

2026.02.24

5. Urgent Oral Question

5.1 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding proposed changes to publicly funded healthcare eligibility policy (UOQ.1/2026)

Further to the proposed changes to policy regarding publicly-funded healthcare eligibility policy, off-Island travel and accommodation policy and discharge-ready patients remaining in hospital, will the Minister provide further details as to how and when these proposed changes might be operationalised?

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

Firstly, I do not know if I am allowed to express my surprise but I am a little surprised that this has been allowed as an urgent question because I am not quite sure where the urgency comes from. The Deputy has been aware that these policies have been under consideration for some time. We have now got them into a written form. The Deputy will know that they are tabled for discussion with the Advisory Board on Thursday, because I wanted to take the opportunity to air these ideas and get the feedback and opinions from the Advisory Board. After all, that is what they are there for. All I can say is that once I have had a chance to discuss it with them, we will give it further consideration and I will be in a better position then to answer the Deputy's question a bit more accurately. I can add that I think it would have been the easiest thing in the world to avoid this because there is an election coming up, but as far as I am concerned we need to be more honest with the public, and that is what I am trying to do. I am trying to confront the real problems that we have got and do that in spite of the election. If I am to be criticised for that, well, too bad.

5.1.1 Deputy J. Renouf:

I have not made any criticism, and I note that the Minister has made the same observation regarding every single urgent oral question I have successfully tabled to ask him. I accept that we are at an early stage. However, the questions that have been raised by the tabling of these proposals will raise legitimate concerns among the public. Will the Minister perhaps answer 2 follow-up questions? One of them relates to the very first question I asked him, which is what timetable is the Minister working to in terms of implementing these changes, bearing in mind that most of these changes will be implemented by order, which is why I think it is an urgent question. It could happen at any point. What timetable is he working towards and what consultation with the public is he planning in relation to any or all of these changes?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

I think I will make the point again. I do not have a set timetable for these things. It is part of an awful lot of other work that is going on. Maybe it is just the way I work but we are taking this thing forward, I will be speaking to the Advisory Board on Wednesday evening and we will make our further decisions then. If the Deputy has got some further concerns he would like to discuss with me privately, I am very happy to meet with him privately and go through it in more detail, but I do not have a set timetable. I would like to move things on as quickly as I can because I think these things are reasonably urgent.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Sir, point of order. I asked about the consultation, whether there would be a consultation. I do not believe that point was answered.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Minister, can you answer that, please?

Deputy T.J.A Binet:

I shall be discussing this with the Advisory Board on Wednesday. We can raise the issue of consultation. It may be something that they advise me to undertake but, as I said, the next thing ... as I

said, we are spinning an awful lot of plates in Health at the moment and this is not the only thing that I am dealing with. I am sorry if I am not giving it quite enough attention but I will just be interested to hear what the Advisory Board has got to suggest to me on Wednesday.

5.1.2 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:

Would the Minister advise if he has done modelling on potential cost implications to the family and if this modelling will be presented to the Advisory Board?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

No, there has not been any modelling undertaken, certainly not that I am aware of anyway.

5.1.3 Deputy I. Gardiner:

A supplementary question: would the Minister advise if he intends to sign the order before the elections or will it be left to the next Minister for Health and Social Services?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

I am going to have to say this for, I think, the fifth time. I shall be talking to the Advisory Board about that. We have got an election coming up. I am not sure whether it would even be possible to implement these things properly, because there needs to be some preparatory work done, but it is work in progress. I am not sure if that is quite understood.

Deputy I. Gardiner:

My question was very simple. Does the Minister intend to sign the order for these changes before the elections?

The Deputy Bailiff:

I think he had already answered the question.

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

I simply do not know. I do not know how many times I can be called upon to answer the same question, but I simply do not know.

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

I will just start by saying that I think this is a matter of public interest and that is one of the reasons why we are here, elected to this Assembly, to ask questions of Ministers. How have the income levels been set for the proposed travel and accommodation policy? Will they be increased annually in line with inflation or average earnings, for example?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

Of course this is in the public interest. That is the very reason that I am doing it, as I say, perhaps unwisely before an election. I am making it a public issue by putting it in the papers for the board to comment upon. I do not see there is anything wrong with that. Sorry, could the Deputy repeat the detail of the second part of her question, please?

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Certainly. How have the income levels been set for the proposed travel and accommodation policy? Will they be increased annually in line with inflation or average earnings, something like that?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

I will answer the second part first. That is something that will have to be decided by a future Government. To be honest with you, I do not know exactly how we have come up with the modelling but it is something I am happy to pass on to the Deputy after the Assembly.

5.1.5 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Given that the justification for the 3 proposed policies being put out there for discussion is around the ongoing cost pressures on the health service, will the Minister perhaps give us an indication about when he believes we will have a long-term funding solution for our health service?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

The fact is it is a shame in a way that the current team have only had 2 years. I think I have been quite plain that the order of priorities for me was to try to get the service in order first and then worry about the longer-term funding in the longer term. Members will know that the Budget was very generous to Health. The health service needed more money. We have now got more money and we can start to address the critical problems that we have got. The job now is to make that funding sustainable, so we are going to do as much work as we can between now and the end of April. Who knows where the election process will take us but we can only work at the speed that we can go.

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

I have not been part of the scrutiny so obviously the only information I have is from the *Jersey Evening Post* and these questions come from that as a member of the public in asking questions. I felt that the Minister's answers to various questions about this proposal were very top level and there was not any detail. Does that mean that the Advisory Board is just being given the suggestion at a top-level point or is there detailed information that the Advisory Board will give detailed answers on and direction for the Minister that then will be published so that we will be able to see the outcome of that?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

I certainly do not want to be openly critical of the *J.E.P. (Jersey Evening Post)*. That would not be a sensible thing to do at this point in time **[Laughter]** but could I suggest that it would probably be to the Deputy's benefit if she spent a little bit less time looking at the *J.E.P.* and went into the board papers that are available online, and I think in here we have 66 pages of detail. I am quite happy to pass the file over to the Deputy for study.

5.1.7 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

I think that is why there have been several questions in this Assembly to ask about the detail, so that the Minister will be able to correct maybe what has been seen in the public so far and so that the public can hear what is in the detail of the board. Unfortunately, my time is limited, and I am sure that of many of the public is limited, to read 66 pages of very detailed information. My question is maybe the Minister could answer a few questions of what is next after the Advisory Board has given suggestions to the Minister on where to go. When will we hear the outcome of that and will the Minister be making a statement or telling us a bit more detail in a succinct manner instead of us reading 66 pages?

[10:45]

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

I had not planned to make a statement about this. As I said, there is a great deal going on in Health and this is one of a large number of different strands. I cannot say that I think I will be making a statement about this, having taken advice from the board. I do not think at this stage there will be sufficient to say on the matter.

The Deputy Bailiff:

I think we have had enough questions, so a final supplementary, Deputy Renouf. Yes, I know, but I think we have spent more than 5 minutes on this question.

5.1.8 Deputy J. Renouf:

I am slightly surprised at the Minister's sensitivity around this, given that there will be members of the public who will be worried that they may be forced out of hospital beds that they feel that they would have been able to stay in before this came in, and that people with long-term health conditions may be asked to contribute quite a large sum of money for staying for long periods in the U.K. or making repeat trips. There are 66 pages. I have read most of them, I think, but I have not seen anywhere in it the amount of money that the Minister thinks will be saved. Has there been a cost-benefit analysis of this,

given that it will cost money to bring in these changes in terms of administration of thresholds and so on? Can he say how much money it is planned to save by the implementation of these, since that is, as I understand it, the whole rationale?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

No, we have not carried out a cost-benefit analysis. Sometimes you have just got to get on with things that you know are the right things to do. One of the key things that we are doing here relates to people who are bed blocking and a charge is being introduced to try to bring about some behavioural change so that people do not spend a month in hospital waiting to get the right care home when other people are waiting for operations. As I say, it is multifaceted. No, there has not been a cost-benefit analysis because these things take time and money to do as well and sometimes just exercising common sense does not seem to be a bad idea. I am not particularly sensitive about this. I am just a little bit flabbergasted about being asked the same question repeatedly.

The Deputy Bailiff:

That brings to the end the urgent oral question. We come now to questions to Ministers without notice and the first question period is to the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs. Deputy Gardiner, I saw your light first.