

3. Oral Questions

3.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier of St. Saviour of the Chief Minister regarding the number of Serious Case Reviews initiated or completed in the last 2 years:

Could the Chief Minister inform the Assembly of the number of Serious Case Reviews which have been initiated or completed in the last 2 years, and how many are ongoing at present? Would he state what major changes, if any, have been made as a result of these reviews?

Senator I.J. Gorst (The Chief Minister):

Could I ask my Assistant Minister to answer this? He is responsible for safeguarding issues so far as they touch our department.

Senator P.F. Routier (Assistant Chief Minister - rapporteur):

I have been advised that in the last 2 years the Independent Safeguarding Chair has decided to undertake 6 Serious Case Reviews, 4 relating to children and 2 to adults. Of those one has been completed. There have been major changes in recent years to improve safeguarding practices across the States services. These changes include the restructuring of children's social services, the development of multi-agency children protection procedures and a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub. Once all the current reviews are complete the Safeguarding Chair will be able to identify what additional improvements are required.

3.1.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Hopefully the Minister for Health and Social Services will go into more detail during questions without notice. I wonder if the Assistant Chief Minister could tell us what themes have emerged from these reviews because it seems quite extraordinary after all the massive reforms of children's services over the last several years and previous reports that we are still at this stage. What themes have emerged?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I am afraid it is too early to say if any particular themes have been emerging. There is one Serious Case Review which has been completed, which is similar to some others which may start. It has not been decided whether they warrant being a safeguarding report yet but that will be decided by the Independent Safeguarding Chair and that relates to sexual abuse of children. That is to be decided at a later stage whether they do warrant being a serious case review.

3.1.2 Deputy M.R. Higgins of St. Helier:

Would the Assistant Minister not agree that part of the problem of being able to identify what the problems are is the total inadequacy of the records? If he looks at written answer 16 to my question regarding offences of sexual abuse on children as reported to the Children's Service, what I see repeatedly written through is information systems used by Children's Service do not enable the capture of the information in the format requested.

[9:45]

Surely they should have adequate records instead of having to go trawling through all their records to see. Is it not a failure to have proper records so they can see what trends are emerging?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I have not had the benefits of looking at the written question answer as yet but I will obviously be doing that. Certainly it is important - vitally important - that all departments

relating to Social Services do have adequate record keeping and it would obviously enhance the services if that was the case. I know that there is a desire within the Health Department to have good record keeping and I think that is one of their aims to achieve that.

3.1.3 Deputy J.A. Hilton of St. Helier:

Has the Assistant Minister been made aware of the preliminary findings of the latest Serious Case Review and if not why not?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I answered a similar question to this at the last sitting with regard to the particular case and I have not been made aware of the findings of that case yet because the Independent Chair is wanting to speak to the people involved - the children involved - before it is disclosed to other people. The answer I gave last time was that as soon as the children have been spoken to the Chair will be deciding at what stage the review outcomes will be made known and obviously made known to me and I will share it as soon as I have it.

3.1.4 Deputy J.G. Reed of St. Ouen:

Given the incredibly significant number of Serious Case Reviews that are being undertaken could the Assistant Minister tell us what the Chief Minister's Department and indeed the Children's Policy Group are doing to deal with and address this matter regardless of what the outcomes are? There are obviously considerable issues around the safeguarding of children for the fact that we have 6 reviews taking place.

Senator P.F. Routier:

I can only share the Deputy's concern with regard to the seriousness of and the number of cases which are coming about. With regard to taking things forward we really need the independent Chair to come to her conclusion and publish her reports before myself or the Health Department are in a position to decide on what is the best way to enhance services. Certainly it is, for me, one of the highest priorities that I have to ensure that the co-ordination of safeguarding procedures are at the best they can possibly be.

3.1.5 The Deputy of St. Ouen:

When can we expect the 6 Serious Case Reviews to be complete?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I am afraid I cannot give an answer to that because speaking to the Independent Chair of the safeguarding review who does these reviews all over the U.K. and obviously in Jersey as well, serious case reviews can take 2 to 4 years to complete and they can be a long, long time because it is a matter of getting all the information together from across departments. I know the urgency that is required and we need to ensure that it is done as expeditiously as possible but the due process needs to take place. They are very, very complex issues to be dealing with.

3.1.6 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Assistant Chief Minister not acknowledge that it is not his role just to be a messenger in these circumstances? It is the role of the people he represents to take action which may have to cut across Ministries. He may have to take action to say: "It is not good enough and we have to shake up the organisation." Would he not agree that is his role? It is not just to be a messenger.

Senator P.F. Routier:

I could not agree more. Once we have the results from the Serious Case Reviews that action will be taken but unfortunately we do not have the results of the Serious Case Reviews. I have to say the reports yesterday, the review which was published by the ...

The Bailiff:

I am sorry, Senator, I think that is going off the point.

Senator P.F. Routier:

Okay, I wanted to share my concerns.

The Bailiff:

You have given your answer. Very well.