

3.9 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the provision of respite care:

Will the Minister inform Members if there are any plans to increase the amount of bed space and/or the level of staffing at Oakwell Respite Home and, if not, what guarantees can she give that in future children who need long-term care outside the home will not be put into this facility which currently caters for short-term respite care?

The Deputy of Trinity (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

I would just like to refer the Deputy to the written answer that I gave to his written question on the same subject, and it is number 19 in the bundle. Therefore I shall not repeat myself at length. There are no plans to increase the bed numbers at Oakwell.

3.9.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

I will ask a supplementary because the written question is slightly different, although I do take that on board, and I thank the Minister for that. Will the Minister answer the part about levels of staffing at Oakwell, whether they will likely to be increased?

The Deputy of Trinity:

The level of staffing at Oakwell is assessed as the needs of the children who become resident in Oakwell.

3.9.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Can the Minister give a best estimate as to when she thinks the situation will be resolved and normal service will be resumed at Oakwell?

The Deputy of Trinity:

Oakwell is for respite and, at times, it does take the children who need perhaps long-term care. Each one is assessed on an individual basis because the welfare of the children in my care is the most important.

3.9.3 Senator B.E. Shenton:

Can the Minister confirm that she is having trouble getting long-term employees and has been using bank staff, which has caused problems because they do not want to work evenings to provide respite facilities?

The Deputy of Trinity:

As I said, the staffing is assessed on a needs basis because the number of children and the severity does differ, and sometimes there is a need to put the children on a temporary long-term basis.

3.9.4 Deputy A.K.F. Green of St. Helier:

I wonder if the Minister would agree to carry out a review of respite generally, because there are clearly problems at Oakwell, and clearly some in the community that are not getting the support that they should be getting. Would the Minister agree to review respite generally, but particularly for children?

The Deputy of Trinity:

The review of respite is continually being reviewed because the most important thing is to address the children's needs, wherever that is appropriate. Sometimes that is out of my control. It is where the needs are the most important and sometimes that does

involve long term care at Oakwell, as I said, on a temporary basis with a view of having other needs put in place. I will finish there.

Senator T.J. Le Main:

On a point of order, some of us are finding it very difficult to understand some of the answers that have been given orally from across the Chamber. I wonder whether I could ask Privileges and Procedures whether the questions that have been put orally could be sent out and written-up in a written form to Members?

The Bailiff:

We can deal with this another time I think, Senator.

[10:30]

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Well it is very difficult for us to understand and to comprehend some of the speeches coming from some of the Members on that side of the Chamber.

3.9.5 Senator B.E. Shenton:

I would just advise Senator Le Main that there are some very good hearing aids available these days. Rather than push the Minister on this, may I just say that the Minister does not seem to be particularly well-briefed on this subject and may I just simply request that after this sitting that she goes back to her offices and has a full briefing on the problems to do with respite care.

The Deputy of Trinity:

I am sorry about this, Senator Le Main, I have got a cold so I will try and speak a bit louder. I am fully well-briefed. Oakwell is for short-term respite care ideally but from time to time there is a need to put a long-term child there on specific needs. That is addressed and the needs are assessed regularly, from time to time, to make sure with a view of trying to put in long-term placement and with those needs we have to be flexible and it does happen from time to time. I know Senator Shenton has been involved with particular families in the past and he has addressed those issues with the department as well as myself, so he understands the problem. We just have to be very flexible and move as quickly as we possibly can. The introduction of Highlands has helped significantly for those 18 and over and I know some Members took the opportunity to go and see that and that has helped dramatically.

3.9.6 Deputy A.E. Jeune:

There seems to be some concern that staffing should be increased but is the Minister satisfied that the skill mix is appropriate for the patient dependency levels? Thank you.

The Deputy of Trinity:

As far as I am aware, yes.

3.9.7 Senator P.F. Routier:

Does the Minister share my view and the view of many parents who use the respite services that it is an extremely valuable service to be able to have a respite service because it enables them to continue to look after their children in their own homes for a longer time and not put the pressure on health services to have a permanent placement?

The Deputy of Trinity:

Yes, that service at Oakwell is very valuable to parents but especially the children too. It is a good service and it goes up to the age of 18. Now we have Highlands on stream, thanks to Senator Shenton's proposition last year. It is a very important service and we must continue with it but also continue to be flexible as well.

The Bailiff:

Deputy Green and then a final question from Deputy Tadier.

3.9.8 Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I am still not comfortable. I wonder if the Minister would agree to look at guaranteeing the availability of respite care for those families that need regular care? Because somebody is staying there on a long-care basis means that people cannot access it on a weekly basis, if you understand where I am coming from, and this is not acceptable. Will the Minister look into it and try and prevent people from being let down from having respite care when they so desperately need it?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I understand the Deputy's concerns and it is very difficult to 100 per cent guarantee because we never know what is going to come around the corner. I do have a statutory right to respond to the welfare of each child and if it means that that child is best placed in Oakwell then so be it, but I understand the parents' concerns. My department has worked with the parents over the summer with a view of trying to be as flexible as we possibly can because I understand that respite is important and will continue to be important.

3.9.9 Deputy M. Tadier:

Like Senator Routier I think it is important to acknowledge the importance that these facilities do provide for families and they are appreciated. In the written answer the Minister has acknowledged that the primary function of Oakwell is for short-term respite. Will she at least give an acknowledgment that given the fact that 2 of the 4 beds are effectively currently being used for permanent, albeit temporary, respite that only leaves 2 beds - and the reason that there were 2 beds is one is from Monday to Friday, the other one all round the week - that puts an enormous strain on the choice that parents are able to have. As has been mentioned, if there are unforeseen circumstances, holidays and other court orders, for example, then we are in a very precarious situation. Can the Minister give that acknowledgement and an assurance that she will be working on this as a matter of priority to get this resolved by the end of the year?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I would like to give that reassurance. I know respite care, as Senator Routier said, is extremely important to all families as well as the children. As my department have, over the summer, worked hard with the families to try and come in the best possible way for these families and the children that need respite and we will continue to do so.

The Bailiff:

Very well. We come next to a question which Deputy Trevor Pitman will ask of the Minister for Treasury and Resources. Deputy Pitman.