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2 Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour of the Minister for Children and Housing regarding the development of the Children and Young People's Plan: [OQ.32/2019]

Will the Minister confirm that hard-to-reach children and young people have been included in the development of the Children and Young People's Plan; and if not, why not?

Senator S.Y. Mézec (The Minister for Children and Housing):

I thank the Deputy for this question. There is a slight difficulty here in that the term "hard-to-reach" does not have a precise definition or parameters which we use. So it is not exactly clear who does and does not fall within this term. There is also a risk that the term can have a professional focus based on what services are able to do or not to do, as opposed to looking at it from the perspective of the child. What I can say to the Deputy is that the level of engagement with children and young people throughout the process of putting the Children's Plan together, I think, has been at an unprecedented scale compared to what we have done in the government previously. We have worked with organisations outside of the government to try to engage with those children who do not necessarily engage directly with public services.

3.2.1 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

I understand that the communications section of the government does have a policy when it comes to hard-to-reach groups. More specifically then, can I ask the Minister: have children with special educational need from backgrounds where English is not the first language and children in care, whether they have been included in the development of this plan?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

That is absolutely the case. There have been different engagement events throughout this process but the most prominent and well-known one was on 14th March last year, where over 120 children and young people were included. Many of those children were involved in this process via organisations like the inclusion project with the Youth Service. There were children from Mont à l'Abbé School who took part and also there were children who are care experienced who were involved, who played a very important role in helping us put together the Youth Connect project which will help provide them a voice in future and is an essential part of us meeting our obligations, not just from the care inquiry report but also the Children's Plan itself.

3.2.2 Deputy S.M. Wickenden of St. Helier:

Could the Minister please confirm if any consultation has occurred with the Minister for Education and, if so, has the Minister for Education given her backing, given the implications of the plan on her department?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

I am sure that the Minister for Education has been sighted on the plan. This has been looked at by the whole Council of Ministers as well. But what I have to say is the plan itself is a broad plan and does not specifically identify the detail of workstreams, which is something of a feature across all departments and the aspirations that we are attempting to meet through this will be not quite as detailed as, for example, some of the things that are going on with the Improvement Plan.

3.2.3 Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

When the Minister says the Council of Ministers has been sighted on it, does it mean that the plan is being done in isolation right now and that the consultation for the detail of a plan will come later?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Last week we had the first meeting of the board that is providing oversight of the implementation of the Children's Plan. The plan exists, it has not yet been published because there is still some work to do on putting our communication strategy for that plan together and there is very heavy involvement of children and young people in that process very specifically, as well as the process of putting the plan together itself. But the plan is about our broad aspirations for children and young people in the Island and we are going to have to refer back to it and be very consistent throughout the next few years when we are putting forward proposal from each government department and will have to measure that up against the Children's Plan and work out if what we are proposing is in line with those aspirations.

3.2.4 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

I wonder if the Minister could explain further, given that this is a broad plan and therefore will have implications for other departments, why the Ministers which will therefore be responsible in the implementation of the plan once the broad plan is agreed have not been included? How can you get an understanding about what you are going to deliver when those people who will be responsible for implementation will not necessarily have the political buy-in as this consultation is going on?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

The board that is put together to help us with the delivery of this plan has representation from across government departments. Of course Ministers will be heavily involved, not just in this but in the government plan that we are putting together at the moment as well. It is not a case of forcing aspirations on to other government departments and expecting them to get on with it without consultation. There will be, I am sure, very robust discussions over the next few years and there will often be disagreements about the best path to deliver the aspirations in this plan but that is all healthy in our system. It is not quite as simple as saying: "Here is the exact blueprint for every detail or decision" that is obviously something that will be subject to lots of discussions over the coming years.