

3.9 Deputy T.M. Pitman of the Minister for Home Affairs regarding legislation relating to knife crime.

Recently the Minister promised a tough stance on knife crime. Would he advise the Assembly what progress, if any, has been made in this area regarding new legislation?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand (The Minister for Home Affairs):

I do not recall making that promise. I have some memory of a *J.E.P.* (*Jersey Evening Post*) headline, but as we all know, *J.E.P.* headline writers live in a parallel universe **[Laughter]** which may or may not have any link with the actual report. Of course I am not blaming the reporters. They have no control over the headline writers. I am very concerned about knife crime and that concern appears to be reflected in the sentencing approach of the Royal Court which has, in recent times, treated knife crime as being very serious. I have, for some years, also been concerned at the difficulties of prosecutions in proving the intent to injure a person in relation to possession of an offensive weapon. Now, the Members of this Assembly may, of course, recall that they were given an opportunity last December to pass a piece of legislation, which I happen to agree with, and was one of the people behind the scenes pushing for, which would have tightened the law up quite considerably, but the Members in their considerable wisdom voted against that. This has created a problem for me because I believe the law does need to be tightened up because of the difficulties of proving beyond reasonable doubt intent to injure, but I do not see any value in reintroducing the provision that was rejected so decisively last December so I either have to invent something new for Jersey or try to find some other model of legislation elsewhere. This is going to take me some time and I do not guarantee success because of the difficulties. There are other issues also in relation to sale of knives for those under age which will need to be looked at at the same time.

3.9.1 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I have to say I am shocked that the Minister would suggest the *J.E.P.* would misquote anyone. I cannot believe it myself. **[Laughter]** In light of the Minister's response, could he just clarify for the House how he is working with his ministerial colleagues to find a solution to this increasing menace, and I am thinking particularly of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture and his role with young people?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

That is going somewhat beyond my remit. I would hope that to be part of educational programmes, to educate young people how dangerous it is to take knives out with them, the danger of others taking knives to protect them against the first set of knives and the danger of knives being used when they are, first of all, only been taken, as it were, for "protection". The legislative problem remains. I should have said that I intend to give some time to it next year.

3.9.2 The Deputy of St. Martin:

I think the Minister will agree the primary objective of efficient policing is the prevention of crime. To that extent, would the Minister not agree that it is very important that young people are made aware as early as possible of the danger of knives and there ought to be a link between the police and education as far as police school involvement in schools informing youngsters of their rights and responsibilities in particular with knives? Could I get an assurance made that the Minister will speak to the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture with a view of

ensuring there is some form of education about the dangers of knives, knife carrying, or the police going to schools in uniform speaking to the children about that?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

I will happily do so. I can see the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture is mouthing something at me, but I cannot lip read. I think he should be allowed to intervene.

The Bailiff:

I think this question is to you really.

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

I think he is trying to say something. I will be making some presentations on Saturday to those involved in Prison Me! No Way! and I suspect there is probably an element of the Prison Me! No Way!, a programme which does go into schools and involves police officers. I see the Minister is now nodding so the answer may be the correct one.

3.9.3 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Does the Minister not believe that because his department is involved heavily with the people who carry knives, does he not think that it is important to understand the culture, to find out why the people are carrying the knives in the first place and does he not think that his ministry is the best suited one to find that out?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

My ministry does not employ psychologists if that was the question. Education for young people is, I think, the best route but also where people are convicted of offences it is important that the sentencing policy be appropriate and it is also, as I have said already, appropriate that we have the right offences.

3.9.4 Deputy D.J. De Sousa:

The Minister now a couple of times has touched on Prison Me! No Way! We all know how successful this has been within education. Am I not right in believing that there was a problem with funding for this and has it now been sorted out? If not, what steps are being taken so that it will continue?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

I do not know the exact answer to the last part of the question, but will no doubt know on Saturday when I meet up with people from there. Home Affairs, because of the massive squeeze on its budget this year, did not feel able to increase what it was giving to that particular function and there was anticipated that there might be a shortfall, but I do not know if that has been met in some other way or simply whether the budget has had to be cut.

3.9.5 Deputy D.J. De Sousa:

Bearing in mind the answer from the Minister and yet he has said that prevention is better than cure, will he not take steps to ensure that this vital area of his ministry is retained and funded adequately?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

This is not just my area. There was a 4-way funding, part from Home Affairs, part from Education, part from Housing and part, I believe, from a bank which saw this as part of their social programme. I am supportive of this work, but I cannot guarantee continuing funding if there are going to be continuing massive pressures on Home Affairs budget. One has to balance priority against priority.

3.9.6 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

The Minister mentions that he hoped to give some time to this matter next year. Could he just advise realistically what timescale are we looking at when some legislation could possibly be brought forward at the earliest?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

I hope to start thinking about this early next year. Of course it depends what else happens in other parts of the Home Affairs empire or elsewhere. I would expect by Easter next year to either have some fair ideas as to where we would be going and then to be starting feeding those towards the Law Draftsman, because we do have law drafting time for 2010, or to have frankly given up on being able to find a suitable solution in terms of a lower level of offence.