

2026.01.20

**4.2 Deputy C.D. Curtis of St. Helier Central of the Minister for Children and Families regarding meeting with local telecoms providers in relation to protection from online harms (OQ.9/2026):**

Further to the Ministerial Response to the Scrutiny Review: “What protection do children in Jersey have from online harms?”, will the Minister advise whether Ministers have met local telecoms providers and detail the next steps to be taken?

**Deputy M.R. Ferey of St. Saviour (Assistant Minister for Children and Families - rapporteur):**

I will answer this on the Minister’s behalf. I thank the Deputy for the question and for agreeing that I take this answer. I chaired a group of relevant Ministers who met with the telecommunication providers on 18th December.

[10:00]

The focus of the discussion was understanding what steps each of the providers were taking to support parents to protect their children from online harms. The wider global factors that represent challenges were also considered, and it was acknowledged the different responses from different jurisdictions to these threats. The meeting was viewed as positive and helpful, with a commitment to ensure regular contact is maintained between Government and the telecommunication providers going forward.

**4.2.1 Deputy C.D. Curtis:**

I am pleased to hear there is progress on this matter but internet service providers told the panel that they had no legal basis to block or filter dangerous content as there is in other jurisdictions because Jersey has no law similar to the Digital Economy Act 2017. Can the Deputy say whether there is a plan to bring in such a legal requirement?

**Deputy M.R. Ferey:**

I thank the Deputy for that follow-up question. The telecom providers told us of the practical steps that parents can take, everything from having certain smartphones that can have restrictions placed on them to home routers that can be filtered to remove harmful content before it gets into the home. But of course these things have to be done by the individual and training has to be given to show parents or guardians how to do that for a phone that they are giving to a third party. The question of course is one of legislation and, as the Deputy will know, we have agreed to do a gap analysis on the relevant legislation to see where legislation can be improved and enhanced in this area.

**4.2.2 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:**

I thank the Assistant Minister for his response. As legislation will take a long time, and from the answer I understood that responsibility is put back on the parents, which is important, would the Assistant Minister advise if telecom providers made any formal commitments what they would do to increase the safety?

**Deputy M.R. Ferey:**

I thank the Deputy for that question. Yes, the telecom providers told us that at point of sale what they endeavour to do is to engage with anyone who is buying a phone, particularly for a third party, and offer training in this area, and highlight what the issues are, highlight the online harms. Of course, this extends to vulnerable people as well as children. There is lots of good work which is being done by the individual telecom providers, because they recognise that this is an issue. Of course, they recognise that this is part of their industry and something that they have control over at point of sale. Yes, they do undertake good training and they do highlight the issues.

**4.2.3 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Would the Minister also advise would any clear action plan be published or prepared, where it will be a clear responsibility divided what Government would do and what providers would need to do going forward before legislation coming into place?

**Deputy M.R. Ferey:**

I think that this will be part of the ongoing work that the Ministerial group will be looking into to see where the delineation lies, what Government can do and what the providers can do.

#### **4.2.4 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:**

The Minister referenced a gap analysis and a Ministerial group that is going to trundle into action. Could he say when the gap analysis will be complete and what will be delivered in this term of Government?

**Deputy M.R. Ferey:**

We are not trundling into action. We are steaming forth very fast into action. This Ministerial group has been set up, it has got a terms of reference, and of course that is something that will be considered as we move forward. We accept that there are only months and weeks left, but we will start to lay a solid pathway for the next Administration to continue the work that we have started.

#### **4.2.5 Deputy J. Renouf:**

Could the Minister confirm that he does not expect any substantive actions to take place during this course, the term of this Government?

**Deputy M.R. Ferey:**

Not at all. We are doing work around the area of the data protection framework to increase individuals' rights to have harmful content removed, so there will be some final pieces of legislation put into place hopefully before the end of this term, but there will also be a clear pathway for new legislation that needs to be put into action.

#### **4.2.6 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour:**

I note there is different legislation coming from various Ministers tackling online harms. I wanted to understand how this is going to be applied in schools, given the children who are below the age of criminal responsibility. Will the telecoms measures be enough, or do we need to change the culture in our schools and not be over-reliant on technology?

**Deputy M.R. Ferey:**

Yes, I think this is a multi-pronged approach. Part of it is technological solutions, part of it is an education piece, and part of it is where the responsibilities lie. There is no one single answer to this threat to children and young people and vulnerable people. It is something that we do have to take seriously and use all the resources that we can to counteract the threats.

#### **4.2.7 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:**

I think the use of technology in schools, some of it is completely necessary, some of it is because teachers are, I think, overworked. Would the Minister agree as part of this work to look at that in the whole and look at all of the cultural factors around it as well so that we are getting to the root of the problem, and that teachers have sufficient time and planning time and are able to teach and not have to fall back on technology?

**Deputy M.R. Ferey:**

I cannot disagree with those sentiments.

#### **4.2.8 Connétable K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour:**

I think the Assistant Minister is very much on the right track with this. In the short term there are various apps that can be used, such as Net Nanny and other things, which do screen out harmful content. Maybe it is possible for most schools to send out a letter to parents: "Would you agree to your son or

daughter have this app applied” and maybe somebody from the Tech Department could visit schools and apply these apps in the short term until the full policy is developed. Does the Minister not agree?

**Deputy M.R. Ferey:**

I explained earlier that there are lots of technological solutions that are being sought at the moment. Many of them are at our disposal now. All they need to be is downloaded on to those phones. Of course we need to make sure that when something like a Net Nanny is put on the phone it is not circumvented by the young person, so proper controls need to be put in place and monitored as well.

**4.2.9 Deputy C.D. Curtis:**

Ministers did not agree with the panel’s recommendation to have a strategy on online harms and I expect there will be a long period of time before the gap analysis is complete. Is the Deputy concerned that Jersey is becoming an outlier compared to other jurisdictions when it comes to protection of children, and what does this say for our reputation?

**Deputy M.R. Ferey:**

I do not think we are an outlier. I think this is a problem that lots of jurisdictions have woken up to, but we are doing all the work that we can to make sure that we move in the right direction. I do not think I can say much more than that.