

2020.05.12

**15 Senator K.L. Moore of the Chief Minister regarding savings and cuts to government departments (OQ.116/2020)**

Will the Chief Minister update the Assembly on any work that is being undertaken to review prospective savings and cuts in relation to government departments and government-commissioned services; and will he advise whether there are any plans not to reopen some government services as the Island comes out of the COVID-19 pandemic?

**Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré (The Chief Minister):**

Members will be aware of the significant economic challenges the Island faces and the impact on government resources. The Council of Ministers is looking at the impact of COVID-19 on our financial plans including planned and future efficiencies. But no decision has been taken in respect of government services or commissioned services at this time, although this will be one of the focuses of the political oversight group that I am in the process of establishing to lead on the economic recovery of the Island. This recovery will be a mixture of elements including savings, efficiencies, measures to support and grow the economy, and the re-profiling of cash flow as well as expenditure. I would note there will also need to be appropriate consideration of related non-economic issues as the Island exits from this crisis. Importantly, we will be arranging a briefing for Members on the financial impact of the crisis on the Island in due course.

**4.15.1 The Deputy of St. Mary:**

Will the Minister confirm that the review will extend to, not only departments of the government, but also to States-controlled bodies such as Ports of Jersey so that the review encompasses capital projects, which might need adaptation in the light of the post-COVID world?

**Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:**

At this stage nothing is in and nothing is out. As will be made clear to Members when we do give the financial briefing, it is important to understand the consequences of the crisis and therefore how we will be focusing on the challenges that will be with us for probably the rest of the year. But nothing is in and nothing is out.

**4.15.2 Deputy S.M. Ahier:**

The need for digital acceleration in the public sector is essential. Does the Chief Minister accept that automation to reduce costs is required?

**Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:**

Absolutely is the answer. As the Deputy will recall, and as Members will recall, we were investing a lot of money into our I.T. structures. I will absolutely praise our present information technology team, our information services team, because if we had not put the investment into Office 365 at the time we did we would not be having this Assembly today in quite the way it is operating. We should be commending everybody who is keeping those services operational. The point I would say is that it is also very clear that, with these type of issues, the issues that we were previously identifying on our I.T. services still remain, those issues, we still have to spend that money. It has also become clear, as we have all adapted to new ways of working, there are other areas that will come to the fore in terms of the impact of how we have been using that technology. We had already said in the Government Plan that a number of the efficiencies further down the line that

made up part of the figure we were working on would be due to the I.T. investment that we were making. I agree entirely with the thrust of the question from the Deputy.

**4.15.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Can I ask the Chief Minister, as he develops the response including the question that was asked by Senator Moore, will he have what would be traditionally called think tanks to help advise him? If so, will he publish the names and membership of those think tanks to the Assembly and to the public?

**Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:**

If it is appropriate to publish those names, I am very happy to reveal them to Members. What I cannot recall quite off the top of my head is what the protocol is around naming members of the public within the Assembly, if that makes sense. But anything that requires to be included, for example in a Ministerial Decision, if that identifies those names then absolutely.

**4.15.4 Deputy K.F. Morel:**

If everything is in and nothing is out as far as review of expenditure is concerned, could the Chief Minister confirm whether that would include the high salaries of the Chief Executive and Director Generals and whether they would be subject to potential review?

**Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:**

As I said, at this stage, and as Members will see, we will have to look at all aspects of what we do as Government looking forward. That is my opinion now. Obviously, as matters progress, we will have a better handle on what the financial impact is going to be. We are waiting for figures to come from the Income Forecasting Group imminently, which obviously will be shared once they have been shared with Ministers, they will be shared with Scrutiny, but then that will hopefully form the basis for Members to understand the issues we will be facing.

**4.15.5 Senator K.L. Moore:**

In the current difficult situation with government staff under extremely high amounts of pressure, managing staff working from home, and a high level of anxiety, does the Chief Minister consider that it is appropriate for managers who are having to deal with those issues to also simultaneously create plans that could see a number of staff, including themselves, being made redundant?

[11:30]

**Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:**

I am unaware of that taking place.