

6. Questions to Ministers Without Notice - The Chief Minister

The Deputy Bailiff:

There you go. We now move on to questions of the Chief Minister.

6.1 The Deputy of St. John:

Given the Clipper had a fire on board last week, could the Minister tell Members, in fact, the reason why the passengers were held on board that ship for some 24 hours or thereabouts, once it was in port. Also, in the event of an emergency, historically, the Island used to keep 3 months food supply on Island. Could the Minister tell us what supplies are currently held in Island, in days, weeks or months, to supply this Island in the event of an emergency?

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

I share the Deputy's concern that passengers seem to have been kept on board that ship for far longer than I would have liked to have seen, but I was not in charge of operations at Portsmouth at that time. The operation decision has been made at the time by people who knew the whole situation. But I am sure that we all ought to firstly thank Commodore for the way in which they have handled and looked after the passengers within those constraints and the way in which they have put on an alternative ship to cover while the Clipper is out of action. As to local food supplies, that is very much a variable basis. There is far more, now, brought in on a "just in time" basis, but on the other hand the Island does, particularly at this time of year, provide a number of crops and other food supplies of its own. There are stocks of various foods, various things at the time. I do not have, on a question without notice, precise details of those particular stocks. If the Deputy wants to raise that as a written question, I would be happy to answer it.

6.1.1 The Deputy of St. John:

Given the Minister is in charge of the Emergency Council, he should have those figures at his fingertips. In relation to the Commodore Clipper, I can accept that he would not be fully au fait. But in relation to the amount of food stocks on Island, the answer he has given is totally inadequate and I expect more of the Chief Minister, in particular, as I said earlier, somebody who is standing with a vote of no confidence against him. I expect him to be aware of what is happening. Will he please try and think back to his last Council of Ministers' meeting with the Executive for the Emergency Council, what the figures are that are held on Island at any one time of foodstuffs, not on a day-to-day basis, or "just in time" basis. There must be some food held on Island and he should have those figures.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Can you improve on that please, Minister?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I cannot improve very much, except to say that the Emergencies Council is very well aware of the risks that we take in terms of food stocks. That is a key risk which we have in our risk register and is reviewed on a regular basis. I repeat my earlier answer that I would be happy to give the information to the Deputy, once I am asked properly.

6.2 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Can the Chief Minister clarify whether he has full confidence in his new Minister for Housing, bearing in mind that he wanted someone else to be appointed? Particularly, does he support the Minister for Housing's initiatives on affordable housing, shared equity and Homebuy, et cetera?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I believe that 2 weeks earlier we had 3 excellent candidates for the post of Minister for Housing and I would be happy to work with any of the 3 of them. I congratulate Deputy Power on his

appointment and I have full confidence that he will do that job thoroughly and keep us all on our toes. As far as policy on affordable housing and Homebuy, I share much of the aspirations of Deputy Power. In fact, the Council of Ministers, itself, endorsed the original Homebuy proposals for La Providence as a pilot scheme. As with any pilot scheme one can learn from it to see where it goes wrong and where it has been successful. I believe that we can learn from that scheme and the impending report, which I gather, the Auditor General has been doing to find out whether the scheme can be improved upon in order to deliver that objective of affordable housing for as many people as possible.

6.2.1 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Supplementary, Sir? Does that imply from the Minister's answer that he will be cosyng up with the Minister for Housing?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

The Council of Ministers works as a team and we try to work together for the benefit of the Island.

6.3 The Connétable of St. Mary:

At a time when every Department is looking to maximise efficiency, it seems to me that States Members should also adopt this philosophy. Will the Chief Minister agree to request Ministers to indicate the estimated cost of providing ... I mean ballpark figure, of providing answers to questions with notice in order to assist Members in making their own analysis of the cost benefits of their inquiries?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

A very welcome question. A few years ago, former Deputy Dubras indicated that the cost of answering one question was something like £700. That may not have been a typical question, but the costs can be quite considerable and the number of questions can and have, indeed, increased significantly. There is a place for questions, but they ought to be appropriate questions aimed to get more fresh information, rather than repeating over and over again, the same few issues. So I hope we will be able to provide that cost efficiency, their costs indication, but, of course, even providing that cost, it comes at a cost.

6.4 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Given that the Minister for Treasury and Resources, in line with the Chancellor in the U.K. is likely to recommend cutbacks in the civil service at all levels, would the Chief Minister be taking his cue from this, and also recommending that there be a reduction in the number of States Members?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

The question of the number of States Members has been debated in the House on more than one occasion. Whatever seems to be put forward seems to have difficulty finding favour with the majority of Members and I hesitate to step where angels fear to tread.

The Deputy Bailiff:

I am not sure it is a matter for your responsibility anyway. I probably should not have allowed the question.

6.5 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

I understand the Chief Minister has recently returned from Gibraltar; would he care to explain what he was doing there and what the visit has informed him in respect of ... it is not a laughing matter, and what the visit has done to inform him of the changing of their tax position?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I did visit Gibraltar about 3 months ago now and, being another island like ourselves, there is a lot that we can learn from a similar sort of community. They, of course, are different, in that they are in the E.U. (European Union) and we are not. What I learnt was that they were planning to reduce their corporate tax rate from 22 per cent to 10 per cent and they announced that last week. I also learnt, perhaps surprisingly, that in Gibraltar corporate taxation or company taxation was regarded by most Gibraltarians as a voluntary tax which you paid if you wanted to. Part of the arrangements in bringing it down to 10 per cent is to cease having it as a voluntary arrangement, but to make it mandatory. I think that is a step in the right direction, it is having good tax practice and something which I would endorse.

6.6 Deputy D.J. De Sousa:

Bearing in mind that the U.K. released figures on civil servants' pay, does the Chief Minister not consider that he possibly missed an opportunity as States Members were aware that he was already happy to release the information before the U.K. announced that they would?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I may well have missed an opportunity. I have provided information as I believe is appropriate, at the appropriate level, and the fact that the U.K. may choose to do something, or not do something, should not affect the way that we decide those things.

6.7 Deputy A.K.F. Green of St. Helier:

It is following on from the Deputy of St. John. I have been concerned for some time regarding supplies of fresh produce. Would the Chief Minister agree to ask his Emergency Planning Officer to carry out a review of our strategy for the supply of food, because I believe we only hold about 3 days' supply in the Island?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

Yes, the strategy is regularly reviewed, but I think it might be in the interests of Members to publish that, at least in general form, for the benefit and information of Members and I will see if that can be done.

6.8 The Deputy of St. Martin:

The Chief Minister earlier this morning said during question time that he and an external officer adviser carry out appraisals on the Chief Executive Officer. At the last appraisal was the matter of the Chief Executive Officer's shredding of the notes taken at the suspension of the Police Chief Officer discussed? If so, what was the external adviser's reaction?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I do not believe it was, no. It is not something which would have concerned me in terms of the performance of the Chief Executive, who I believe ... that is something which had been perfectly well explained and did not require the advice of an expert consultant.

6.9 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

The Chief Minister mentioned about his talks in Gibraltar, could he please elaborate on talks that he has been having with the Isle of Man and Guernsey regarding corporation tax. We know that Guernsey is also proposing ... Sorry, just repeat it, yes. Could the Chief Minister please tell us about the talks that he has had with the other Islands regarding corporation tax, especially as the Isle of Man is also reviewing it and Guernsey is supposed to be moving to 10 per cent and you mentioned Gibraltar going down to 10 per cent.

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

If the Deputy had been at the presentation given to States Members yesterday, he would have learnt that the Isle of Man, Guernsey and Jersey have been talking on a very frequent basis about

the corporate tax proposals for each of the Islands. Both Jersey and Guernsey worked closely together and issued consultation papers at the same time on the future of corporate taxes in the Crown Dependencies. Guernsey has indicated a direction in which they would like to go, if all things were equal. Jersey has set out a number of different possibilities and examples for ways to go forward. We will make up our mind on the basis of informed consultation, together with the assessment which we will have later on in the year.

6.9.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Could the Minister say that if, for example, Jersey was not happy with the course that Guernsey or the Isle of Man were taking, we would go it alone or do you think, competitively, it is not a situation we could tolerate?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

That is very much a hypothetical question at this stage. The desire of the 3 Crown Dependencies is to have a united front and go forward with a common approach. We will have to wait and see whether we can achieve that objective. I certainly hope we can because, from an international competitive point of view, that is the sort of thing which our customers would expect to see. But I do appreciate that there are different circumstances in Jersey, Guernsey and Isle of Man, which may make some nuances to the overall system within which we work. Just as at the present time there are slight nuances between Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man's version of Zero/Ten arrangements.

6.10 Deputy C.H. Egré of St. Peter:

At a previous Chief Minister's question time, then answered by the Minister for Treasury and Resources, in the Chief Minister's absence, I did ask about the availability of the reports on previous airport emergency exercises. Regretfully, I have heard nothing since. Could he please allow me the privilege of reviewing those reports so one can look at lessons learnt?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I have to apologise to the Deputy of St. Peter, I was not aware that that question had been asked in my absence. I will look back at the transcript of those questions and see what can be provided as soon as possible.

6.11 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

I wonder if the Chief Minister, wearing his Minister for Emergencies' hat, can tell us whether or not the siren that used to sound regularly on a Monday morning has been done away with in favour of using a mobile phone system to alert people as to a disaster? I ask that because normally mobile phone networks are the first things that are shut down in disasters.

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

The short answer is that the siren, to my knowledge, has been made obsolete. I do not know if it has been removed. I know it is not in operation any further and has been replaced by alternative methods which have been deemed to be more appropriate in reaching a wider community more quickly.

6.11.1 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

May I ask the Chief Minister to give way for a second just to press then, because I certainly believe it is mobile phones? Would he undertake to investigate the fact that mobile phone networks are the first things that are shut down and we have moved to a position which is untenable?

[12:15]

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

The Deputy makes an allegation there about mobile networks being the first thing to be shut down. If that were the case I would be concerned, but I have no information to suggest that that is indeed the case.

The Deputy Bailiff:

That brings question time to an end.