

2.4 Deputy A.K.F. Green of St. Helier of the Chief Minister regarding the Customer Service Department:

Will the Chief Minister advise the Assembly how he proposes to reduce the Customer Service Department at Cyril Le Marquand House with a budget of £447,300 to £277,400 and yet he increased the staff full-time equivalent from 11.7 to 12.3 as shown on page 17 of the annex to the Business Plan?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur (The Chief Minister):

Yes, I agree that the figures do look anomalous but the increase in F.T.E. (full-time employment) is as a result of a temporary addition to meet a particular demand of Planning and Environment. This task has now been completed and the current number has reverted to 11.7. There are customer services activities undertaken in several departments across the States and not just in the central Customer Services Department. A review is proposed to examine the economies of scale achievable by combining or relocating the central functions and departmental ones. The States remains committed to putting the customer first. However, in difficult economic times, the level of service provided will necessarily come under review but by combining activities with other departments, maximising efficiency and managing vacancies, savings will be achieved. Every opportunity will be taken to re-deploy staff and avoid redundancies. One of the options to reduce the Customer Services budget would be to take on additional work, charge under the requester and therefore treat it as income. In this instance, the level of manpower within Customer Services would remain the same but the next budget would reduce.

2.4.1 Deputy A.K.F. Green:

That is all very well but it does not explain to me how we go from a budget of £447,000 plus to £277,000 and take the F.T.E.s from 11.7 to 12.3. The Chief Minister says it is a temporary arrangement and they have gone back to the 11.7 but what we are talking about here is the 2010 Business Plan. That is what is published in the Business Plan for 2010. I am not satisfied. Please could the Minister explain?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I agree that it is confusing but those figures are taken at a moment in time and I accept that they could be put back at 11.7 rather than the 12.3 that was shown. I think that is something which I am happy to take up. I have tried in fact to explain why the figure is what it is, but also to reassure the Deputy and reassure the House that there is not in fact an overall increase in staffing in that department.

2.4.2 Senator S. Syvret:

Perhaps I am mistaken but it does seem to me that the actual F.T.E. figure of 11.7 to 12.3 is not really the issue here. The important question is how is it possible, say, for argument's sake, to maintain an F.T.E. of 11.7 and produce such a dramatic cut from £447,300 to £277,400 even with the existing F.T.E.?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I have tried to explain that that was a result of combining customer services activities across all departments of the States. The next figure is shown within the Chief Minister's Department but this is an overall States Business Plan and not a departmental arrangement. What we aim to do in centralising and improving efficiency across the States is to reduce the overall spending of the States. That, I am

comfortable we can achieve and the effect, although shown in my budget, would in fact be shown and received by the States as a whole.

2.4.3 Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I do not think anyone would argue with the Chief Minister for the need to reduce our expenditure but I still cannot see how we reduce the budget to that level and maintain the full-time equivalent level. Would the Minister not agree that the problem here as, indeed, throughout the States - because this is just one of many in the Business Plan - is that now the organisation is run by accountants that do not understand the business and that is why we end up with figures like this. [Approbation]

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

The organisation may be run by officers. The organisation policy is set by Ministers and by the States and it is policy which is the important thing here. I accept that in trying to provide more and more levels of information and more and more detail, we end up sometimes getting into confusing situations, particularly if that information is inconsistent. The alternative would be to have very little information available to Members but that I think would be a retrograde step and I am happy that we have a wealth of information, even though sometimes it does indeed look anomalous.

2.4.4 Senator S. Syvret:

If it is possible to keep the F.T.E. figure at 11.7 and yet decrease the budget from £447,300 to £277,400, surely the question that has to be asked is there must have been, somewhere in the system surely, some gross inefficiencies and inadequate and very poor use of public money to enable such a cut in expenditure to be met and yet still maintain the same degree of F.T.E.s.

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I think it is symptomatic of some of the efficiencies that we have been seeing over recent years in the States. The fact that there have been fragmented similar activities carried out by a number of different departments each doing their own thing and each employing staff, one of the reasons for having an efficiency drive was to ensure that where we could get across States centralisation and efficiency, we would do so. This is an example of where that is going to be happening and I am proud of the fact that we can indeed reduce our overall spending and indeed maintain the level of service.

2.4.5 Deputy A.K.F. Green:

Is the Chief Minister then saying that the staff levels will remain in the Customer Service Department at 11.7 and that there will be no staff reductions or redundancies in that department?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I am saying that we are tasked with reducing our spending in that level and I hope it can be done without requiring redundancies. There may well be staff that are not replaced and it may be that that figure will come down. I am more interested in the amount of money we spend and the amount of money we can save rather than the precise staff numbers which, as I say, are a matter of a snapshot in time.