

4. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Chief Minister

The Deputy Bailiff:

I am afraid that brings the first question period to an end. We now come to questions of the Chief Minister. I call on Deputy Hilton.

4.1 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

With the proposed town park due for completion some time towards the end of 2011, beginning of 2012, can the Chief Minister tell Member whether any consideration would be given to inviting Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, to Jersey to open the park to celebrate in part her Diamond Jubilee?

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

I thank the Deputy, it is an excellent suggestion. I am aware that the diary for Her Majesty is compiled some considerable time in advance and it may well be there will be an opportunity in the future for her to do that. I would not necessarily want to commit to doing it at the end of next year or the start of 2012, but at some convenient date that would be an excellent suggestion and I am happy to take it up and pursue it.

4.2 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Can I ask the Chief Minister if he was aware of whether or not Harcourt is in contention of application for compensation from W.E.B. at this time because if it transfers over under the States of Jersey Development Company I understand that settlement could occur without it coming back to the States of Jersey and just be done by officers? Is it the case that there is a claim for compensation at the moment, and what is it?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I am not aware of any claim for compensation, if there was, I would expect it to be the directors of W.E.B. or the directors of S.O.J.D.C. to defend that vigorously. But, as I say, I am not aware of any such legislation being contemplated.

4.3 Senator J.L. Perchard:

Unlike his Minister, is the Chief Minister prepared to confirm that Jersey's fee-paying schools provide excellent value for money for the States and the taxpayer? Would the Chief Minister be prepared to advise his Minister that it would be prudent to bring to the States, for approval, any proposals to reform the arrangements between the fee-paying sector and the States of Jersey?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I shall preface my answer by saying that previously I used to be a member of the board of governors of 2 of the private schools in question. I am no longer a governor of either of those schools but I do retain a position as a trustee of Beaulieu Convent. On that basis I think it would be improper of me to make any comments about value for money, although I have my own personal views. As far as advice to the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture, I am quite confident the Minister is capable of making up his own mind and will listen to advice from me and from other people.

4.4 The Deputy of St. John:

Given the reply the Minister just gave to Deputy Le Claire, reference Harcourt, in the event of any funding being required by the Jersey Property Company that we have just set up, it will be public money that will be being spent and therefore if any settlement is to be agreed will that come to the House prior to any money being handed over or any agreement being signed-off?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

It strikes me as being a very hypothetical question. Should a settlement of a significant nature be required, it may well be that the board of directors of the company would wish to seek comfort from the States. I cannot speak for the new board of directors, that will be for them to decide if and when that should ever come to fruition.

[12:00]

4.5 Deputy T.A. Vallois:

Could the Chief Minister advise the current status of the social policy framework and whether any new policy will be coming forward within the next 12 months?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

Discussions are ongoing in terms of the social policy framework on a couple of issues, mainly to do with elderly care and linked to some extent to proposals which the Minister for Social Security may be bringing in due course about the funding of that care. I am anxious to continue to work with what is now known as the third sector, and with that intent about 12 months ago I set up a social policy working group involving members of the third sector who are working among themselves and advising the social policy forum on ways in which that might be pursued.

4.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Given that we have already seen the proposals to meet the C.S.R. stage 2 cuts from 3 departments and the fact that 2 of those departments have not managed to meet their targets, will the Chief Minister assure Members that he will publish the targets and the proposals from the other 7 departments which we have not seen yet? Will he do so by when and, if he will not, why not?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I am anxious that when we come to debate the Business Plan in the fullness of time Members will have all the information they require in order to make proper and informed decisions. The timing of that process will depend very much on the way that decisions are reached by Ministers and I would certainly hope that in the coming budget proposition being lodged there will be some further information available to Members.

4.6.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

May I have a supplementary? Hope. Can he go a little further than that, will he have those published by the end of the week?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

It is not for me to publish, if anything is to be contained in the budget document that is a matter for the Minister for Treasury and Resources.

4.7 The Deputy of St. Mary:

In the *J.E.P.* on 13th October Islanders read that sewage overflowed into the critical care unit, A. and E. (Accident and Emergency) and the scanning facility at our hospital, and that this has happened twice in the last 12 months: "We get blockages on a monthly basis." Can the Chief Minister confirm that this is the vision that he has for our Island in the aftermath of cuts in public services?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

No, and that is precisely why, as the Deputy may be aware, that the C.S.R. proposals are far more lenient in respect of Health because we are aware of certain issues which do need to be addressed. For that reason I am confident that the new Minister for Health and Social Services will apply funds in the best way in order that we can have, and continue to have, a very good hospital service and a very good health service.

4.7.1 The Deputy of St. Mary:

A supplementary, if I may? Does the Chief Minister not see a link between sewage coming through the roof in our hospital, the fact that sewerage network in the whole Island is falling apart and the fact that our roads are £2 million a year adrift in maintenance? Does he not see a connection between that and the strange situation that Jersey is bottom of the class in the amount that it spends as a proportion of its wealth on public sector and public services?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

While there may be links there of a very tenuous nature, because what the problem at the hospital is, as I understand, is due to some construction difficulties rather than anything fundamental in the sewerage system below the road. That said, whatever the cause, the objective must be to put it right and make sure it does not recur.

4.8 Deputy M. Tadier:

I will be asking question 23, which I did not have a chance to ask. Given that the Chief Minister stated that the initial suspension of the Chief Officer of the States of Jersey Police, which was heavily criticised in the Napier Report, was justified in the light of the Wiltshire Report submitted a year earlier, can he confirm whether the ends justifies the means is now an accepted principle of his administration and, if so, which other areas will this be applied to?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I believe the decision to suspend the previous Chief Officer of Police was correct at the time but I am also pleased that the findings of the Wiltshire Report fully endorse that decision. Accordingly, I make it clear that I have full confidence in all those involved in coming to the decision to suspend at that time.

4.8.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

A supplementary, if I may? It seems to me that Napier said that at the time there was not sufficient evidence either way to determine whether or not the suspension was justified, irrespective of what may have happened in hindsight. So can the Minister just confirm or reiterate that statement, because I do not think that is true?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

Yes. I am totally satisfied that on the basis of the information that I am aware of, there was good reason - justifiable reason - for the decision to suspend the Chief Officer of the States Police in November 2008.

4.9 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Elaborating upon Deputy Southern's previous question, would the Minister say what discussion occurred in the Council of Ministers when it was decided that the cuts for Health would be substantially reduced? Who then was it thought would take on the burden of the cuts which Health could not itself take on?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I do not believe that the Deputy was at the workshop that we held for all States Members last week when it was quite clear from the independent assessors of the Health Department that the level of cuts which mathematically they might require could not be achieved and still provide the sort of service and the measures which Health clearly needed. On that basis, it is inevitable that the arrangements will have to be made good in other ways and I am pleased to say that arrangements have been agreed with Ministers to enable £65 million worth of saving to be delivered.

4.9.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

A supplementary. I was at Scrutiny. I wonder could the Chief Minister say then who indeed has taken on those cuts?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I have said, and will continue to say, that arrangements are still in a discussion stage and while we have agreed at £65 million worth of cuts, the precise details of that will become clearer in June 2011 and 2012 when the business plans for the following 2 years are each presented to Members.

4.10 The Deputy of St. Peter:

Following last week's debate and the Chief Minister's reference on a couple of occasions this morning to the new board of S.O.J.D.C., what action, if any, has been taken to advertise the positions for the role in this new robust board? Will the recruitment process be overseen by the Appointments Commission?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I was discussing yesterday afternoon the process on which we might want to provide job descriptions, advertisements and so on in order to promote this as soon as possible. I am anxious that those advertisements for new directors should occur at an earliest possible stage so that we can move forward. I confirm also, and I am pleased to confirm, that I will want to involve the Appointments Commission very much in that selection process.

4.10.1 The Deputy of St. Peter:

A supplementary? Will the Appointments Commission be involved at the stage of setting-up job descriptions?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

It is not normal for the Appointments Commission to be involved in the job description. The purpose of the Appointments Commission is to ensure that the selection process is carried out in a fair and proper manner.

4.11 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Today the U.K. Government is producing a strategic defence review and tomorrow will be announcing savage cuts to our armed forces. Has the Chief Minister been in any discussions with Her Majesty's Government about either increased contributions from Jersey or the future role of the T.A. (Territorial Army)?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

The short answer is no. The contribution which the Island makes in respect of the T.A. is a very valuable contribution I am sure but in comparison with the scale of the cuts being proposed by the U.K. Government, whatever that may be and it will be known this afternoon, I suspect that the contribution of Jersey, even if it were to be doubled, would not make a significant difference to the overall problems that are facing the U.K. defence authorities.

4.12 The Deputy of St. Mary:

Yes. We have learnt that Health simply cannot deliver their cuts and I just put it to the Chief Minister for his comments that it would have been more sensible to tackle the cuts in a more intelligent and measured way, taking on board what the public might actually want from their public sector, instead of listening only to a very narrow band, a very narrow ideologically driven view, so the fat and the duplication was cut and not the services and the facilities that the public depend on and enjoy.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Was that a question?

The Deputy of St. Mary:

I would like the Chief Minister's comments on whether the process should have been more measured because we have now seen a cut in Health that has got to be shifted suddenly at the last minute to somewhere else, and we do not even know where?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

It is not a cut at the last minute, I totally refute that. When we started this process we set up independent review groups to look at the major areas of spending, such Health, Education and Home Affairs, and that group independently came to the view that the pressures on Health at the current time were such that the level of cuts required would be difficult to deliver. That is not my view but it is a view shared by independent outsiders at an early stage, and knowing that information we are better able to plan for the overall requirement which we all must have as States Members to reduce our overall level of spending. That would be done in a proper managed way over the coming months in order to deliver on the targeted £65 million which is necessary if we are going to keep our tax rises to a minimum.

The Deputy Bailiff:

That brings the second question period with the Chief Minister to an end.