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5.6 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour of the Chief Minister regarding establishing a taskforce to urgently tackle child poverty in Jersey (OQ.65/2026).

Will the Chief Minister agree to establish a taskforce, or similar, to urgently tackle child poverty in Jersey; and if so, what will the timeline and budget be for this work?

Senator L.J. Farnham (The Chief Minister):

I, together with all Ministers, share the Deputy's concern about the pressures facing children and families in Jersey, especially those arising from affordability and the cost of living. The Government is considering a number of options for how we can bring a stronger, more co-ordinated focus to these issues, including whether a taskforce, commission or similar time-limited body could help identify practical measures to improve affordability and support families. Ministers met with a delegation of local charities and other experts over the summer, and a further meeting is planned for next week, and we are focused on identifying real practical help based on their advice. No decision has yet been taken on the precise form, timetable or budget, but reducing the cost of living and making Jersey more affordable remains a top priority for the Government and will play a central role in the Common Strategic Policy.

5.6.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I thank the Chief Minister for his response, and after the conversations that we had I am really pleased to see that there is something happening within Government. What I would like to understand is will there be actions set and decided upon in time to allocate funds in the forthcoming Budget?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

We certainly hope in the forthcoming Budget to build upon the work of the previous Government. Some help we have put in place for families included free G.P. (general practitioner) visits for children; extended childcare provisions for 2 to 3 year-olds; the roll out of school lunches in primary schools; significant additional funding for Children Services; and we will be building upon those in the forthcoming Budget. As I say, it does remain a top priority. We will be starting to address and provide help with cost-of-living measures, but I think the real work is around how understanding the affordability challenges, not just for children and families, but we need to understand what practical changes can be made over the next 4 years to reduce the cost of essential goods and services, increase disposable household incomes and make Jersey a more affordable place for all Islanders in which to live, work and have families. It is a complex piece of work that we need to fully understand.

5.6.2 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

Child poverty and indeed families who are living in relative poverty in Jersey also are more likely to suffer from consequential potentially health-related issues, and we have seen that in Jersey. Obesity figures and overweight figures for children in Jersey are higher than elsewhere. When this was raised recently, it seemed that one media report said the Government of Jersey's Ministers said the Minister for Children and Families and the Minister for Health and Social Services were both unavailable for comment. I understand that Ministers were effectively passing the buck as to who was responsible for this area of children's welfare. Could the Chief Minister clarify that the reality is that all Government Ministers take responsibility but clarify who is the point of contact that should be dealing with these particular issues?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

Ultimately that is correct, the Government is responsible and the Government is accountable to this Assembly, and this Assembly shares that joint responsibility to the wellbeing of all children, as the Deputy will know. I hope that answers the question.

5.6.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

I suppose the question is, when it comes to this particular issue, which I think is directly linked to child poverty and the health issues that arise, who would he seek to be updating him at the Council of Ministers on those kinds of issues from his Ministerial team?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

It is a general question. It would depend on the details of, or the facts of, the particular case that was being approached. The Minister for Health and Social Services is responsible for the health of the Islanders; the Minister for Children and Families is responsible for the welfare of children; in nearly all circumstances, the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning has responsibility for children; and the overall responsibility will, of course, sit with the Government, but it depends on what issue. But I cannot reiterate enough the importance and the priority this Government is placing on improving not just the affordability and cost-of-living challenges for families and children, but children's health and wellbeing.

5.6.4 Connétable I. Gardiner of St. Helier:

Given that J.O.L.S. (Jersey Opinions and Lifestyle Survey) found that 45 per cent of households in St. Helier would have been unable to afford unexpected, necessary expenses compared to 22 per cent in rural Parishes, does the Chief Minister accept that financial hardship is disproportionately concentrated in St. Helier, and will he ensure that any child poverty action considers targeted measures for families living in the Parish?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

The statistics would indicate that, and I have said before, it is difficult to target support by Parish; we try and target it by case because while the statistics, I think by the very nature of the Parish - the built-up area - the statistics are more challenging in St. Helier. We want to make sure that the support is available right across the Island where it is needed. So, I am not sure how we would target support to a particular part of the Island. What I am trying to say is we want to make sure that support goes to whoever needs it, whichever part of the Island they live in.

5.6.5 The Connétable of St. Helier:

I would welcome a conversation with the Chief Minister because I do have some ideas as in physical actives, green space and other areas that exist ... less exist in St. Helier compared to other Parishes. Does the Chief Minister also accept ... he mentioned that he is bringing organisations and charities together and I do believe there is lots of support available across charities, Government, Parish. How will the Chief Minister ensure there is a single, clear accessible way for families to find out what financial and practical support is available across the third sector, Government and Parishes, because the information is not readily accessible and in one place?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

Can I first say I wholeheartedly agree with the comments of the Connétable about the built-up area and the importance of town regeneration. The increase of green space in St. Helier, that undoubtedly has an impact on the welfare of parishioners, especially young people. We started to address that with the youth club and looking at where we can introduce new green spaces to improve wellbeing of parishioners. Could the Connétable just remind me of the final part of the second?

The Bailiff:

This is a question about setting up a taskforce, Connétable, we must not go too far away from that. What was your question?

The Connétable of St. Helier:

The question was that the taskforce would include Parishes, charity organisation and the Government, the support is available, but there is no one information hub where people can access and see what is available. Would this taskforce consider to create a joint information where people can go and say: "I need dentist". One of the charities can support dentists, for example.

Senator L.J. Farnham:

I do not see that being a key deliverable of whatever group we establish to advise on cost of living, but it is an important issue for the Government. We started to work on that in the previous Government to make it easier and co-ordinated, because we want to make sure that people that need help and support are getting it. So, we will take that on board. It is a key priority for the Government, and I will identify the Ministers and make sure we work with the Connétable and other Members to ensure we improve our information to help Islanders receive what they are due.

5.6.6 Deputy L.V. Feltham of St. Helier Central:

In one of his previous answers, the Chief Minister mentioned meeting with a number of charities within the sector. Could he tell the Assembly what the key messages were from those charities and what actions he told those charities he would take next?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

The meeting was chaired by Senator Boleat and was attended with other Ministers. Like I said, there is a follow-up meeting based on that. Senator Boleat and the Ministers went in really to listen to some of the concerns which are, I think, well known by most Assembly Members, around affordability and about the logistics of where help is received, and about a co-ordinated approach that is required by Government and the third sector to find the right solution. Senator Boleat is following up and chairing another meeting next week, I believe, and we will provide a report to the Council of Ministers following that.

5.6.7 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

The Chief Minister also said that he was seeking to understand the costs that put pressure on families and people living in poverty. Could he give an update on the work being undertaken to identify minimum income standards for the Island, which was instigated in the last term of office and would indeed inform this piece of work and any work that such taskforce would undertake?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

I have no update on that at the moment, but I will consult with the Minister for Social Security to find out where we are and update the Deputy accordingly.

5.6.8 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

In terms of the actions being considered, Deputy Tadier mentioned the health of children. Would the Chief Minister consider actions that would help families access healthy foods, such as extending the healthy start vouchers or indeed making school meals fully funded?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

The answer to that is yes, on both counts.