

2024.12.10

**3.1 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity of the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs regarding the Youth Justice Strategy (OQ.246/2024):**

Further to her response to Written Question 95/2024, and the anticipated launch of the Youth Justice Strategy during the summer of 2024, will the Minister advise why the strategy has not yet been published?"

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat of St. Helier North (The Minister for Justice and Home Affairs):**

I thank the Deputy for the question. The Youth Justice Strategy has taken a significant time to finalise for a number of reasons and there has been a significant amount of work undertaken this year. In redefining the strategy to align with the Building a Safer Community, as indicated we would, in answer to the previous Deputy's written question, it became clear that a number of changes were needed. Ongoing discussions with stakeholders indicated that there were concerns that the strategy was too aspirational and not represented of the challenges in the existing youth justice system. While the strategy clearly and rightly sought to shift the focus towards prevention, it became apparent that the strategy needed to also focus on understanding current challenges and addressing these concerns. The strategy was redrafted in October/November of this year to address concerns and to ensure it was representative of the current system and aligned with the wider Government's priorities. I delegated responsibility for the strategy to my Assistant Minister last month as he has responsibility for children and also would be able to jointly do that, so it made sense. A private Scrutiny briefing has since been held and a few further amendments were suggested. I am pleased to say that I have the final draft in my hand, which we hope to publish in January.

**3.1.1 Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

I thank the Minister for her answer, but could the Minister outline exactly what has been changed to this strategy since December 2023; put another way, since the last Government had a strategy that was about to be published?

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

I cannot give a finite appraisal of exactly what has been changed. However, as I stated, it was quite aspirational. There are limits within some of our criminal justice systems in order for us to be able to necessarily work through the strategy as it was. I appreciate that the Deputy says that it was ready to go in the previous Government. However, the Government changed at the end of January and the co-ordinator, who was employed at the beginning of the year for the Building a Safer Community, has needed to work, as the responsibility for the Youth Justice Strategy has moved to that individual. It was important that that individual had an ability to be able to work with the strategy and all the key stakeholders. That is why it has taken longer to facilitate having it ready to roll. As I said, I have the final draft, which landed with me on Sunday afternoon, and I have literally read over it once and I will be focusing on that, and it will be completed by myself this week.

[9:45]

**3.1.2 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:**

The Minister mentioned in both answers what is aspirational. Would the Minister give examples what aspirational things were cut out from the draft of the strategy?

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

As I stated, I could not tell you exactly what has and has not been removed. What I will say is that the youth justice system is going to be that all partnerships will work together and, from my perspective, we have to have a system whereby we feel that we are able to achieve those objectives of what that strategy says. If the strategy says that no children should end up in the criminal justice system it is therefore not possible to do that if we have not got all of the areas that we are able to do to prevent that from happening. We need to do a lot of work to be able to put preventative measures in so that the young people do not end up in the criminal justice system.

### **3.1.3 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

It is very interesting that the Minister cannot give a specific example because when we are talking about aspirational, or ambitious at least, I would like to have some clarity. What does it mean in practice when we said it is too much?

### **Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

We can all be aspirational however we also have to be able to achieve what we want to achieve in a given period of time. It was clear that there were a number of elements that had been withdrawn from the system. For example, all of the work that was done within schools had been removed in not the previous Government, but the previous Government to that, and so we did not have, for example, Prison! Me! No Way! Therefore we then reintroduced it under the previous Minister for Home Affairs, which I am very pleased occurred, because we need to be able to provide young people with education in relation to what is and is not right, and also we need to be able to balance that with achieving our aims, which is to keep young people away from the criminal justice system as much as we possibly can.

### **3.1.4 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:**

In the Minister's initial answer she said that one of the things that needed to be achieved with the strategy was to align with wider Government priorities. Can she say in what way the previous strategy was not aligned with Government priorities?

### **Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

As I have stated, the priority is that young people are kept out of the criminal justice system and that young people, particularly children, are put first in the whole of the system. If we have a system whereby we have not got the resources and we have not got the elements in place to be able to achieve those aspirations then the system will fail. If the system fails then we are failing young people. From my point of view, it was identified through all of the stakeholders' inputs that some of those things may not be achievable. The stakeholders had further opportunities for feedback, and just as an example I will give you a timeline. As from the beginning of January ... from early 2024, the strategy was shared with stakeholders and a stakeholders' meeting was held in May to discuss strategy, and there was excellent engagement. They then were asked to prioritise their actions and revise what they thought was achievable and to rate that achievability, bearing in mind there is no extra funding. So the concerns were raised by some of the stakeholders that some of those things they would not be able to achieve. As I said, we have 18 months in which to achieve things and it is not appropriate, in my point of view, to put in things that we cannot achieve.

### **3.1.5 Deputy J. Renouf:**

I thank the Minister for that answer, which is quite interesting. She seems to be saying that the strategy should only reflect what is achievable, for example, around youth justice,. Can she explain why it is not the other way around, that the strategy tells you what needs to be done and drives the change you need?

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

I do not disagree with what the Deputy is saying, however as I said, to me if you are going to create a strategy you create a strategy in consultation with the stakeholders and what those stakeholders think is achievable. If you create a strategy which stakeholders say they do not believe that they are able to achieve, then surely that is of a negative impact.

**3.1.6 Deputy H.M. Miles of St. Brelade:**

Could the Minister be quite precise about what it was that stakeholders said they could not achieve?

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

As I said, there were some concerns raised in some of the ability to deal with young people who ended up in the criminal justice system. Therefore, we needed to have things in place to be able to deal with those young people if we had to.

**3.1.7 Deputy H.M. Miles:**

I am not sure my question was answered. Could the Minister be precise about what it was that stakeholders said they could not achieve?

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

As I said, there are elements of the strategy which deals with the young people and then they go into the criminal justice system. There are things within the criminal justice system in which they may not have been achievable had we remained with the strategy as it was.

**The Bailiff:**

I think the question was those things that were said by stakeholders that they could not achieve.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

This goes back to May, and I have not got that long a memory.

**3.1.8 Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

The Assistant Minister for Justice and Home Affairs at the last States sitting said that he could not say how many children have been held criminally responsible for their actions between the age of 10 and 14 in the last 3 years, and what have been the consequences. Would the Minister be able to answer this question?

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

I would not be able to give figures in relation to this without prior notice because obviously this would be a matter I would need to get stats from the States of Jersey Police. Therefore, I cannot answer that question.

**Deputy T.A. Coles of St. Helier South:**

May I raise the défaut on Deputy Alves please?

**The Bailiff:**

Yes, Deputy, the défaut is raised.