

STATEMENT

BY

THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

TITLE Operation Jasmine

DATE 4th December 2013

BY Rt. Hon Carwyn Jones AM, First Minister of Wales

Members of this Assembly will be familiar with the historical events and alleged abuse that occurred in care homes in Gwent in the early years of this century. These events resulted in a major police investigation called 'Operation Jasmine' that led to a number of cases within the criminal courts.

In March of this year, the cases against the owners and manager of these care homes was placed 'on file' due to the condition of one of the defendants following an unrelated assault. This means that, potentially, these cases could be revived should the condition of the defendant improve.

Today I wish to inform the Members of the Assembly of my decision to establish an important review of this case in order that we may learn for the future.

It had always been our intention to review the lessons of this serious and tragic case following the conclusion of criminal proceedings. However the unusual circumstances we find ourselves in have warranted further consideration of options. I have therefore sought advice and guidance from a number of quarters, including legal officials. I have corresponded with and met the group that represents the families of the victims. I have also met the Older People's Commissioner who has taken a special interest in these events.

I recognise that much has been done by the sector already to learn lessons from what happened. We have introduced new procedures for the Inspectorate on managing escalating concerns with care homes, funded a Dignity in Care programme to improve practice and in the new Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Bill included provisions to significantly strengthen the law around adult protection in Wales. We are also currently consulting on a major White Paper on Regulation and Inspection of Social Care. The Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales has also modernised its approach to Inspection and Regulation to give a stronger voice to care home residents and their families.

But I believe that we need a full and independent review of these events to understand whether there is anything else the social care sector and policy makers need to learn, anything else we need to put in place.

I have therefore decided to establish an independent review to quickly and effectively look at the major issues raised by the events surrounding Operation Jasmine.

I expect the review to speak with the families of those involved as well as the local authorities involved, the police, the professionals and the regulators. I am sure that these groups will be keen to be involved in this review and to share their experiences so that we may continue to learn lessons.

I am pleased to say that Dr Margaret Flynn has agreed to lead this review. Dr Flynn is a much admired figure within the social care sector. She is currently the independent Chair of the Lancashire's Safeguarding Adults Board and has been the chair and author of high profile Serious Case Reviews concerning older people. Members may be most familiar with her role as author of the important review into care at Winterbourne View Hospital published last year. Her appointment is a reflection of the importance we place on this review and what it can achieve.

I have talked with Dr Flynn. We are both committed to a review that must be serious and comprehensive. She has agreed to ensure a full report by the end of 2014 and, where appropriate, provide any interim findings to Welsh Ministers in the summer so that these might inform changes to our policy or future legislation in this area.

Finally can I say a few words, on the record, to the victims and their families? I received a letter from the Chairperson of the families' group Justice for Jasmine in October which contained the personal stories of many of those involved in this case. These stories were moving and powerful. They captured, better than any speech I could make, the importance of protecting our older people in care and of putting their well-being at the heart of our public services. The victims and their families have acted throughout with great dignity and fortitude. They are an example to us all.

I do not want the events that happened in Gwent a decade ago to ever be repeated. This review will be part of ensuring that is the case. I ask this Assembly and its members to support it.