

2.10 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding the purchase of amphibious vehicles servicing Elizabeth Castle:

Does the Minister consider that the agreement to purchase the amphibious vehicles servicing Elizabeth Castle and the compensation paid represent value for money?

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

Sorry if this sounds a bit like déjà vu but I have asked the Jersey Heritage Trust for a full report into the circumstances of the purchase which I will endeavour to make public as soon as possible and will be able to answer the question in more detail once I have that report.

2.10.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Can we remain assured that under the arms-length agreements by which the Trust is operating - and the Minister - that he is perfectly happy with an arrangement where when a contractor absents himself or removes himself from the contract it is perfectly reasonable to pay him compensation?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

No, you cannot be satisfied, that is why I have asked for a full report. One thing you can be satisfied with is that we will hold all bodies to which we give grants to account, and we can. But as I said earlier, the States set up the Jersey Heritage Trust. There are States Members as trustees. It is an independent body and we can hold them to account. But unless the States tell us to take over these things entirely we cannot run them ourselves, that is why they have been set up independently. When I have the report I may have a view on whether this was the correct way to proceed or not. Until I have that report I am unable to make such a judgment.

2.10.2 Deputy S. Power:

Would the Minister be prepared to comment on the fact the Jersey Heritage Trust even considered paying goodwill to Pure Adventure Limited for a service to Elizabeth Castle that in 2007 was regarded as unreliable, inconsistent, unsatisfactory and problematic?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

I am waiting for the report to see what the Jersey Heritage Trust have actually done and why they have done it, as part of the accountability process. Until I have that report it would be totally wrong for me to comment on the speculation that the Deputy has just mentioned.

2.10.3 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Would the Minister acknowledge that in order to bring peace of mind both to himself and to the other Members such a report should be written by someone like the Comptroller and Auditor General?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

In the first instance, I have asked for a report from the Jersey Heritage Trust, which is the body concerned. If, following that report, I feel that it needs to be more looked into then I will consider how that should be undertaken.

2.10.4 Deputy S.C. Ferguson:

Does the Minister not think that this is a case for amending the Public Finances (Administration) (Jersey) Law so that the Comptroller and Auditor General has free rein to examine the operations of people like the Jersey Heritage Trust, the Jersey Arts Trust and so forth? As I understand it, for instance, the Jersey Arts Trust is still working on their 2006 accounts. Is this not symptomatic of a need to give the Comptroller and Auditor General free rein to examine the workings of these bodies?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

I would have thought that the body that should bring forward any extension of the Comptroller and Auditor General's powers would be the Public Accounts Committee, of which the Deputy is the chairman. So if she feels it is the right thing to do and her committee feels it is the right thing to do, then they should do it.

Deputy S.C. Ferguson:

We shall be.

2.10.5 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisssier:

Would the Minister acknowledge that by getting the Jersey Heritage Trust to report on themselves he may not get quite the objective report he is looking for.

Senator M.E. Vibert:

In the first instance I have asked the Jersey Heritage Trust to give me a report on the circumstances into their purchase of those vehicles, which seems eminently reasonable to me. If I have concerns after that I shall have to consider how I carry it out. Can I remind the Deputy, who seems so concerned about this, to go and look at who the trustees of the Jersey Heritage Trust are, who he seems to be questioning, and if he feels that is the correct thing to do. The Jersey Heritage Trust is a body that I believe is doing a very, very good job for the Island in protecting our heritage and running our ancient monuments and museums. In this area I want to know and I have asked them for a report on one part of their business and I am waiting for that report. I have no reason to doubt that the trustees of the Jersey Heritage Trust will not produce an accurate and factual report for me.