

2.5 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains of St. Clement of the Minister for Health and Social Services as to whether any concerned parent had contacted him alleging gross professional misconduct by the Children's Service:

Would the Minister advise whether any concerned parent has contacted him alleging gross professional misconduct by the Children's Service, and if so, would he outline how he intends protecting the children involved during the period until Mr. Williamson's work is completed?

Senator B.E. Shenton (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

Senator Perchard has delegated responsibility for this area and I wish for him to act as rapporteur.

Senator J.L. Perchard (Assistant Minister for Health and Social Services - rapporteur):

Over the last weekend I was, for the first time, contacted by a concerned parent alleging gross professional misconduct by the Children's Service. The Deputy's question, however, appears to imply that either the Minister for Health and Social Services or myself are aware of allegations of gross misconduct against the Children's Service staff that such special measures are in some way required to protect the children involved. I can confirm that I am not aware of any such allegations. If the Deputy, however, is aware of allegations to the contrary, I urge him to make contact with the Public Protection Unit of the States of Jersey Police immediately, furnishing any evidence so that allegations can be properly investigated and that the children involved can be properly protected. However, if the Deputy is referring to unsubstantiated allegations by a disgruntled parent who does not wish the Children's Service to carry out its duties in the way the law requires, then I urge him to encourage those parents to use the appropriate legal channels available to them. This is very important. I wish to assure this Assembly that any case against a member of staff where evidence is produced of gross professional misconduct, such that the children involved need to be protected, will be rigorously pursued by myself according to the appropriate States' procedures.

2.5.1 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

I take it from the Assistant Minister's answer that he is going to do nothing. It is a pity, Sir, that the Assistant Minister has been given the job of answering the question because my question following the supplementary is to the Minister himself. What I want to know, Sir, is why it is that the Minister has failed to respond to a parent with grave concerns about his family? I have a document here dated 7th November, Sir, where he says: "It is now 6 weeks since I verbally asked for a meeting. It is now 4 weeks since I requested a meeting in writing. Has it been arranged? What date? What time?" That letter was written a couple of weeks ago. Why has there been a delay, Sir? Considering the fact that that letter contained information from a lawyer stating that the Children's Service showed a gross level of bias and none of the tactic employed by them would stand up to public scrutiny. What is going on, Sir?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

It would be inappropriate to discuss the details of a specific case other than I am aware of the case and the Deputy is ill informed. The case is subject to a live police and Children's Service investigation and therefore I will say no more. Since my appointment I have met with senior officers of the department and senior social care professionals many, many times. In fact, I have spent much of my time with them. I am a frequent visitor to our residential homes. I am completely satisfied that the children in our care are being appropriately managed and are safely managed. I assure Members that the service will continue to be robustly managed with all staff being supported and encouraged through what is a very difficult and sensitive time for us all.

2.5.2 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

May we take some of the personal emotion out of this issue and look at the actual state of procedures themselves. In his question to the Minister, the Assistant Minister's responsibility -- the questioner put the point that he wanted to know how the Minister intended protecting the children involved. I did not hear anything of that in the answer that was given; I heard answers to the effect

that States' procedures would be followed and staff would be supported. What I would like to ask is, because it has been unclear to me, given that there is evidently a particular report to that that is in the affirmative, what procedures are in place or taking place under the States' procedures to protect that child or those children? What procedures are in place to protect the children? That is part of the question.

Senator J.L. Perchard:

This is completely inappropriate and I am surprised that you are encouraging the Assembly to go down this channel. I refuse to discuss the details of the case other than to assure the Deputy and the House that the children involved - as a subject of the question just put by Deputy Baudains - are perfectly safe.

The Bailiff:

In fairness to Deputy Le Claire, the question he was putting, as I understood it, is what were the procedures? What were the States' procedures?

Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

That is exactly what I did, Sir. I did avoid the personal issue when I put it to the Assistant Minister. I thank you, Sir, for that intervention. What are the States' procedures; not what are the particulars.

Senator J.L. Perchard:

The children are subject to an inquiry by the Children's Service and they are not in the care of the Children's Service but are being monitored by the Children's Service.

2.5.3 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Given the sensitivity around the Children's Service at the moment, and I have every sympathy for them, can we have an assurance that both the Minister and the Assistant Minister have arrangements whereby they are to be kept up to speed and informed of any allegation as it may be made to the contrary to the actions about the Children's Service?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

Absolutely, Sir. As a result of the sensitivities that are surrounding the Children's Service at the moment, I am very much hands on.

2.5.4 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Can the Assistant Minister assure us that the recent report compiled by the Chief Officer, in the very best of faith, which exonerated the staff and indeed quite rightly in some respects praised them, can he assure us that he and the Minister have checked this report and that this report fully complies with the conditions one would expect from a rigorous, independent and objective report?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

The report that Deputy Le Hérisier makes reference to is a report on historical practices within the department. Mr. Andrew Williamson is conducting a review of services historically. I am perfectly satisfied that the services being provided to date by the Children's Services are some of the best possible services that we could provide.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Sorry, Sir, point not answered. Can the Assistant Minister reassure the House if that report was produced on the basis of the conditions he would see it as being essential to a full rigorous independent report?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

I have spent little time looking at the historical aspects of the Service. I am hands-on looking at the current service. I will endeavour to study the document, but I am looking at the service today and ensuring that the children in their care are being appropriately looked after.

2.5.5 Senator S. Syvret:

Would the Assistant Minister agree with me that given that the Minister and himself are very new to this job, they may well not be au fait with all of the precise details of various procedures, quite understandably? Could the Assistant Minister give me and the Assembly an assurance that should any flaws and deficiencies in the existing policies and approaches be revealed that they will take swift action to change them?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

Absolutely, Sir, and I think that I will be in a position to do that because I am aware of the practices that are taking place currently within the service.

2.5.6 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

I do not recall yet having had an answer as to why the Minister has not responded to a communication from residents that need his assistance. It is now 8 weeks since this particular person approached him, Sir, and I want to know why that is. Secondly, Sir, will the Assistant Minister agree to look into this case again, the one he thinks I refer to? Because it is clear from his comments that he is misinformed about the case. I am obviously not going to go into details here, Sir, but the comments he has made lead me to believe he has not got a clue what he is talking about.

Senator J.L. Perchard:

I resent that absolutely. My position is that I will not discuss a live police and childcare case in this Chamber. However, I have spoken to both the parents - unlike Deputy Baudains - and the Children's Service regarding this case. Deputy Baudains has spoken to one of those 3 parties. If we are just suggesting who has knowledge of this case, I suggest it is not Deputy Baudains.

Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

I presume, Sir, he refuses to answer my question?

The Bailiff:

I am sorry, Deputy; the Minister has what?

Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

It is twice now, Sir, I have asked why it is that it takes 8 weeks for somebody to get a reply from the Minister and they still do not have one.

The Bailiff:

I thought the Minister had answered that.

Senator J.L. Perchard:

I also thought I had answered that, Sir. The case that Deputy Baudains is representing is a live police and childcare investigation. I have communicated with Deputy Baudains' clients by email, by telephone, and I will not discuss it in any further detail as it is the subject of a live police and child allegation.