4.6 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade of the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning regarding a review of the general provision and regulation of nursery care in Jersey. (OQ.98/2026)

I understand this will be answered by the Assistant Minister, which is great for me, if that is all right with everyone else. Further to the announcement that Busy Bees nursery will close its business at Leeward, what steps is the Minister taking, if any, to review the general provision and regulation of nursery care in Jersey?

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter (Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning - rapporteur):

I was of course sorry to learn of the closure of Leeward Busy Bees. The closure of any nursery is concerning for parents, children and staff, and my thoughts do remain with those who are affected during this transition period. I can confirm that the Childhood and Early Years Service has worked closely with the nursery's owners to minimise disruption. I am advised that there are no job losses expected, with Busy Bees offering places for the affected children at its other 2 settings in Jersey and transferring staff where appropriate. The Department has been helping a small number of families in securing alternative childcare arrangements, and if there are any others who are impacted who do need support then I would urge them to contact the Department. I understand that overall the numbers of childcare spaces in Jersey is growing. A new nursery has recently opened and additional childminders are currently progressing through the registration process, which will further strengthen provision. We are continuing as a Department to maintain a focus on the early years' sector. I am grateful to the Minister for giving me delegated responsibility in this area very recently so that we can continue to do that, and I am due to meet with key stakeholders in the very near future. Looking ahead the main legislative reform priority for 2027 will be the Day Care of Children (Jersey) Law 2002, while also undertaking a wider review of statutory requirements to ensure the framework remains effective, proportionate and fit for the future.

4.6.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

I thank the Assistant Minister for her answer. Notwithstanding the review that is going on at the moment, there have been some voices, what I might call fringe voices, that suggest that the sector is currently over-regulated. Is this a view that her Ministry shares, and would she explain whether she believes that the current general state of regulation is either valid or excessive?

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

I will repeat a comment that we made at Scrutiny on Thursday, that the regulation review is absolutely not about deregulation. It is about making sure that the regulations that we do have are fit for purpose for 2026 and beyond. Clearly the law that is in place from 2002 is 24 years old. Children's safety and safeguarding will always come first, as will the quality of the early years provision in Jersey. The piece of work that is already underway and will happen in 2027 will involve formally consulting the sector and the wider public, so people are very free to share their views as part of that going forward.

4.6.2 Deputy V. Li of St. Helier North:

I just wondered what was the evidence for the scheme in the first place and how will it be funded sustainably after 2 years? As I was being told during the public hearing it is only a 2-year scheme.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Do I understand when the Member says "the scheme" she means the 2 to 3 funding scheme? Yes and the question of ongoing ... it is a 2-year pilot scheme and it will be assessed going forward. The absolute intention is to continue that going forward. I do not think we would be starting such a scheme without wanting to see it continue, but of course we will look at the evidence. When it comes to funding, that is a wider Government question and, as Government moves towards a 3-year funding cycle, that will be part of the conversations that happen over the next few months and into early next year.

4.6.3 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour:

I am delighted that the Assistant Minister has been given this responsibility. When the review is going to be carried out, obviously the Assistant Minister cannot foresee the outcome of it, but is her general direction more or less regulation?

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Thank you for the question. I think I would repeat what I have said before; it is not about deregulation, it is about making sure we have the correct fit-for-purpose regulation going forward. There are certain areas, and I can list some of them that have already been identified by officers in the department as needing to be looked at, so it is around definitions, categorisations of childcare, improved clarity on workforce qualifications, prioritisation of safeguarding responsibilities, the inspection framework needs to be aligned with contemporary risk-based models. I could go on and share some of those. As we say, there will also be those that come up during the consultation with the sector and the public as well. I do not think it would be appropriate for me at this stage, having had delegated responsibility for I think a week now as well, to say that it should be either way. My priority, and I think I share this with the Minister - I know I do - is that children's safety and safeguarding always comes first. The quality of provision is important. It is not about deregulating the sector, it is about making sure that we have the correct regulation and the system that ensures that it is in place as well.

4.6.4 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I thank the Assistant Minister for her answer. I am pleased to hear that quality will continue to be a big focus. I think that rates of pay for childcare workers is key in attracting high-quality staff. Is there anything that the Minister is considering doing to tackle this issue, given that it has been I think quite difficult for private businesses to make a profit in this area and there is that interaction there? What can Government do to actually improve the terms and conditions and the pay offered to those childcare workers to attract some really high quality workers there?

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

The most recent piece of research that was conducted with providers, the *Child Care Providers Survey Research Report 2025*, and that is going to be an annual survey going forward - it has been done for the previous 3 years - does look at the challenges in the sector. We know that recruitment and retention is a challenge that is often cited by providers. That piece of research also looks at the current offerings to those working in the sector. Those who were surveyed in the last survey are all paying the living wage to their staff. There are also a number offering additional benefits around gym memberships and memberships to other things on-Island. It is something that the providers and the sector are very aware of, they are working on. I think one of the key areas for Government is around how we help to upskill and the courses that are offered. There has been a lot of very good work that has gone on in recent years in that area focusing on childcare, but it is something on my list to check in with, see where we are at with that and what more could be done.