

#### **4.14 Urgent oral question**

##### **The Bailiff:**

Very well. Then we come next to an urgent oral question for which leave has been given and that is a question from Deputy Tadier to the Minister for Home Affairs.

##### **Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for Home Affairs regarding allegations that a former prison employee had an inappropriate relationship with a prisoner at H.M.P. La Moye:**

Would the Minister advise whether a former prison employee had an inappropriate relationship with a prisoner at H.M.P. (Her Majesty's Prison) La Moye and if so, what assurances can he give that safeguards are in place so that such illegal practice may not occur in the future?

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

I am assuming that the question relates to matters which were alleged in a U.K. Sunday newspaper and which were referred to yesterday in a Jersey newspaper. The alleged affair set out in the newspapers is, in the views of the Prisoner Governor and myself, hard to believe - in my opinion, it is very hard to believe - and has been strongly denied by the prisoner concerned. Up until late 2009 to early 2010, because of the shortage of appropriate accommodation at the prison, drugs counsellors and chaplaincy staff and sometimes other persons did visit prisoners in their cells. The member of staff concerned was in charge of the prison's drug and alcohol counselling services and did visit the prisoner on a number of occasions. However, and I am making a general statement now, whenever such visits took place to prisoners, the doors were not locked. In fact, the lock was turned so that the doors could not be closed and in the case of the particular prisoner concerned in the articles, because he was viewed as being a high risk high security prisoner, there was always an officer detailed to monitor his activity and to regularly check on the safety of anyone who was seeing him in his cell, and it is that additional level of security frankly which makes the newspaper account very hard to believe. **[Interruption]** I was going to go on and describe changes to the system which have taken place since. From late 2009 early 2010, civilian grades stopped conducting any business in prison cells. That was because there was a lot more accommodation then available. Meetings are now held by pre-booking in interview rooms. The interview rooms have glass panels and there is C.C.T.V. (Closed Circuit Television) nearby but not in cells. This provides a much better safeguard.

##### **4.14.1 Deputy M. Tadier:**

Just because something is hard to believe does not necessarily mean it did not happen but leaving that logic aside, can the Minister advise, given the very serious nature of this allegation and the reputational damage it would have for both public confidence in Jersey and possibly outside of Jersey, surely the very minimum that we would expect is a proper review to be carried out which would, at the very least, seek to interview both parties who were alleged to have taken part in this alleged activity. Has that been done, will that be done, and if not, why not?

##### **Senator B.I. Le Marquand:**

The prisoner has strongly denied this. Frankly, I think that the allegations as set out in the press are very much in the area of fantasy and I really do not think there is any point in wasting public money and time on a review of something which appears to me to be so fantastic and unlikely.

##### **4.14.2 Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

It appears to me that there does appear to be some tightening-up on the employment procedures. What changes have there been to due diligence on the employment of staff?

**Senator B.I. Le Marquand:**

This particular employee was quite well known to the service, having started going into the prison from 2003 onwards. She then obtained an employment contract in 2006 and that was then varied in 2008. It appears that fresh references were not taken up in relation to later contracts. That appears to be so because the person was already well known and was reckoned to be well respected at the particular time. My own personal view in relation to that is that when there was a move to a contract of employment, there should have been strict due diligence matters. In relation to the move from 2006 to 2008, I view that essentially as a variation to contract and would not have expected that to be so. Clearly, it is very important that people who hold such posts are fully and properly vetted because of the important nature of the role that they play.

[11:30]

**4.14.3 Connétable M.J. Paddock of St. Ouen:**

Could the Minister advise the Assembly why the female is no longer employed at the prison?

**Senator B.I. Le Marquand:**

Yes, she resigned from her post in 2010.

**4.14.4 Deputy M. Tadier:**

The Minister seems to be saying he does not believe this because there are safeguards in place which are designed to stop this kind of thing happening but he has not addressed what happens when safeguards themselves fail for whatever reasons, either through human error or through conspiracy to pervert the internal processes of the prison. Will the Minister take this matter seriously and say that he will investigate, at least instigate an internal inquiry, at least make sure that he interviews the relevant stakeholders and also look at whether or not in the last 5 years there have been any other allegations of inappropriate relationships between prisoners? Will the Minister look at whether there have also been inappropriate relationships within the last 5 years?

**Senator B.I. Le Marquand:**

I am not aware of any. Because this was at very short notice, I have concentrated on the details of the particular matter but I will very happily make that inquiry.