

3. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Minister for Economic Development

The Deputy Bailiff:

Very well, that brings an end to that part of question time. We now come to Questions to Ministers without notice and the first question period is for the Minister for Economic Development.

3.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I would just ask the Minister for Economic Development if he can update us as to how far he has got with the Shadow Board for the Harbours and Airport?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean (The Minister for Economic Development):

Yes, I can. I am delighted to say that we placed an advertisement and had more than 50 applications. We have whittled that down to a short list of 9, the final interviews took place yesterday and I hope to be in a position to announce to Members and the public the composition of the Shadow Board within the next few weeks.

3.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Is the Minister still supportive of the Think Twice, Buy Local campaign?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

Yes, I am, very much so. I think it was a very important campaign, although it has not got the prominence that it had when we first launched it, the principle is still very clear. We encourage local businesses to engage as much as possible and for consumers within the Island to think about buying locally rather than off-Island, if that is possible. It is a 2-way street and it is very much up to local businesses to play their part in that in terms of being competitive.

3.2.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

Very much in the context of that answer would the Minister, therefore, extend that ethos to supplying information about companies which do not pay tax in Jersey versus those who do, so that consumers can make an informed choice about when they buy locally the taxes will also be paid locally?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Just one moment, Minister. Can I say to all Members and Deputy Tadier, if I may say so, that was a classic example of somebody standing up to ask a supplementary question without seeking leave from the Chair. It does not follow, particularly at this time of question time, that there is an automatic right to a supplementary question. There is a long list of Members who want to ask questions. Now, Minister?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I think the role of the Consumer Council in this area is important and I think if indeed the Consumer Council would decide whether they wanted to compile such information and that it would be a benefit to consumers, then indeed that would be a route that I would suggest such information should be published.

3.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Given the troubles that we have in our postal service on the Island and the consultation paper sent out in response to that, which appears to have given up on the maintenance of a decent postal service, what consideration has the Minister given to adopting the arrangement in Guernsey, whereby their O.U.R. (Office of Utility Regulation) has a specific requirement to maintain a minimum service level?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I do not know where the Deputy gets the idea that because the consultation is closed that we have given up on it. The consultation has closed, we hope to be in a position fairly soon to announce the position with regard to the consultation, indeed to what that is going to lead to with regard to a new U.S.O. (Universal Service Obligation) for the postal service, a matter which I intend to bring back to this House for Members to consider.

3.3.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The consultation taking place by his department proposes either 3 deliveries a week or 5 deliveries a fortnight. In Guernsey they are consulting with the public about reducing their deliveries from 6 to 5 in the week. They are doing a damn sight better on a similar basis, why has their proposal to cooperate fully with the postal service not been adopted by his department?

[11:45]

The Deputy Bailiff:

Deputy, “damn sight better” is not parliamentary expression, please withdraw it.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

I withdraw it, sir.

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I was going to say that I did not recognise that terminology. Nevertheless, I will say that the consultation has just closed, the matter is going to be considered before a proposition is going to be brought before this Assembly for Members to consider. I would suggest, having seen the initial results from the consultation, which I have reviewed, that I would not imagine a dramatic change to the U.S.O., there will be some need for a reduction, but I do not think it will go to the extreme ends that were suggested in the consultation paper.

3.4 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

For some time now Condor Ferries has been operating a number of its vessels on 3 engines rather than 4, meaning considerable delays to people that are travelling. What protection is there for the consumer in relation to these sorts of issues when they are faced with the full fares and no redress, where in the airline industry they be given redress for delays, *et cetera*.

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

The Deputy raises a very good point and, in fact, it was noted only recently in the media that Condor are ferrying a lot of business to the airlines because of the technical difficulties they have had. There is choice in the marketplace, people can indeed fly with competitive fares as much as use the sea. With regard to redress, obviously it is a requirement from Condor to provide minimum service in terms of frequency of sailings and standard of service that they deliver. They are very aware of the difficulties they have had in recent times and over the winter period the vessels in question are going to have a full overhaul. They expect, and I certainly hope, that that will lead to far better quality of service next year.

3.5 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

In a survey of States salaries it appears that the Airport holds the dubious distinction of having the highest ratio of high paid managers to staff. Would the Minister agree that he is in total agreement with the management structure at the airport and he sees no need for reform?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I would say that there is always need to consider reform if it is felt that an organisation is not functioning in the way that it should. I think the Airport has moved on tremendously in recent years under the leadership of the current Airport Director. It is a very well-structured and well-organised organisation, however the suggestion which has now been put into practice of

establishing a shadow board will only help both the Airport and the Harbours improve the way in which they deliver their services and their operation overall.

3.6 Deputy J.B. Fox of St. Helier:

Reverting back to the sea routes and fare pricing survey, we were promised a report to the States in April, it is now 6 months past April. I know you are waiting for the Guernsey Island to reply to this joint venture but if they do not, will you please bring a structure to the States, shall we say, within a month, would you agree to that? That might encourage Guernsey to respond a little quicker.

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I understand the frustration that the Deputy has with regard to this. We did make the decision to do a joint consultation with Guernsey. It was the right decision although it has slowed the process down. For that I am clearly as disappointed as the Deputy is. I have had a discussion only on Friday through teleconferencing with our Guernsey partners - in the interests of saving costs we now do not travel backwards and forwards as frequently, we teleconference - I thought I would just mention that. **[Laughter]** I made it very clear to my counterparts in Guernsey that indeed we needed to come back and make a decision on this matter within a matter of a few months. I cannot guarantee that it will be within a month. I like to be able to deliver where possible on the undertakings that I give, but certainly by the end of this year I would plan to come back with further information and clarity on the position following the consultation on sea services.

3.7 Senator F. du H. Gresley:

Does the Minister agree that the Chief Executive of Jersey Finance should not have tried to influence the budget debates by speaking to the media about his views on the possible effects on the economy if private Members bring forward amendments to the tax raising measures to be proposed by the Minister for Treasury and Resources in the budget?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

The Chief Executive of Jersey Finance represents the industry as much as he does the Island when he is promoting overseas, he was expressing, in the article that I read last night, his opinions of the likely impact on the finance industry of various outcomes. He raised some serious issues. I am not sure he was necessarily trying to influence anybody and I would also suggest that it is unlikely that the Minister for Treasury and Resources is going to be influenced either by the Chief Executive of Jersey Finance or anybody else for that matter. He will make his decision based on evidence.

3.8 Senator T.J. Le Main:

In view of the current shortage of rented affordable homes, every time I pass La Folie Inn it bugs me to think that there were 3 units of accommodation - certainly 2 cottages - there and I wonder what discussions have taken place or otherwise whether they could be utilised, even temporarily, for social housing or otherwise, but it seems we have got a very bad record in the leaving very valuable property just sitting empty and deteriorating?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Is that something you feel you can answer, Minister?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I will have a stab, Sir. In all seriousness it was kind of you to ask but that particular property does fall down at the harbour. It has formed part of the East of Albert considerations for the future development of the harbour area, and that, indeed, has led to many of the delays that have gone on. It is frustrating, it has been a building that has been empty for a number of years,

however it is now included in the plans and I understand is likely to go out for expressions of interest fairly shortly. So hopefully we will see a light at the end of the tunnel in this regard and a decent use for that building.

3.9 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

Last autumn, 2009, I attended a public meeting with many concerned boat owners with regard to the potential changing of moorings in the Old Harbour, I was wondering if the Minister could tell Members how far the consultation process has gone and whether any decisions have been made in that regard.

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

No, no further decisions have been taken in that regard. At that time, and I recall it clearly, we took the decision to withdraw that proposition for further consultation. That process is ongoing and certainly it will be on the agenda for consideration of the shadow board, when it takes up its position, in terms of giving some further advice on the matter and appointing an appropriate group in order to give further advice.

3.10 Deputy C.H. Egré of St. Peter:

Would the Minister indicate when we can finally draw a line under the issue regarding the P.F.O.S. (perfluorooctane sulfonates) contamination of the water supplies in the St. Ouen Bay area? This issue has been going on for at least 14 years and the current Airport Director wanted this dealt with when he first arrived in Jersey; he is about to leave.

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

Yes. I can only take responsibility for recent years, I do not go back as far as 14 but nevertheless the matter has been dragging on. Both the Airport Director and I have both been keen to get this matter resolved. It has not proved to be as simple as initially thought. We believe now that we are very close, although I have said this several times to the Deputy before, to be able to draw the matter at last to a conclusion and I believe that a letter will be shortly finding its way to the legal representative of the Residents' Association. Hopefully that will give some clarity and finality to the position.

3.11 The Deputy of St. John:

Given that P.F.O.S. does not break down, how can the Minister give an answer has he has just given to the Deputy of St. Peter, given that there is no end in sight to this particular product breaking down?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I do not believe that I gave an answer that P.F.O.S. would be broken down, all I said was that I believe the letter would be finding its way to the legal representative of the association of residents affected by P.F.O.S. That letter will lay out in it the terms under which they will be affected or are affected by remedial work such as water, mains water connections and so on, that they will benefit from as a result of the pollution that they have suffered.

3.12 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Can the Minister tell us when he will be tabling legislation before this House on the Financial Services Ombudsman? When will it come to the House?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

We have been working on that subject. We were working with the U.K. Ombudsman to get some clarity as to whether or not we could work jointly with them and we have had discussions: I had discussions on Friday, with my Guernsey counterparts on the same subject. The idea being a pan-Channel Islands Ombudsman in order to be more effective from a cost perspective. We

believe that we will be in a position to report back to the House in December, which is an undertaking given previously to Senator Breckon who raised this matter.

3.13 The Connétable of St. Mary:

Driving to the States this morning I could not help but notice the location of the ferries by the enormous plume of black smoke I could see rising from behind the hotel. Will Minister advise Members whether he will be discussing with the operator engine replacements to ensure that the ferries operate cleaner; not only better but cleaner too?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

As we have already discussed, the ferries have had - and I am assuming it is the company we were referring to earlier on - a certain number of technical problems. The boats are going to be overhauled through the winter and we hope that will give a better quality of service and more reliability and so on. I will certainly raise the matter with regard to pollution but I suspect the issue is one that affects all ports around the world, although I do accept the concerns of the Connétable.

The Deputy Bailiff:

I am afraid that brings the first question period to an end.