

2024.09.10

2.15 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the improvement of women's health services (OQ 168/2024):

Will the Minister provide an update on his work progressing the improvement of women's health services, including termination of pregnancy?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet of St. Saviour (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

I wonder if the Deputy would be minded to allow me to pass that over to my Assistant Minister, Deputy Howell, who is responsible.

The Bailiff:

Yes, very well.

Deputy A. Howell of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity (Assistant Minister for Health and Social Services - *rapporteur*):

Thank you to Deputy Doublet for her question. We have an action plan for progressing improvements to women's health services that I will be sharing with the Women's Health Political Advisory Group later this month and then with Scrutiny. New criteria for access for funded I.V.F. (in-vitro fertilisation) services have recently been published and I would like to thank everyone who helped to shape these criteria, especially Deputy Stephenson for bringing the initial proposal to the Assembly. But these criteria will only come into effect from 1st January if the Assembly approves the necessary funding for the Government Plan, and I urge them to do so. The recently refurbished maternity unit is now open, which includes the dedicated midwifery-led unit. There is also a counsellor, mental health specialist nurse and a breastfeeding specialist. We are listening to feedback from Jersey Maternity Voices, a group of service users, who provide continual service improvement feedback. The findings of the recent survey on contraception services will be published later this month and the findings of the women and girls' health and well-being survey will be available as part of the Jersey strategic needs assessment in quarter 4, 2024. We continue to progress plans to provide an opt-out breast screening service as opposed to an opt-in screening programme by early 2025. This will ensure that every woman is automatically invited to a screening appointment at the right time. With regard to the termination of pregnancy, there is an active review of fees under way. With the Minister's support, I have determined that terminations should be free of charge for those under-18s, full-time students under 21 ...

The Bailiff:

Assistant Minister, I am sorry, you are well over the time normally allocated for a Ministerial answer. Can you bring your answer to a swift conclusion?

Deputy A. Howell:

Yes. We have other things that we are doing to improve women's health, especially we are going to try to get the gynaecological ward up and running again. Thank you. But I will carry on and let everybody know.

The Bailiff:

Just as a reminder, Ministerial answers should be no longer than ... or any answers should be no longer than one minute and 30 seconds. Sometimes people stray over that and there is an element of leeway afforded by the Chair, but there has to be a limit.

Deputy A. Howell:

I apologise, Sir.

The Bailiff:

No, not at all, it is an ongoing learning process. Yes, a supplemental question.

2.15.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I thank the Assistant Minister for her answer. In a letter to my Scrutiny Panel in July, the Minister stated that he was unable to commit to deliver wholesale legislation change in the area of termination of pregnancy due to limited resources. Could the Assistant Minister explain where the resources that were previously allocated to this work have been reallocated to?

Deputy A. Howell:

I thank the Deputy for her question. I am very sorry, I cannot say exactly where the resources have gone, but we are continuing to make improvements to women's health.

2.15.2 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter:

On 21st June, the Minister for Health and Social Services was quoted in the media as saying he was trying to get resources to get the full review and update on the Termination of Pregnancy Law back on track, yet recent communications with Scrutiny show that this has not been achieved. Can the Assistant Minister detail what steps were taken to try to secure resources and why it has not been possible?

Deputy A. Howell:

We are trying to do our best with the resources we have and we just have to prioritise what we can.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

I am not sure that answered the question. What steps were taken to try to secure resources?

Deputy A. Howell:

Discussions are ongoing.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Can I have a supplementary?

The Bailiff:

You can ask a supplemental question, yes, indeed.

2.15.3 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

What resources would be needed to get the work back on track, please?

Deputy A. Howell:

I think we would need a greater amount of money in the Budget.

2.15.4 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

What risks were identified by not bringing forward the new law as previously planned and what mitigation, if any, has been made to deal with those risks?

Deputy A. Howell:

We were not able to do that and we are prioritising what we can with the funds and resources available.

2.15.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Assistant Minister mean they were not able to identify the risks of not bringing forward this legislation?

Deputy A. Howell:

We prioritised, Deputy Tadier, what ...

The Bailiff:

Through the Chair, please.

Deputy A. Howell:

Sorry. Thank you, Sir. We prioritised what we absolutely needed to do, which included the fact that ... I will read it to you. We are drafting instructions to allow all women in Jersey to have access to termination in Jersey as opposed to just those who are ordinarily resident for 90 days, and that will be issued imminently.

2.15.6 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Could the Assistant Minister commit to ensuring that information relating to this area will be prepared in advance of our next Scrutiny hearing so that the questions can be answered fully, including how much money and resources would be required to fulfil the requirements of this policy area?

Deputy A. Howell:

Yes. Thank you.