

4. Questions to Ministers without Notice - The Chief Minister:

4.1 The Deputy of St. Martin:

At a recent meeting with the Privileges and Procedures Committee with regard to the Ministerial government reform it is recorded that the Chief Minister gave Ministerial government a glowing first yearly report but said there were problems with Scrutiny saying that some Members were pursuing an opposition agenda. Would the Chief Minister give examples where some Members are pursuing an opposition agenda? Also, given the difficulties encountered by both States Members and Scrutiny Officers in successfully getting Scrutiny off the ground would the Chief Minister agree that it was time that he gave due credit to the good work being done in general to Scrutiny.

Senator F.H. Walker (The Chief Minister):

Yes, Sir, and gladly. In fact, I made that point in the meeting that I had with the review group and my comments were abridged in the *J.E.P.*. I made it abundantly clear that I thought there were some aspects of Scrutiny and some Panels within Scrutiny who were and are doing a first class job. Sadly, that part of what I said was not reported in the *J.E.P.* I assume it is... well, I know it is on the transcript so there we have it. But I have made in the past and I continue to make criticisms of some Scrutiny Panels. I was not specific in the evidence I gave to the review group about that but I have to say I think at least 2 of the reports produced by one of the Scrutiny Panels and the accompanying remarks issued in press release forms by its Chairman are clear evidence that that particular Panel on those particular issues was not working on the premise of being evidence-based and it basically reached their conclusions before they began their study.

4.1.1 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Could I press the Chief Minister to inform the House of those 2 reports which he did not agree with?

Senator F.H. Walker:

I do not think I will do that. I think the House is well aware of all the reports it has received and the House can reach its own conclusions.

4.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Fifteen months ago, Sir, the Chief Minister supported the Health Minister when issues were raised, reference the Job Families Agreement with nurses. We were told it was a blip, it was a heavy hand on a tiller and that things would return to normal and go on to greater and greater perfection, so to speak. Would he accept that this judgment was misplaced and that there are serious problems there and that they need to be addressed urgently?

Senator F.H. Walker:

I think everyone associated with the new structure, both from the employee side of things and the employer side of things, was very optimistic about what it promised and very optimistic about the timescale in which it could be delivered. Sadly, I think everyone involved with that has been disappointed that it has become more contentious than it had appeared to be and it has certainly taken far longer to implement than I think anyone imagined it would. But I agree with the thrust of the Deputy, it does need and is getting very considerable attention, both from the employee representative side and from the employer and I called a meeting a couple of months ago with employee representatives at which this was one of the major items of discussion and I am satisfied that the appropriate action has been taken. But it is complex and it cannot be forced on anyone. It has to be introduced by agreement and that is taking a considerable length of time.

4.2.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

I wonder, Sir, if the Chief Minister, while it is not in his specific domain, as I said he was very supportive of the project. Here was a project intended to deal with the particular needs of a

professional group who were very difficult to recruit and keep and retain group and yet the project and its objectives have seriously gone off the rails. Would the Chief Minister tell this House, Sir, what went wrong and what has been done to put it right?

Senator F.H. Walker:

I cannot give full details of what went wrong. It was a combination of things where it proved, once the agreements have been agreed it proved impossible to agree on how it should be implemented. That has arisen in a number of contexts; job grading is one and there are others. But the Deputy again is right, there were very high hopes at the time that this would introduce a much better structure, would aid recruitment at senior levels particularly, and that has been a problem. The good news, however, is that recruitment issues within the nursing profession in Jersey - recruitment problems - have eased very considerably in recent months compared to a year ago and that is a very positive position.

4.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Chief Minister undertake to inform himself what the impact of the £2.5 million additional cuts required to pay for the 2007 pay rise have on particular departments and will he commit himself to bring this information to the House?

Senator F.H. Walker:

No, Sir, I will not. The Ministers concerned have accepted the position. The Ministers concerned have made their own provisions and we should recall that this is a one-off only, this is not an ongoing requirement. This is a requirement in the year 2007 only and I know full well that the Ministers would not have accepted that position was it likely to result in significant and serious cutbacks to the level of service we offer the public.

4.3.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Chief Minister accept that it is perfectly acceptable for me to ask each of his 9 Ministers what impact that additional £2.5 million has?

Senator F.H. Walker:

If the Deputy wishes, by all means.

4.4 Senator L. Norman:

A few moments ago the Planning Minister told us that he is likely to determine the planning application for the houses at Plémont before the Council of Ministers come forward with their preferred option on the future of the Plémont headland. If that application is in the affirmative will that way of doing things not put the States at a huge disadvantage in any future negotiations?

Senator F.H. Walker:

We do not believe so. The fact is that a planning application is in process. A planning application has been submitted and the Law requiring that application to be decided upon kicks-in and it is necessary for the planning decision to be made so that the Council of Ministers are aware of its impact before we can take any final decisions on the final outcome of the headland. We have, of course, discussed this with the Planning Minister and others and we remain optimistic that a solution which will be widely accepted can be found.

4.4.1 Senator L. Norman:

Do I understand from that, Sir, that the Council of Ministers has decided not to come forward with their preferred option for the future of the headland until the Planning Minister has determined the application? In other words, everything is on hold until the application is determined?

Senator F.H. Walker:

Yes, Sir.

4.5 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Further to reports that the U.K. has one of the worst drinking problems in Europe with a fifth of children aged 11 to 15 drinking at least once a week, does the Chief Minister think that raising the legal drinking age to 21 may be part of the answer?

Senator F.H. Walker:

That is not something I am qualified to answer at all. That is very much for the medical professionals and the Law Officers, I think, and others. What I can say is that (a) I am hugely impressed with the approach being taken by the Health Minister and his team which will shortly be published in the new directions policy which does concentrate on alcohol abuse as one of its main priorities. I am also delighted by the recent results of the survey among school children which show very clearly that serious drinking among school children is falling and falling sharply. So the policies in Jersey are having an impact and of course we need to build upon that further.

4.5.1 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

This is something that in the past I have approached the Minister for Economic Development and the Minister for Home Affairs that we do have a situation where we are having older teens buying drink for younger teens and that this may be... I think we have failed the youth to some extent and this may be an important way forward. Does the Minister not agree?

Senator F.H. Walker:

Again, it is not something that I have any personal experience of, nor do I feel qualified to give an answer. I think the Deputy would better direct his question in this context to the professionals.

4.6 Deputy R.C. Duhamel of St. Saviour:

Can the Chief Minister tell the House what maximum size population he would personally support for Jersey in order to achieve economic growth?

Senator F.H. Walker:

The States in their last debate on migration quite deliberately did not set a population ceiling. They agreed a migration policy, that is the policy I am obliged and required to follow, that is the policy I am following. There is no question of a ceiling and I am most certainly not prepared to put a figure on it at this stage or probably at any stage.

4.7 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Notwithstanding the excellent initiatives and vision laid out in the St. Helier Regeneration Plan, would the Chief Minister acknowledge - and the Waterfront must serve as the example of recent history - would he not acknowledge there is a real danger that unless there is genuine consultation and different kinds of consultation this will hit the kind of cynicism and resistance which has bogged down the Waterfront plan until very recently?

Senator F.H. Walker:

I think there are a number of underlying issues there. First of all I endorse the comments made earlier by the Planning Minister. It has to be said that the architecture on the Waterfront has not exactly set many people on fire. However, we should not forget the point that the Waterfront is a highly popular and very well used facility, mainly by young people. So far as the consultation process is concerned, the Waterfront must be one of the most consulted upon issues in Jersey in recent years but I am particularly pleased with the work being undertaken under the leadership of

W.E.B. (Waterfront Enterprise Board) and, indeed, the Planning Minister and others on, for example, the sinking of the road and the Hopkins' proposals generally. What we need to do now is ensure that we deliver a regenerated St. Helier only with high quality architecture having been fully consulted upon. I have every confidence that the steering group and the Planning Minister will ensure that that is exactly what takes place.

4.7.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

I wonder if I can follow-up. Could the Minister say specifically how the consultation and the involvement of the public and of this House will be different so that the mistakes we made with the Waterfront will not be repeated?

Senator F.H. Walker:

The mistakes the Deputy refers to were not on the back of the consultation process, they were frankly on the back of architects' designs and planning decisions of the day. That had little to do with public consultation. The public, as I have said, have been widely consulted. The Deputy attended the presentation - and I am grateful to him for doing so - on Monday (yesterday morning) and he is well aware that there is a major series of consultation events that are taking place. There are exhibitions, there are walkabout tours, there will be leaflets, there will be every opportunity for the public to respond. Of course it is up to the task force to take on board the public's comments. It will not be possible to meet all the public's ambitions because many of them, as always, will be contradictory. But the public will be listened to and will have, I emphasise, every possible opportunity to contribute to what is undoubtedly the biggest opportunity for the town - for St. Helier - that we have seen in at least one generation.

4.8 Deputy J.B. Fox:

The EDAW report that was published yesterday - I think it was - will be displayed or details of it will be displayed at the Town Hall and the comments that you have just been making about the Waterfront also link into the improvement of our Island and our capital especially. I was just wondering if it would not be possible to support the Constable of St. Helier through the Chief Minister's Office or the Council of Ministers, to have permanent public displays on the changing face of St. Helier with its plans, *et cetera*, so the public have one known place that they can just walk in and publicly - just like an art gallery...

The Bailiff:

Deputy, the question is becoming so long that the Minister is going to be unable to reply.

Deputy J.B. Fox:

Sorry, Sir, I will leave it at that.

Senator F.H. Walker:

Excellent idea, Sir, and I will discuss it with the Connétable. First class idea. I think that is what he has in mind anyway but I agree we should strive to put before the public.

The Bailiff:

That concludes the second question period without notice.