

2019.11.25

3 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian of St. Lawrence of the Minister for Home Affairs regarding the decision not to have a Deputy Chief Fire Officer: (OQ.285/2019)

When did the Minister decide not to have a Deputy Chief Fire Officer, and why?

Connétable L. Norman of St. Clement (The Minister for Home Affairs):

If I could preface my comments by saying that we have, in my view, a first-class Fire and Rescue Service, that is the envy of many other jurisdictions. This is a credit to our firefighters who serve on the front line and to our very effective senior leadership team. At the present time, we have decided to have a flatter structure in the Fire and Rescue Service. We will continue to have a senior management team that is fit for purpose and reflects our modern and dynamic service.

3.3.1 The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

Before making his decision, I would expect the Minister to have taken note of the 2017 independent strategic review of the Service, undertaken by the highly qualified Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser to the Welsh Government. The report noted the then limited senior resource capacity within the Service and made a recommendation as how best to secure and utilise that capacity, which included the role of a deputy chief fire officer. Has the Minister read that report? If so, what consideration did he give to that important recommendation, before he decided to abolish the role of the Deputy Chief Officer, thereby reducing capacity even further?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I did see the report some considerable time ago, soon after I was appointed. But I think the Constable will know that we have been in the situation since the previous Fire Chief retired and the current chief became deputy chief. Also, despite that report that the Constable refers to, we have been conducting detailed service reviews ourselves, exploring the opportunities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our services, while maintaining and properly resourcing the front line, which is absolutely vital to me. These reviews have highlighted opportunities to create a senior management team that is best placed for the challenges that the Fire and Rescue Service face today.

3.3.2 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Given that the Fire Service is one which has been an exemplar of succession planning over the years, as an outsider looking in, it seems to me that removal of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer role could be a hindrance to future succession planning and bringing up talent from within. Does the Minister agree with this précis of the situation and if not, would he explain why not?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Succession planning is vitally important in all services - and particularly those in Home Affairs - and I think that the Home Affairs Department have got a good record in succession planning. I think the new Fire Chief is a Jerseyman, who has come through the ranks; the current Chief of Customs and Immigration has come through the ranks ... sorry, the Deputy is mouthing something to me which I cannot quite understand. So there is a good situation there. The new Fire Chief is only recently in post and one of the roles he will have, one of the conditions he will have, is to encourage and think about succession planning when he eventually retires. We do have a substantial management team, including the Area Commander, Group Commander and 4 Station Commanders. All of whom will have the potential with training and expertise and experience to move up the ranks as opportunities arise. But succession planning is vitally important.

3.3.3 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Given in a future situation where we are looking for a new Chief Officer, given that other Brigades around the U.K. will have Deputy Chief Fire Officers and local candidates would not have been able to operate at that role, they being seemingly subordinate roles, does that not put local candidates at an immediate disadvantage to candidates from the United Kingdom?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I see absolutely no reason for that at all. The existing management team, if the Chief Fire Officer is away, or is ill, the Area Commander steps up for the delivery of all response activities. The management structure is in place. There is a hierarchy. There is a flatter management structure than we used to have but, quite honestly, I have been concentrating - and I think Members would expect me to - on front line fire-fighting services. That is the most important thing to me. But the guys in the management team are also doing a first-class job and I have got nothing but respect and praise for them also. Hopefully, it will be some time before we are looking for a new Fire Chief anyway.

3.3.4 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

You never know, buses do operate and so on. Would not a deputy officer ... well, no, you have to always ... I am sorry, people do not understand; you must always allow for being knocked over by a bus.

The Bailiff:

Yes, but if you could pose your question.

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Would not a deputy officer be the person to supervise such improvement as a clean cab policy? Would the Minister come back to the States and confirm that the Department has got a clean cab policy?

The Bailiff:

I am sorry, I am not sure I heard the expression. A clean what, Senator?

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

When firemen are wearing their uniforms in the cab, there is a lot of rather nasty materials that they acquire during fighting a fire.

The Bailiff:

I see. I just was not sure that Members would have understood the reference to a clean cab policy. Your question was: is the absence of a Deputy Chief Fire Officer likely to ... would plan for that?

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Would he not be the person to supervise such improvements as a clean cab policy and maybe the Minister would like to come back to the States and confirm that the Department has a clean cab policy?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I do not need to come back to the States. I can tell the Senator that the Fire Service operates a clean machine. No question about that. I do spend time at the Fire Station. I do spend time with the

management team and officers of the Fire Service. In fact, just a few weeks ago, I spent a whole day, an awful day, with Green Watch where I was taken into a simulated burning building, I was cut out of a car which simulated a crash. I thank my Assistant Minister for assisting with that particular thing. I think there was a force 6 going on at the time and I was taken out in the R.I.B. (rigid inflatable boat), in the rescue boat and that was a terrific experience. Also, on that day, we went on 2 emergency calls, which was totally impressive and saw the co-operation that goes on between the Fire Service and the Ambulance Service. I do not know quite what that has to do with the Senator's question but I do assure her - and she is more than welcome to come and see - that the fire engines, before they go out, are very clean. Very clean indeed.

3.3.5 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

The toxic materials that the fireman's uniforms pick up during a shout are such that it causes a health hazard and most advanced Fire Brigades are taking off their uniforms and putting them in a separate compartment when they go back in the machine. Does our Fire Brigade do that?

The Bailiff:

That question is not related to the presence, or otherwise, of a Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Senator. It is asking about current practice which, in my judgment, has not anything to do with that.

3.3.6 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Just for some clarity, would the Minister confirm that there will be a review of how this is working and also reassure that every person involved, from every staff level within the Fire Service, will be able to take part of that service, to see how it is affecting the delivery of the service?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Absolutely. Two things to say about that: we will be having a target operating model review beginning of next year, which all officers and all firefighters will be involved in and be able to have their input. What I really want to do, because it has been some time, is to have a proper formal inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary and Fire also next year, if not the year after, when all of these sort of things, including the management structure, the number of firefighters, the number of machines, the number of resources we have, all that to be taken into consideration to inform and advise me, as the Minister.

The Bailiff:

We have run out of any reasonable time allocation for this question, I am afraid.

3.3.7 The Connétable of St. Lawrence.

It is interesting to hear that a further review will take place in a couple of years' time. But, clearly, public safety must be paramount in all decision making that reduces operational capacity. Will the Minister assure the Assembly today that this decision will not result in any reduction in service to the public? Apart from that assurance, will he tell us why he believes that to be the case?

[15:15]

The Bailiff:

They may be playing your tune, Minister.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I think they are coming for the Constable. Can I say, I am absolutely confident that the Fire and Rescue Service and the other emergency services, for which I have political responsibility, will run extremely effectively as it is currently structured. The Chief Fire Officer has an excellent team around him and I know that between them they can provide effective leadership and resilience of the Service. I have said before that if additional resources, that changes are needed to improve these services, I will not be found wanting, if a robust case can be made by the services. I proved that with what I have done with the States of Jersey Police and if the other services find themselves in a similar situation, they will not find me wanting.