

**QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE ON  
TUESDAY, 20th APRIL 2004 BY THE DEPUTY OF ST. MARTIN**

**Question 1**

In RC.49/2003, entitled 'Absence Levels in the Public Sector', presented to the States by the Policy and Resources Committee on 2nd December 2003 it is stated that the level of absenteeism for the 12 month period ending on 30th June 2003 was 4.62 per cent for the Fire Service, 4.77 per cent for the Police Service and 11 per cent for the Prison Service.

Would the President explain why the Prison Service's level of absenteeism was so much higher than the other two Services and state what steps, if any, have been taken address the issue?

**Answer**

Sick absence at the prison during the calendar year 2003 was 9.2 per cent or 2,354 days of which 65 per cent, 1,519 days, related to 16 staff who were on long-term sick absence (in excess of 20 days) for a variety of reasons. Of these 16 members of staff, seven have now returned to duty, six have either retired through ill-health or are due to be retired as a result of ill health, two are still on sick leave and one officer's contract is being terminated.

Two new long-term sickness cases have commenced since the start of the new year one following an accident off duty and one following surgery. All sickness cases are monitored and dealt with using the sickness management process operating across States departments and utilising BMI, the Bradford formula, return to work interviews and back to work plans.

All of the long term sickness cases in 2003 were genuine absences that were covered by medical certificates. There is no one explanation which explains why there were so many, but I am satisfied that appropriate steps were taken to return staff to duty as early as possible. It needs to be understood that prison officers need to be fully fit before they can carry out their full range of duties which may involve the physical restraint of recalcitrant prisoners. The Prison Service has very few options for 'light duties'.

**Question 2**

Would the President inform Members –

- (a) of the total cost of overtime paid to Officers in the Prison Service for each of the years 2001, 2002 and 2003?
- (b) of the highest amount paid to any individual officer in each of those three years?
- (c) of the average payment paid per officer, for officers entitled to overtime, for each of those years?

**Answer**

- (a) 2001 - £430,963  
2002 - £442,994  
2003 - £562,110
- (b) 2001 - £12,177  
2002 - £12,380  
2003 - £17,856

- (c) 2001 - £5,986
- 2002 - £5,679
- 2003 - £7,300.

### **Question 3**

Would the President state what percentage of the annual overtime was paid to -

- (a) compensate for officers on sick leave?
- (b) compensate for establishment shortages?

### **Answer**

- (a) 2001 - 29 per cent
- 2002 - 30 per cent
- 2003 - 24 per cent
- (b) 2001 - 41 per cent
- 2002 - 34 per cent
- 2003 - 45 per cent.

### **Question 4**

Would the President inform members whether any personnel from the Prison Service attended a Control and Constraint Conference in the U.K. in January this year and, if so, would she inform members whether any of those officers attending were on long-term sick leave at the time?

If so, would the President –

- (a) inform members of the cost of that officer's attendance?
- (b) state whether the officer concerned has now returned to full duty?
- (c) state what benefit the officer, the Prison Service and the taxpayer gained from the officer's attendance?

### **Answer**

Staff from the prison attended a refresher training course and conference about Control and Restraints in the UK in January of this year. One of the staff attending was long-term sick at the time but for the duration of the course/conference he was given permission to attend by his GP. As mentioned in the answer to question 1 prison staff need to be fully fit in order to carry out their full range of duties but this does not prevent them from making a positive contribution to the work of the prison in other ways. The officer in question has been the main Control and Restraints trainer for the prison for over eighteen years and one of the purposes of the UK trip was to discuss arrangements to select his replacement should he be unable to return to duty.

- (a) The cost of flights and hotel accommodation was £219.14.
- (b) In April 2004 the prison was informed that BMI are recommending that he be retired by reason of ill-health. A firm decision on this has not yet been taken.
- (c) The officer was able to make a positive contribution to the ongoing work of the establishment, the prison was able to use the expertise he has developed over the last 18 years to assist in planning the way forward should he be unable to return to duty and the taxpayer has benefited in many ways as a result of

the efforts of this particular officer to secure the most effective and efficient methods of training staff and the equipment needed to deliver the Control and Restraints resource to the prison.

**Question 5**

Would the President advise whether there is a formal policy in place concerning attendance of Prison Service personnel at conferences, courses and similar events? If so, would the President inform Members whether there are any criteria for Officers attending such events while on sick leave?

**Answer**

No.

**Question 6**

Would the President inform the Assembly what measures are in place to ensure that the health of prison officers on long-term sick leave is monitored by the Prison Service to assess whether the officers are fit enough to return to work for light duties or part time work?

**Answer**

This question has been answered in question 1.