

2024.03.19.

5.4 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour of the Chief Minister regarding actions to address economic abuse in the Island (OQ.49/2024)

Will the Chief Minister advise what actions he is taking to address the incidence and impact of economic abuse in the Island, a common feature of domestic abuse, as discussed in the V.A.W.G. (Violence Against Women and Girls)

Deputy L.J. Farnham of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter (The Chief Minister):

As we can see from testimony in the V.A.W.G. report, financial and economic control is a harmful feature of domestic abuse as victims not only suffer directly, but the loss of financial control can trap them in an abusive situation. The Government has accepted the recommendations of that report, and we will be assessing the prevalence of economic abuse with the intention of making specific provision to address it in the Domestic Abuse Law, if necessary.

5.4.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I thank the Chief Minister for his answer. Could the Chief Minister comment on his understanding of the awareness of this type of abuse in the Island, and what does he think could be done to improve the awareness of this abuse so that we can start to prevent it?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I think one of the biggest problems society faces with domestic abuse is that we tend not to be aware of it, or tend to be in denial, or tend to think it does not happen in our own community. The V.A.W.G. report was entitled *It's a Hidden Problem*, so we can work to bring it to the forefront, so we can address it just by the work we are doing now. I cite the report of AXA, the way the Government and this Assembly will deal with that and continuous questioning, which enables answers to be given in the public domain.

5.4.2 Deputy T.A. Coles:

Does the Chief Minister therefore support a move to independent income support allowances, rather than the household versions that we currently have?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I would need to discuss that with the Minister for Social Security to gain her view. In principle, it sounds sensible, but I would need to understand the detail.

5.4.3 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:

Will the Chief Minister then advise when the full action plan and specific timetables will be published on the V.A.W.G recommendations, so that there is this timely implementation of all these recommendations, including the economic abuse one.

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

The first report outlining that will be produced at the end of this month. That will set out the timetable. I think there is a lot of work that needs to be done. There will be some recommendations that can be addressed quickly, some in the medium term and some in the longer term. This work is

being led by the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs. While we can set out a timeline, I think it is something that is going to be subject to variance as we get to grips with the problem.

5.4.4 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

As the Chief Minister outlined, there are a large number of recommendations, and we have been made aware that the chief executive has advised the Council of Ministers to focus on a few priority areas. Which, therefore, does the Chief Minister believe are the key priority areas within the V.A.W.G recommendations to do? Is economic abuse one of those areas to sort out?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I do not recall the chief executive referring to prioritisation within the V.A.W.G. report. The whole V.A.W.G. report is a priority for the Government and will stay a priority for this Government, and I hope future Governments, until all of those recommendations have been implemented.

5.4.5 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Given that the numbers of mostly women, but also some men, in the Island who experience this type of abuse, would the Chief Minister commit to looking at the funding to organisations such as F.R.E.E.D.A. (Free from Domestic Abuse) who provide outreach support and education around preventing this type of abuse, to see if anything can be done to improve those services and further support those organisations?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

The short answer to that is yes, we will keep funding under review for all these important organisations. F.R.E.E.D.A. do receive government support and we must make sure that support remains appropriate, not just for F.R.E.E.D.A. but for all organisations, to help tackle domestic abuse.