

2025.05.13

2.4 Deputy K.M. Wilson of St. Clement of the Chair of the States Employment Board regarding managing and monitoring health and safety policy within the Health Service (OQ.116/2025):

Will the chair outline how the States Employment Board is managing and monitoring health and safety policy within the Health Service and, given recent staff concerns regarding working conditions raised in the media, will he advise whether the S.E.B. (States Employment Board) intends to review the application of the policy, and if not, why not?

Deputy L.J. Farnham of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter (Chair, States Employment Board):

The health and safety policy for the Health Department is aligned with the policy that is in place for the whole public sector; obviously appropriately designed for the Health Department. The implementation is formally delegated to each department that manages the day-to-day operational aspect, as the Deputy will well know from her former lives. The States Employment Board is monitoring the policy by receiving monthly updates, which is a standing order on every S.E.B. agenda. Following concerns raised in the Assembly by Deputy Catherine Curtis, the States Employment Board has invited the chief executive officer of Health and Care to provide an update in person at its next meeting next week, I believe. In addition, communications have been sent to all staff regarding statutory break periods and secondary employment. A link has been sent to all health staff to make contact if they are not receiving the correct breaks, so that the situation can be remedied. At this stage, we would like to speak to the chief executive and do some further investigations before we decide whether a full review is necessary.

2.4.1 Deputy K.M. Wilson:

I thank the Chief Minister for his response. In September 2022, the C. and A.G. (Comptroller and Auditor General) report identified ongoing weaknesses in the management of the States Employment Board which oversees - as the Chief Minister said - all employees in Jersey. Specifically, the C. and A.G. highlighted issues related to health and safety at work, noting that there was still work to be done on this issue. Could the chair explain what progress has been made in the last 12 months with regard to oversight, how health and safety policy is applied on the ground, and if it has been adapted in response to changes in workload, infrastructure or staffing?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

The States Employment Board works with all States departments and Health and Care Jersey has established processes in place to manage and monitor implementation of the health and safety policy. More recently, these have specifically included health-specific training, audit, safety tours and walks, inspections, operational management through the department's Health and Safety Committee, more detailed investigation of reported incidents, analysis of outcomes from occupational health reporting, and the work undertaken by the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian. Additionally, staff rosters are subject to a formal monthly check and an assurance governance process to ensure they are compliant with both the law and the department's most stringent patient safety rules.

2.4.2 Deputy C.D. Curtis of St. Helier Central:

After I raised this matter, Deputy Ferey wrote to me to say that he was following this up with the chief people officer, as mentioned, and the Minister for Health and Social Services arranged for me to meet with the director of workforce for Health and Care Jersey. This was a productive meeting, so my

question is: how often does the S.E.B. meet with the director of workforce for Health and Care Jersey?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I cannot answer that; I have to look at the record or discuss with Deputy Ferey on that. But like I say, we have monthly health and safety policy updates from the relevant official - from the overall official responsible - and the chief officer of People Services is representative of the public sector at our meetings. With meetings with officers at lower levels, I would have to speak to Deputy Ferey to confirm that, but I will certainly do.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Could that be followed up in writing?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Yes, either myself or Deputy Ferey will continue the correspondence with the Deputy.

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

Given the very high vacancy rates within Health and Social Services and the strenuous attempts to bring staff in, is the Chief Minister aware of circumstances whereby, finally, a successful recruitment has been made, the post has been given, and then the post holder has come to Jersey and left because of concerns about health and safety policies as raised by my colleague Deputy Wilson?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Relevant to the question, Sir?

The Deputy Bailiff:

I think it just about is, yes.

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

The answer is no, I am not aware of any staff coming in and then leaving because of the reasons that the Deputy suggested. I am not personally aware.

2.4.4 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:

I asked the question to try to get a sense of the importance which health and safety and the issues of staff and safety policies and all the rest of it are being given by the S.E.B. I wonder whether the Chief Minister could say how much time he has spent as chair of S.E.B. actually discussing some of the concerns that have been raised very publicly about health and safety. Has he spent much time at all? Any time? No time?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

As I have said on a number of occasions - not recently in the last few minutes - health and safety is one of the key areas that the States Employment deal with, to the point that it is a monthly standing order item on our agenda and we see full, detailed, lengthy reports about health and safety aspects throughout the whole public sector, including the Health Department. I happen to believe that we have a fantastic, qualified health staff working under difficult circumstances, dealing with challenges - not least staff shortages; there is a global staff shortage in qualified staff - who are complying with all of the very stringent health and safety rules and patient requirements, as required in the department. The States Employment Board is not aware of any circumstances as described by Deputy Curtis. That is why we are looking into it in depth and in detail. I, Deputy Ferey and all members of the States

Employment Board spend a lot of time working with it. I am helped enormously by Deputy Ferey, who is the vice chair. I am not sure if the Deputy has ever sat on the States Employment Board, but if he has, he will realise that it is a time-consuming and important role; we do that to the very best of our ability and with as much detail as possible.

2.4.5 Deputy K.M. Wilson:

I am grateful to the Chief Minister for the emphasis he places on that, but we still hear of reports where breaches of health and safety are still occurring, so it does question the reliability of the systems in place. Could he give some indication of how the S.E.B. responds to things like exit interviews or surveys - or even engages with staff-side organisations - to track these systemic issues in staff retention and morale that are related to safety concerns in particular?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

We receive regular reports and statistics on that. Depending on the circumstances and the statistics that arise, the States Employment Board will agree policy decisions on dealing with that. Recently, we were quite concerned at the number of exit interviews that were actually taking place and that is something that we are exploring, because we would like to see more leavers participating. Of course, we cannot make a member of staff leaving participate in an exit interview, but recently we have put in place instructions to try to increase that so we can better understand why people come into the organisation and why they leave. That is a constant work in progress and the current States Employment Board are striving in all aspects of the work that we have to do to make continued improvements not just in the health service but right across the board. I am pleased to say that recent reports have shown that some improvements are being made, not least the report in relation to the reduction in bullying and so forth. We are doing our very best; we are moving in the right direction. I thank the Deputy for her questions.