

5. Questions to Ministers Without Notice - The Chief Minister

5.1 Deputy S. Pitman:

I believe it was about 3 weeks ago that I asked the Chief Minister if he would furnish me with the research undertaken into 1(1)(k)s tax and land development tax. I have yet to see this. I have also since sent the Chief Minister an email with no response. Could he give me a confirmation that he will send this information to me as quickly as possible?

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

Yes, I apologise to the Deputy if I have overlooked an email from her. I do not recall seeing it but certainly I thank her for the reminder and I will make sure it gets done in the next 48 hours.

5.2 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Is the Chief Minister aware of growing concern among members of the general public and indeed employees as to his Education Minister's failure to clarify the situation around allegations that senior members within the department are being investigated by the police? If he is aware, what will he do to try and alleviate this concern?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I believe any concern that does exist is confined to a minority of people. It is a matter which comes under the ambit of the police and while those inquiries are ongoing it would be improper for me to make any further comments.

5.2.1 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Can I have a supplementary to that? I was contacted by 3 members of the Education Department over this very weekend so I think the concern is very real and I think perhaps the Minister does not appear to be taking it quite as serious as we should.

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I note the Deputy's comments and I shall give them an extra degree of concern and note it.

5.3 The Deputy of St. John:

Will the Chief Minister advise us when the old abattoir site and the drop-off centre which is within it will be completed, as it is currently running well over time and given that work has stopped on that particular site - and all I can understand is possibly because the contractors may not have been getting reimbursed for the work they have done - will the Minister please advise us when is this going to be up and running and also did he see the press reports at the weekend in the Irish press reference Harcourt?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

Yes, there is a dispute at the moment between the developer and the employer about the abattoir site and in the nature of all these disputes one aims to resolve it as quickly as possible. But I cannot at the moment give any particular timescale. Certainly from my point of view I am anxious, particularly for some of the activities within that site, that that be done as soon as possible. I am also concerned that the delay is detrimental to the Island's activities. As far as the comments in the Irish press are concerned, yes, I did see the comment in the press over the weekend. I am not sure how complete that comment was but I did note it.

5.3.1 The Deputy of St. John:

A supplementary. Given that there is a dispute and it appears to have been going on now for some months, has the Chief Minister's Department tried to intervene so that this gets resolved?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

Yes, I have intervened through the medium of the Waterfront Enterprise Board who are the employer of the contractor in this particular case, and they are as anxious as I am to ensure that this is resolved as soon as possible.

5.4 Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour:

I am grateful to the Minister for submitting the policy on reporting serious concerns. If I can highlight page 7 on the policy, 7.37: "If the concern is about a chief officer, the employee may raise the matter with the chief executive." What happens if there is a concern with indeed the chief executive?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

In that particular case I think the appropriate person to contact would probably be myself.

5.5 The Deputy of Grouville:

As the minutes of the Chief Officer's Board are at this present time inaccessible to States Members, can the Chief Minister confirm if expense claims of chief officers can be made available, just as States Members claims are and as they are paid for by the public?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

Firstly, I must apologise that on some Members' computers that particular area is inaccessible. I am told it is accessible downstairs and I am making arrangements for ordinary Members remote access also to be able to access that particular section. As for the publication of claims, yes, those claims will be published in the same way as Members claims are published. That work is in hand as I said earlier this morning.

5.6 Deputy S. Power:

I wonder could the Chief Minister confirm whether all payments due on the old abattoir site and on the annexe site, which is the site adjacent to the old abattoir site, by the developer to the Waterfront Enterprise Board are up-to-date?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I cannot confirm or deny that at this stage. I would need to have notice of that and I can endeavour to find out for the Deputy and respond to him in due course.

5.7 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Could the Chief Minister indicate how successful his recent trip to Madeira was and is he confident that links between the 2 islands are going to be developed in the course of his time in office?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

Yes, I am very confident that the excellent relationship that we have with the island of Madeira and the officials in that island will continue. We had fruitful discussions both with the president of Madeira and effectively the Constable or ...

The Connétable of St. Helier:

The mayor of Funchal.

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

... the Mayor of Funchal who is I know anxious, as is the Constable of St. Helier, that we proceed with fitting arrangements between the 2 islands. There is a lot we have in common and I was very heartened by the support and the amount of time devoted to us by officials in that island when we visited last week.

5.8 The Deputy of St. Mary:

I was surprised to hear at the briefing on population that took place at St. Paul's Centre recently, I heard the Chief Minister say - and I took notes - that on the matter that there was consultation and a key message from the consultation was that the population should not go over 100,000. I would just invite the Chief Minister to tell us what that consultation consisted of.

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I think that consultation was founded on the discussions we had last year in the Imagine Jersey 2035 which was a wide-ranging discussion with a cross-section of the Island community. After discussion of various options there, that was a consensus view. That is also I think the view which I picked up from general listening to views of the public.

5.8.1 The Deputy of St. Mary:

Can I have a supplementary? I have the report of Involve here about Imagine Jersey 2035 and I have read it quite carefully. I do not remember the matter of the population ending up over or under 100,000 being a topic for discussion, either in the survey or in the event at the Royal Yacht. Could the Chief Minister advise us on exactly how this 100,000 ... where it has come from and in what way he can realistically say there was consultation involved?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

Because I think one must not look at these things in isolation; what was being looked at was also the impact which a larger population would have on the greenfields sites and the countryside and the environment generally. It was felt that while there was some scope for further growth in population, that scope was limited by the constraints of the Island and that a figure of 100,000 people should not be exceeded without much greater research into the effects that that would have. It is to some extent a hit or miss figure but based on the Housing Needs Survey, which that has projected, I certainly believe that that figure is justifiable and realistic. In relation to the Housing Needs Survey and the figures which are shown in the population part of the Strategic Plan which demonstrate the effect of that population figure on the demand for the greenfields sites.

5.9 Senator J.L. Perchard:

Does the Chief Minister know why his Minister for Treasury and Resources felt it necessary to advise the public via the media that he was about to give Harcourt Development Limited one month in which to prove their financial capacity in order to deliver the Esplanade Quarter?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I do not think that the Minister for Treasury and Resources, who I cannot speak for, chose to use the media as the vehicle for explaining that. I believe that the media asked a question of the Minister for Treasury and Resources and quite rightly he gave an answer to the question.

5.9.1 Senator J.L. Perchard:

Supplementary. Does the Chief Minister share the view of the Minister for Treasury and Resources that Harcourt Development Limited must be given only one month in order to prove their financial capacity to deliver the Esplanade Quarter site?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I believe the time limit in question was in fact 2 months rather than one month. I believe it is realistic. The discussions have been, in my view, protracted and we need to resolve this issue without undue delay. I think that timescale is quite sufficient for any developer to come up or be unable to come up with the required information.

5.10 Deputy M. Tadier:

Can the Chief Minister inform the House what steps are being taken to ensure consistency of policy is achieved when it comes to the suspension of civil servants?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I think the policy is quite clear and it will be adopted, I am sure, on a consistent basis. But suspensions for any long period are a very rare occurrence. Suspensions of a straightforward nature are generally simple and dealt with quite quickly. Where you have complicated matters which will require an ongoing suspension because of legal involvement each case will be different and although they are done on consistent principles, there may be different requirements for any particular situation. The general policy of consistency does remain and I would ensure through the States Employment Board that that policy is adhered to. I have no reason to doubt that it is being adhered to.

5.11 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

If - and let us hope it is only if - the Waterfront project were to not go ahead because of the inability of Harcourt to come up with a guarantee, what is the Chief Minister's plan B?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

Should the proposed developer fail to deliver the satisfactory responses required, we will then have to consider whether anybody else could deliver it in the same way and at what cost. The masterplan itself has already been agreed by this House and that remains in agreement irrespective of the developer. It will be up to the Council of Ministers generally but particularly the Minister for Planning and Environment and the Minister for Treasury and Resources to work with me to ensure that the objectives of the States agreed in the masterplan can be delivered, either wholly or in sections.

5.11.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

A supplementary. Would the Chief Minister comment on, given the very changed financial and economic environment in which we now find ourselves, that that approach is not realistic at the present time?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

That would entirely depend on the appetite of investors and developers. This is a long term project and it may well be that some people will consider that this a very opportune time to invest while interest rates are low and while building costs are cheap. I cannot speak for any individual developer. I do understand and appreciate the economic constraints within which we live.

5.12 The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

Does the Chief Minister feel that Members using their Blackberries in the House shows a lack of respect [**Approbation**] towards other Members and I refer particularly to Ministers? If he does, what steps is he taking to prevent this?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

This is a matter of judgment. I would ask Ministers and indeed all Members to attend sittings of the House diligently and be here at all times whenever possible. Given a choice between needing to deal with an urgent message within the Chamber or having to leave the Chamber and go elsewhere to do that, it is a balance to be struck. I believe that Ministers will strike an appropriate balance and I would like to see Ministers in the Chamber as often and for as long as possible.

5.13 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Does the Chief Minister believe that his Draft Strategic Plan is an improvement on his predecessor's?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

The answer is, yes, I do but we shall see in 2 weeks' time whether that confidence is justified.

The Bailiff:

That concludes the time allowed for questioning the Chief Minister.