

2.8 Deputy M.R. Higgins of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding data relative to archive storage across States departments:

Following his response to a written question on 19th January 2010, would the Minister outline what significant resources would be required to furnish me with the data relating to archived storage across States departments and advise when he would be able to provide the information requested?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf (The Minister for Treasury and Resources):

The Deputy seeks information on both the amount of archive space being rented each year and the cost this storage is to the States. There are many obvious locations used to house public records, however many exist in rooms and locations across the whole of the States of Jersey and to locate and quantify all of these would not be a simple task by any measure, and would require many hours of work if we are to give an accurate picture. The Deputy further asks me to provide the charges for the movement, maintenance, and retrieval of material. Just as I have to say to the Deputy of St. John in relation to bottles of water, unsurprisingly, we do not currently routinely analyse out financial data against these headings. To do so would require a search of systems and, again, the hours taken to do this would be difficult to quantify without embarking on the exercise itself. It is not my intention to immediately ask officials to embark on this significant piece of work unless there is an obvious benefit and payback to do so.

2.8.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

The Minister has extolled the importance of making savings in the public sector. This is quite an obvious area where money is being spent. Many departments have archive stores around the Island, in fact I have spoken to one or 2 Ministers about their archive stores and they did not even realise they had them. Now, the point is, money is being spent to store documents or furniture or whatever at great expense to the public, and if Ministers do not know, they should know. Therefore, I would say to the Minister, is he not misleading the public when he says he is serious about finding waste in the public sector? All he has to do is send an email to each department. They should know their contracts, they should know what storage they have.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I am serious about waste and I am serious about concentrating resources in the direction that is likely to yield the biggest types of saving. If the Deputy has real, hard evidence that there is inappropriate or excessive use of storage and archive equipment or facilities across the States of Jersey then I will have it looked into. But I am afraid to say that I think that there are other higher priority areas of expenditure and analysis and data that need to be collected before focusing on data archive. I simply do not want to ask departments to go on a wild goose chase in order to give an accurate - because we would only give an accurate answer - to the question that says: "Will the Minister provide all the data in relation to archive storage?" I cannot see the point when there are obvious savings elsewhere that need to be focused on.

[11:00]

2.8.2 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Can I remind the Minister that the first Shadow Scrutiny review conducted by Deputy Southern's panel, which I sat on, was to do with the Tourism Office relocation and as a part of that relocation there was significant storage of archiving materials from that

building into sheds in the countryside as part of the lease. This was conducted by W.E.B (Waterfront Enterprise Board). Surely when we are going to rationalise the use of States buildings and consolidate and save money in that regard, these issues will come into effect. Therefore, it is certainly reasonable to start to accumulate this information so that a better understanding of the archiving needs and requirements of the States is there for us to put into play and to measure against when we are asked to consolidate these States buildings as part of the new son of W.E.B., or whatever it is going to be called. Does the Minister not agree, now that I have refreshed his memory on that particular piece of work which was part of the lease?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I agree. I think that there are very significant efficiencies and savings and reduction in space that can happen across the organisation. But it is not only archive storage, it is office space. There is a generous per square foot allocation of office space across the States of Jersey. We regularly see States offices being inefficiently configured in traditional formats that are a relic of the 1960s and 70s in terms of their layout. It is a determination to deal with the really big issues of office and accommodation efficiency that I want to focus on rather than just simply focusing on archive and storage. If there are some departments, and I know that there are some and I am asking questions about the amount of archive storage to try and get an understanding... if there is a point that the Deputy is making, and there is a problem... for example, at Planning and Environment to see particularly if there is a particular archive issue there. But to do it across the organisation is simply not efficient, but I agree with the Deputy.

2.8.3 The Deputy of St. Mary:

It raises the question of the proper management of the archive of the States which is a very valuable historical resource, as well as being a useful resource in its own right. The Minister has just mentioned planning and quite clearly you must have not only an archive but a proper searchable well-functioning archive. I understand the difficulties he has outlined but I am worried that he has not once mentioned the word Jersey Archive where there are professionals whose life is to look after archives, to catalogue them and to make sure that they work and that they are accessible and that they are stored in the smallest possible space. So would the Minister not agree that there is possibly a role in this area for the Jersey Archive?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I agree. The archive is an important facility that can be used in order to keep public records. The archive currently holds 480 cubic metres of public records belonging to public authorities across the Island. To ensure that these records are properly kept we allocate ... to provide those services in the private sector would cost around £140,000 a year, whereas the archive, under the service level agreement with Jersey Heritage, as I understand it, provides that facility. They are good at providing that facility and if their expertise and if their space can be used more by other States departments then we will encourage it.

2.8.4 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

I am amazed at this talk of archiving. Is it not time we got into the 21st century and scanned all documents as they came into the States?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I could not agree more, and that is exactly why we are going to be looking at process re-engineering across the organisation in terms of the comprehensive spending review. Where an electronic copy of a record can be kept, it should be, and it will certainly reduce cost and archive storage which Deputy Higgins is concerned about.

2.8.5 The Deputy of St. Mary:

Yes, that exactly; the answer of the Minister there to Senator Ferguson's question exactly points out the need for the involvement of people who know and are professionals in the field of archiving. It just seems to me, as we have now learnt, that they do a job that is worth £140,000 with respect to a few records - 480 cubic metres of them - for nothing. That is in itself a question. But would the Minister not agree that there is a synergy here to be had and there must be a better way of doing this?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I am more than happy to ask Property Holdings to consider using the Jersey Archive more appropriately. That £140,000 figure was just simply the cost of providing the storage. They provide an additional approximately £200,000 worth of advice in relation to the advice on storage, the transferring, the cleaning of records, the repackaging of records and also opening the facility for 3 days a week to the public. So they provide a great deal of benefit to the public in excess of £140,000.

2.8.6 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I have another reason for asking the question. Part of it is - in fact it has been alluded to by Senator Ferguson and the Deputy for St. Mary - it is the idea of digitising archives and so on. I am very concerned that the States will this year be debating a Freedom of Information Law ...

The Bailiff:

Deputy, I am sorry, this is question time.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Okay. We have a Public Records Law; we have a Freedom Information Law that is going to be introduced; States departments have records scattered all over the place, they do not know what they have got. They should be digitising it, they should be dealing with this. We cannot ... does the Minister not agree that departments should not be allowed time when the Freedom Information Law comes in, to claim that they have got to get their records in order if they do not know what records they have got and where they are and digitise them?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Well at least I understand now the background of the reason for the question. The reason for the question is a forerunner to the Freedom of Information Law and I understand exactly now where the Deputy is coming from. I am happy to look at the issue of digitising records. Clearly, in the Freedom of Information Law, if it is brought in - it depends how it is brought in - there will be a requirement for States departments to release information. Clearly, in the longer term, it is important that we do digitise information because that is going to keep it in a cheaper, but also perhaps a more secure way and a more accessible way in the longer term.