

3. Oral Questions

3.1 Deputy J.A. Hilton of St. Helier of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding St. Mark's Hostel:

Does the Minister consider that the correct decision was made when St. Mark's Hostel was closed to make way for a facility aimed at accommodating 16 to 25 year-olds together and, if so, why?

The Bailiff:

I gather, Assistant Minister, you are going to answer this question?

Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier (Assistant Minister for Health and Social Services - rapporteur):

Yes. The closure of St. Mark's Hostel was a planned closure over the last 4 years. It came initially from a recommendation in the Scrutiny Report S.R.6 done in 2009 to ask the Health and Social Services Department to get a strategy for 16 to 25 year-olds. I must point out that Strathmore and Field View - and we do now have 3 other facilities for care leavers who are in our care - are not necessarily the same. We were finding more and more young people who were not known to our services being homeless for one reason or another.

3.1.1 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

The reason I asked that question was because at a recent Scrutiny Panel hearing in July, I brought the subject up of St. Mark's Hostel being closed and my concern around 16 to 25 year-olds being housed in one establishment. Members will be aware 2 weeks ago, we were given a presentation by the Scottish Care Inspectorate who were invited to Jersey to look at the facilities available here who looked after children and in their report, and I quote, they say: "An adolescent hostel where significant improvements have been made following our inspection is now to close. The current residents will move to a voluntary sector hostel which includes young people in their 20s. Little consideration has been given to the consideration to the potential risks this may hold for vulnerable 16 year-olds living with 25 year-olds." The question I would like to ask the Assistant Minister, in light of the fact that the Health and Social Services Department invited the Scottish Care Inspectorate back to the Island to inspect the premises, is what action does the Minister intend to take to address this concern?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Well, we have discussed this and I did know where the question came from because I and my Minister and the Minister for Home Affairs were very saddened to read this, and I will admit that we must have not communicated our strategy very well to the S.C.I. (Scottish Care Inspectorate) when they returned. There are 2 young people from St. Mark's who went across to Strathmore. We now ensure every 16 and 17 year-old are looked after ... I oversee this with the Assistant Minister for Social Security and the Assistant Minister for Housing by meeting monthly with the shelter manager and officers to make sure this is a smooth transition. Everything so far ... and as I say, these are not children necessarily known to us. When I met some of the youngsters at Strathmore, they were staying in Jersey. Their parents had left. They had been brought here when they were about 7. Their parents had left because their work had dried up and they could not get any other work. This was their home, they were not leaving so we have to house them. We work with them, key workers, there are 17 there at the moment between, I think we have got 7 17 and 18 year-olds and 7 up to 22 to 23. They are all in education except 3 and the oldest 2 will be moving into Roseneath. It is a complete strategy and, as I say, I am keeping an eye on it with the other Ministers involved.

3.1.2 Deputy J.G. Reed of St. Ouen:

Listening to the Assistant Minister, do I understand the fact that the department is not planning to take any action regarding the comments made by the Inspectorate?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

I just have to reiterate. The action we have to take is that we did not get across our strategy because, we were tasked in, I think it was S.R.6 of 2009, to look into children who find themselves homeless. They may be coming out of prison, they may not have been known to our services, but they were literally sleeping on friends' couches until friends' mums got fed up with them and then they were finding themselves homeless. St. Mark's was never going to be that facility. St. Mark's was too small. Strathmore is big enough to segregate off and at the moment, we are looking at it monthly. It is working well. The only delay I would say that we would like to happen soon, and I am assured it will happen at the very end of November, is the opening of Roseneath for the moving on of some of the 23 and 24 year-olds. In fact, there are only 2 that will be moving on because they are that age.

3.1.3 The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Just as a follow-up. It is still not clear, and maybe the Assistant Minister can answer this particular question, does she believe it is acceptable to accommodate 16 to 25 year-olds together?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

The one good thing about having Field View, the other 3 flats and Strathmore now, every young person is assessed and one 16 year-old who came to our notice not through our services was not offered Strathmore. They were then offered Field View and that is where they went because we felt they felt that it was more appropriate and this will continue. There are key workers. There is a project called the Star Project, which is an international tool apparently that is used to measure the engagement of younger people and I am told that the mixture is working better than having 7 or 8 16 year-olds all in one place together from the staff and the young people themselves.

3.1.4 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier:

In her monitoring of the situation, has the Assistant Minister come across any particular problems with the mixing of 16 and 17 year-olds with 25 year-olds?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Sorry, I never got the very first word in my what's-it, pardon?

Deputy G.P. Southern:

In your monitoring.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Oh, monitoring, sorry. I thought you said "voluntary". There will be problems. I think we have solved a problem. We have now found a place that young people can go, they are assessed and there was an increasing number. The minute Strathmore opened we had 17 young people between the ages of 17 and 22. Now, in St. Mark's, we were only accommodating 4. Where were these young people before? They were sleeping on someone's floor or sofa.

3.1.5 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

My question had nothing to do with young people sleeping on people's sofas. It is all about strategy. The Assistant Minister said they obviously did not get the strategy across to the Scottish Care Inspectorate when they came over. The Scottish Care Inspectorate have said in their report that they believe that vulnerable young people are being put at risk and my question to the Assistant Minister is are you going to take note of this and do something about it and move those teenagers out of Strathmore or stop putting people in their 20s into Strathmore with drug

and alcohol problems with vulnerable 16 year-olds? So my question is: what is the Assistant Minister going to do about that?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

I think the Deputy is misquoting the report. They said we need to get a strategy. I said we have not got the strategy across. Yes, there will be older people in Strathmore and younger people with different problems. The Deputy has asked me to move these young people out. There is nowhere for me to move them to. This is our strategy and it is working. It is being monitored monthly, as I said, by 3 Ministers, officers and, at the moment, it is new but this is the strategy and this is what we will carry on doing.