

STATES OF JERSEY



DRAFT ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN 2011 (P.99/2010): TWELFTH AMENDMENT

**Lodged au Greffe on 31st August 2010
by Deputy T.M. Pitman of St. Helier**

STATES GREFFE

PAGE 2, PARAGRAPH (a) –

After the words “withdrawn from the consolidated fund in 2011” insert the words –

“except that the net revenue expenditure of the Education, Sport and Culture Department shall be increased by £50,000 to maintain the overall budget of the Youth Service (notwithstanding the saving that will be made through the restructuring of the senior management of the Youth Service as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review (ESC-S7))”.

DEPUTY T.M. PITMAN OF ST. HELIER

REPORT

In lodging this amendment I feel that I must stress my genuine sympathy for the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture in finding himself in the position of being asked to make cuts, not only with what has been aptly described as a blunt knife, but by necessity of trying to meet his allotted savings quota within such a crude framework by attacking areas I am quite sure that he feels in his own heart should be left well alone. The proposal to remove £50,000 from the budget of the Jersey Youth Service falls firmly and squarely into this category.

Not only is this proposed cut a mistake and, over the longer term a false economy, it is also, I believe, a cut that has been initiated out of convenience, i.e. a comparatively easy option – rather than a genuine process of analysis as to what will be gained or lost should the cut be accepted by the Assembly. As such, I strongly believe that a cut forced on the Minister by an ill-defined process should be rejected, and I say this for the following reasons I outline below.

A management structure that was ‘top heavy’

As Members will be aware, being a former education professional, I have maintained since my election 2 years ago that the current management structure in the Jersey Youth Service was ‘top heavy’ and in need of restructuring; further still, that resultant savings could be better targeted at frontline service delivery where it could do the most good in providing value for our taxpayers’ money. Whilst this view was consistently dismissed, the accuracy of what I had been arguing for was, however, finally fully endorsed by a recent independent review into management structures within ESC.

Added to this reality, the other underlying issue behind the £50,000 ‘saving’ now being put forward – very reluctantly I believe – by the Minister for ESC, has been the decision of the current Principal Youth Officer to take Voluntary Redundancy later this year. Added together, and even acknowledging that the Jersey Youth Service has also effectively seen 5 years of growth, it may seem to some that on first glance this ‘saving’ is timely and merited. I do not believe that this is the case.

Growth *has* occurred in recent years. Thanks largely to the combination of the service becoming much more adept at highlighting for people the value of what they do, and a small number of aware politicians who deserve credit for championing the need for adequate support since the advent of Ministerial government. The reality behind this recent growth, however, has been a crucial service under-resourced for a great many years: ridiculously under-resourced. A service surviving and delivering largely due to the commitment and willingness of its paid professionals and wonderful volunteers to go way beyond the call of duty week after week.

Removing monies that have been identified as wrongly focussed within a department instead of redirecting them is both a mistake and long-term false economy

Indeed, having finally reached the position in the last few years where the Connétables have also now persuaded, to the best of my knowledge, each and every Parish Assembly to support this crucial informal education/community work with significant financial parish partnerships, these forward steps need to be consolidated and the budget that it has taken so many years to achieve protected.

The best way to do this is to maintain the Jersey Youth Service's current budget and, learning from the findings of a management structure that is unnecessary, redirect those monies to focussed frontline services. My experiences as both a former Senior Youth Worker and current politician indicate to me that this comparatively small figure of £50,000 could be channelled into a number of areas – I have no doubt that there are more – where additional targeted work could make a huge difference in tackling current youth-related problems within the Island. Of course, many of these areas will be touched on by various projects already. However, the key difference is that ring-fencing of such funding could allow significant, focussed work. For example –

Youth employment

It is not lost on any one of us that in the current difficult economic climate the need to support, whether by offering training in CV construction, job applications, letter writing, interview strategies, all the way down to counselling young people currently unable to find work, would be monies shrewdly invested. A boost in funding could even offer potential for such support to be offered at centres during the day, as well as the traditional evening sessions the service provides. Funding would also raise the potential for 'buying in' external expertise.

Political education

With disappointment having been expressed at both the number of young people turning out to vote since the lowering of the age to 16 two years ago, and significant criticism of the States strategy in raising awareness of this change and the reasons why using your vote is important, the political education aspect of citizenship is an area that is in dire need of some significant funding. Added to the fact that we are only a few short months away from an election year; and with a Scrutiny review into the subject also shortly due for publication, I believe that funding here would be money very well spent.

Anti-social behaviour

If there has been one issue that has been raised with me by more constituents regarding young people than any other since my election, it has been anti-social behaviour. As all States members will agree I am quite certain, the majority of Jersey's young people are an absolute credit. Nevertheless, a small minority do regularly make life a misery for many. Viewed in this context, whilst I certainly do not ever wish to see youth workers being parachuted in to try and tackle social problems that should be being dealt with by the police – my own experience of trying to help St. Helier No. 1 constituents at Albert Quay is a good example – the fact is that regular and targeted intervention from skilled workers can make a big difference in bringing young people to see the misery and damage such behaviour can cause; and ultimately bring about a change in this.

Anti-racism initiatives

An area of informal education in which I have a particular interest: I believe that investment in developing work in this area is long overdue. Monies from the surplus management post could be utilised to combat the unfortunate and highly damaging attacks we have seen in recent years on foreign students. Funding could equally be used potentially to make a major anti-racism initiative an annual event. To this regard, as I am sure Deputies Shona Pitman, Ben Fox and Connétable Simon Crowcroft would attest, the 9 month-long anti-racism project undertaken by Grands Vaux Youth

Centre in 2005, culminating with a party of 19 visiting Madeira for a week, had a huge impact on raising awareness amongst young people. Though this project involved young people from St. Helier and St. Saviour, ring-fenced funding could make this an annual initiative that could target young people from all over the Island.

An investment in youth is an investment in the future

I repeat, I have no doubt that there are many more areas that are in dire need of such funding. The one thing that can be said of each of the possibilities that I outline, however, without any fear of contradiction, is that investment in any or all would result in Jersey's community eventually getting back far more in terms of future costs saved by preventing young lives going off track. After all, the saying that investment in youth is investment in the future is one saying that really is anything but a cliché.

Further still, when one considers that the current rate of pay for 'Sessional' youth workers who could deliver many of the above sessions alone is between £11.50 and £12.70 per hour, it is quite apparent that re-allocating this £50,000 rather than cutting it has the potential to get us an awful lot for our money. Thus, I hope that members will agree with me that the budget of the Jersey Youth Service is one area that simply should not be cut in such a crude and opportunistic way. Any 'savings' would ultimately be a false economy.

The Jersey Youth Service budget must be protected and monies targeted to frontline services where they are most needed.

Financial and manpower implications

Whilst it is true that adopting this amendment would result in an increase of £50,000 to the Youth Service and Education, Sport and Culture budget as proposed, I would point out again that the reality of this would mean that we are simply maintaining the existing budget of a department that has only in recent times begun to receive anything like the funding a professional service requires. The retention of the £50,000 may lead to a need for some increase in manpower in frontline services.