

23.12.11.

**5. Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade of the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development regarding the closure of Nude Food (OQ.242/2023)**

Will the Minister advise what lessons, if any, have been learnt from the recent closure of Nude Food, particularly in relation to those workers who were brought to the Island on work permits and their ability, or otherwise, to seek alternative employment?

Deputy K.F. Morel of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity (The Minister for Sustainable Economic Development):

Ordinarily the subject of work permits would fall to the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs, rather than the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development. A work permit is tied to specific employment and should this cease the immigration permission also falls away, if there is one. If extenuating circumstances exist, work permit holders whose employment ends can be allowed to switch to alternative employment without leaving the Island. Jersey Customs and Immigration Service have been in contact with the majority of those affected by the closure of Nude Food, and in most cases they are being permitted to switch to another employer, subject to finding alternative employment within hospitality. I would also like to add that I just want to send ... my thoughts are absolutely with the staff and the owners of Nude Food.

2.3.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

First of all, can I thank the Minister for answering? I think there is something of a Venn diagram between his department and Home Affairs and this one; clearly, the fact that his department has now been changed to Sustainable Economic Development. Does he agree that there is something not very sustainable about the current system we have where we need to get many of our employees from overseas on work permits and we find in such a situation where work permits are terminated prematurely, that those workers are having to turn to social media and crowdfunding before they can look for other jobs. Does the Minister have any thoughts about the synergy between his department and Home Affairs to make this a more sustainable and perhaps a more fair area for those workers and businesses?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I thank the Deputy for his question. I would like to say, first of all, that I have a very good working relationship with the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs, and there is no question that one of the subjects of conversation that we have and official meetings, et cetera, that we have had since day one of taking up our roles, has been about work permits and will continue to be about work permits. I understand that the Jersey Customs and Immigration Service, and I have seen this myself and spoken to them myself, does have a very understanding attitude in the main to when very unfortunate circumstances arise, such as the one that we are discussing today. From that perspective, I am comforted that the Jersey Customs and Immigration Service does adopt the right attitude, even when the rules themselves may be slightly more fixed. I would have to refer to the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs as to whether or not work permits need further changing, but it is a constant subject of conversation.

2.3.2 Deputy M.R. Scott:

Will the Minister accept that the attractiveness of the Island for workers who come here to work under a work permit is somewhat threatened when hospitality businesses are perceived to be vulnerable?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I think the biggest threat or the biggest action to make it harder for our economy to attract people was, in fact, the United Kingdom leaving the European Union. That is probably the main reason why the hospitality sector is finding it difficult to bring people in. But I do understand we have, as we saw in the media just last week, up to about 2,000 people on work permits, possibly more. There is no question that Jersey remains an attractive jurisdiction for people to come and work in.

2.3.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Notwithstanding previous answers about what is not within his domain, will the Minister consider to look at what might be in his domain? Will he consider that when a work permit is issued to a worker for, let us say, 9 months, it could be a year, and if that work is terminated could he bring about a situation whereby the worker is simply just allowed to stay on the Island to fulfil that period and look for work without needing to revert to Home Affairs, which, with due respect, has absolutely nothing to do with the employment chances between ... that should be a relationship between the employer and the employee? Does the Minister agree that more liberalisation of the work permit system might be beneficial?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I thank the Deputy for his supplementary question. I am very much open to discussing whether liberalisation of work permits is the right way forward or not. I personally do not have a fixed view on that at the moment but it is wrong to suggest that I have any power in terms of work permits. I, as Minister for Sustainable Economic Development, do not. It really does fall entirely to the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs. So where the business community speaks to me and has concerns about work permits, which from time to time they do, I pass that on to the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs, and we have an ongoing dialogue about the appropriateness of our work permit system, and that will continue. Even following this exchange, I will speak to the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs about these matters.