

2.3 Deputy K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding the purchase of amphibious vehicles operating to Elizabeth Castle by the Jersey Heritage Trust:

Under what circumstances has the Jersey Heritage Trust purchased the amphibious vehicles operating to Elizabeth Castle?

Senator M.E. Vibert (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

I have asked the Jersey Heritage Trust for a full report on the circumstance of the purchase and will be able to answer the question in detail once I have this report.

2.3.1 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

The route to Elizabeth Castle is an extremely challenging route. With the new amphibious vehicles there have been a catalogue of incidents - surely on this kind of route safety must be absolutely paramount. Does the Minister not agree?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

Absolutely.

2.3.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Could the Minister outline how the accountability of the Trust to him is carried out in practice and what kind of reporting relationship he has with the Trust?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

We have a Service Level Agreement with the Jersey Heritage Trust and other cultural providers in return for being the purveyors of the grant to the Trust. We have regular reports on both financial and on the progress that they are making against the Service Level Agreement. Of course, as the Deputy is fully aware, as he was the one who made the point so forcibly in the cultural strategy, these are arm-length organisations that need to be able to operate themselves. The Jersey Heritage Trust was set up by the States and there are a number of States Members as trustees on the Jersey Heritage Trust. So, while we pass on the grant; help where we can; make sure there is a Service Level Agreement; and that the Trust meets that agreement, the Trust is an independent body and is not part of the States. It is not a department of the States. My department does not decide what they buy and what they do not buy.

2.3.3 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Could the Minister, in this perfectly acceptable arms-length relationship he has, outline what approval he has given and what structures he has put in place so that at arms length he is absolutely assured that financial controls are as tight as they can humanly be?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

We receive regular reports from the Jersey Heritage Trust and other bodies on how their finances are going and I can assure you we are not lax in any way. The Deputy might remember how I took a stand, against quite considerable opposition, ensuring that the Jersey Opera House stuck to its budget and did not overspend. I do not think that we can be accused of not holding the bodies that we grant aiding to, to account.

2.3.4 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Can I, therefore, assume with the Minister's reassurances that there is absolutely no possibility that a purchase of £500,000 would escape his notice?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

It certainly has not escaped my notice which is why I have asked for a full report on it.

2.3.5 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would it escape his notice in terms of normal reporting procedures?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

If I understood the question perhaps I could answer it.

2.3.6 Deputy A.J.H. Maclean of St. Helier:

I wonder if the Minister who has asked for a report into this incident would confirm that he will have the report published when it is complete.

Senator M.E. Vibert:

Absolutely. Obviously, I will be discussing with the Trust whether there is any commercial confidentiality in it, but I think it is very important that States Members have as much information as possible about it, including the fact that, of course, the amphibious vehicles under discussion are approved by the Marine and Coast Guard Agency and the Harbour Office.

2.3.7 The Deputy of St. Martin:

In an answer a few minutes ago the Minister said that this was not public money. Could I ask where the money is coming from for the Heritage Trust? Is it not part of public money so, therefore, the cost for the repayment does come from the taxpayer?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

I believe if the Deputy listens back to any tapes I never said any such thing. I did not say this was not public money. I said the Jersey Heritage Trust is an independent body and we grant aid to it and it also gets a considerable amount of money and other income through its entrance charges at various bodies including, for example, an average of £320,000 per annum from Elizabeth Castle entrance fees. Yes, we give a substantial grant to the Jersey Heritage Trust and that is why we hold them to account. I will continue to hold them to account and that is why I have asked for a full report on this whole issue because I, like other States Members, want to be assured that this is being carried out correctly, that it is the right thing to do and that it has not been a misuse of any part of the grant or funding that goes to the Jersey Heritage Trust.

2.3.8 Connétable D.J. Murphy of Grouville:

Could the Minister please put a time limit on the issuing of the report and, again, I would like to ask if that report will be made public?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

I have asked for the report as soon as possible and once I have it I would be looking to publish it in the same vein, and I would imagine that would be before the end of this month.