

4. Questions to Ministers Without Notice - The Chief Minister

4.1 Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour:

Why, in the Council of Ministers' Part A minutes, dated 7th May 2009, did the Council of Ministers need to agree that Ministers should make every effort to be present in the States Chamber during meetings of the States?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur (The Chief Minister):

Because I believe it is important that Ministers set a good example that, wherever possible, they should attend at least those parts of the meetings of the States, which are of an important nature. I believe that that was demonstrated very much in the discussions on the Strategic Plan we have recently had.

4.1.1 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

On a supplementary point, where are the Ministers today and what example are they setting for other Members? [Approbation]

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I said the business which we consider to be particularly relevant to their particular areas of expertise. This question period is questions for me and it is important that I be here. It is perhaps more important that they deal with other matters at this stage so that they can be here later on in other sessions.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Chief Minister, I am afraid I am going to have to interrupt you. Apparently we are not quorate. [Laughter] We are just quorate now, yes. Had you finished your answer, Chief Minister?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I think I finished, except maybe to point out it is not just Ministers who are not present at the time.

4.2 Deputy S. Pitman:

As Members are aware, I recently made a complaint about the Minister for Social Security not getting back to me with questions regarding ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

One moment, we are not ... somebody has just left and so we are not quorate.

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Where are the Ministers?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Very well, the Deputy has returned.

Deputy S. Pitman:

I will start again. The Members will be aware that I made a complaint regarding the Minister for Social Security in asking him questions regarding several constituents who have serious issues with their income support. There is one dating back to January, another going back 2 months and others a month and several weeks. I still have no answers to these questions. I did ask the Chief Minister: "Where do I go next as I am getting no answers?" Could he tell me that and also could he - I have asked him, this will be the fourth time now - provide me with the research that was undertaken regarding 1(1)(j) tax and 1(1)(k)s, and also a land development tax?

The Deputy Bailiff:

That is 2 questions, I think, Deputy. We need to stick to one question at a time, so the first one is in relation to the Social Security.

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

The first one; I am aware of the concerns of the Deputy and I understood that the Minister for Social Security had endeavoured to respond to the concerns raised by Deputy Pitman. If that is not the case, then certainly, on his return I shall put that to him. But, meanwhile, the Assistant Minister can no doubt assist and, indeed, the officers of the department. I am not aware of any reason why there should be a delay.

4.2.1 Deputy S. Pitman:

The Assistant Minister says that she is satisfied with the actions of her officers regarding these cases but gives no reason, no answer as to why. Still, I am left with no answers. Where do I go?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

It sounds to me that the Deputy has an answer but not the answer she wishes to have; that I cannot do anything much about.

4.3 The Deputy of St. Martin:

I remind the Chief Minister, and the House in fact, that it is 6 months now since the States approved my proposition regarding the review into the role of the unelected States Members. Will the Minister give an update on the progress being made into the selection of the chairman and panel and are any adverts going out for recruitment?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I share the concerns of the Deputy of St. Martin. I have been trying unsuccessfully to recruit a chairman for this panel and, of the parties that we have approached to date, I have made 4 approaches and all 4 have successively turned down the position. We are now casting the net wider and I hope to be able to make an announcement as soon as possible but that is the present situation.

4.3.1 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Could I just ask a supplementary on that? Has the Chief Minister given consideration maybe to advertising the fact that the Island would like to look for a possible chairman rather than going out asking people if they would like to do the job?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

The chairman of this panel is going to have to have some significant expertise and, while one can advertise, it is a question of trying to ascertain where the most appropriate place to advertise would be, recognising that that person is probably going to come from outside the Island. On that basis, if all else fails, I accept that that will be an alternative solution. I believe that trying to obtain people with the right expertise through the appropriate channels is a better way to proceed in the first instance.

4.4 The Deputy of St. Mary:

My question is about consultation. In the Strategic Plan Members put an amendment, and it was accepted by the Council of the Ministers, for transparency, openness and accountability. My question is does the Chief Minister agree that proper consultation is an important part of the democratic process and an important part of achieving transparency, openness and accountability, and will the Chief Minister give an assurance that the Council of Ministers will consider that all propositions coming from them have a proper consultation report attached?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

Yes, I certainly agree that proper consultation on matters of significance is important. It would be rash to say that every proposition that we bring forward requires consultation. Many of the propositions we bring forward are of a relatively simple nature and consultation would not seem to be appropriate for them. When it is a matter of public policy, then I agree that consultation is necessary and that will be achieved.

The Deputy of St. Mary:

But will it be attached as a part of the report?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

Consultation is a process and certainly the outcome of that consultation process may well form a part of the report. I am not quite sure what the Deputy is getting at.

4.5 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

In the 2009 Business Plan the Chief Minister's office was required to bring a plan regarding the application of the recommendations of the Comptroller and Auditor General's report on spending to the House. Would the Chief Minister advise us when we can expect to see this?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

Yes, the report prepared by the Comptroller and Auditor General last year on spending focused on areas where he believed that, if the States were so minded, savings could be achieved. That report is being very seriously considered in the context of the Annual Business Plan, which we are now in the course of preparing, and we are reviewing each of the Comptroller and Auditor General's recommendations to see which ones can be implemented and during which period. So, it is an ongoing process and it should be made available at the time of the Business Plan and, indeed, before then because I am sure that the Scrutiny Panel, of which the questioner is a member, will be interested to see just how those are being carried forward.

4.5.1 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Yes, the Chief Minister presumably is talking about the individual departmental recommendations. What about the cross-cutting recommendations which are the area where we can save considerably more money?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I was not simply talking about departmental savings; I was talking about both departmental savings and cross-cutting areas. I think both of those areas need to be addressed in the Business Plan and both of them will be addressed.

4.6 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Any person from the British Isles or the European Union with a current passport may come to Jersey in search of work there. However, there are no computer checks with the new European Community countries regarding police records. Will the Chief Minister, in consultation with the Minister for Home Affairs and possibly his U.K. counterpart, establish such a system?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

Certainly I believe the matter of cross-border communications and checks of people of different nationalities is receiving greater importance and prominence these days and, indeed, we are in discussions primarily with the U.K. authorities on a variety of such matters to the extent that that can be done in conjunction with the Home Affairs Minister. I am sure that he and I will work closely to try to achieve what we can for the benefit of the Island and, in fact, more particularly for the benefit of the wider world community, primarily in combating matters such as terrorism and other offences of that nature, which we are all anxious to stamp out and avoid.

4.7 Deputy C.H. Egré of St. Peter:

Further to the question asked by the Deputy of St. John, regarding emergency planning, and realising that the original concept of the Parish Emergency Officers was to assist in monitoring any radiation fallout following a war, would the Chief Minister now encourage and support the development of that role within the Parishes to meet our modern environment?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I think in emergency planning, a variety of bodies have a role to play and I am very appreciative and aware of the importance which can be provided by the Parish authorities as a whole and maybe a designated officer, where appropriate. I believe that what is important is that we have a proper strategy for emergencies, whatever the nature, be that radiation or anything else, and that those policies can be applied to a variety of circumstances. That will require an input from a very diverse number of groups but certainly the Parishes have an important role to play in that and, if there are ways in which that can be strengthened, I will certainly be one to encourage that and I am sure that the representative Committee of Constables on the Emergency Planning Group would do the same thing.

4.8 The Deputy of St. John:

I thought I had been forgotten about, Sir. As the Chief Minister's Department have something like 37 parking spaces allocated to them, could the Chief Minister give us reasons why we have car parking spaces which are available to vehicles for lease and describe what that is all about and, furthermore, do the people who use these car parking spaces - I presume the majority of which are in the middle of town - do they all work for the States and are any of those spaces for visitors?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I am not quite sure which of the 37 parking spaces in question but I will speak primarily about those I do know about and they are all occupied by employees or Ministers of the States. As far as the leased vehicles are concerned, the States do lease a number of vehicles because we find that an appropriate and cost efficient way of providing vehicles, particularly given the high mileage allowance which currently exists for people who use their own vehicles. Where those vehicles are being used by employees of the States departments, it is appropriate that they should park at that department. Certainly there is no question of, perhaps sadly, any space being available for visitor parking.

The Deputy of St. John:

I also asked if they paid for these spaces.

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

No, at present there is no policy, whether that be for the Chief Minister's Department or any other department. Where staff park at those departments it is generally because they need that parking space in the context of their duties, whereas the policy does get reviewed and we have reviewed it certainly at an Employment Board on a couple of occasions in the past, and it has always been felt it is very difficult to draw a reasonable dividing line between where it is appropriate and where it is not appropriate.

4.9 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Given the revelation that there are only 3 apprenticeships available in the States, within T.T.S. (Transport and Technical Services) as it happens, would the Chief Minister explain what steps he and his Council are taking to come up with a realistic number, given the looming issue of youth unemployment?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

Yes, this issue has become a very real part of the discussions we have been having recently in terms of the use of the fiscal stimulus and certainly matters such as apprenticeships in various directions are being considered as a part of being good use of that money, certainly on a short term basis, to encourage people at this current time. Having said that, I believe that there may well be scope for apprenticeships on a more ongoing basis in the future as well, but I believe that this can give the impetus just to see how that can be best applied, and I think the department is seeing the benefits which they may be able to get from apprenticeships and will themselves be encouraged to promote them in the future. That would be a matter for each department to decide.

4.9.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Just to follow up, could the Chief Minister confirm that departments have been approached and that, in order to provide seed money, there will be money from the fiscal stimulus to help launch these apprenticeships across the States?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I think, as far as the fiscal stimulus plan is concerned, this is more a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Treasury and Resources. Each department has been approached to see which ways that money could be used to good effect to pursue the aims of their organisation, and I am certainly not going to suggest that they have to apply apprenticeships against their will, but where there is a willingness for that department to see the benefits for apprenticeships then I am sure they will get every encouragement from the Minister and from myself.

4.10 Deputy S. Power of St. Brelade:

I wonder if the Chief Minister could confirm that in any assessment of a potential site for social rented housing, that the commercial return to Treasury has got to be a different proposition to that of a standard commercial site, and can he therefore confirm why there is no representation by the Minister for Housing on P.79, the composition of the States Development Company?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I am not sure I understand the question. Matters of zoning and planning are a matter for the Minister for Planning and Environment and certainly planning considerations should not be swayed by any commercial decisions so, to that extent, I believe that the Minister for Planning and Environment and his department will run a totally independent operation quite correctly. Perhaps the Deputy can remind me what Projet 79 is all about.

Deputy S. Power:

Projet 79 is the regeneration infrastructure of the States of Jersey Development Company Limited, and I wanted to know why the Minister for Housing is not represented, given the property portfolio on the composition.

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

The aim of the regeneration group is to provide a broad strategic overview and it may well be that that group will call on other people to give advice as and when appropriate, but I believe we wanted to look at a much more holistic approach and if one took the approach of going to this Minister or that Minister you could end up with a far more piecemeal and undisciplined approach. We believe that there are key areas of the Island, and a particular key area is St. Helier, where a proper strategic look can achieve better results and I believe that this proposition has the ability to deliver that. In addition, of course, there will be other groups like the St. Helier Urban Task Force which also have a part to play in delivering some of the detail of underlying that strategy once it is agreed.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Very well, that brings questions of the Chief Minister to an end.