

2.12 Deputy M. Tadier of the Chief Minister regarding the recommendations made by the Independent Jersey Care Inquiry: 1(402)

Before I start, may I ask if you are content to remain in the Chair in the regard that one of my supplementaries may stray into talking about the separation of powers? If you are happy with that, then I, also, am.

The Deputy Bailiff:

This is a question and answer session in which no decision will be made by the Assembly in ordinary business.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Thank you, Sir; I just wanted to check. Does the Chief Minister accept all of the recommendations made by the Independent Jersey Care Inquiry and if not, why not?

Senator I.J. Gorst (The Chief Minister):

I am grateful to the Inquiry for its work and for the recommendations made. Yesterday I committed myself to acting upon the report and delivering the recommendations. It will, however, be for this Assembly to collectively determine if it accepts the Inquiry's recommendations, not solely a matter for me alone. We will have an opportunity to start discussing this on Thursday. I will, in due course, bring to the Assembly a detailed assessment of each recommendation and the resource implications for approval.

2.12.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

I appreciate the Minister, like all of us, will have had limited time to read through, although I know, no doubt, he will have already started work to digest the recommendations and he will, no doubt, have his own thoughts. Would he give a global assessment of the recommendations, whether he thinks that they are what he expected? Does he think that they are reasonable, on the face of it? That does not, obviously, negate any further detail that he may give on Thursday.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The Deputy knows that, in the executive summary document, there are 8 global recommendations. They seem to me sensible, reasonable and I think that this Assembly and our community can get behind them. Underneath those 8 global recommendations are 600 recommendations. They are going to take more time for all of us to understand how we can deliver on them and what mechanisms we need to put in place, in order to deliver on them. One of them, for example, says that children in our care, children should be loved. I hope that nobody in this Assembly would not accept that recommendation. The challenge will be how we ensure that those children in our care ... we are their parents, in law. Every single Member of this Assembly is a parent of those children. How are we going to love them, as if they were part of our family? It is that detail that will be more difficult and need much more work on.

2.12.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I hate to come down to such mundanities, but I think I noticed a marked hesitation on the Chief Minister's part last night, when he was interviewed specifically and asked whether Haut de la Garenne should be knocked down. It certainly symbolises much of the past. Will the Chief Minister commit to doing just that?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The Deputy knows that the Inquiry said that, in order to deliver on the recommendations, we needed to engage with the community and get buy-in from the community and consult with the community. I dedicated myself, yesterday, to doing that and engaging with care leavers around

what they want for that particular recommendation. If care leavers and the community agree, I will absolutely support it. I think it is a good recommendation. I think that on that site we could build a new building for the benefit of the young people of our Island into the future, but I am mindful that one of the themes throughout this report is that we must listen to what those who have suffered want. We must engage, right across the community, rather than just going off and delivering what we think is best. That is what I am committed to doing.

2.12.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

It is all very well for the Minister to talk about consultation, as he often does, but consultation takes enormously long times. Does his desire to consult on all 600 recommendations mean that nothing will be done, in the traditional Jersey way?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

We are just short of 11 months until an election. I believe I will be judged on whether I have given my wholehearted support to endeavouring, to the best of my ability, to deliver on these recommendations.

[11:00]

I believe the whole of this Assembly will, likewise, to be judged. Now, detailed work needs to be undertaken upon how, as I say, some of those recommendations will require practical application: what money will be required, what people will be required. That detailed work has to be brought back to this Assembly for approval. I am proposing that it is brought back after the summer recess, probably in October, in a detailed Children's Plan, so that this Assembly can approve it. That is the right process. I am dedicated to delivering on these recommendations.

2.12.4 Deputy R. Labey:

The full report is going to take time to read, let alone implement on many of its recommendations. But the most worrying statement is that children in the care of the state are still at risk. That cannot be left to take time to remedy. What confidence can the Chief Minister give us that that will be addressed immediately? Can there be an independent look, outside of the current Civil Service, an independent look, at Child Services in the Island?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The report says that children may still be at risk. That is unacceptable. I am not prepared to accept it. The report, I think, accepting that none of us in the Assembly have had time to really understand the detail of the 800-page document, but I think that the panel came to that conclusion, because of the work of the Interim Social Services Director. Her name may be in the public domain, but I will not refer to it. The 4 independent audits that she requested to be undertaken, and it was agreed by the then Minister for Health and Social Services and myself that they should be undertaken. Those audits, in 2015, showed that Children's Services were not providing in the way that every Member of this Assembly would wish them to be providing. I believe that that is why the panel said children may still be at risk. Since that time, millions more pounds have been spent in Children's Services. They are redesigning the way that they deliver services. If Members want a detailed briefing of the work that has been undertaken since those audits - like setting up the Children's Improvement Panel, like bringing in independent people from the United Kingdom to challenge officers on that panel -then I am happy, as I know the Minister for Health and Social Services will be happy, to do so. Independent inspection ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Chief Minister, if you could bring your answer to a close, please, because you are 20 seconds over the normal allocated answer time.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I do apologise, Sir. I accept entirely the panel's finding that we need to have independent inspection in legislation.

2.12.5 Deputy R. Labey:

Can we see the audits to which the Chief Minister refers?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Those audits are already in the public domain. They were submitted, as evidence, by the Health and Social Services Department to the inquiry.

2.12.6 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I appreciate it is early days and so it may take longer to think of these issues, to see what the clearest way forward is. The report talks quite a bit about the Jersey Way and how, for many people in this Island, both now and historically, there have been attitudes towards the States of Jersey, its institutions, its politicians and its Crown Officers that have meant many people do not trust the States, or like engaging with it. Recommendation 7 talks about addressing this issue. Does the Chief Minister share my concern that, in going to consultation on many of these recommendations, it would be important to attempt to address that element of recommendation 7 in an early stage, so that ordinary members of the public will have confidence that these consultations are worth taking part in and will achieve good results? Does he accept that part of recommendation 7, which talks about looking at our institutions and reforming them to make sure that the public can have confidence that they are dealing with things in an objective way and where vested interests take no hold in them?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

It is not often that the Deputy and I agree, or his party and I agree, but when it comes to reforming our institutions, to make them fit for purpose into the future, because I value them, we do agree. I think that the publication of the report, yesterday, is a continuation - for members of the public I think it is a start - of seeing a cultural change in how our institutions will respond and react to those stories. It has been a difficult journey. I ultimately think we will not deliver on those recommendations as an Assembly unless every Member of this Assembly commits themselves to taking the amount of time it is going to take to read and consider this review and really try and understand and listen to those stories. I think it is that that will galvanise us into action. For me, the Jersey Way, as described in this report, is about having appropriate oversight, having appropriate independent review, appropriate challenge of systems ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Chief Minister, could I ask that you bring your answer to a close? You are again over the one minute 30 seconds.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

It is that that this report helps us to start to address.

2.12.7 Deputy M. Tadier:

Throughout the report there are criticisms of a lack of investment both financially and in terms of political will, both now and in the past, when it came to Child Services. Indeed, in 6.3,

Ministers who served with the Chief Minister, including former Senator Le Marquand, the Minister for Home Affairs, said that the priority of the States was, and remains, the maintenance of a low tax status. Similarly, Senator Kinnard, when she was Minister for Home Affairs, said that legislation relating to the finance industry would definitely take priority over other types of legislation. Given these facts, does the Chief Minister acknowledge that there is a stark choice to be made; that is whether or not the Council of Ministers and he sees his prime job as maintaining Jersey as a low tax, low spend jurisdiction, without sufficient funds to fund these services properly, or whether we have properly funded, modern, valued services, which cost money and require political will to achieve?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Of course these services cost money. That is why we produce the M.T.F.P. that we did, reprioritising current expenditure. We know that departments underspent last year. We know that income is greater than expected. We are in a position to be able to properly analyse the financial cost of delivering on the recommendations and having the ability to say: "Yes, we are going to allocate the money. We are going to recruit the people to deliver on these recommendations." I think we are in a unique position, the day after this report is published, to work together, across the Assembly, because despite the temptation for political divide, I think that the Member that has asked this question and his party agrees with me that it is really important that we now work together to deliver on these recommendations. I think he is committed to it. I am committed to it. Let us deliver together.