

## **Questions to Ministers without notice -**

### **5. The Deputy Bailiff:**

Now we come to questions to the Chief Minister. Who wishes to ask a question of the Chief Minister?

#### **5.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:**

Would the Chief Minister confirm that he still wishes to send out a message about the States bearing down on public expenditure? In this case, how does he account for the recent advertisement for another Chief Executive Officer for a States Department, in excess of £100,000, when the last one was made redundant? Surely the whole point of redundancy, and the sizeable payoff that usually accompanies it, is that you do not seek to fill the position again?

#### **Senator F.H. Walker:**

I can confirm that the onus is very much on bearing down on States' expenditure. It was not so long ago that the Constable of St. Helier congratulated what was then the Policy and Resources Committee, and the team, for the actions taken. In relation to the specific point he raises, the previous head of Planning and Environment was given voluntary early retirement. The savings were paid for. The savings were accumulated, as we said, at the time. The reason was that the States, at that point, decided to merge both Planning and Public Services, as they were then known. We certainly did not need two Chief Officers in one department. According to the State's decision we have now de-merged: we have gone back to 2 departments. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind at all that the Planning Department, which is one of the most important departments in the whole of the States, requires a very able, and capable, Chief Officer. Hence the advertisement and hence the salary offered.

#### **5.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

The Chief Minister has made a public commitment to increased emphasis on a social justice agenda over the coming years. Will he ensure that such commitment is turned into something concrete by ensuring that there is sufficient law drafting time assured for such projects over the next 3 years?

#### **Senator F.H. Walker:**

Finding law drafting time and resources is always a difficult issue because there is always more need than there is resource to meet it. But I can assure the Deputy that social issues - social justice as he termed it in his question - are very much at the top of the Council of Ministers' agenda. Although we have yet to take decisions, I am very confident that adequate law drafting time will be made available.

#### **5.3 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisssier:**

Can the Chief Minister outline what his thinking is in respect of collective responsibility for the Council of Ministers?

#### **Senator F.H. Walker:**

I did this. This is already in the public arena because I made it very clear, both in my speech, I think, and certainly in the documents I presented for the election of Chief Minister. Basically, the collective responsibility is that any Minister may disagree with his colleagues. A minority of Ministers - any one individual - may disagree. If he or she does, then they have a choice: they either merely record their dissent, or not, as they wish. If they wish to take it further, providing they advise me and their colleagues that they will publicly dissent from a decision and/or even bring a private Member's report proposition to the States, then they are at liberty to do so. That was clearly spelt out in my submission and has been fully agreed by the Council of Ministers.

#### **5.4 Deputy S.C. Ferguson:**

I wonder if the Chief Minister could confirm whether or not the human resources policy has been changed? There do appear to have been jobs where people have been appointed without advertisement. There appear to be a number of jobs where the description has been tailored, and appears to be with a particular applicant in mind.

#### **Senator F.H. Walker:**

I am afraid, without any indication of which specific post the Deputy is referring to, I am unable to answer that specifically. All I will say, very clearly, is there has been no change in policy.

#### **5.5 Deputy P.N. Troy of St. Brelade:**

Sitting in Deputy Rondel's chair, I thought I should, perhaps, consider asking the Chief Minister a question. This is something that I was looking at prior to becoming an Assistant Minister. I would like to state that, during the Budget debate, I asked the Health Minister why respite care at Secker House had closed and why current service provision on the McKinstry Ward does not meet the previous standard of facilities received at Secker House? The Health Minister would not give an assurance, at that time, that additional funding would be coming forward to improve facilities. So, I would like to ask the Chief Minister: does he consider it acceptable that respite care should continue at a reduced level of service? Would he consider requesting a report? If in agreement with me that the service provision has decreased, will he then exert pressure on the Health Minister to bring forward increased funding to this area to improve facilities?

#### **Senator F.H. Walker:**

I will gladly ask for a report. The problem of funding, of course, is that there are many examples of where we would want to improve the service offered. It is a question of prioritisation, as we well know. The States has agreed to overall levels of spending. We are doing our very best to provide the best possible service - certainly in the core social areas - within that level of spending. The Council of Ministers is having a 2-day meeting this week, where we will be looking to prepare the first draft of the next 5-year strategic plan. Of course, resourcing, and the ability to fund key social issues, will be top of that agenda but I will, as the Deputy has requested, ask for a report on the respite care.

#### **5.6 The Deputy Bailiff:**

I had seen Deputy Southern, before you. If nobody else wants to... Deputy Southern.

#### **Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Will the Minister inform Members what progress has been made in securing adequate, and prompt, legal advice to Scrutiny Panels?

#### **Senator F.H. Walker:**

I, and the Chief Executive, together with the Attorney General, met the Chairmen's Committee last week, which the Deputy is well aware of because he sat on it. The Deputy will be aware that we are currently awaiting a letter from the Chairmen's Committee, so that this can be discussed by the Council of Ministers with a view to providing the prompt legal advice that the Scrutiny Panels must have, which we specifically said, "would have".

#### **5.7 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisssier:**

Following on from Deputy Ferguson's question: could the Chief Minister define the difference between a Director of Procurement and a Director of Strategic Procurement, particularly given that it was a policy, quite recently, that procurement would be sent back to the departments.

Presumably, there no longer exists a department?

**Senator F.H. Walker:**

The difference between a procurement manager and a strategic procurement manager is the word “strategic”. [Laughter] The Deputy is quite right that there was, once upon a time, a considerably subsidised, and resourced, procurement department which was not achieving the savings it was set to achieve and it was closed down. What we need to do now, and I believe we have the right way forward, is ensure that we have a “slimmed-down” procurement scenario where we can save the States genuine money. What we are looking to save is £5 million a year. The total spend of the States is something like £80 million in this respect. With the facility we are setting up, we are looking to save £5 million a year. I believe we will achieve it.

**5.8 The Deputy Bailiff:**

Any other questions? Yes, Deputy Mezbourian?

**Deputy of St. Lawrence:**

I would like to know what is the Chief Minister’s view of the response “No comment” when given by his Ministers to questions asked by members of the public?

**Senator F.H. Walker:**

I am not, generally speaking, in favour of “No comment”, at all. I am not aware of a specific instance that the Deputy is referring to. Sometimes, I know from personal experience, it can be suggested in the media that a Minister - or previously a President or a States Member - has refused to comment, simply when they have not been contacted or they have not been contactable. But, generally speaking, I am not in favour of “No comment.” I believe the public, even if a full and detailed answer cannot be given, are entitled to some sort of response to a legitimate and genuine question.

**5.9 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

If I may return to my previous written and oral questions, to press the Minister: could I draw his attention to the comments made in his answer to my written question? The former Human Resources Sub-Committee recognised that some might take the view that the current overall ban, for example in respect of civil servants, might be considered disproportionate (this is a ban on any political activity). Given that other departments and other Ministers are acting as if Human Rights [Law] is in place, surely, if it is possible that such an overall ban on any political activity could be recognised as disproportionate, it would be appropriate to remove that ban forthwith, as soon as possible?

**Senator F.H. Walker:**

I have already given that answer in writing and, also, earlier replied to another question from the Deputy. I do not think I can elaborate on the position, merely to reiterate that we are making rapid progress and a report and proposition will be before this House very shortly.

**5.10 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:**

Following on from the “Yes, Minister” answer, quite frankly, I want to see if the Chief Minister could define the role of a Director of Strategic Procurement designed to promote the cause of procurement, as per the job ad?

**Senator F.H. Walker:**

His job is to buy things better and cheaper.

**5.11 The Deputy Bailiff:**

Any other questions? Well, if no other Member wishes to ask a question I will draw it to a close, but I am anxious that Members should have a full opportunity. Deputy Le Hérisssier?

**Deputy R.G. Le Hérisssier:**

Well, I think it is wrong. The Chief Minister is an important person and we need to know, can he tell us, Sir, what he sees as his 3 most important priorities?

**Senator F.H. Walker:**

Again, I think I made that very clear when I put forward my submission for the election of Chief Minister. The top 3 priorities, if the Deputy is referring to overall policy, as I made very clear, certainly we have a very big social agenda. We have got to protect the economy and protect the environment. Those are the 3 main policies but, of course, there is much detail to be added to those. That is why we are now beginning, as the States have instructed us to do - in fact it was begun last week with the Assistant Ministers in a very valuable meeting - but we will be meeting, as I have already said, for 2 days this week to move on the strategic plan process. Of course, that will make our priorities abundantly clear. The States will have the opportunity of not only scrutinising them but agreeing or disagreeing with them as they wish. But, I can assure the Deputy that social items are very much at the top of the agenda.

**5.12 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Is the Chief Minister aware that the current expansion in the fulfilment industry, with its emphasis on a low skilled and largely immigrant workforce, runs directly contrary to his own migration policy?

**Senator F.H. Walker:**

No, I am not, and the Deputy is inaccurate because the vast majority of people employed in the fulfilment industry are local people.

**5.13 The Deputy Bailiff:**

Yes, Deputy Southern, I can see Senator Ozouf is bursting to ask a question. [Laughter] Well, stop him please, this is primarily for non-members of the Council of Ministers. So, Deputy Southern, yes?

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Once again, can the Minister clarify - I see signalling about zero, it is not true zero because I have seen the figures - that when he refers to local employees he is referring to locally qualified under the 5-year-rule and not under any 14-year-rule or anything bigger?

**Senator F.H. Walker:**

Yes.

**5.14 The Deputy Bailiff:**

Does any other Member wish to ask a question? Well, Senator Ozouf?

**Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:**

Has the Chief Minister been asked the questions that he thought he would be? If he has not been, what were the questions that he thought he was going to be asked, and what are the answers? [Laughter]

**Senator F.H. Walker:**

I anticipated that the Minister for Economic Development would make such a hash of his time that I would be asked a load of questions about the economy.

**5.15 Deputy J.J. Huet of St. Helier:**

I would just like to get something clear in my mind: is the Chief Minister expecting questions from Assistant Ministers, or not?

**Senator F.H. Walker:**

That is really not a matter for me, I think. I am quite happy to field questions from any Member of the States. I think it is a question, though, of making sure that, as the President has said, questions without notice is of the maximum value to non-executive Members of the States. Generally speaking, I would expect to field the majority of questions, certainly, from people who are not either Ministers or Assistant Ministers, but I am quite happy, personally, subject to the rulings of the Chair, to take questions from anyone.

**The Deputy Bailiff:** If I may add there, certainly, of course, Assistant Minister, under the Standing Orders any Member may ask a question of the Chief Minister and, therefore, that is a right, but the Chair has to select if there are more people who want to ask questions than are available. In my judgment the Chair should, on the whole, give preference to Members who are not part of the Executive but, in default, the Chair will accept questions from members of the Executive.

**5.16 Deputy J. Huet:**

In that case, may I ask a question, Sir, to the Chief Minister? **[Laughter]** It relates to the question, previously, about employing somebody for planning. Was the Chief Minister not aware... or maybe I have got it wrong. I was under the impression when the 2 departments combined, that they would eventually re-split again. Maybe I did not understand it. So, if we knew they were going to re-split, why did we get rid of one to employ another?

**Senator F.H. Walker:**

We believe that the decisions reached and the way the job has been specified now, will serve the Island well - and, indeed, better - from a planning perspective in the future. One of the requirements of the post is that the Chief Executive should themselves be a capable and thoroughly experienced planner.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

Very well, the time has expired in relation to the questions of the Chief Minister, so that brings that matter to an end.