

5.4 Deputy K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding a reduction in the cleaning of States roads: [1(515)]

Has the Minister ordered a reduction in the cleaning of States roads and, if so, is this a temporary measure?

Deputy E.J. Noel (The Minister for Infrastructure):

I have not specifically ordered a reduction in the cleaning of States roads, however the Deputy will recall that my department was required to make significant budget savings as part of the M.T.F.P. (Medium Term Financial Plan) 2, and as a result a service review of the Department for Infrastructure cleaning services was carried out in 2016, which did result in this particular section making efficiency gains and optimising the resources that we have available. The mechanical sweeping and highways cleaning teams saw a reduction in direct staff numbers, mainly through to the outsourcing of all road cleaning works within the Parish of St. Helier boundaries by the Parish itself, and we are grateful for the officers of the Parish and indeed the Constable for working with us in this end. Some reorganisation of working times and practice will also present significant savings.

5.4.1 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I think that was a yes. I refer not only to the litter in the road, but the leaves that are coming. Winter is coming on, leaves are coming off the trees and we have had minor flooding in St. Saviour and other parts of the Island, more serious flooding in St. Ouen where there was several feet of water. Will the Minister ensure that all storm drains are kept absolutely clear to avoid any flooding incidents this winter?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

That is a different area - that is not about the cleaning of the roads - it is about making sure that our drains are not blocked. We have not seen any changes to that team that go round. They work on a rotation basis and do target black spots where there are issues but when you have the level of rain that we saw 2 Saturdays ago, you are going to unfortunately get blockages from time to time.

5.4.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

That was a strange answer from the Minister. He said that he had not specifically ordered a reduction in the cleaning of the roads. So has he ordered it in a non-specific way, is the first question?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Ministers are to be held to account and we are to answer the question that is put in front of us. The question that was put in front of us was: "Had I ordered a reduction?" No, I had not. I had authorised for a service review to take place to make sure we are carrying out our services to the public efficiently, which is what our department strives to do day-in day-out.

5.4.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Did the Minister also say and admit that they had outsourced the service of cleaning the roads to another party and that is why there is a reduction in the service?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

No, I did not say that. What I did say is that for the Parish of St. Helier, the Parish now ... the Constable is not with us at the moment, and I am grateful to him and his team for agreeing to take on cleaning of the roads for the entire Parish of St. Helier. That has freed up our staff to

concentrate on the rest of the Island, and the Parish themselves do an excellent job within their Parish.

5.4.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does that mean then that the Minister has failed to establish a service level agreement with the Parish to ensure that we have the same standard of cleaning with the same regularity as previously?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

We have an excellent working relationship with the Parish **[Interruption]** ... if the Deputy would let me give him the answer that he is looking for, it might not be the answer that he wants. That we do have a service level agreement with the Parish and it has been therefore a considerable amount of time and it is refreshed regularly.

5.4.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is the Minister satisfied that the standards produced by the Parish are satisfactory and meet that service level agreement?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I am satisfied with the work that the Parish does on behalf of my department. To date I do not believe that we had any complaints from the public for the condition of the roads in St. Helier since the review in 2016, nor have we had any from anywhere else in the Island, to my knowledge.

5.4.6 Deputy A.D. Lewis:

Last year I notified the Minister on behalf of the residents of First Tower that all the drains in the area appear to be blocked and very quickly his department came out and cleaned them. We were very grateful for that. However, a year has passed and they do not appear to have been attended to again. He mentioned the fact that there was some kind of rota and a process whereby these things are taken care of. Would it be possible for him to either publish that or let us have a sight of it so that we can inform our residents that these things are taking place on a regular basis and when they might be?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I am most happy to do that. The Island is split into 4 sections that we deal with and they are done on a rota basis of those 4 sections in turn. But in particular, as I said, the road sweeping in St. Helier is done by the Parish but the gully collection on our roads I believe is still done by my department but I am happy to provide that information to the Deputy, and indeed to the public.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Deputy Martin.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Would the Minister agree therefore that the natural conclusion of the ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Actually, Deputy, I called on Deputy Martin. You are next on the list.

5.4.7 Deputy J.A. Martin:

I think I was going to go in the same direction. Did the Minister not stand up in this House many times when questioned by other States Members on when he was cutting costs and staff in his department and say that services would remain the same? Today we are hearing he did a service review after he cut the staff. Is that not the case? Or is my memory fading because I am sure the Minister did tell us service would stay the same.

Deputy E.J. Noel:

The service review was carried out in 2016 and the staff that were not required after that service review left after that, not before. Just to correct Deputy Martin there. We have maintained the level of service that we provide for road cleaning. What we have done is move away from our 7-day shift patterns to 5-day shift patterns, therefore saving costs of work being carried out at the weekend. Also one of the things we did receive complaints about was our road sweepers being out early Sunday morning, so we have listened to that and therefore that is one of the reductions we have done. It means that they are now out Monday to Friday throughout the day.

5.4.8 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Has the Minister been in town on a Friday or Saturday night to see the rubbish that is around the roads?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

As I have already explained, we have a service level agreement with the Parish of St. Helier for cleaning the roads within the Parish. I have not, to my knowledge, had any complaints about that but if it is an issue we will take that up with the Parish to ensure that they are complying with the service level agreement.

5.4.9 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Is it not now clear that the natural conclusion of the M.T.F.P. and this Minister's policy was that Islanders are now simply going to have to put up with living in an Island or in St. Helier, a Parish that is more messy than it was before, and that the concerns that were expressed by the workers at the time, the workers who he refused to meet at the time when he was threatening to outsource their jobs, were accurate and that the service has gone down?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Absolutely not. I do not agree with the sentiments of Deputy Mézec there. The M.T.F.P. reductions were voted on by this Assembly. It is this Assembly that set our cash limit and we said that we would have to make significant savings. Our savings target was some 23 per cent of our cash limits. We also had a reduction of over 20 per cent of our staff across the board. Those were difficult things to do but we did them, I believe, with respect for the workforce and took the workforce with us through those difficult periods. We need to make sure that the services that we provide to the public are efficient and we need to optimise the resources that we have got available to us. My department, along with every other States department, have not got a bottomless pit of money. We have our cash limits and we have to use those monies as effectively as possible to provide the services to Islanders.

5.4.10 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

It may well have been an Assembly decision to adopt the M.T.F.P. but in his election for Minister for Transport and Technical Services, at the time, he specifically said he wanted to do the opposite. So given the issues that have now arisen is he now happy to prepare to admit that the promise he made in his election speech for Minister for Transport and Technical Services was an irresponsible promise and that the Assembly made the right decision, or would he, even

if he does agree with my sentiment, at least agree with the facts that the service has gone down as a direct result of this frankly ill-informed and dangerous, I would say, outsourcing of public services?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

No, we have made the services more efficient, and I believe the Deputy is referring to a question by his colleague, Deputy Southern, back in I think it was November 2014 for the elections of ministerial posts where he asked if I was going to reduce the headcount of my department. The truth of the matter was is that it was my intention to increase it because I was bringing 2 departments together. I was bringing Property Holdings to join Transport and Technical Services and therefore at the time that is how I answered him, in that vein.

5.4.11 Deputy M.R. Higgins of St. Helier:

Does the Minister accept that part of the policies of the Council of Ministers have caused a reduction of service and an increase to the problems he faces? To give one example, the number of gardeners were cut, they were privatised, and put out to private agencies. Those same private agencies, if you wander through St. Helier and you see them doing the gardens, their idea of cleaning up the gardens is using a blower, which blows all the leaves and all the rubbish into the road, which blocks the drains. So does the Minister accept that he needs, first of all, to try and speak with his colleagues and make sure the gardens are done properly, and they reduce the amount of rubbish that is going to the drains and causing blockages?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

An interesting question from Deputy Higgins because the gardens in St. Helier were outsourced to the Parish of St. Helier, in particular the maintenance of the Town Park, apart from the mechanical side in terms of the fountains, *et cetera*, again under an S.L.A. (service level agreement). If the Deputy is telling me that his Parish are not living up to that S.L.A. then I will take that up with the Parish.

5.4.12 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

No, I am not saying it is the Parish. I am talking about Andium Homes and the gardeners that are used there. I live right next door ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Deputy, that is a response, not a supplementary question.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Okay, fine. Will he take it up with Andium Homes and the others then to try and get the gardens done properly, number one? Secondly, stop blocking the drains.

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Andium Homes does not come under my remit as the Minister for Infrastructure. If Andium Homes are not maintaining their properties to the satisfaction of Deputy Higgins then I suggest that Deputy Higgins takes it up with Andium Homes.

5.4.13 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

My questions are relating also besides debris, also to leaves. Last time I looked storm drains were in the roads so that does apply to my question. We have had some incidents in St. Saviour, there are people walking in the road because there are too many leaves on the pavement and it is very slippery. We used to have the roads and the pavements cleaned 3 times a week, now we are lucky if we see it every 6 weeks. As I say, winter is coming on, the drains are being

blocked. When we had the recent storm the drains were, in my area, 7 of them, cleaned by me ... you can take the boy out of T.T.S. (Transport and Technical Services) but you cannot take T.T.S. out of the boy.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Deputy, we have to come to a question.

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Will the Minister agree to look at this again and improve the cleaning regime?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

As I have already explained, I am not sure how the particular road outside Deputy Kevin Lewis is cleaned 3 times a week or previously cleaned 3 times a week. I find that quite difficult to take on board when we work on a rota basis and the Island is split up into 4 separate rotas, and those are done one after each other. We continue to look at the services that we provide and we continue to look for producing a more efficient and effective service with the resources that we have. So I am quite willing to look at that again because that is what we do day-in day-out.

[10.30]

That is what my department does on all of its services day-in day-out; we look at ourselves to make sure: "Is there a better way of doing it, is there a more efficient way of doing it, to provide more services to the public for the money that we are given."