

2025.07.08

4.7 Deputy M. Tadier of the Chief Minister regarding in service provision for deaf Islanders (OQ.175/2025):

Will the Chief Minister state what gaps, if any, have been identified in service provision for deaf Islanders across Government departments, including signing provision and hearing loops; and, if none, will he commit to engaging with affected Islanders to ascertain how service provision might be improved?

Deputy L.J. Farnham of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter (The Chief Minister):

British Sign Language is operational across most government services using remote online third-party interpreter sign video. This includes at Union Street and across all services, emergency services currently also offer an emergency only text service. There are hearing loops in Union Street. The diversity and inclusion team maintain relationships with the Jersey Deaf Society, Earsay Jersey, and regularly attends deaf partnership meetings and monthly informal deaf club meetings. The Government also receives direct communications from Islanders via a dedicated deaf community engagement officer who works in the government building at Union Street as part of the Social Security Department. There are always opportunities to improve service provision for deaf Islanders, and we are actively working on this; in schools, through supporting engagement with British Sign Language, using parents, increasing capacity to deliver enhanced British Sign Language courses and training in Jersey. The hospital is working to improve the overall patient experience for deaf patients and this includes focus on communication, enhancing both the clarity of written communications and the range of communication methods available, and enhancing waiting areas and hearing loop maintenance. Yes, the Government will commit to continue engaging with affected Islanders to ascertain how we might further improve service provision.

4.7.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

I thank the Minister for his answer. I recently engaged with one deaf person in our community who said that she would get phone calls from the hospital about her appointments even though her notes clearly said that she was deaf and she could not answer the phone. On another occasion she was asked at the hospital, for example, where her appropriate adult was and she simply replied that she was an intelligent adult and did not need an appropriate adult, she was simply deaf. Does the Minister think that across departments more needs to be done to perhaps combat this, perhaps thoughtless or careless, prejudice that deaf people might face in our community?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

While, of course, I cannot comment on individual cases, yes, I think more can be done. The hospital are working to improve the overall patient experience for deaf patients. As I said, we are committed to engaging with affected Islanders. I would urge Members who are contacted by any affected Islanders to get in contact with the Government if they are having difficulties, where we will be pleased to listen to the problems with a view to improving our services.

4.7.2 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:

Will the Chief Minister explain why the main meeting room in the new Union Street building lacks hearing technology and commit to ensuring Islanders who are hard of hearing can fully participate in public meetings, like the Planning Committee hearings, in an accessible space?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I think when the building was originally designed it was not envisaged that public meetings would be held in that space, and I do agree that areas where there are public meetings need to contain the appropriate provision.

4.7.3 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

Yes, it was because I accompanied an Islander last week to the Planning Committee in the main meeting room and, as hard of hearing, she was unable to follow the proceedings even though she had a lot to say on the matter. Now, accepting that this is difficult to have public meetings at New Union Street, what will happen next, because there needs to be this accessibility for Islanders to participate, especially in things like the Planning Committee?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I think I need to liaise with the relevant teams at Union Street and following a brief Ministerial discussion, to just simply give an instruction for that part to be put right and make sure the provision is provided. I undertake to do that.

[11:00]

4.7.4 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:

Would the Chief Minister advise if the public counters room is routinely tested for the hearing loops, and if any new recruited staff receive mandatory training by engaging with the deaf community?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I am sorry, I did not hear the full question, but I do not have the detail to hand as to exactly which members of staff are trained to liaise with hearing-impaired customers, but I can certainly find out.

4.7.5 Deputy I. Gardiner:

In that case, a supplementary: would the Chief Minister advise which department chief officer or Minister has the responsibility of engagement with the deaf community?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

If I may, I will provide that information to the Deputy in writing following the sitting.

Deputy I. Gardiner:

Sir, would it be possible to provide it in the public domain because I think that it is important for the deaf community to know who is ultimately responsible for engagement with them?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I will publish the answer, yes.

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

Does the Chief Minister think that we are doing enough generally to make sure that Islanders with disabilities are being included?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I think we are doing more than we have done. There is a momentum going, but we can always do more. We recognise that, and we are committed to doing more, as I believe this Assembly is, but we cannot achieve it overnight. I believe that where there is a will, there is a way to get better and we are committed to doing that.

4.7.7 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

What more could we do? For example, is there anything baked into policy formation which requires sensitivity to protected characteristics such as disability?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I am just wondering, Sir, are we related to hearing now? Could the Deputy clarify?

The Deputy Bailiff:

The question was in relation to ...

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Yes, in relation to hearing.

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Yes, I outlined what we are doing in the opening answer, what we are working on improving and, of course, a commitment to continue engaging with affected Islanders to ascertain how we might further improve the service provision. We are committed to doing that and I think the important thing is we keep the momentum going. That is the message I want to put across to the Assembly.

4.7.8 Connétable K. Shenton-Stone of St. Martin:

On Sunday, I attended the Earsay, which is the deaf community, barbecue and met some fantastic people there, and was interpreted to. It appears that the community are quite poorly served, and they do not seem to have a dedicated social worker who actually uses B.S.L. (British Sign Language), which is incredibly important. I believe it was got rid of by a chief executive, 2 chief executives ago. Can the Chief Minister commit to providing - because it is incredibly important - a social worker who can use British Sign Language. They are a deaf community. Could you look into that, please?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Yes, certainly. As I said, we receive direct communications, we liaise directly with the partially hearing-impaired community through our deaf community engagement officer who works at Union Street. I did meet with him briefly last week, but I undertake to follow that up to see what we can do to improve things in that area.

4.7.9 The Connétable of St. Martin:

Because B.S.L. is a distinct language and culture, maybe we could include them in the International Cultural Centre. Would he think about that?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

That is up to those people involved in the International Cultural Centre, but I certainly would not object to it.

4.7.10 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

Would the Chief Minister commit to giving us more information or conducting an audit about the numbers of staff across departments who are B.S.L. trained and under which circumstances B.S.L. signing, interpreting, subtitling and so on would be provided automatically for governmental announcements and videos, et cetera.

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

If I may just briefly provide some further statistics according to the report by the Royal Association for Deaf Persons. There are approximately 13,000 adults who have some degree of hearing loss, there are between 6,000 and 7,000 active adult hearing aid users. There are 24 British Sign Language first language speakers, somewhere between 10 and 20 have profound hearing loss and communicate with mixed methods. There are 74 deaf children and young people who are supported by the Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department's deaf support team. We are on top of the statistics and I can only reiterate the Government's commitment to continue engaging with affected Islanders to ascertain how we might further improve service provision. So the answer to that is yes.