

2026.02.24

4.5 Deputy B.B. de S.V.M. Porée of St. Helier South of the Chief Minister regarding Modern Day Slavery legislation. (OQ. 31/2026):

Will the Chief Minister advise what discussions, if any, he has had with Ministers regarding the introduction of modern-day slavery legislation, and what has been the outcome of such discussions?

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

The Minister for Justice and Home Affairs and I have discussed the issue on a number of occasions since 2024, and most recently the Minister has asked officials to consider policy and legislative drafting that would be required to take something forward or put something in place. I intend to ask, when they have done that, for details to be presented to Council of Ministers for a broader discussion.

4.5.1 Deputy B.B. de S.V.M. Porée:

What has been the main reason that prompted the Chief Minister to issue a media statement with the intention of introducing a dedicated modern slavery legislation in Jersey to strengthen against exploitation?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Of course, nobody in this Assembly or this Island wants to see exploitation, and it is something that the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs has been, I think, championing for some time, back to at the time when she was on Scrutiny. The legislative drafting has been sitting in the development pool for some time but was put back to allow for the Violence Against Women and Girls drafting to take place. Given some recent concerns combined with the logistics of the law drafting programme, that led to a joint statement being issued by the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs and myself.

4.5.2 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

The Minister mentioned work that is going on with the Violence Against Women and Girls, and that has taken priority, but does the Chief Minister also acknowledge the fact that when it comes to modern-day slavery practices that maybe also present in our Island, those are very much things that can affect women and girls, and the precariousness that some immigrant workers may find themselves in the Island if they do not have sufficient protections can very much lead to the type of violence and abuse that we do see very much directed at women in Jersey?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Yes, I do accept that, which is what has made the Violence Against Women and Girls legislation extremely important. I would remind Members that any reports of modern-day slavery or exploitation will be thoroughly investigated at the moment under current legislation. There is a raft of legislation that can assist with minimising the risk and dealing with allegations of modern-day slavery and exploitation and certain charges would be appropriately pursued under existing legislation.

4.5.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Chief Minister agree that part of the issue here may be that we have a system where the employer very much holds the work permit on behalf of the employee, and that it could be argued ... and part of the finding of the Scrutiny Panel review only a couple of years ago was that ... we did not use this word, but that it can be argued that the employee is effectively like a chattel of the employer. They cannot move around freely. They cannot change jobs without the permission of the current employer and therefore there is a potential for that asymmetric relationship to become an abusive one. Is that something that the Chief Minister is concerned about and would he be willing to address that in any move to bring in modern anti-slavery legislation?

[10:15]

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I would not, perhaps, agree with the phrase “chattels”, but I get the point that the Deputy is making and that certainly needs some further consideration whether we stick with those rules. I know there are - and the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs would be better placed to answer the detail on this - some laws based around permits, immigration permits, and employment. In principle, yes, I think that perhaps needs another look.

4.5.4 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:

I would like to check with the Chief Minister, following Deputy Tadier’s question. Is it anything that this Council of Ministers can bring as a Ministerial Decision or update of the permit policy before bringing the modern slavery legislation forward, such as work permits? We understood that the legislation will not be brought forward this term, but what the Chief Minister and his Council of Ministers can do in the meantime to make tangible differences for the migrant workers.

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I think that is a question for the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs. The Minister for Justice and Home Affairs can take action if she feels necessary. As I alluded to in my response to Deputy Tadier, current legislation does ensure any accusations of modern-day slavery exploitation we thoroughly investigate. I do not think in that case the Cabinet Ministers are minded to bring anything forward before the election. Like I say, we have a presentation from officials and will get the direction of travel moving if that is what the Council of Ministers agrees to do.

4.5.5 Deputy I. Gardiner:

I will challenge the Chief Minister because I think that the population policy and work permit are sitting solely with the Chief Minister’s office and the Assistant Chief Minister. Would the Chief Minister consider how the situation can be improved before the full legislation would be brought forward, which was delayed by his Council of Ministers?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I refer to my previous answer.

4.5.6 Deputy R.S. Kovacs of St. Saviour:

In the light of all the other questions and answers, what would be the proposed timeline for bringing forward the formal proposal, if any?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I think, should the Council of Ministers agree, officials could be instructed to start work on the drafting during the period bringing us to the election period, when the States is in purdah. There is some space there in the drafting programme, I believe, so it could start then, and then it would be up for the new Council of Ministers and a new Assembly to take it forward.

4.5.7 Deputy R.S. Kovacs:

Does the Chief Minister anticipate or intend this work, at least the in-principle decision, be done within the current term?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I do not think we can make decisions during purdah, if I understood the question correctly. The Minister and I are looking forward to getting the views of the Council of Ministers when we put the matter before them, so we will make the appropriate decision at that time.

4.5.8 Deputy B.B. de S.V.M. Porée:

Would the Minister be in a position to give his word that if he gets elected again, and if he occupies the chair of Chief Minister, would you take this issue as a matter of urgent consideration into your portfolio to be?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Well, I need to get re-elected. If I just leave it at that, if I may? I think it is clear that this is a matter of concern. The Minister for Justice and Home Affairs and I have discussed, we are going to talk about it at Council of Ministers. We want to make sure that we protect the most vulnerable people in our community and the introduction of the appropriate, balanced modern-day slavery legislation that would be right for Jersey is something that I think needs to be a high priority for this Government and this Minister, and I would hope that carries on into the next Government.