

23.06.13

7 Deputy R.J. Ward of the Minister for Children and Education regarding the on-Island facilities for children needing emergency care (OQ.113/2023)

Will the Minister advise what developments, if any, have been undertaken in the last 3 years to improve the infrastructure for on-Island facilities for children needing emergency care under the Minister's care?

Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North (The Minister for Children and Education):

Thank you, Deputy, for his question. Between 2020 and 2021 there were limited developments due to the pandemic and various other matters. I found when I was elected into the role that we do not have sufficiency in the system. It was a Government Plan bit and vote of this Assembly, thank you, passed and allowed us to progress. Since January we opened 2 new junior residential homes in St. Helier for 4 children. I also have further property, which when refurbished will provide homes for 3 children, and this is underway. The capital and revenue budget are in place and I anticipate a therapeutic home will be provided on the Island in 2024. We are progressing with the site and plans. On top of this, we know that we have early intervention services which support children and families through the Hub and Government investing £6.5 million in the social care reform programme this year, which includes the priority of providing loving homes with other work streams.

3.7.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:

The original question was about children needing emergency care. Can I ask the Minister, the facilities that were mentioned in that answer, will they be available for emergency care, which may mean that for a significant time they will be empty?

Deputy I. Gardiner:

Thank you, Deputy, for clarification. We need to understand that emergency, it means emergency. During the last 12 months we did receive children in care or we needed to move them in an emergency situation on 21 occasions. From 21 occasions we have 3 when we need to provide emergency accommodation. One emergency accommodation resulted in 31 days and 2 others within 2 months. What we are doing, we are increasing sufficiency within the system to make sure that we have enough places as demand increased. On top of that we are working with the foster provision because some of the foster provision will be suitable specifically for this emergency accommodation. From 21 occasions that we had during the last 12 months, 3 that we needed to put in emergency accommodation, the other side we had sufficiency.

3.7.2 Deputy R.S. Kovacs of St. Saviour:

Partially the question was already answered what I wanted to ask. Can the Minister expand on what is the process when children need to be accommodated like that on very short notice and how much capacity there is for short-notice accommodation?

Deputy I. Gardiner:

Emergency, it means that it can come the night before, that foster place sadly is broken or the family circumstances change very rapidly and we have been notified that the children are at risk and we need to take the children in. It would be police notification or it would be a call decision. When the call decision was made it was very clearly stated to the court what type of provision is available and how we are going to proceed. The first instance is we are checking what we have in place, if it is best to foster, if it is with relatives within the family that can provide a secure place. It is going through

the head of service, from the head of service it is going to the associate director and from the associate director it is going to the group director responsible for the children. It is going through all procedures to make sure that we looked at all possible options before setting immediate emergency accommodation.

3.7.3 Deputy R.S. Kovacs:

If the Minister does not know the figure now, can she look into providing a figure of how much availability there is for children in care, it is having the number?

Deputy I. Gardiner:

I will try to give some numbers that they have and I will try to address. First of all, we have 6 homes that offer accommodation, 2 homes offer short breaks, 2 homes offer supported accommodation for young adults, say, over 18. The majority of our children - 45 per cent of the children - are in foster care, 19 per cent in connected carers and 19 per cent in residential care homes, both on and off the Island.

3.7.4 Deputy A. Howell:

I was just asking the Minister if it is her ambition that we will probably hope not to send children off Island for placements in the future.

Deputy I. Gardiner:

I thank you for the question. It is my ambition to provide as many placements on Island as possible. But saying this, because we are a small jurisdiction it will be almost impossible to provide very specific, very specialised support that is available in the mainland. We will not be able to care for every circumstance. Something that we need to consider sometimes is the family circumstances will impact the decision but, as a general principle, I can give an example, from 20 options that we had children coming in and out of the care, we have a few, I am not allowed to mention the number but it is a very low number in the last 12 months that we had fewer than 5 per cent of the Island. The intention is to try to do everything possible to bring children to the Island. I am in discussion with my officers, when we have some children which are placed off the Island, how we are making sure that they may be stabilised and they are coming back to the Island when they can enter our provision here. The last point, therapeutic children home that were on the plans for years, it was raised before my term as a Minister, it was a previous term and now we are progressing with this. We would have therapeutic children home some time next year, it depends on the planning and we need to go through the process to make sure that we are providing therapeutic spaces here as well and not sending off the Island.

3.7.5 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Can the Minister give us her assurance that with developments that are planned for cases where there are emergencies, that we will not end up in a position in future where vulnerable children are housed in unregistered properties which are deemed to fail to meet official standards of care?

Deputy I. Gardiner:

Since it has come to my attention, I am working with the Children's Commissioner and Care Commission. We have meetings and discussions of what the framework needs to be in place to meet the standards. Because what is happening, we need to be very clear, the emergency accommodation that needs to be in place in very short notice will struggle to meet the children's homes settled requirement. What we need - and it is important to have in place - and this is what we are working,

that it will be framework prepared for emergency accommodations that currently is not in place but it is developed and it will be in place to make sure that we are meeting the standards of the Care Commission.

3.7.6 The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

Can the Minister confirm whether or not foster carers are able to hold full-time employment, apart from their fostering duties?

Deputy I. Gardiner:

Thank you, Connétable, I need to double-check this. I know that there are different arrangements with different types of foster carers because there are some foster carers full time, there are foster carers who are in the system for different arrangements. I will be happy to provide follow-up information to the States Members.

3.7.7 The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

My understanding is that it is indeed the case that foster carers may hold full-time employment. When the Minister has confirmed that or not, will she advise the Assembly, please, how that is conducive to emergency placements?

Deputy I. Gardiner:

Absolutely, yes, I will provide a full answer for the Connétable's question. Thank you.

3.7.8 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Given that emergency placements do include going off-Island and there has been recent criticism from the U.N. (United Nations) about our lack of certainty over those placements, can the Minister reassure both this Assembly and the Island that those issues will be dealt with as raised but we are listening to those criticisms and that we will not, as was suggested by one person, one advocate, face another Care Inquiry in the future over these issues?

Deputy I. Gardiner:

Thank you, Deputy, for raising this. Because I am listening and I am in intensive work with the Children's Commissioner making sure that all these concerns will be addressed and work in very intense in progress to make sure that everything is in place. First of all, to bring as many children back to the Island, to make sure that we have enough sufficiency and to make sure that when the children are going off the Island they have all necessary provision. Just as a matter of fact, every placement of the Island is rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted. We are checking every placement and social workers are checking monthly what is happening with our children off the Island. We are working, we are listening and we know that we need to improve. We are not perfect but we are in the journey.