

2.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier of St. Saviour of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding a possible conflict between the role of Senator Perchard as Assistant Minister in charge of Children's Services and his membership of the Chief Minister's Advisory Group relating to the Haut de la Garenne affair:

Does the Minister consider that any conflict exists between the role of Senator Perchard as Assistant Minister in charge of Children's Services and his membership of the Chief Minister's Advisory Group relating to the Haut de la Garenne affair?

Senator B.E. Shenton (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

As Minister for Health and Social Services I am ultimately accountable for ensuring that the children in our care are safe and free from danger. I have delegated responsibility for social services to Senator Jim Perchard in whom I have complete confidence and I do not feel that his role on the Advisory Group conflicts him in any way. In fact, I believe the opposite. Can anyone imagine what it was like to be within our care system when the Island was subjected to the media frenzy following the discovery a child's remains earlier this year? Can you imagine the psychological damage potentially caused by stories of mass murder, mass graves and torture chambers? Can you imagine the effect on former residents who were led to believe that they were perhaps lucky to be alive? As Assistant Minister responsible for children the Senator is in a position to provide valuable input to the group.

2.1.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister not acknowledge that he has utterly missed the point, and that it is the role of the Assistant Minister to remain utterly independent of what is going on elsewhere and not to be identified with a body which looks increasingly like an official spin?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

I am very sorry that the Deputy feels that way about the advisory body. The Advisory Group was to provide advice at a time when we needed input from the people in positions who knew what was going on. The Senator was in a position to know what was happening in the children's service at that time and provide valuable input to the group.

2.1.2 Senator S. Syvret:

Does the Minister for Health and Social Services not consider that his position and that of his Assistant Minister is palpably absurd? There can be no other functioning democracy on the face of the planet whereby the politicians with responsibility for child protection would be publicly, proactively and repeatedly attacking a police investigation into child abuse.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

The Assistant Minister and myself have never attacked the police investigation into child abuse. Where we have raised questions was when the discovery of a child's remains was announced and indeed it was the Chief Minister that phoned me up on the Saturday to say that a child's body had been found. This is obviously not the case and I do not want to dwell on it at this time. All I would say is that we do have victims of child abuse out there and I am surprised that the Senator would want to make political capital out of it.

2.1.3 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister, given what is perceived by many as a grave error, now acknowledge that the Assistant Minister should not be party to any groups whose role could be misconstrued and that he should remain as a totally independent person fostering the best in children's services?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

No, what I would say to the Deputy is that in future any of these groups, if they are set up, should be set up with terms of reference that are distributed to the whole States Chamber so that we can all

fully understand what the group has been set up for and how the Members have been chosen to be on that group.