

3. Questions to Ministers without Notice - The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture

3.1 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

The Minister was very hawkish with regards to States expenditure when he was vice-chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. In view of the current dismal financial forecasts would he tell us what he is doing in this area in his department?

Deputy J.G. Reed of St. Ouen (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

The first thing that I can tell the Senator that I am doing is spending time with my Finance Director understanding how the department currently manages its budget, and I can assure Members that up to now I have found a department that is well run, that aims to not only manage its budget in an effective manner but equally ring-fences the funds allocated for that purpose, and I would suggest that in part that is the reason why at the end of 2008 the carried forward sum - which was the underspend - amounted to just over £2 million. In other words the department is run on the basis that you spend what you need to spend and you return what you do not. Clearly, especially with the Education Department, there are many variables, so it is very difficult to determine at the beginning of the year the exact amounts to be spent and that is partly the reason why on occasions there are underspends available.

3.2 The Deputy of St. Martin:

A very short question which will need a very short answer. In relation to the historic abuse inquiry, is the Minister able to reassure Members that there are no Education, Sports and Culture employees under police investigation.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I have already answered that question and I believe that the answer was I can neither confirm nor deny.

3.2.1 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Can I just get back to the Minister? Will the Minister at some time or other make a decision as to whether it is a yes or no because at the moment he is sitting on the fence? **[Approbation]**

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I would be absolutely delighted to tell this Assembly yes or no. However, my hands are tied in the fact that there is a police investigation going on and until such time as that police investigation is terminated I am unable to comment further.

3.3 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Does the Minister agree with me that the performance of Beautiful Jersey by Sadie Rennard was superb and will the Minister scrap the dirge that is the new national anthem? **[Approbation]**

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Suffice to say I believe that the lady in question who sang Beautiful Jersey did a wonderful job. **[Laughter]**

3.4 The Deputy of St. John:

Could the Minister tell us what action he and his department are taking to help the many young skateboarders to arrange events across the Island for their type of sport?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

First of all, we are as a department doing much to encourage many activities, including skateboarding. Indeed, one of my Assistant Ministers, Deputy Green, has responsibility for the

Youth Service and has been working alongside the young people that are using the facility down on the new North Quay. Equally, we attended a meeting up at the Les Quennevais Communautaire with a group of young people who would like a facility in their area. I am proud to say that in St. Ouen we are ahead of the game and have been for some while, and as a Parish and a community we have already - and have continued to provide - a relatively small, but useful facility for our young people. Regarding the events, clearly there is a Skateboard Association and we would encourage any individual who chooses to develop and promote this sport to come and have a talk with us.

3.5 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Could the Minister clarify for the House whether he fully supports the potential introduction of social workers to all schools and is this something he will be pushing for strongly?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I think it is absolutely important that schools and the Social Services Department, especially the Children's Services Department, work extremely closely together. There are great opportunities to be had in early intervention programmes which include social workers being actively involved and working with the schools on a day-to-day basis. I support any initiative that develops this area further.

3.6 Deputy M. Tadier:

If someone in the department is the subject of a police investigation perhaps for having abused children, beaten them up, locked them in a squash court, kicked them, *et cetera*, would it be normal process for the department to suspend that person while they are being investigated or to leave them at work?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I am not very clear on the policy that the department operates, suffice to say that if there was a known concern about an individual that was involved directly with young people then the appropriate action would be taken.

3.6.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

A supplementary. We already know that the Home Affairs Department, for example, would suspend someone as a neutral act. Is there a similar policy in operation in the Education Department?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

As I said, the action that would be taken by the department and the Human Resources Department would be appropriate to the concern.

Deputy M. Tadier:

How can the House judge if it is appropriate if we do not know what that action would be? It is a non-answer, if I may suggest.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Maybe I can help the Deputy by providing him with the policy within the next day or 2.

3.7 Deputy S. Pitman:

How much time is given a week in secondary schools to local historical, cultural and political education and does the Minister think this is enough and if not what will he do about it?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I am unable to give you the exact amount of time that is dedicated to this subject. All I will tell you is that the curriculum provides a well-rounded education for our young people and I would hope that these areas are dealt with in the appropriate manner. If the Deputy would like to know more I would suggest that she contacts the department who can give her more detailed information.

3.8 Deputy S. Pitman:

During my time as a youth worker we recorded in the youth centre the ethnicity of the young people coming in and those who were born in Jersey, not Portuguese origin but white locals, 90 per cent of them often referred to themselves as English and not Jersey. Does the Minister recognise this among young people and if he does will he not look at the curriculum of the P.S.H.E. (Personal, Social and Health Education) and history?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I do think that it is important for all of our local children to fully understand our local history and heritage and culture and, as such, I am very keen to see that promoted throughout our schools. Indeed, perhaps it is important that we pay attention to the adults who arrive on the Island and equally encourage them to understand more about our culture. One of the areas that I am aiming to pursue and have raised with my department already is the opportunity perhaps of including more of our local history within the G.C.S.E. (General Certificate of Secondary Education) curriculum as is the case in the Isle of Man.

3.9 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister state whether he considers that education and skills training in particular play a vital part in times of recession and give his commitment to this House to maintain services and levels of staffing throughout this recession?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Absolutely.

3.10 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

It is my understanding that Education, Sport and Culture have the intention of bringing the Island Games back to Jersey. If this is the case, what improvements will the Minister make to sporting facilities in the Island and will he be attending the games in Aland later this year?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

In 2008 it was approved by the last Council of Ministers that support would be given to making a bid to hold the Island Games on the Island in 2015 and a bid committee was formed. It is still very much the intention of me and the department to support this idea for many reasons, one of which is that the last time the Island hosted the games was in 1997 and was one of the largest Islands involved in its own right.

The Deputy Bailiff:

I think if you would not mind, Minister, a reasonably concise answer to what was a fairly straightforward question.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Am I going to Aland? No, Sir.

3.11 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Building on Deputy Hill's question, would the Minister not acknowledge that the current situation where he can neither affirm or deny any sort of suspension or action is in fact cruel both to the individual who is subject to all sorts of trial by bloggery and various other things, and to

parents and students of the system? Can he not come up with another method which somehow marries these 2 demands and leads to openness, albeit without compromising people personally or without compromising future trials? To deny and to do nothing else is making the situation utterly unsatisfactory. Secondly, why was the social worker removed from Le Rocquier School?

The Deputy Bailiff:

I think that is one question.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Is it unsatisfactory? Yes. Can I do anything about it? No. We have to rely on the justice system and police carrying out their investigations. They are the responsible authority. I would just remind Members and people listening that currently our justice system recognises that one is innocent until proven guilty. I would suggest that paying attention and listening to, and promoting, unsubstantiated allegations about individuals is absolutely not the way to behave.

3.11.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

A supplementary. Would the Minister not agree that it is for precisely that reason that we should be open as far as we can be about this and not allow the rumour mill to totally take over and fear to increase?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I believe that I and the department have been entirely open. It is others that seem to choose to increase the rumours.

3.12 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Can the Minister inform the House what talks, if any, he has had with outside clubs and sports associations to open up the excellent facilities in most of our secondary schools, even some of our primary schools, for children to use either after school or at weekends? If he has not had any could he tell me why not?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I have not directly spoken to any school about the use of the facilities outside school hours. However, I have required the department and the department's officers to pursue this line. Indeed, we are considering the redevelopment of St. Martin's School and I have held discussions with the Constable with a view to seeing whether or not we can support the community within the school development. I would like to point the Deputy to a very good example that I saw last week at First Tower where the community use of that building after school hours or during school holidays is wonderful so we are doing much at the moment.

3.13 Deputy S. Power of St. Brelade:

The Minister will be aware that he has responsibility for a much loved 22-acre site in the middle of St. Helier, namely Fort Regent. Would he support the principle of funding from the Economic Stimulus Package to carry out a master plan for the future of Fort Regent on the grounds that it is timely, targeted and temporary?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I am not sure if Fort Regent has not been master-planned out over the past number of years. Would I support the fiscal stimulus funds to be used to fund developments at Fort Regent? I am not sure. In all honesty, I believe that we as the Scrutiny Panel need to come up with a long-term solution to the Fort that can properly provide the facilities that the users and others require for the foreseeable future. Using small amounts of money to tinker around the edges I do not believe achieves that target.

The Deputy Bailiff:

I am afraid that ends the questions without notice to the Minister.