second year of a 2-year deal; other groups are in a one-year deal. For 2022, all groups have accepted a 2.9 per cent rise in salary. Nurses have had an additional day's leave before March 2022 and another day's leave after. All other groups have received one day's leave in the year and a £500 non-consolidated payment has also been made to staff. The question also asks me about support for staff, and that I can talk about. I am very pleased that during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic approximately 74 per cent of H.C.S. employees received a physical and psychological well-being check and follow-up well-being checks and other support has continued. We also have a bespoke digital well-being pack for all H.C.S. employees and spiritual support has often been delivered through our chaplaincy team. There are regular mindfulness sessions and the COVID-19 Bailiff's Fund awarded in 2020 enabled a new H.C.S. well-being team to continue delivering one-to-one psychological therapy for H.C.S. employees. That was particularly to reflect on their experience of responding to COVID-19 and there is a rolling programme of mindfulness, resilience, anxiety management and sleep strategies for all H.C.S. employees. In January of this year, a director of culture, engagement and well-being was appointed within H.C.S. A programme of culture and engagement work is being rolled out that specifically focuses on recognising and rewarding employee achievements.

3.9.1 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

I thank the Minister for his detailed answer and some pleasing news in there. In spite of the things he mentioned, of course, some of them were put in place because of the COVID-19 pandemic. What is his impression and his final message to staff to make sure these things are not reactionary but they become part of a way of life so people can have the support they need under challenging future demands?

[10:45]

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

As shown by our appointment in January of a director of culture, engagement and well-being as a permanent post, that shows that H.C.S. is taking seriously the well-being and support of its staff and this is not just a single COVID issue.

3.9.2 Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Does the Minister ever have an opportunity to hear directly from workers for Health and Community Services about the reasons that many of them may feel under pressure and what remuneration package they are given and how that affects that? Would the Minister further accept that it is all well and good talking about well-being and support for anxiety and all the rest of it, but often the

cause of that anxiety is the troubles people face in their lives trying to pay their bills? Would looking at that not be a more appropriate thing to do?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Yes, I do sometimes receive emails or have spoken to some members of staff about pressures, rarely I should say about their remuneration packages. I imagine for that they would pass their concerns through their unions and professional bodies to negotiators and that will be dealt with at the States Employment Board level. Of course, our staff and, indeed, all staff in the public and private sector will be feeling the stresses and strains of the present time, the inflationary pressures, and we need as a community to support those who are vulnerable in our society. I would want H.C.S. to play its part in that, but it is a wider Government role and something that across the Island we must not just forget about the vulnerable people, and even if not financially vulnerable, which the Senator might be meaning, those who might be emotionally vulnerable through the stresses of work. Because I do recognise many H.C.S. staff have over the last 2 years especially been put under tremendous strain and stresses, and I commend them for their response. They have maintained health services. We have rarely had to seriously limit what is available. We are in a good position in the light of COVID and that is down to our hardworking and diligent staff, and I thank them tremendously.

3.9.3 Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Does the Minister ever hear the feedback that I know I and certainly others hear from healthcare workers that the cost of living in Jersey when measured against their remuneration package they believe does not compare favourably to other jurisdictions? Does he believe that that perception may have something to do with levels of retention in his department?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

The Senator referred to healthcare workers so I thought by using that phrase he was extending it into the private sector, but he did refer at the end of his question to my department. No, my understanding is that the remuneration levels of employees in H.C.S. are on the whole generally better than the N.H.S. (National Health Service) but, of course, the costs these staff face in terms very often of accommodation or living costs are the greater. That often makes it difficult to retain people who come to Jersey, attracted by a financial package, a greater financial package than they might otherwise earn in the U.K., but costs are greater. That is recognised as a concern. Insofar as concerns the wider sector, healthcare, yes, it is an area where pay is often low, but I do know that those organisations that pay well and provide pensions and good sickness packages and the like, they tend to do better in the recruitment and retention of their staff. I think that shows that where employees are valued and their worth is recognised, because clearly caring for people in the community or in any setting ...

The Bailiff:

I have to ask you to bring your answer to a close.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

... is a difficult job and needs to be properly rewarded.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

May I check we are quorate first, Sir?

The Bailiff:

Yes, I think we are quorate.

3.9.4 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Thank you, Sir, I just thought I would ask. I am pleased to hear of the proactive stance that the Minister has taken on this matter, but is he concerned that the appointment of a director for culture, engagement and well-being may be seen by many Islanders as just another layer of management being brought in as an answer to a problem? Will that director of culture, engagement and well-being be assessed for the success of their role? Will it be assessed on a reduction in staff turnover?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I feel I cannot win sometimes because I am either accused of having too many managers or if there is a problem why have I not appointed a manager to deal with it. So this is a person charged with a specific responsibility but who works with the executive team, but with all teams in H.C.S., to deliver and ensure that there is proper engagement and well-being is cared for. I do not know, because that would have been a matter for that person's terms of employment, as to how results are monitored, but certainly this is an active programme within the executive team and we will certainly be looking to that director to improve the situation. One measure may well be the levels of retention of staff.

3.9.5 Deputy K.F. Morel:

With many human resource professionals on-Island, can the Minister confirm whether he was able to fill that role, whether the department was able to fill that role, with an on-Island candidate?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I will need to come back to the Deputy on that if I may. I cannot be certain.

3.9.6 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour:

The Minister mentioned hospital chaplains as part of the support offered to staff. Are these chaplains in demand from staff and are they able to meet the demand along with their duties to patients of the hospital, and are these chaplains remunerated, please?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

They are remunerated and they do an excellent job looking after both patients' needs but also staff needs. As to the balance between patients and staff I do not know, but I am not aware of any particular pressures that they have voiced. They are a valued member of the team. I am sure they would work well and pass on their experiences and any concerns about service to everyone within H.C.S. working on well-being.

3.9.7 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

The chaplains, it sounds like a wonderful service for those who have religious beliefs. Is the Minister aware of humanist chaplains and, if he is not aware, would he agree to look into some information that I might be able to send him with a view to having a service for those who have non-religious beliefs who would not feel comfortable accessing a religious chaplain?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I should stress that the chaplaincy team would seek to work with anyone who might need their services, not simply those who might express any sort of spiritual belief. Their services are available

to all. I do not know anything about humanist chaplaincy services and I would be pleased to pass on any information to our team that the Deputy may wish to forward to me.

3.9.8 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Minister agree that the stark reality for many healthcare workers who might be thinking of coming to Jersey is that they look at the package being provided and they think 40 per cent of my gross income is going to go to my landlord, perhaps more, 20 per cent of my income is going to go to income tax perhaps, roughly, about 6.5 per cent of my income is going to go to social security, but that is okay, I will have 33 per cent of what I earn left to pay for the increasingly high utility bills, the food costs in Jersey and perhaps some travel back and forth to the U.K. or elsewhere if I need to? Does he agree that setting up a director of well-being is probably a good thing to have as an ancillary service but it does not deal with the core issues? When we have something like Locate Jersey, which we pump lots of governmental money into to help the wealthy, the super wealthy, relocate to Jersey ...

The Bailiff:

Deputy, it is supposed to be a question to the Minister for Health and Social Services from within the Minister's portfolio, and it is turning into something of a political statement. So perhaps you could focus it into a question, please.

Deputy M. Tadier:

By way of analogy, we have something called Locate Jersey, which we pump lots of money into from the taxpayer to help those who probably do not need the help to locate here so that they do not have to pay much tax, whereas in reality we need key workers in the Health Department. Could we set up something similar to Locate Jersey but just for essential health workers, et cetera, so that they can be given help to find appropriate, cheap, affordable accommodation to allow them to stay in Jersey and lead fulfilled lives working for us?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

We do provide a relocation package and assistance is both financial and practical in helping staff move to the Island. Accommodation, as the Deputy has said and I absolutely accept, is a huge issue for many, not so much taxation. Most employees find themselves paying less in tax when they come here than they did in the U.K. Yes, this is an important part of the government workforce strategy that we need to house our essential key workers and we need to make sure that we can retain them here on Island. That is about having accommodation available that is affordable to them. It is an ongoing issue which Governments will have to tackle for some time in the future.

3.9.9 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

I thank Members for joining on this question. The recent results of the N.H.S. staff survey sadly was not unexpected and there are echoes that we have seen here in Jersey, so my final question on this matter to the Minister for Health and Social Services is: will he say today how grateful we are for all their services but they must be supported going forward in more ways than we are doing right now?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Yes, I will absolutely echo the words of gratitude by the Deputy. We are grateful for how not just H.C.S. staff but all public sector workers have brought the Island through the last 2 years. The Government has put measures in place to support staff and I think one of the things we as a community, and that will include us as States Members, must bear in mind is that when we are

critical of other politicians and the policies that we have not been able to deliver, perhaps in the view of some, and about service delivery, that can upset staff. That can demoralise staff who are doing their very best to deliver a service. When they hear at a high-level services are being trounced as rubbish when they are not rubbish, that will demoralise them. So I think we have a part to play in making sure we use appropriate language and targeting any criticism, acknowledging always the hardworking nature of our public service.