

6. Urgent Oral Question to the Chief Minister:

30th June 2009

The Greffier of the States (in the Chair):

The Bailiff yesterday gave leave to the Deputy of St. Mary to ask an urgent, oral question to the Chief Minister. Deputy?

6.1 The Deputy of St. Mary:

Will the Chief Minister confirm that Heritage and Culture are important to the Council of Ministers, the work of the Heritage Trust is valued by them, and advise the Assembly what action, if any, will be taken to avoid 3 major sites closing in the middle of summer and what action will be taken in the longer term to secure a sustainable future for the service?

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

I do confirm that Heritage and Culture are important to the Council of Ministers and that the work of the Jersey Heritage Trust is indeed valued by the Council. This is reflected in the key priorities of the States Strategic Plan, approved earlier this month, which included, as a priority, to protect and enhance our unique culture and identity and support the development of arts and heritage in Jersey. Members will be aware that the Jersey Heritage Trust is an independent organisation which receives financial support from the States. The Trust already receives a significant annual allocation from the States through the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture. In January this year, it was provided with additional funding for 2009 of £200,000 for this year in order to assist it in responding to the cost pressures mentioned. That is in addition to the £2 million that the Jersey Heritage Trust already receives. Neither the Council of Ministers, nor the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture, would seek to dictate how the additional funds should be allocated; it is for the Trust itself, as an independent body, to determine priorities in accordance with its budget. So it has already been agreed that arrangements will be put in place for an independent review to be conducted of the Jersey Heritage Trust as soon as possible, and that is underway. I am confident that any recommendations arising from that review will be given careful consideration, both by the Trust and by the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture, including any proposals relating to the long-term funding arrangements for the Trust.

6.1.1 The Deputy of St. Mary:

I am very pleased to hear that a review is being commissioned into the activities of the Jersey Heritage Trust. I think they would rather have some cash to get on with the job. I just wonder whether the Chief Minister would like to comment on all these grand words in the Strategic Plan, but when he comes to it, the Director of the Heritage Trust is talking about ending free access to children and he does not really want to do that. I would just ask the Chief Minister where are the priorities of this Council of Ministers? Because a review does not pay the staff and it does not keep the sites open.

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I am well aware of that. From the start of my term of office I had an early meeting with the representative of the Heritage Trust, and as a result of which we took 2 actions: one action was to commission the review and the other was to give them an immediate injection of cash of £200,000 to tide them over this immediate problem. So it is not a question of doing one or the other. We have gladly done both in support of the aims and principles, which I set out, which the States agreed, in the Strategic Plan.

6.1.2 The Deputy of Grouville:

Does the Chief Minister recognise that the Public Records Law, which was introduced, had a huge impact on Jersey Archives? Does he not consider that funding direct from the Chief Minister's Department to Jersey Archives to pay for this service and ongoing work would be in order?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I think that it is symptomatic of ... a problem which we often seem to ignore in this House, and that is when we pass a law and we say there are no financial implications; we skirt around the situation that there often are financial implications somewhere else down the line and that is one good example. But the Archive Service, which is a very laudable service, provided to support the Public Records Law, is part of the operations of Jersey Heritage Trust. As such, it is for them to allocate their resources in what they believe is the most appropriate way. It would not be for my department, or any department, in fact, to interfere with the running of a private organisation to say how they should spend their money. If the States decide that they want to bring back the Jersey Archive Service into public ownership, that is another matter, but it is not a matter which is being discussed today.

6.1.3 The Deputy of Grouville:

Jersey Archive are providing a service to the Government so that the Government complies with this law. It is a direct service. The Government are employing Jersey Archive Services for this and paying nothing for the huge amount of resources this takes from the Jersey Heritage Trust.

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I am well aware of the valuable service that the Archive provides and it is really for the Heritage Trust to decide, as custodians of that Archive Service, whether they wanted to maintain that or give it back to the States to maintain. I would say that that sort of issue is one which is surely going to be reviewed or taken up in the course of this review and I think we should await the outcome of that review before jumping to any conclusions about which is the right course of action to take.

6.1.4 Deputy J.A. Martin:

That follows on nicely because what I was going to ask is can ... he may not have them now, but can he furnish the States Members with the terms of reference for this review? Because I think it is fundamental that we know where it is going and what it is looking at. I mean, I need to see whether it is looking at ... is culture and heritage even under the right ministry.

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I only received this question yesterday afternoon and I have not had a chance to make detailed inquiries. I understand that the review, which in any case being commissioned by the Heritage Trust must be under their terms of reference, will include obtaining information from the museums, libraries and Archive Service in the U.K. in order to see how that might be able to assist us, as well as looking with the Economic Development Department and Jersey Enterprise into the business activities of the Trust. So, it is a wide-ranging review. The precise terms of reference, I do not have available at the current time.

6.1.5 The Deputy of St. John:

As a former trustee of the Heritage Trust, I have one or 2 concerns. Can it be right that hundreds of thousands of pounds were spent on purchasing DUKWs to and from Elizabeth Castle when they were already in private ownership? Also, will the Chief Minister confirm that a new roof is required at La Hougue Bie, for instance, which also comes under the Heritage, or is it something that is nice to have? Because it is claimed that they are changing from slate to tile, or the other way around.

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I mentioned a moment ago that the terms of reference included looking at the commercial activities of the Trust and it may well be that the commercial activities, such as the ferry service to the castle, which the Deputy talks about, is one which might need reconsideration. As to the roof of the premises at La Hougue Bie, that again is a matter of priorities. Like all of us in each department - and we will see this when we come to debate our own spending plans - we have to prioritise what we consider to be the most important activities; be those roofs or archive buildings.

6.1.6 Deputy S. Pitman:

Would the Chief Minister advise Members when he expects this review to be finished?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

No, I expect it to be finished as soon as possible because, clearly, the Heritage Trust need to know their priorities for 2010. We have given them funding for the current year, so certainly a timescale, I envisage, would be during the course of this year.

The Greffier of the States (in the Chair):

I note there are 4 more Members waiting to ask a supplementary. I will allow these 4 to ask them. The Constable of St. Helier.

6.1.7 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier:

As a present and States-appointed trustee, could I ask the Minister whether he is aware that as responsible employer the Heritage Trust has begun consultation on redundancies and that it will have to take decisions about closing sites that are important to the Island on 10th July?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I would expect any Trust to take responsible decisions and then be a responsible employer. I would be disappointed if it led to immediate redundancies in the middle of a

season when we have given them additional funding to tide them over the present time, but that must be a matter for the trustees to decide. They are independent and I am not going to interfere in their decision making.

6.1.8 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Is the Chief Minister happy with the fact that there has been a very well-orchestrated membership campaign on behalf of the Trust? Would he not wish to see the Trust working in concert with the National Trust and the Société? Secondly, is he aware of whether the wage costs of the Jersey Heritage Trust are in conformity with the policies espoused by our beloved Minister for Treasury and Resources?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I will repeat that the Trust is an independent organisation and I am sure it is for them to decide whether there are merits in working more closely in conjunction with people like the National Trust and the Société; certainly, I believe that would be a sensible thing to do. Again, as I say, it is for them to decide as an independent organisation. It is equally for them, as an independent organisation, to set their wage rates, but I would expect them, as a responsible employer, to be reasonable and realistic in that respect as well.

6.1.9 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

The question raised by the Constable of St. Helier puts the hourglass before us; 10th July they are looking to regard closing some important and historical sites, heritage sites, and redundancies. Given that this is the height of the holiday season, would it not be more appropriate to look at limited closures, I ask the Chief Minister? Such schemes as exist in other jurisdictions, whereby local residents who prove local residency can access heritage sites at a reduced rate, thereby increasing footfall on an ongoing basis? I appreciate the Chief Minister does not want to get involved in operational matters, but unless he takes a proactive stance on this we are going to see a disjointed operation in relation to heritage at one of the key points in our economy, tourism, at the height of the tourism season. Will he undertake to go and look into these issues with the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture, please?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I would be disappointed if the Board of Trustees and Heritage Trust acted other than in a responsible way and in a commercial way. If they decide that it is in the interests of the Trust and its profit and loss account, if you like, to arrange for special arrangements for local people in order to increase footfall, that is a commercial position which I would entrust to them as people with more commercial expertise than maybe my department has, to take appropriate decisions. Whether doing things in the middle of the season is a particularly good commercial activity to take has to be a matter for the trustees to decide, but it may well be that in the terms of giving an adequate notice period to staff who might have to be put down subsequently, a date has to be stated and worked as a basis. It is really not for me at this stage to be able to explain that when, in fact, the Jersey Heritage Trust is not a direct responsibility of the Chief Minister's Department. I am really responding to this question as an urgent question because it is a matter of, I think, importance to all States Members as a whole.

6.1.10 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Would the Chief Minister not agree that thousands of pounds could be saved; just remove the scaffolding which has been surrounding St. James' Church for so long? **[Approbation]** Will he take some steps to have a word with the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture? **[Laughter]**

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I can certainly have words with the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture, and indeed, with the Minister for Planning and Environment. I suspect that the continued existence of scaffolding around St. James' Church is a matter of public safety and I would not want to jeopardise public safety in the sake of simple economies. What we need to do is have a resolution for that issue and not have the scaffolding ongoing for ever and ever. That resolution, sadly, seems to have taken longer than I would like to have seen, and longer - no doubt - than the Deputy of St. Martin would like to see.

6.1.11 The Deputy of St. Mary:

I am quite shocked by the Chief Minister's continual reference to prioritising within the service, as if somehow it is the Jersey Heritage Trust's responsibility that these sad things are maybe about to happen, and I would ask the Chief Minister to express a view on whether in fact the reality is continual underfunding and the slow strangulation, in terms of funding, of the entire service for years?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

Certainly, I believe that the trustees of the Heritage Trust did have a responsibility to prioritise and to run that operation properly and if it turns out that they had inadequate funding in order to do that, that will no doubt be highlighted in the course of this review and they can immediately be put on a firmer footing. I suspect that this change in circumstances has not arisen overnight and really until that review is undertaken and reported on, I am not going to speculate on why there should be these particular difficulties at this current time, particularly, as I say, having given the Trust an additional £200,000 earlier this year in order to resolve some of this temporary crisis.

The Deputy of St. Mary:

When do we expect the report?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I have already answered that question. I do not know the precise date, but it will need to be during the course of this year.