

2.13 Deputy K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding an emergency payment to Brig-y-Don children's home:

Will the Minister advise whether she intends making an emergency payment to Brig-y-Don Children's Home to enable this charitable facility to remain open and continue its important work, and, if not, will she explain why?

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

I hope I have answered most questions of Deputy Southern's but here I am. Members will be aware that the Minister for Treasury and Resources is seeking early debates on P.17 to resolve the urgent funding issues, not only of Brig-y-Don but of family X. As I said before yesterday, I visited the home and met the staff and the children and have been in communication with the chair at Brig-y-Don Trust. In the coming days I will be meeting with the charity's patron, which is His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor, and will discuss the future of both the charity and the children's home. If this funding can be agreed today then, as I have said previously, I will go forward to discuss future plans for the home as identified in the Williamson Implementation Plan. The children's welfare and consideration of this excellent staff are my paramount concern.

2.13.1 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I thank the Minister for her answer. Given the funding, is it desirable for the Minister and the department that Brig-y-Don reopens again?

The Deputy of Trinity:

Yes, it is my wish that we can, working with the charity... that Brig-y-Don can reopen. As I have said before, it needs quite a lot of work done to it but I hope if the funding is there that we can take it and work a way forward to it.

2.13.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

If it turns out that that agreement cannot be reached over a service level agreement with the management committee of Brig-y-Don, and they carry out their promise to close in August, what alternative plans does the department have to continue some activities at Brig-y-Don or otherwise?

The Deputy of Trinity:

As I understand it, the home will be closing at the end of August. The plan was that the home was going to close anyhow, even if we have funding, as I said, because of the need of refurbishment. There are some children there and placing them and also care of the staff too, is important. That is why, as I said before, the 4 months' notice was important.

2.13.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

If I may, a supplementary. That was no answer again. In the case of failure to reach agreement is it the intention of the department to take over the property of Brig-y-Don and run it as the sole responsible operator of that institution to deliver Children's Services in Jersey?

The Deputy of Trinity:

Yes, I want to move forward; the department wants to move forward with Brig-y-Don Trust that it still remains a children's home. But at the present moment it is owned by

the Trust and I cannot speak for the Trust to say whether we can reach negotiations. I certainly hope so. But the property is owned by the Trust.

2.13.4 Deputy A.E. Jeune:

Could the Minister advise us how many children are currently residents in the home and what is the percentage occupancy at the moment? Thank you.

The Deputy of Trinity:

At this present moment in time there are 7 children currently in the home. I did answer that question yesterday about the percentage. Yesterday they were full. I think they can take up to 9 but 2 were sharing. But these children have all got separate bedrooms. I am sorry, I do not have that information about the percentage occupancy. But I can get that to the Deputy.

2.13.5 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister acknowledge that there still remains an irreconcilable division between her department and the home insofar as the home wishes to control its admissions and the department wishes to have control over the admissions?

The Deputy of Trinity:

Yes, and that will be one of the negotiating points that, if I do get the funding, has to be resolved if we are going to move forward.

2.13.6 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister who has, in a sense, inherited a thankless task, not acknowledge that this issue, not having been resolved over 7 years... does she see any kind of miracle on the horizon?

The Deputy of Trinity:

Seven years is an unacceptable time. As you know I have only been Minister for Health and Social Services for 2 weeks, just ... not quite. It is unacceptable. But I am an optimist and I hope that if we do get the money that we can sit down and thrash all these out to look at some sort of future.

2.13.7 Senator S. Syvret:

Will the Minister take my advice and go back to her department and instruct by a Ministerial Decision the relevant senior staff in her department to negotiate a settlement with Brig-y-Don within one month and impose that deadline on them? Enough is enough. Seven years is an absurdity.

The Deputy of Trinity:

As I said, 7 years is a long time and I think, Senator, some of it was under your Ministerial... [Approbation]

Senator S. Syvret:

Part of the consequence of being lied to by staff repeatedly.

The Deputy of Trinity:

But I will go forward. I can instruct and I will, and I will sit down with the charity. But it is not in all the department's hands. We have to work with the charity to be

able to move forward. I need to get that point across. It is not all in my hands. It is the charity who have been doing a very excellent job over a long period of time.

2.13.8 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Would the Minister not agree that it appears to be failure of her department to recognise that Brig-y-Don has expertise in certain areas and with certain ages of children and that her department does not recognise these and wishes to impose its own views?

The Deputy of Trinity:

Yes, the staff are doing an excellent job and they are trained and the home is registered. The Children's Service has changed and I know it is under pressure, and that is the whole point of the Williamson Plan is that the Children's Service needs to change, need to develop into a service that fits the purpose for the 21st century. All the staff need to understand that and all the department staff need to move forward with that. I am waiting for the Scrutiny Panel review on Williamson so that we can take that plan forward and change the service. It does include Brig-y-Don.

2.13.9 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Supplementary, please. Surely if Brig-y-Don is full at the moment then there is a need for the area in which they have particular expertise, and her department is really being quite unreasonable in trying to impose clients on to Brig-y-Don which are outside their area of expertise?

The Deputy of Trinity:

It is a very specific and, as I said before, that is one of the specific areas that we will have to negotiate, is the vulnerable children and the ones with really, really challenging behaviour problems. That is something that I will have to do if we get the funding.

2.13.10 Senator P.F. Routier:

I congratulate the Minister for taking on the job of trying to resolve the issue with Brig-y-Don and going to meet with them, and also the previous Minister for coming forward with the proposals and plans for resolving the issues for Brig-y-Don, which I hope we are going to fund today. Considering some of the comments made by Senator Syvret earlier and also just the recent comment about the Minister should instruct the department to come back within one month, and also the comment that this has been going on for 7 years, does the Minister agree that there is a need to have a greater political oversight in what has been a Cinderella service - the Social Services Department?

The Deputy of Trinity:

Yes, even over these 2 weeks there is a big problem in the Children's Service and we need to understand the problems and go forward with it. But, as you said, the problems with Brig-y-Don have been going back for ... trying to negotiate for 7 years, and that is unacceptable. We need to move forward and we are now, with the Assistant Minister who has got responsibility for Children's Services... and I welcome the Scrutiny and everyone's input into it. But we need to make sure that any investment that we are going to put into Children's Services is, as I said before, fit for purpose and up-to-date for the 21st century.

2.13.11 Senator J.L. Perchard:

The Minister has indicated that she will be encouraging Members to enthusiastically support the opportunity to debate P.17 today and support the substantive proposition in P.17. Will she explain why she supported the motion to defer the debate on P.17 until the end of June?

The Deputy of Trinity:

Yes, I can, because I think at that time we were not given enough information or understanding of the severe pressures that the Children's Services were under. If I remember rightly, Senator Perchard, unfortunately, you were not in the House to explain. But also I believe that a Scrutiny Panel needs to look at the Williamson Implementation Plan to make sure that it is what we need, it is what Jersey needs and that all Members can have some input into it and that we can move forward and get a service that the States of Jersey can be proud of.

Senator J.L. Perchard:

Point of order, Sir, the debate was never taken. It was a motion not to have the debate that was supported by the Minister for Health and Social Services and it was a sabotage and supported by the majority of this House.

2.13.12 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Can the Minister confirm that negotiations with Brig-y-Don are still ongoing and, given the funding, is it just a question of admissions that is a stumbling block?

The Deputy of Trinity:

Negotiations will still be ongoing, especially if we do get the money. As I understand it, the admissions are a major stumbling block. I am sure over a period of time there will be others but at this moment in time I am just aware that that is the main one.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Very well. I am afraid that the time for oral questions has expired.

The Deputy of St. John:

Sir, I ask that Standing Orders be lifted so that we may finish the agenda.

The Deputy Bailiff:

You are stealing the Deputy of St. Martin's thunder. **[Laughter] [Seconded]** Very well. There is a proposition which is seconded that Standing Orders should be lifted so that we can deal with the remaining 4 questions. All those in favour kindly show. The appel is called for. I invite Members to return to their seats and the matter before the Assembly is whether to extend the time to complete the questions and the Greffier will open the voting.

POUR: 38		CONTRE: 2		ABSTAIN: 0
Senator S. Syvret		Connétable of St. Saviour		
Senator P.F. Routier		Deputy J.B. Fox (H)		
Senator P.F.C. Ozouf				
Senator T.J. Le Main				
Senator B.E. Shenton				
Senator A. Breckon				
Senator S.C. Ferguson				

Senator A.J.D. Maclean				
Senator B.I. Le Marquand				
Connétable of St. Helier				
Connétable of Trinity				
Connétable of St. Brelade				
Connétable of St. Martin				
Connétable of St. John				
Connétable of St. Peter				
Connétable of St. Lawrence				
Deputy R.C. Duhamel (S)				
Deputy of St. Martin				
Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier (S)				
Deputy J.A. Martin (H)				
Deputy of St. Ouen				
Deputy of Grouville				
Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire (H)				
Deputy of Trinity				
Deputy S.S.P.A. Power (B)				
Deputy S. Pitman (H)				
Deputy K.C. Lewis (S)				
Deputy I.J. Gorst (C)				
Deputy of St. John				
Deputy M. Tadier (B)				
Deputy T.M. Pitman (H)				
Deputy A.T. Dupré (C)				
Deputy E.J. Noel (L)				
Deputy T.A. Vallois (S)				
Deputy M.R. Higgins (H)				
Deputy A.K.F. Green (H)				
Deputy D. De Sousa (H)				
Deputy J.M. Maçon (S)				

The Deputy Bailiff:

We come to question 13 which the Connétable of St. Helier will ask of the Minister for Home Affairs. Before the Connétable puts his question can I just remind Members that under the relevant statute any discussion of the suspension of the Police Chief has to be in camera. Now the Bailiff has approved this question as being an open session and the answer on the basis that it is purely factual about matters which are consequential upon the suspension, but can I make sure that Members fully understand they cannot raise in supplementary matters any question relating to the suspension. If they do we will have to go into camera. It is only matters which are consequential and factual in the way that the Connétable of St. Helier's question is.