

2016.06.14

### **3.10 Deputy M.R. Higgins of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the provision for the safeguarding of vulnerable children and adults: [9492]**

Following the publication of the Children's Services' Independent Audit reports, what confidence does the Minister have in Health and Social Services' staff and the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub to provide the service required by the Island to safeguard vulnerable children and adults?

#### **Senator A.K.F. Green (The Minister for Health and Social Services):**

This report was commissioned by my department and I accept that some of it made disappointing reading. However, it sets an important baseline to work from. There is little point in investing, as we are, £5.5 million employing 20 extra social workers unless we can be sure of where we want the services to be and the difference that our investment is making or made. As a member of the Sustained Improvement Board and having spoken directly to members of Health and Social Services' staff over the past 12 months, I am confident that staff are committed to the protection and safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults in Jersey. We are progressing with improvement of services in line with the improvement plan. With regard to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, this multi-agency team is made up of staff from different partner agencies who are progress-reviewed regularly via the M.A.S.H. (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) Oversight Group.

#### **3.10.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:**

Is the Minister not concerned though by the number of serious case reviews that we have had, one after another, repeating lessons that we are told have been learnt but have not because they keep on coming up? Also, with the Mary Varley report or this independent audit that was conducted in February of 2015, how confident can he be that we have learnt the lessons and we are going to change things?

#### **Senator A.K.F. Green:**

I am very confident that we are moving in the right direction. The serious case reviews in the main are historical and we do need to learn lessons. One of the biggest lessons in there is the record keeping and the sharing of information and an I.T. (Information Technology) system has been commissioned to achieve that. I am absolutely confident. The Mary Varley report, as the Deputy referred to, said quite clearly that no child was at risk as a result of some of the downfalls. But it also said - and this is very important to me - that we must work much more closely with the children. We must hear the voice of the child in particular and I am going to ensure that happens.

#### **3.10.2 Deputy J.A. Hilton:**

Can the Minister confirm whether the interim head of social workers and safeguarding was relieved of her post a few weeks ago? Considering the importance of this role, has the post been filled and whether the Minister has had any success in finding a permanent replacement instead of an interim post?

#### **Senator A.K.F. Green:**

I am absolutely delighted to be able to tell this Assembly that all the directors now have been appointed and offered permanent posts. They are not all in place yet but every single directorate within the service now has an appointed director, some of whom are in posts, some of whom are arriving, so we have moved on significantly. In relation to the first bit of the question, I am not aware that any director was asked to leave. I am aware of resignations though.

#### **3.10.3 Deputy M.R. Higgins:**

Unfortunately, I do not have the same confidence that the Minister has in this particular area. I also believe, just adding, that the head of governance has already just left as well recently. The reason why I do not have confidence in this sector, as the Minister well knows, is that in 2 of the cases I have been helping we have had problems, one where defamatory statements have been made. Before the Minister tries to criticise me on this case, there is documentary evidence to show that the statements made by that director were false. Secondly, we have a system where the multi-agency hub has in the past failed to carry out its job. When it has been pulled up on it and is supposed to go through a particular process to try and rectify matters that have failed, have broken the Data Protection Law in order to try to avoid going back to the court and telling the court that it had fouled up. So, how can the Minister tell me that he has great confidence in this department when they make defamatory statements which are definitely false and there is written evidence to show that it is defamatory and agencies are covering up what they do, rather than admitting their mistakes?

**Senator A.K.F. Green:**

I am not going to rise to the Deputy's bait. I will never convince him that the service is moving on, that things are improving. As far as I am concerned, it is the service that is provided to children and vulnerable people that is important. I am not going to enter into slagging matches and correct him on some of his absolutely false statements. Incorrect statements, sorry, not false. Incorrect statements. This service is a service that has been under-invested in for years. The previous Minister started to improve that. I have continued with that investment and the staff have worked very hard, I think, under very difficult circumstances sometimes in order to try and provide a service. We need to invest. That is why we are putting £5.5 million in. That is why there are 20 extra social workers. That is why I am delighted to be able to report to the Assembly that we have, not interim, but permanent directors in place. This service is going forward, this service is going to provide the improvements that our young people deserve and have every right to expect.