

2025.06.24

3.13 Deputy C.D. Curtis of St. Helier Central of the Minister for Children and Families regarding a strategy to protect children from online harm (OQ.147/2025):

Will the Minister advise what consideration, if any, he has given to an Island-wide strategy to protect children from the various forms of online harm and if he has given no consideration, will he explain why not?

Connétable R.P. Vibert of St. Peter (The Minister for Children and Families):

Of course we are giving consideration to an online strategy to cover online harm. Of course there are also many other harms that of course are not online and we have to consider those as well. But when considering a strategy we have to consider that today children, increasingly their lives are shaped by their digital experiences. Whether it is social media, gaming or online learning, the online world is now a fundamental part of childhood. That brings opportunities but also risks, ranging from exposure to harmful content and cyberbullying to exploitation and online addiction. A cross-Ministerial group has now been established to co-ordinate the approach and develop a strategy on this matter, including any considerations arising from the Scrutiny Panel's review. I believe that this group will focus on actions, offer a tiny and important focus point for Government and an evolving area of policy development. My focus in this is to ensure families are effectively supported to navigate those challenges in the short term, rather than working on any other strategy. I accept that in order to develop our medium and future-term approach to this policy issue we need a sustainable, strategic approach. Any future strategy must avoid duplication of existing work and be agile enough to keep pace with rapidly evolving technology. It must also balance child protection with young people's rights to freedom, expression and digital access. I recognise there are other challenges to overcome that coincide with this issue, for example, alternatives to screens and mobiles in the shape of play spaces and I hope the play strategy will help in this aspect. Our new ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

You have reached nearly 2 minutes there.

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Yes, sorry, Sir.

3.13.1 Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Just to confirm, as the Minister for Children and Families, will the Minister say whether he is supportive of an Island-wide strategy to protect children from online harm?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Absolutely I am supportive of such a strategy. As I say, that is likely to be developed with a number of other Ministers but I am 100 per cent supportive of that. I have certainly also looked at what is developing in other jurisdictions, in particular Australia's move to a ban on social media for the under-16s and how other European nations are tackling that as well.

3.13.2 Deputy H.M. Miles of St. Brelade:

Minister, the 2017 Independent Jersey Care Inquiry highlighted that Jersey had historically lagged behind other jurisdictions in updating child protection laws. How is the Minister ensuring that online safety legislation is not similarly delayed?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Now that we have established a cross-Ministerial group with the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development to ensure that there are not delays, as I say, if I believe there were delays then I would obviously wish to take action to prevent any blockages. But I want to see legislation as quickly as possible.

3.13.3 Deputy C.D. Curtis:

I thank the Minister for his answer. While there are huge benefits from the online world, does the Minister appreciate that there are dangers which need a co-ordinated approach from parents, schools and Government too and that a strategy could pave the way forward?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Yes. I think that a strategy is extremely important. We must help families and the children themselves deal with these online issues. What is always at the front of my mind in these things is that once a child or young person has seen a disturbing image that can be never removed from their mind. I think that is particularly important when we start to consider whether there should be a block on social media, for instance. I have my own personal view on that. I need to speak to other Ministers but my personal view is that I think we will have to, through the owners of these platforms, certainly bring in some restrictions on social media