

4. Questions to Ministers Without Notice - The Chief Minister

4.1 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

I wonder if I could ask the Chief Minister, I recently received a request for a letter of support for a resident of Jersey who is seeking to prove that she has been continuously resident here since 2003 in order that she can free herself from the requirements under the 5-year residency law. I put questions to various Ministers in relation to this because, in effect, as a member of one of the 10 E.U. (European Union) accession countries her first 3 years in residence in Jersey were under a work permit scheme. The Minister for Housing has told me that that does not count towards the housing qualifications but given that there are some 4,000 to 5,000 people that this might apply to that might be able to enter into the 5-year stream, what does the Chief Minister feel about this and is he able to give us any indication as to whether or not full-time only begins when the countries are accessed or whether or not the work permit time will be taken into account as far as he is aware?

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

This is the first time I have heard of any such issue and I am not in a position this morning to give the Deputy a considered reply, but I will note his question and I will respond to him in full as soon as I can.

4.2 Deputy S. Pitman:

In light of a reply received from the A.G. (Attorney General) which I believe Members have been copied into, in my view it seems quite clear there is a very real risk that holding a Committee of Inquiry before all police investigations and trials are concluded could undermine bringing all those responsible for failing our children so appalling to justice. Would the Chief Minister not concede that upon reflection any consideration of a Committee of Inquiry should be put aside until the excellent police work has run its course? After all, Sir, as I would hope we would all agree it is justice that is important and not P.R.

Senator F.H. Walker:

We absolutely do all agree that justice is important and that is the most important consideration of all. But the victims are important here and that is why we judged it necessary to propose at this stage a Committee of Inquiry should be established to ensure that all aspects of the child abuse issue are thoroughly investigated and seen to be investigated because only then will the victims have any chance and, indeed, will Jersey have any chance of closing the book on this very sorry and sad chapter in our history. I am surprised at the point the Deputy is making because she and I have exchanged emails over the last few days. Both in those emails and in my original statement, I made it abundantly clear that the Committee of Inquiry would not commence until after the police and judicial processes had been completed so as therefore no chance at all of the Committee of Inquiry interfering with the delivery of justice.

4.3 Deputy S.C. Ferguson of St. Brelade:

The House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee is reporting today on immigration. Given that the tenor of the result will be that the economic benefits of net immigration to the resident population are small and close to zero in the long run, will the Chief Minister rethink his support of the immigration policy?

Senator F.H. Walker:

We are constantly reviewing Jersey's immigration policy and it would be quite wrong to suggest that Jersey's immigration policy bears any resemblance whatsoever to that in the U.K. We are all aware of huge problems with immigration in the U.K. which simply do not exist in Jersey, where immigration is controlled and we have a great deal more information on our immigrants than they do in the U.K. and, of course, the States have approved new immigration policy which

is progressively coming into effect. I see no reason at this stage to review that purely because the U.K.'s position has run into difficulty.

4.4 Deputy C.F. Labey of Grouville:

In the Imagine Jersey 2035 results I notice that one of the strongest voting results that came out was that there was very strong opposition to any form of building on green field land. How is the Chief Minister going to progress or secure this priority?

Senator F.H. Walker:

We are looking to progress or secure that plan in a number of ways. We require further information first of all on Jersey's housing needs and that would be available to us within the next couple of weeks. But last week I met with the relatively newly-appointed chief officer of our property division, our Minister for Housing, the Minister for Planning and Environment and others, and I was delighted to see how many brown field sites, as they are defined, are potentially available, and many of them in States ownership, if the States are prepared to progress along those routes. So I believe that we have a very strong possibility, a very good chance of securing the housing needs of Islanders on the one hand and doing so with the minimum of intrusion into our green fields.

4.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Further to my written question earlier on the Imagine Jersey 2035 conference; does the Minister accept that the statement: "The survey and initial conference votes indicated a strong opposition to any increase in taxes and contributions" made by the organisers involved in their report is, in fact, inaccurate and that from the very beginning there was marked support for paying extra taxes and contributions - so that is an inaccurate statement. Furthermore, does he accept that the statement 100 per cent in the 19 to 24 group, while accurate, totally accurate, referred to the 4 people who were there in that age group, was misleading because the statement: "100 per cent of this cohort agree" is very different to 4 people out of 136 agreed.

Senator F.H. Walker:

Both statements were factual and, as the Deputy well knows, went on to be considerably qualified and explained in other areas of the report which he noticeably has so far failed to quote from.

4.5.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Chief Minister supply me with the evidence that says both of those are factual when the first is totally incorrect and misleading?

Senator F.H. Walker:

The first is not totally incorrect, the initial response, which is what the Deputy has himself referred to in the question, did indicate opposition to paying increased taxation. Subsequently, throughout the Imagine Jersey event, that opinion was modified which has also been clearly reported. That is one of those areas that the Deputy has failed to pick up on when he continually questions me on this aspect.

4.5.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister show me that evidence?

Senator F.H. Walker:

Yes, Sir.

4.6 Deputy J.G. Reed of St. Ouen:

In recent weeks we have heard that the police investigation at Haut de la Garenne has focused on 4 areas referred to by the media and others as the cellars. Can the Chief Minister inform this Assembly, in what year these areas were last used?

Senator F.H. Walker:

I cannot precisely answer the Deputy's question in terms of what year they were last used. But I can inform the Deputy and the House that I was at Haut de la Garenne yesterday and I am satisfied, completely satisfied, that the police have a totally legitimate need to investigate those cellars.

4.7 Deputy I.J. Gorst:

The Chief Minister some moments ago in answer to a question from the Deputy of Grouville said that he aimed to deliver restraining development in green field sites by development on brown field sites. Can he confirm that when he uses the term "brown field sites" he does not mean derelict greenhouse sites? He agrees with the Environmental Department that derelict greenhouse sites are green field sites with greenhouses on and not with a Planning Department that might see them quite differently?

Senator F.H. Walker:

No, Sir, I cannot. There are a limited number of the sites identified as brown field which do currently have dilapidated glasshouse structures on them. I do not believe that the needs of Jersey or the environment of Jersey are best served by allowing those dilapidated structures to remain on those fields going into an ever worse condition and becoming an ever increasing eyesore.

4.7.1 Deputy I.J. Gorst:

Would he not, however, agree that the Island Plan placed an onus upon the owners of those derelict greenhouse sites to ensure that they are either in good repair or taken down?

Senator F.H. Walker:

Yes, Sir, I do. But that does not mean when we come to meet the needs of the Jersey community, when they require housing, that does not mean that consideration, in my view certainly, should not be given in particular cases to some of those sites. I believe it goes far too far to maybe blanketly say we will never build housing on dilapidated glasshouse sites. I think that does not accord with the needs of the people in Jersey who need housing. Each site would have to be measured on its merits, but I can further confirm that the number of such sites in the list I referred to earlier is very small indeed.

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

The House was recently informed that a strategic planning exercise was being undertaken, not by the Minister for Planning and Environment but indeed by the Chief Minister's Department. In a written question tabled by Deputy Baudains of St. Clement to the House today to the Minister for Economic Development, the answer gives information that the Economic Development Department, Jersey Harbours and the Waterfront Enterprise Board are undertaking a master planning exercise for the East of Albert area that includes the site of the current fuel farm and La Collette. The Minister for Economic Development does not indicate that indeed the planning exercise is being undertaken by the Chief Minister's Department or, indeed, as to whether or not there are any other departments involved in this long term strategic planning exercise. Can the Chief Minister inform the House categorically who is undertaking the strategic master planning exercise for the East of Albert area and whether or not the Minister for Economic Development's remarks should perhaps have included his department as the prior organising influence?

Senator F.H. Walker:

The strategic planning of the Waterfront site, including La Collette, the East of Albert area as well, as its known, is being undertaken by all the relevant Ministers and organisations, which of course includes the Waterfront Enterprise Board, so the Minister for Economic Development is involved in that. I am involved in that. Other Ministers are involved in that, but of course at the end of the day any planning decision has to be taken by law and, of course, will be taken by the Minister for Planning and Environment.

4.8.1 Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

The Chief Minister did not specifically state which Ministers are involved; could he indeed do so, so that we are not in any doubt as to who is involved?

Senator F.H. Walker:

Yes, Sir. This is an open book. It is the Chief Minister, the Minister for Treasury and Resources, the Minister for Planning and Environment, the Minister for Housing (as applicable) and the Minister for Economic Development.

4.9 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Today I have received - I do not know if other Members have - an invitation to the Jersey Field Squadron to look at the activities that they have been conducting both in Afghanistan and Iraq over the last 18 months. I received an e-mail this morning demonstrating the level of support that the Canadian people give to their service men and women when they subsequently have served in those areas of operations and have returned home with their loved ones in caskets, and the support for their loved ones is immense. Some countries are now having to face the fact that they are ashamed to have their own uniforms seen in public. Would the Chief Minister join with me in commending the commitment of the men and women of Jersey who serve in Her Majesty's Armed Forces, both in full-time operations in the United Kingdom and also for the Jersey Field Squadron?

Senator F.H. Walker:

Yes, Sir, I very much would. In particular, in relation to the Jersey Field Squadron I was delighted to be able to attend the ceremony at Government House a few months ago when members of the squadron who had recently then returned from Iraq and Afghanistan were honoured by His Excellency and I think that was entirely appropriate and I very much hope and I am sure that will continue to be the case. I think it is, frankly, disgraceful that members serving on behalf of their country who are putting their lives at risk are then afraid to march through the streets or walk through the streets in uniform, and I would hope that would never ever happen in Jersey, and nor do I believe it will. [Approbation]

The Bailiff:

I am afraid time has expired, I am sorry to Members who still wish to ask questions.