

**7. Child Abuse –
Statement by the Chairman of the Social Affairs Policy Review Committee**

The President: We turn now to Item 7, a Statement by the Chairman of the Social Affairs Policy Review Committee, Mr Cretney.

The Chairman of the Social Affairs Policy Review Committee (Mr Cretney): Mr President, it
5 was resolved in July 2017:

That Tynwald notes with concern reports of historical child abuse at the former Knottfield Children’s Home, which closed in 1983, and refers the matter to the Social Affairs Policy Review Committee to report by December 2017; and further instructs the Committee to investigate the adequacy of current procedures to protect from abuse children in care (looked after children) in the Isle of Man and to report in March 2018.

We have been unable to complete our work on the first part of the resolution — reports of historical child abuse at Knottfield — in time for this sitting.

We issued a call for evidence on 25th July which we re-issued on 11th September. A number of individuals have come forward, whose evidence we have heard in private. I would like to take
10 this opportunity to pay tribute to those individuals, and to their bravery in coming forward and talking to us so openly. We have also received written evidence from the Department of Health and Social Care, the Chief Constable, the Children’s Centre and Mrs Kerry Sharpe. During November, we published this written evidence on the Tynwald website pursuant to Standing Order 5.10(2).

15 Back in September we also announced that the Hon. Member for Garff, Mr Perkins, had decided not to participate in this inquiry. This was because his daughter, Detective Constable Emily Perkins, was a member of the Public Protection Unit of the Isle of Man Constabulary and had played a part in certain criminal investigations relevant to the Committee’s work. The Committee supported Mr Perkins’ decision. Since that time, the inquiry has been taken forward
20 by the other two Members of the Committee, namely the Hon. Member for Douglas North, Mr Ashford, and myself.

Mr President, I have mentioned that a number of people came forward and spoke to us. With the permission of those individuals we passed on what they had said to the Police. On Thursday, 30th November 2017, we were advised by the Chief Constable that a new criminal investigation
25 had commenced related to the subject matter of our inquiry. It is too early to assess whether or not this investigation will lead to anyone being charged with criminal offences, but it is critically important that nothing can happen that might prejudice the investigation or, in due course, a criminal trial. On the advice of the Clerk of Tynwald, we have therefore suspended action on the first part of the inquiry. As part of this, we have removed from the Tynwald website the written
30 evidence which we had previously published there.

Mr President, as a Committee we are disappointed that we have not been able to complete our work on the first part of the July resolution by the time of this sitting. We are also disappointed to have to suspend this part of our work. It is particularly hard to do this when we
35 look at it from the point of view of the people who have come forward and talked to us. I feel very strongly that the Committee owes it to them to complete a report to Tynwald in due course. However, I am equally convinced that in the present circumstances the Committee must act on the advice that it has been given, and must therefore step back and allow the Police to do their job.

40 In the meantime, we will continue our work on the second part of the inquiry, which is into the adequacy of current procedures to protect from abuse children in care – that is, looked-after children.

Thank you, Mr President.

45 **The President:** Hon. Members, I have to advise the Hon. Court that under Standing Order 3.4, paragraph 8, the only questions permitted of a Committee before it has in fact reported, relates to the date on making that report. That is the only sort of question that is permitted.
Mr Baker.

50 **Mr Baker:** Thank you, Mr President, and thank you for clarifying that, which I was aware of. I would like to ask the Chairman when he anticipates reporting both the second part of the mandate and if he has any indication about when he may be able to report on the first one?
Thank you.

The President: Mr Cretney.

55 **Mr Cretney:** Thank you to the Hon. Member for Ayre and Michael, Mr Baker. In relation to the second part of the report, which we are now concentrating our work on, we do aim to meet the original date of March. Time will tell whether we comply with that, but that is our intention.
60 In relation to the first part which has now been suspended. Clearly, this is in the hands of others. I have had a conversation with the Chief Constable and he hopes that in the first quarter of the new year he will have an idea whether or not grounds for prosecution are feasible.

The President: Mr Thomas.

65 **Mr Thomas:** Thank you, Mr President. Does the Chair agree that it might be hard to meet that deadline just announced for part two, given that the evidence might be quite tricky to take, given the –

70 **The President:** Hon. Member, we cannot question in any way the proceedings of the Committee or the concerns of how hard it may or may not be. Simply the dates, and I think the Chair of the Committee has indicated, as far as he is able, what that date will be.
Mr Thomas.

75 **Mr Thomas:** Thank you, Mr President, for that further guidance. So does the Chairman agree with me that that date is an ambitious date?

Mr Cretney: I think in my original response I did indicate that I felt that that was the case.