

2018.10.09

18 The Connétable of St. Helier of the Minister for Home Affairs regarding the level of public safety in Jersey: [OQ.149/2018]

What assessment has the Minister made of whether Jersey is a safe place in which to live and whether there are sufficient police resources available to ensure public safety, especially in urban areas, during the hours of darkness?

Connétable L. Norman of St. Clement (The Minister for Home Affairs):

I am very pleased to have the opportunity once again to say that Jersey is a safe place to live, to work and to visit and I pay tribute to all the services and groups across the Island who have contributed to ensuring that that has happened. Jersey is a safe place to live, to work and to visit, and I say that with confidence because that view is supported by all the available evidence and statistics. Indeed, in the most recent Jersey Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, it recorded that 94 per cent of Islanders feel safe in their neighbourhoods. Recorded crime over the last 5 years has been decreasing. If we take violent crime and the night-time economy, which seemed to be the basis of the Constable's question, the last 12 months has shown a decrease of around 11 per cent in crime. That does indicate at present there are sufficient resources with the police, but we cannot and we will not be complacent. The police are in the process of delivering a new operating model, which will invest greater resources in community policing, allowing them to work more collaboratively with partners, including the Honorary Police, and focus greater efforts on further crime prevention. Such an approach, in my view, can only be of benefit in our common objective of keeping Jersey, and indeed St. Helier, safe.

3.18.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:

I thank the Minister for his answer and endorse his thanks and confidence in the various police forces in the Island. I would like to press him though on numbers, because there is certainly anecdotal evidence that a lot of police officers have resigned from the force in the last year or so. I would like his assurance in terms of numbers: where are we in terms of the number of police officers in the Island and particularly the number of police officers on the beat or involved in community policing?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

The spending review meant that over the last 5 years, the States of Jersey Police, like other departments, had to reduce their budget. The majority of the States of Jersey Police budget is on manpower and therefore the number of actual police officers has reduced over the last 3 years, and there has been virtually - because of the budget restraints - a ban on recruitment. That is now changing and we will be appointing something between 10 and 12 new officers over the next few weeks; some might already be in post. But as I said, what the budget reduction has done is enabled the senior management team at the States of Jersey Police to think more smartly about the way they police this Island using modern technology. We have all heard about the iPads or the tablets that have been issued, which the police can write their reports on. Once they have dealt with an incident, instead having to come back to police headquarters, they can stay out on patrol, whether it is in their cars or on foot. That has been a great asset to the States of Jersey Police. As I said in my comments, there is more emphasis on community policing, where people can know their police officers, respond to their police officers and their police officers can know their communities and the people and be much more proactive in their policing. I have got great confidence in that and I am sure it is going to work.

3.18.2 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I am just referring to the transcript of a public hearing which the Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel held with the then Minister for Home Affairs. At that time, I think it was 2 or 3 years ago, we quoted from a framework document that said: "There are concerns that if the number of police officers drops below 200 in the near future, this will significantly impact on the States of Jersey Police's ability to fulfil its broad spectrum of functions." I do not know if I missed the Minister giving the actual number of officers just then; sorry if I did miss it. Could the Minister just tell us what the actual number is? Is this still the case, that a number below 200, is that significantly impacting on the ability of the people to fulfil their full range of functions?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I did not make that statement. I do not know who made that statement or what it means, but certainly the number of police officers at the moment is something just over 200. As I said, we are recruiting another 10 to 12 currently. But I think over the last 3 or 4 years, we have seen the changing attitude, this smarter policing, if you like, which is enabling the police to concentrate on their priorities and to keep the Island safe. The fact that we have seen a continual reduction in crime over the last 5 years, and particularly at night time in the urban area, by 11 per cent in the last 12 months, does show that the policing model is working.

3.18.3 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Could I have a brief supplementary, Sir? Although the crime figures are reducing, is it not true that the police are needed increasingly more in other areas, for example, concerns for welfare and attending people with mental health issues, so that we should not be dropping our police numbers any further?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Yes, I agree. When I stood for this position as Minister for Home Affairs, I said: "I want to ensure that all the emergency services, including the police, fire service and so on, are adequately resourced to do the job they need to do and the job they should be doing." I think we need to be careful about how deeply the police should be involved in mental health or whether that should be the Health Department. I am working with the States of Jersey management team, my director general at Home Affairs and the police authority and will continue to do so - it will be a continual process - to ensure that the police are adequately resourced to provide the service that Jersey wants and needs.

3.18.4 The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

I am sure that my fellow Connétables were somewhat disappointed recently when we were told that our community police officers were being withdrawn from the Parishes. Although it is an operational matter, I wonder whether the Minister is able to advise us if and when they are going to be reinstated, because my understanding was that it was for a short period of time only. If he is not able to tell us if and when they will be reinstated, will he please undertake to raise this as a matter with the States of Jersey Police?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

As the Constable said, it is an operational matter and not something that I will be aware of. I hope she heard me say in my comments - and I say it again - the new operating model is going to invest greater resources in community policing, but I will get to the Constable and anybody else who wants to know what that will mean in real terms and how quickly. I repeat again, I know we are recruiting

10 new police constables who will all be community police officers, so it is happening and it happening now.

The Bailiff:

It was 12 a minute ago, Minister. It has gone down to 10, has it?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

It is between 10 and 12, Sir.

Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade:

I am pleased that 11 new recruits will be coming on board soon. **[Laughter]** My initial question is aligned with that of the Connétable of St. Lawrence and has been adequately answered.

3.18.5 The Connétable of St. Helier:

I too am reassured by some of the things the Minister has said, but I would like to ask him directly: if he had a bigger budget would he spend it on more police officers on the beat? Following up from that, would he like me to bring an amendment to the Budget which has just been lodged in order to get more resources in the police force?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I appreciate the Constable's offer of assistance there, but for the moment perhaps he could leave it to me to have discussions with the police authority and the senior management team at the police and of course the director general, who has great experience of the Jersey Police, to make sure that we are properly resourced. It is important to me that we are properly resourced; it is important to the Island that the police are properly resourced. In fact, all of our emergency services have to be properly resourced. **[Approbation]** But sometimes there are ways of doing things better with less cash and I think the police have proven in the last 2 to 3 years that they are able to do that. There will come a time of course when you cannot become more efficient and more resources may well be needed, but that is something that we are going to work on in the next few years.