

20.10.06

10 Deputy K.F. Morel of the Chief Minister regarding the incorporation of home-working with the OneGov office strategy (OQ.258/2020)

In developing the OneGov office strategy what steps, if any, is the Government taking to incorporate the effects of home working by staff into the assessment of its future office needs?

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

In developing plans for a single office a degree of agile working has been concluded in terms of desk to staff ratios and spatial requirements. In more recent times, as a result of the COVID-19 situation, we know that more staff want to work in more agile and flexible ways, so officers have been asked to consider the implications of more home working and how that would impact on the current plans for our new building. I am advised that with more agile working there is the opportunity to effectively accommodate more staff in a new building and that could also realise greater efficiencies across the public sector. In parallel, officers are in the process of developing an agile working strategy that will ensure that agreed and consistent principles are applied across the organisation to offer public service staff the flexibility that aligns with modern lifestyles.

3.10.1 Deputy K.F. Morel:

The Minister, in his response, mentioned that more staff could be accommodated in a building in which agile working and home working are encouraged. Would it not also make sense to see it as fewer staff would need to be accommodated in a building? So, should 30 per cent of staff be working from home on any given day - as is happening in many private offices - a 1,500-person building would only need to be a 1,000-person building. Is that not an appropriate way to view this cultural change in working that has taken place over the past few months?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I take the point the Deputy is trying to make but what we are saying is that if we have less people in the building we can, therefore, bring more people from other places and free up those places that those people are presently working in and, therefore, achieve greater efficiencies. There is a balance between people working from home and, as we have all experienced in the isolation period we have all been through, and the kind of networking and well-being of people working in an office together. So that is the balance we are also trying to achieve. The Deputy is absolutely right in what we have talked about in terms of home working, there is provision in that we have looked at the office strategy from the perspective of COVID-19 and the impact there, but we are satisfied that the principles are that if the original cohort that we were looking at is reduced from the principles of homeworking we can bring more people into the strategy and, therefore, achieve greater benefits for the public and for the workforce.

3.10.2 The Deputy of St. Martin:

When the new office building is eventually constructed can the Chief Minister give the Assembly an assurance that it will be on States-owned land and it will not be rented or leased from a private company?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

At this stage all options are on the table and the tender process is due to come back to myself and other Ministers relevant to that group, I believe, during the course of this month. I also believe that we are giving Scrutiny an update I think this Thursday, if not the following Thursday.

3.10.3 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Does the Chief Minister agree with me that the States currently owns too much land and purchasing further land for the construction of a new office building would seem to go against the grain?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I can understand what the Deputy is saying. I agree with his first comment, which is that we do have too much planned and too many buildings, a number of which are not up to standard and provide a poor working environment for our staff, as well as being inefficient to run. Therefore, the whole principle behind this is to get our staff into better working conditions, to save money for the taxpayer and ultimately to release sites for much needed housing, which will be brownfield. But in terms of what is the best strategy, that all depends on timing, what can provide the best fit for the requirements of the States - and there are a whole number of variables in there - and, as I say, Scrutiny will be getting their latest update I believe in the next couple of Thursdays. Once we have got a position obviously we will be bringing that to States Members at the very least as a briefing and then, subject to what the outcomes are, there will be references either in the Government Plan or as a separate approval.

3.10.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Chief Minister just mentioned decent working conditions for the staff. Does he consider that Broad Street is arranged in such a way that actually it is a sick building and that there is not enough access to daylight, which in the long term will cause serious problems to people's health?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I certainly would not go to that extent. Broad Street is not without its difficulties but it is a significant improvement on previous accommodation that we were occupying. We can certainly see a lot better working practices coming out and that is people working together, silos breaking down, all those types of issues from the move to Broad Street; so I think it was a good result. In terms of daylight, we will make sure that is covered in any future schemes that are brought forward.

3.10.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

A related topic: do the current sites on the Parade and in Broad Street provide sufficient access to the public so that the Government can show its best face to the public, or are those places very difficult to get into? You end up stuck in front of a door that is locked and you have got to wait for a member of staff to come in. Especially now that we have done the rear of Broad Street ...

The Bailiff:

I am not sure that is focused into a question yet, is it, Deputy Southern?

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does he agree that we are not presenting our face in the current structures?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I think we are still operating under COVID restrictions and, therefore, by dint of that of course the public access is not what we would all want. Prior to that I would say the access to Broad Street, as far as I was aware, was perfectly effective.

3.10.6 Deputy R.J. Ward:

In the provision of these office spaces and facilities will this be extended equitably to non-Executive Members of the Assembly, which is a benchmark for good governance?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Indeed I think in answer to one of the written questions, the proposed office strategy will be considering better facilities for States Members. It will obviously be a matter for Members to consider.

3.10.7 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can the Minister reassure that that consideration is equitable and gives non-Executive Members the facilities they need to perform the role that is so essential to hold Government to account?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

As far as I am concerned anything we do will be an improvement on the facilities that Members presently have. I would need to understand exactly what the Deputy means by equitable. I imagine it will be up to a fit standard and appropriate for the type of business that we all do in our various roles.

3.10.8 Deputy K.F. Morel:

In my previous question I mentioned that private offices are restricting the number of people who work to 50 per cent, 30 per cent, 20 per cent, keeping them away from the office. Would the Minister advise the Assembly as to whether there is any percentage of office staff that the Government is using in its modelling that it intends to say: "No, we will only work on 80 per cent or 70 per cent of staff being in the office at any one time."

[11:00]

In their modelling is there any particular percentage that the Government is working to?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I have to say I will have to go back and confirm what that percentage is. It would not surprise me that there is some form of modelling exercise in terms of percentage. I do not know what that is but I will come back to the Deputy in due course.