

20.11.02

19 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the development of a policy to allow safe singing. (OQ.296/2020)

Further to his response to Oral Question 244/2020, will the Minister update Members on the development of a policy to allow safe singing by both adults and children?

The Deputy of St. Ouen (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

Yes, in response to the Deputy's request, officers updated S.T.A.C. on possible measures to mitigate the risks associated with the various activities, including singing, which is currently restricted by guidance. As I said in the answer given to the Deputy of St. Mary, given the local context of the increasing number of positive cases, S.T.A.C. advised against any general relaxation of restrictions related to these activities at this time, but it did encourage further work by officers to review mitigations and options for small outdoor gatherings of musicians and singers for further consideration by S.T.A.C.

4.19.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I thank the Minister for his answer. Does the Minister agree with me that the guidance around singing should have been relaxed months ago and, in fact, singing and music has been neglected in policy formation? Would the Minister agree to review this, particularly in light of the well-being and educational importance of singing for children, and to look at allowing whole-class singing within existing bubbles?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I cannot agree with the statements just made by the Deputy. The guidance was formulated on the basis of the advice we received from S.T.A.C. They and I do acknowledge the therapeutic and social benefits of singing or playing music, but this has to be measured against the risks associated with the spread of droplets, which singing carries to a far greater extent than normal speech. So it is a case of assessing risk, which, of course, we ask our expert advisers to carry out, and advising us on what is a safe activity. So I hope that explains the approach to the Deputy.

4.19.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

I wanted the Minister to clarify and perhaps agree with me that he might need to be more precise in his language. Can he clarify that you cannot restrict something through guidance? You can restrict something through law or regulations, but that guidance is simply that.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

That is correct. It is guidance. There are no criminal sanctions, if that is what the Deputy is suggesting, to somebody singing.

4.19.3 The Deputy of St. Mary:

During the course of the afternoon I have received an email regarding a taskforce being set up to address the question I raised earlier about Christmas music. There are 2 points arising therefrom for me. First, could Members be circulated with the details of the persons comprising that taskforce so that organisers can get in touch with them? Secondly, the question I raised was, yes, partly in relation to Christmas music but it was more general, that organisations are intent on establishing a way forward to maintain their choirs and musical groups, not just for Christmas but beyond that. So

would he please confirm that the guidelines being worked on will cover the long-term situation and not just Christmas time?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Yes, I undertake that we will give the Deputy and States Members a contact so that they can engage with that taskforce. I am sure that what we try and put in place for Christmas will have ramifications for the long term, because if we can establish an appropriate means of singing or playing instruments so that we can celebrate Christmas, if that is deemed safe for that time, I cannot see why it would not be deemed safe in January, for example. So of course the intention is to allow normal activities to take place if it is safe to do so. Where we can find a safe way we will do so.

4.19.4 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

It was drawn to my attention this morning that we have a pub in the Parish who flatly refuse to take a blind bit of notice of the guidance being issued, despite being challenged by the police. I would urge the Minister to give early attention to this and would ask him if he accepts that this practice is presently taking place throughout the Island.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Yes, I presume the Constable is referring to singing or playing of loud music in pubs. If he wished to let me have the name of that venue, or let the enforcement officers have that name, I would encourage officers to investigate. We know that venues have been taken to the Licensing Assembly and there have been fines imposed for breaches of regulations in courts as well. So it is possible. I am thinking of Deputy Tadier's question, which perhaps related to individuals, but venues and businesses are required to maintain a safe system of work and safe premises. If they are seen not to be doing so, then it is possible that enforcement measures could be undertaken against them.

[16:15]

4.19.5 Connétable S.A. Le Sueur-Rennard of St. Saviour:

Although it could be disputed, I am a singer and I can stand in front of a candle and it will not go out and there are no droplets that come from that. To be honest with you, in retirement homes, music is so important, not only in the schools, but I can see where Deputy Doublet is coming from. Music is very, very therapeutic. I just find it such a shame that we are not allowed to have singing and yet people in the streets ...

The Bailiff:

Connétable, I have to interrupt you. There does have to be a question.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

There is going to be one, Sir. Yet people in the streets can spit. Can the Minister not look into this practice, which I find very, very awful, to be honest with you. The germs that would come from that are a heck of a lot worse than the ones that come from a singing voice.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I thank the Connétable. I have always enjoyed her singing and I understand what she is saying. It gives me no pleasure to restrict singing and activities. I do not sing myself but I love listening. In answer to the habit of spitting, yes, it is appalling and, of course, if somebody spits directly at somebody, that could be an assault and a criminal offence. If they spit on to the pavement it is just a horrible habit. The police have responded magnificently and they have helped the Island enforce

the COVID response, not by heavy-handed means but by encouraging and educating members of the public. I am sure if police officers saw that sort of thing happening they would give appropriate words of advice.

4.19.6 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

The Minister has mentioned science that he is basing these decisions on. Could he please now provide the references so that I and others may look up this research and assess it for ourselves, please?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I will go back to S.T.A.C. members and seek the detail of that. There has been no decision about this. The Deputy refers to a decision. What has happened is the guidance remains as it always has throughout the summer. There has been a request that it be changed. It has gone to S.T.A.C. S.T.A.C. have advised that it should not be changed, so I suppose that is the decision I presently made, but we are going back to S.T.A.C. to talk about what might be able to happen, particularly in outdoor venues. But I will seek the scientific background on which their advice is formulated and respond to the Deputy.