

3.9 The Deputy of Grouville of the Minister for Home Affairs regarding the funding of the salaries of the suspended Chief Officer of Police and the Acting Chief Officer:

Is the Home Affairs budget currently funding both the salary of the suspended Chief Officer of Police and the Acting Chief Officer and, if so, could the Minister advise how many regular police on the beat one of these salaries and pension provisions could pay for?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand (The Minister for Home Affairs):

The answer to the first question is: "Yes" and the answer to the second question is that the approximate increased costs by reason of the suspension in terms of staff costs are, as I believe I indicated 3 weeks ago, of the order of about £160,000 a year. I have just given the figure for the average costs of a police constable as being £55,000 and so the arithmetic comes out an average of just under 3 although my notes tell me that, in fact, it is 2 and a half to 3 and a half, depending upon the pay scale of individual officers.

3.9.1 The Deputy of Grouville:

Does the Minister believe that the public are being badly let down when due to delay and lack of conclusion to the suspension of the Chief of Police that as well as costing the taxpayer thousands of pounds, public safety is also being compromised?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

No, I do not. It is my belief that the public, other than those who have extremely short memories, want to know what happened in February 2008 and, in the months thereafter, why the Island received the adverse publicity internationally which it did and what responsibility different senior police officers have for that. Those are all issues which will be unravelled in due course as part of the current investigations.

3.9.2 The Deputy of St. John:

How many officers are currently working under the Attorney General's Department and can a claim be made against the Crown Officers' budget so as additional officers can be brought in to do the regular policing of the Island?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

My friend, the Deputy of St. John, has once again caught me out here because he did ask me a question prior to it about the so-called A.G.'s police force. I have not, in fact, yet followed that up so I do not know how many are currently working. What I do know is that there are currently huge pressures on the financial crimes investigation part of the police force and those pressures are unlikely to decrease. There are also currently a number of major investigations, some of which are in the financial crimes area and, frankly, the police force would not be able to fund these were it not for the fact that we have recourse in relation to such complex cases to court and case costs as an overspill of normal expenditure but I will find out the answer to the original question.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Can I inform Members before this hare goes running too far that Crown Officers are not the responsibility of the Minister for Home Affairs.

3.9.3 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Referring back to the original question, would the Minister advise what impact, if any, this continuing and longstanding situation now is having on morale within the police force?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

I am not sure I want to answer that question because different people have different opinions. My general appreciation of the situation is that police morale is higher at the moment than it has been for a long time.

3.9.4 The Deputy of St. Martin:

The Minister said that the cost was about £160,000 but will the Minister also accept the fact there are 2 other officers suspended and they have been suspended for well over 12 months. One is of quite senior rank so in addition, really, to paying for the suspension of the Chief Officer, there is also the cost of 2 other officers who are suspended. On top of that, of course, there are the excessive costs at the moment with the Wiltshire Police inquiry. Would the Minister accept that possibly if indeed all the officers were back at work or indeed they were not paid to be off work, that we could probably have more than 3 officers back on the beat?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

The Deputy of St. Martin is absolutely right. There have been 2 other officers, one of whom is quite senior, suspended for some time. Unfortunately, there has been a lengthy delay there primarily due to the criminal investigations having to be completed first which delayed matters. I am able to inform the House that the disciplinary hearings in relation to these 2 officers will be taking place in February. The Deputy is, of course, right that these 2 officers being suspended are a further substantial drain upon police resources.

3.9.5 Deputy A.E. Jeune of St. Brelade:

The Minister gave the cost of police constables to the Island. Could the Minister advise how that cost compares with a village P.C. (Police Constable) in the United Kingdom and a city Police Constable?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

I am afraid that that question is too difficult for the Minister for Home Affairs without notice. I do not have those figures available. I understand that police officers are very well paid.

3.9.6 Deputy M.R. Higgins of St. Helier:

In a written answer today, the Minister has indicated that there were 1,649 days lost to sickness by the police force up to 30th November. What steps are being taken to minimise the amount of time that officers are having off or to check that they are off for valid reasons?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

I understand that, in fact, the figures are lower than the average figure in relation to States workers generally which is quite surprising because one would expect active police officers to suffer physical injuries from time to time during the course of their duties which would render them unable to return. I think those figures are good.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Can I say that that last question was right at the very margins of a question which relates to the original question.

3.9.7 The Deputy of St. John:

Given the comments made by the Chair to the Assembly a few moments ago, would the Minister look at using the ‘user pays’ charges and charging the Crown Officers’ Department for the time that his officers are employed by that particular department?

The Deputy Bailiff:

I do not see that that relates either to the question. **[Laughter]** The final supplementary, the Deputy of Grouville.

3.9.8 The Deputy of Grouville:

The Minister was on the radio last week claiming that due to budget constraints, there were not as many Bobbies on the beat as he would ordinarily like. Given this very unsatisfactory state of affairs pertaining to the suspension of the Chief Officer and now we learn from the Deputy of St. Martin, 2 other officers, could he give this Assembly his assurance that these conclusions are going to be reached as soon as possible?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

I am absolutely certain I have never used the phrase “Bobbies on the beat”. That is not a phrase that I would ever use. The answer to the question is I have already given a date for the disciplinary hearings in relation to the other 2 officers. The answer in relation to the Chief Officer of Police is that this is a very complex investigation and I am able to now move it further forward thanks to additional information I have received in the last fortnight and will do so as rapidly as possible.