

21.03.23

4 Deputy K.G. Pamplin of the Chief Minister regarding bullying in the public sector (OQ.71/2021):

Given the recently published HR Lounge follow-up report into staff bullying and conditions, will the Chief Minister advise what measures the Government intends to introduce to make improvements to the States of Jersey employees?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré (The Chief Minister):

The Connétable of St. Ouen is taking this question.

Connétable R.A. Buchanan of St. Ouen (Assistant Chief Minister - *rapporteur*):

I thank the Deputy for his question. While I was pleased to see the progress made since the last HR Lounge report and the improvements we introduced have been recognised, nevertheless we recognise that this is a long journey and we still have much work to do. We are fully committed to implementing in full the original recommendations for which 22 have already been completed. Going forward we are committed to dealing with the issues raised in the current report, we are implementing the rest of the recommendations, as well as addressing the problem areas highlighted in this latest report. The report gives credit to the use of the helpline, case management, early resolution measures implemented, supported by a new policy in management training. In addition, yesterday States Members had the opportunity to understand the wider people strategy, which will go a long way towards providing more support to employees when raising complaints and addressing poor behaviour. Additionally, we have already started a management training programme that will set the standard for management style and culture and we also continue to be fully committed to the Team Jersey programme, the value of which was recognised in this latest report.

3.4.1 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

I thank the Connétable for his answer. Added to the effects of the last year, what additional support will be put in place for all members of staff across the civil service States of Jersey who have gone above and beyond for this Island during the pandemic, as well as what support additionally with their mental health will be offered?

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

I thank the Deputy for his question. We have a wide range of support through the workplace through our occupational health services, regular communication in mental health first-aiders and we are currently reviewing additional support in the form of bodies, as mentioned in the HR Lounge report. There is a wide range of support for staff members who are having mental health issues and we are continuing to review that in the light of the pandemic and additional strain has been placed on our staff with the additional work they have had to do.

3.4.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Does the Assistant Chief Minister agree that one of the ways in which to ensure that our staff are confident if bullying is happening is to have union representation that is supported by the S.E.B., including facilities time and regular meetings so that unions are seen as that important key support mechanism in the workplace?

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

I thank the Deputy for his question and I completely agree with him. We have put in place a number of measures to engage with our union colleagues. Indeed, I have particularly reached out and engaged with one union member from a teaching unit who has made some specific comments and recommendations in relation to the HR Lounge report and we value the contribution that we will get from that. But, yes, I completely agree with the Deputy and we hope that the unions feel their relationship with us has improved substantially in the last year or so.

3.4.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Does the Assistant Chief Minister believe that there is adequate facilities time across the trade union representation so that staff do know that they can be supported and also unions can play a constructive role in building relations?

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

Yes, I thank the Deputy for his question and knowing him as well as I do, I suspect there is a reason behind asking it. We would like to think that there is adequate facilities time but if he wants to address any specific concerns he has about that with me I give him my assurance I will look into it and get back to him.

3.4.4 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Given that much of the problems that have arisen over bullying and so on, arise from the example set by senior staff and the fact that the registers of complaints and so on have only been held within departments, will the Assistant Minister explain how far they have got with getting a decent complaints system together with a central register, which is reviewed by the chief officer and not just left to each department where it can be buried?

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

I thank the Senator for her question. It is my understanding that our complaints register has been centralised in the Complaints Management Unit as your central unit and it is reviewed regularly. But I am not 100 per cent certain about that, so I will clarify that point and get back to her on it but that is my understanding.

3.4.5 Senator T.A. Vallois:

In the follow-up HR Lounge report one of the recommendations that had not been undertaken was a review of how staff promotions occur. Would the Constable be able to give an indication of when that will happen and whether consideration of how that happens in terms of staff promotions has an effect on both P.59s and also the use of consultants within the States?

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

Yes, I thank the Senator for her challenging question. As to the first part, yes, we are intending to implement the following recommendations as quickly as we possibly can, given the staff constraints. As to the second part of that question, I think I would like a little bit of time to consider it and get back to her with a more detailed response, which I will share with the rest of the Assembly.

Senator T.A. Vallois:

No supplementary, but I thank the Constable for his answer.

3.4.6 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

If you read the report the tone is very clear, that there was an issue of culture toxicity from the very top. My supplementary question is: there is a change of leadership happening at the moment, what is happening right now to deal with these issues that we can change the culture and the toxicity to make people feel like they can come forward with their complaints?

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

Yes, I thank the Deputy for his question. You might just take a step back and one of the comments made to us when the report was presented to us was that, generally speaking, staff have much more confidence in our ability to deal with complaints and that the management culture is that we are taking these issues seriously. But, having said that, I do accept that the report made it quite clear that there is an issue with senior management and that is an issue that I intend to tackle with the new chief executive within the next week or so to look at further measures to improve the culture among his senior team.