

2025.11.11

2.7 Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée of St. Helier South of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding adequate support for Islanders experiencing mental health problems (OQ.243/2025)

Will the Minister advise what measures are being implemented to ensure adequate support is available for Islanders experiencing mental health problems, given that Mind Jersey is no longer providing counselling services and that other agencies offering such crucial support have reported increasing difficulty in meeting the growing demand for their services?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet of St. Saviour (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

While Mind Jersey have recently ceased to provide some limited counselling services, I would like to assure Members that that will not have a significant impact on mental health services users in any way. That is because the Listening Lounge currently provide a comprehensive service utilising fully qualified British-accredited counselling psychotherapists and Jersey Talking Therapy also provide a service using psychological well-being practitioners. I know that recently Mind Jersey's contract to provide a service to carers came to an end but I can also inform Members that a new contract was recently awarded to a partnership to provide carer support, and that is led by the Listening Lounge. But it also includes a number of other charities, including Dementia Jersey, Focus on Mental Illness and Jersey Eating Disorder Support group. This year we have also commissioned or developed a number of other services, including a physical health pilot for people with mental health needs and the recovery help which is running an increasing number of support groups. I hope that this helps to put the Deputy's mind at rest and other Members' minds at rest too.

2.7.1 Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée:

Is the Minister concerned by the fact that running a social media campaign on the benefits of repeated co-counselling, while actively reducing the funding that makes it available, is sending a very mixed message to the electorate?

Deputy T.J.A Binet:

Yes, I am caught a bit off balance here. I was not aware that we were reducing funding because we are supporting all of the work that I have previously mentioned. I can certainly check but that certainly does not sound like a reduction in the support that we are offering people with mental health problems. It looks very much to me like an increase and an improvement.

2.7.2 Deputy T.A. Coles of St. Helier South:

Given that the services mentioned by the Minister, the Talking Therapy and the Listening Lounge have limited places and limited number of slots available per client, is the Minister concerned that the increased demand by reducing services for Mind may force people more into the private sector where these services are not regulated?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

I am led to believe, and I have been making inquiries as recently as this morning but I cannot speak for Mind, but the services that they were providing were not of the quality that are being provided by these other providers. I was not aware of a shortfall in the capacity. As a result of what Deputy Coles has said, I will certainly be looking into that but that is something that has not been brought to my attention.

2.7.3 Deputy T.A. Coles:

The Minister says that he was concerned about the quality of their services being provided. Is not quality driven up by regulation and having counselling services added to the professional register would be more beneficial to the public as a whole?

Deputy T.J.A Binet:

No, I think we have had this discussion and, as I say, I do not want to get too deeply into this because I have had limited time. I have got 5 questions this morning and I have been trying to ensure the accuracy of them. This is something I am happy to take up outside of this. But I am led to believe that Mind Jersey were using trainees in the counselling service but I do not want to get any further down this road, if the Deputy will permit me, because I need to look into this in more detail.

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

The Minister mentioned that a contract at Mind Jersey has come to an end and that there may be a new contract. Does this new contract result in an overall increase or decrease in funds to this much-loved and effective local charity?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

To the best of my knowledge, and I have looked at this in a bit more detail, the partnership that is being put together is going to offer a considerably more comprehensive service. As I say, it involves Dementia Jersey, Focus on Mental Illness, the Listening Lounge is there, which leads the project, then Jersey Eating Disorder and they are offering a broader and, hopefully, a more effective support service, and that is why the contract was given to them.

[10:15]

2.7.5 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

The Minister did not answer my original question, so I would be grateful if he could answer whether Mind Jersey are receiving an increase or a decrease in funds with this new contract. Also, by what measure is the Minister making a judgment on the quality of their services?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

In terms of the amount of funds that have been attributed to the new service, that is something I would have to enquire about. As to the judgment on the quality of the new service, that has not been defined by me. There is a commissioning process and that commissioning process has found that the bid that was put in by the Listening Lounge in conjunction with these other charities was the better of the options than that what was chosen. I think that that is the process that we use and I cannot see any reason to suggest that that would not be the case, that it is a superior service on offer.

2.7.6 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

Will the Minister advise whether he is monitoring waiting times for referrals for mental health services and, if so, could he tell us what the average waiting times currently are?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

No, to be honest with you, I would not be able to carry that level of detail round because I find myself monitoring anything and everything in the health service employing 3,000 people. The answer to that is no. But if the Deputy would like some information I can certainly make some enquiries in that regard.

2.7.7 Deputy M. Tadier:

The supplementary is really whether the Minister is aware of issues in terms of waiting times when it comes to mental health referrals and whether he can tell us whether the waiting times are coming down or whether they are staying the same or going up?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

No, I tried to answer that the first time and I said that I cannot monitor everything all the way through the whole system; it would be physically impossible. But if the Deputy would like some details I am very happy to make inquiries and provide them to him.

2.7.8 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf of St. Saviour:

Would the Minister kindly address whether or not in his view this is affecting the increasing number of Islanders that are awaiting A.D.H.D. (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) diagnosis and treatment and, therefore, require counselling? He will be aware, as Members are, of my personal interest in this.

The Bailiff:

This is a question about Mind Jersey providing counselling services; that is the original question.

Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:

The extent to whether or not it affects those requiring counselling services because they cannot get A.D.H.D. diagnosis and treatment.

The Bailiff:

All right. Minister, can you assist in this way?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

I have listened carefully to that question and I do not know if I understand it fully. I have mentioned the fact that we have got some comprehensive services available from other sources, which are more comprehensive than the other ones, as I understand it, that were made available from Mind Jersey. With regard to A.D.H.D., I think the Deputy knows that we are doing all we can to bring waiting lists down and there is work ongoing with that. I am hoping that we are going to make some significant progress in 2025. But if the Deputy is aware of anybody with A.D.H.D. that cannot get the counselling services they require, I am very happy to listen to them and see what we can do to put that straight.

Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:

I am grateful for that last comment. I am aware of many, as the Minister is aware, and I am grateful for his comments and engagement for those people who are awaiting diagnosis and need counselling clearly.

2.7.9 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter:

Is the Minister able to clarify or confirm that he is one of the trustees of one of the charities mentioned in the new partnership that is being awarded this contract? If that is the case, can he confirm what involvement he had or did not have in the tender process to award that, please?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

Yes, I am very happy to confirm that I am chairman of the Jersey Focus on Mental Illness. I am also happy to confirm that I have had absolutely no involvement with their inclusion in this service whatsoever. To be fair, I found out that they were part of this once the contract had been awarded. I would also say it is not a commercial business and I think charities should be viewed - and I think they are viewed - for what they deliver in their own right.

2.7.10 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

I am grateful to the Minister for that clarification that he was not involved. I would just question whether he should be answering this question in the States Assembly at all, but would the Minister agree with that? I do not know if I need to phrase it as a question or whether it is a point of order for you, Sir, about whether he should be, and he has praised rather a lot.

The Bailiff:

I do not think there is any difficulty in answering questions in the way that he has. Have you a question or not that you want to ask him?

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

No, Sir.

The Bailiff:

No, there is no question.

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

Sir, if I may, I have made extensive inquiries for the Charities Commissioner about my involvement and the way I conduct myself. I have been given basically a clean bill of health to carry on. I would not have done that without taking his advice.

2.7.11 Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée:

As the Minister stated, he is prepared to look at the situation in greater detail. Would he be prepared to consider providing the service through the hospital? Would the Minister come back to the Assembly and report it to us of the outcome of this further research?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

I am sorry but I do not think I have quite understood what I am being asked to do, Sir, forgive me.

The Bailiff:

Do you want to repeat your question, Deputy Porée?

Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée:

As the Minister has stated, in particular with the question to Deputy Coles, he is prepared to look at the situation in greater detail. Would the Minister be prepared to come back to the Assembly and report his findings?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

I am not entirely sure which situation the Deputy is referring to but I am happy to pick it up with the Deputy in order to not delay proceedings. I will make that commitment, whatever that might be, if that helps to move things on.