

5. Questions to Ministers without Notice - The Minister for Health and Social Services

5.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisssier:

Is the Minister aware that perhaps inadvertently the regulatory regimes in care homes are leading to a situation where the number of double-rooms is being much reduced and there are difficulties apparently for married couples to occupy such facilities in residential homes? Is he aware of that, Sir, and, secondly, what does he intend to do about it?

Senator B.E. Shenton (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

I thank the Deputy for the question. We are, as he is aware, going through a consultation process with regard to residential and care homes and, as the Deputy is also aware, there is a need for more robust regulation in this area. The consultation process has identified a number of issues which need to be addressed and we are working flat-out to address these and that is just one of the issues that has been raised. But I think also the Deputy would also agree with me that when we are putting the regulation in place we must not put such stringent regulation in place that we start putting the smaller homes out of the business and end up with a monopoly in the market. I think I have just answered a question that the Deputy may have been asking me in the future.

5.1.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisssier:

Just a supplementary, and I thank the Minister and we understand the move to single rooms is often because of en-suite provision, but is he aware that this process is already well under way, well under way before the consultation process is likely to end and that we could find ourselves with a serious shortage of accommodation for married couples who wish to move into such homes?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

We do not currently have a serious shortage of accommodation, but yes one of the reasons for bringing this process forward is that we were aware of difficulties and possible problems in the future. I thank the Deputy, the Deputy has been giving great input into this area. I am not sure whether he will be conflicted in due course [**Laughter**], and I mean that jokingly, not nastily. But we are aware it is a very important theory and we are looking into it.

5.2 The Deputy of St. Martin:

In answer to my question about prostate cancer 2 weeks ago, the Minister stated that his department was not going to introduce a prostate screening programme; that bowel cancer will be the subject of the screening programme. Will the Minister outline the proposals for the screening, including whether the screening will be free; will it be both for men and woman; and when will the screening programme begin?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

We are starting a bowel cancer screening programme. I do not have all the details yet because the Medical Officer of Health and her department are putting together the process and so on. I believe that it will not be limited to one sex and it will be for both sexes. I seem to remember that bowel cancer is about the fourth largest killer with regard to different cancers and that is why we are bringing that forward ahead of prostate cancer, which is slightly further down the list. I did read a very interesting article yesterday about prostate cancer which was published in a U.S. (United States) publication and we are well aware of the concerns the Deputy has with regard prostate cancer and we are hoping to move forward on that in due course. But at the moment we are putting bowel cancer in place first but we are well aware of the Deputy's concerns regarding prostate cancer.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

May I just ask whether it will be free, the new screening programme, Sir?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

I would hope it would be. Again, I have not had the final costings forwarded from the department, obviously we are working within a finite budget. Ideally it should be free and that should be what we are aiming at.

5.3 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

It seems a long, long time ago since I sat on the review of the closure of the Leoville and McKinstry wards at Overdale, and I would like the Minister to update the House, please, Sir, on the current situation in those wards to advise us whether all patients have now been moved?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

No, I think it is fair to say there is still a certain amount of unrest regarding the closure of those wards and I am going to go up to see the staff of McKinstry ward, I believe, on Thursday because they are unhappy about the closure. We are reaching the end of the process so that the actual closure will be within the next few weeks. But I am well aware of the concerns and the points made within the Scrutiny report.

5.3.1 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

May I have a supplementary to that question, Sir? Would the Minister advise whether there are patients now in both wards or have they been moved to one? Is either of the wards empty?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

I know that there are definitely patients in the McKinstry Ward. I would have to check to see whether there are still patients in the other ward.

5.4 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier:

With the warm weather now upon us, is the Minister aware of what steps his Health Protection Unit is taking to mitigate the odour nuisance being created by the Island's green waste composting at La Collette?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

We are in regular contact with the Transport and Technical Services Department and the Minister of Transport and Technical Services, to insist that they operate under best practice. At the present that is as far as we can go with regards this, is to make sure that they do operate under best practice.

5.4.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:

A supplementary, please, Sir. The Minister mentioned he is in regular contact with the other department, would he confirm that the 2 Ministers have agreed to defer legal proceedings in order to allow the Health Department to go for an amendment to the law to protect it from being responsible for a bill should the Parishes' legal action take it down that road?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

The Constable is partly right. Under the way the law as currently drafted it is up to the court to determine best practice and we could end up with quite a hefty legal bill if we start going into litigation with Transport and Technical Services. What we are trying to do is amend the law so that the Health Protection Department has more power to prove best practice itself. Because I think the Health Protection Department has much more expertise in this area - with all due respect to the court - than the court itself. So I think that it is an area where we will be bringing an amendment to the House but I think it is common sense and I would not want to spend hundreds of thousands of pounds of taxpayer's money and get absolutely nowhere.

5.5 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Can the Minister please inform the House how far they are down the line with the unique health name and address register? How many people they have on it? Could he inform the House with this new name and address register what the take up is on existing screening programmes? Thank you, Sir.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

I would have to come back to the Deputy with the exact answer because she has asked where we are today. The last time I spoke to the Health Department I think we were up to about 40,000-odd. But I will have to come back on that and, again, I will have to come back with the actual figure with regard the screening programme and the figures with regarding executed screening programmes.

5.6 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Given all the problems with the birth of *New Directions*, old directions, U-turn directions, could the Minister confirm, Sir, that *New Directions* is indeed on course and that all the vital parties within his department are totally behind that report and that all that simply remains to be done is a little bit of work on the financial side? Could he confirm that is the situation?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

To be honest, there is still a fair amount of work to be done on the financial side to get it to a standard where we are totally happy with it. As far as I am aware everyone within the department is behind *New Directions* but, as I say, there is still work to be done and it is on course, albeit as a delayed course, and a very slow boat. But we are trying to get there. What I do not want to do is bring something to the House that is half-cocked or half-baked and it falls down in a number of areas. It is also a process which I believe Scrutiny can offer a great deal of input and we thank them for their patience in this because they have been exceedingly patient with us with our delay after delay.

5.6.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Just a supplementary. Could the Minister confirm that there will now be a section in the report, as was not the case previously, on Social Services?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

There are a couple of areas where the report is a little bit light. I will not enlighten the Deputy on where I feel the other areas are light but we are hoping to bring a report that covers all areas that *New Directions* should cover, which includes Social Services.

5.7 Senator S. Syvret:

The Minister for Health and Social Services rejected an appeal from Mr. Simon Bellwood. He did, however, say in that letter and I quote: "However, in the wider public interest if you can furnish me with tangible facts which can be corroborated independently then I will consider how best to proceed." In the light of the following tangible facts, would the Minister for Health and Social Services now agree that an independent investigation into the precise handling of Mr. Bellwood's concerns at Greenfields be undertaken, particularly with regard to the activities of the civil servants? The tangible facts being demonstrated in the BBC Southwest Politics Show on 13th January; witness statements taken as part of the Madeleine Davis investigation; police interviews of former residents of Greenfields; interviews received by Gerald White; information received by Andrew Williamson; information received by the Howard Legal for Penal Reform. Does the Minister for Health and Social Services consider that list to be a sufficient amount of tangible facts to merit a proper independent investigation?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

I can confirm that we are undertaking an independent investigation into the circumstances surrounding the failure of Mr. Bellwood to complete his probationary process and we have promised on numerous occasions that this report will be made public to all States Members and members of the public.

5.8 The Deputy of St. Mary:

Given that the Minister has ultimate responsibility for Social Services, does he acknowledge the long-term social benefits that can accrue from a universal entitlement to early years' education and care and has he considered that money spent in this area would indeed be well-spent?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

I agree that we have to try and provide, as a government, universal care and move away from this lottery position, but I also am aware that there are a large number of people on this Island that can afford to pay for nursery care and perhaps we should not be subsidising those that are earning hundreds of thousands of pounds a year by providing free care. We have a limited budget. If this House wants to increase the budget of the Education, Sports and Culture to provide free care for everyone, then so be it. It is a decision for the House. But it is important to at least give those on limited budget access to a certain number of hours free care every week. But it is the way that we carry out that policy that I have a few questions with.

5.8.1 The Deputy of St. Mary:

A supplementary, Sir. I did specifically ask did the Minister acknowledge the long-term benefits? We are hearing from *New Directions* that we are looking to the long-term health benefits to the Island. Does the Minister not consider that we need to look to the long-term benefits for social aspects as well, Sir?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

There are long-term benefits but there are also long-term benefits with a child staying at home with a mother that can spend time and look after the child in a quality home environment, as indeed my wife did with our youngsters. That was something that I was fortunate to be able to do because of my earning capacity. I could afford to live with only one income. There are other people not so fortunate. I think to turn around and say that nursery care is better than a loving mother at home does a great disservice to all those mothers that do stay at home and bring up their children. So I do not think you can be quite so black and white in this matter.

5.9 Deputy J.J. Huet of St. Helier:

I note that the Connétable of St. Helier was worried about the compost odour at La Collette and I would ask the Minister for Health and Social Services has his department done anything about the smells that can be once or twice a day in the First Tower area from the sewage that the people put up with, year in year out, day in day out, week in week out? What effect has he found in his department that this has on the health of these people and, if not, has he ever done anything to get rid of it? Thank you, Sir.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

I thank the Deputy for the question. I often wonder when people moan about the smell emanating from La Collette if we have a particularly... people living at Bellozane have put up with much worse in my opinion. Sometimes you drive past Bellozane and the smell is absolutely horrendous and I think as a States Assembly the quicker we can put a roof on the Bellozane treatment plant and improve the output from the plant the better, because also at Health we have concerns about the outflow in this area. I have great sympathy, and I think as a States body we need to try and address this as a matter of great speed.

The Bailiff:

That concludes, I am afraid, the first question period.