

2024.04.30

### **3.6 Deputy J. Renouf of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding the Evie electric bike rental service (OQ.81/2024)**

Will the Minister advise what communication, if any, he has had with EVie regarding the suspension of its electric bike rental service, and what assistance, if any, the Government can provide to resolve the insurance cover challenge EVie is facing?"

#### **Connétable A.N. Jehan of St. John (The Minister for Infrastructure):**

Together with the Minister for the Environment, we met with EVie in February and then there was an exchange of emails with the Chief Executive of Evie in mid-March, around a proposal to the Government around a shared mobility bike fleet, which presented a number of alternatives for the EVie dockless electric bike business. However, on the basis of the information provided by Evie, there was not a strong business case for Government involvement and the matter was not pursued. In terms of insurance, specifically, officers in the insurance team in Treasury and Exchequer provided assistance to EVie regarding insurance of their motor fleet towards the end of 2023. As far as I am aware, to date, EVie have not requested any further assistance regarding bike insurance per se. Similar to the motor fleet situation, I understand Treasury officers would be happy to provide assistance where they can to help EVie resolve the bike insurance issue. This does not mean it would be possible to place the EVie bikes under the Government of Jersey insurance programme.

#### **3.6.1 Deputy J. Renouf:**

I find it slightly disappointing that there have been no follow-up meetings since February. The Sustainable Transport Policy next steps document includes the following Ministerial commitment to: "Continue to encourage shared mobility as an alternative to private car ownership." It even mentions, on page 46, working explicitly with EVie, to this end. Should the Minister not be engaging actively with EVie to try and avoid the loss of this important service?

#### **The Connétable of St. John:**

I thank the Deputy for his question. We are happy to continue discussions with EVie. In fact, we are discussing different options with EVie. There are, I should say, a number of local businesses who provide cycles, be they traditional or electric cycles for hire. They offer collection and delivery, and we are happy to work with any of those providers.

#### **3.6.2 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:**

What data does the Minister have to understand the demographics of the people who are making use of these vehicles?

#### **The Connétable of St. John:**

I thank the Deputy for her question. I understand that 56 per cent of the users are local. I do have the ages somewhere. I believe the average age is between 20 and 40.

#### **3.6.3 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:**

Does the Minister share my concerns that those on low income would not be able to have the same accessibility to these types of bikes if the scheme is not continued?

#### **The Connétable of St. John:**

There are, as I said earlier, other providers. It will depend on the usage of the bike. The bus service is a cheap alternative to cycles. But what we are not able to do is support a business case where the numbers do not stack up for us to purchase part or all of the service.

#### **3.6.4 Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

Is the Minister aware that it will be far harder to start a new shared e-bike scheme than to keep an existing service going? Should he not therefore be exploring every possible mechanism EVie's insurance issue?

**The Connétable of St. John:**

I will repeat, we have not been asked to resolve EVie's insurance issue for bikes; we were asked whether we would invest in the business. If EVie want help with their insurance then it is the Treasury Department that would be the people to help them.

**3.6.5 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Does the Minister recognise there is a big difference between the hire company and the scheme provided by EVie as an e-bike which is available now in most places around the world for locals who are not able to buy an electric bike to use it on a daily basis? If the Minister does recognise the difference between hire and the scheme, would he explore every possible mechanism to solve EVie's difficulties and to allow the service to continue?

**The Connétable of St. John:**

I do recognise the difference because when I visit other locations I will often hire a bike and visit sites of interest, so I am very familiar with that, and I am very familiar with the different levels of quality in those provisions. What we cannot do is spend money. At a time when we have other demands on government finances, it is not something I believe the Government should be involved in, propping up this business.

**3.6.6 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

I agree that there needs to be consideration always to the public money and we need to be prudent with the public funds. Would the Minister engage with the Minister for Treasury and Resources and with EVie Bikes to explore an option to save this business before it disappears?

**The Connétable of St. John:**

We are happy to explore anything with the provider.

[10:30]

We have suggested that, like other jurisdictions, they go and seek sponsorship for the services, whether that is from perhaps a local electric company, Visit Jersey or anyone else that may be interested in that. You will see around the country and around Europe that a lot of these schemes are sponsored by local businesses, and we have suggested that to the current provider.

**3.6.7 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:**

I am not sure I fully agree with the Better Way position of nationalising Evie, but if I could ask the Minister: where is the line that needs to be drawn when it comes to supporting one particular business which has been struggling over others in the market which may also be operating successfully?

**The Connétable of St. John:**

I thank the Deputy for his question. The business case would have to demonstrate it is sustainable and we have not seen evidence of that to date.

**3.6.8 Deputy J. Renouf:**

I think I am very disappointed that the language the Minister is using here, he has referenced the possibility of other providers, he has talked about a bus service, he has talked about not propping up this business but he has had no other contact since February with the business. I checked last night with EVie and it seems to me that this is not a Government that is working flat ... a Minister that is working flat out ...

**The Bailiff:**

Deputy, this is, at the moment, a political statement, it is not a question. It has to be a question.

**Deputy J. Renouf:**

It is about to be a question.

**The Bailiff:**

Well, if it could be a question straight away, please.

**Deputy J. Renouf:**

The whole point of my earlier point was, as a strategic policy, that it puts a long-term strategy as a priority; is he happy to see the business die on his watch?

**The Connétable of St. John:**

As I mentioned in my original answer, we exchanged emails in mid-March, I have had exchanges on LinkedIn in April, so it is wrong to say that the last correspondence was in February.