

4.14 The Deputy of St. John of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding applications for stimulus funding:

Does the Minister consider that the grants for a new visitors centre at Durrell was money well spent at a time when taxpayers are tightening their belts and will he undertake to bring future applications for stimulus funding to the Assembly for approval before any more contracts are granted and if not, why not?

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

Proposals by departments were well in excess of the £44 million approved by the Assembly for fiscal stimulus. The Fiscal Stimulus Steering Group evaluation procedure has made sure that only projects that fulfil the fiscal stimulus criteria of targeted, timing and temporary are allocated funding. This particular project represents a tourism-focused public-private partnership between Economic Development and Durrell and achieves a 100 per cent multiplier on the States of Jersey spend of £1.5 million. It will give a significant boost to the construction industry by releasing £3 million which, in the absence of matched funding, would not take place. The project will deliver a visitors centre which will allow Durrell to maximise its revenues, help boost this important tourism site and, therefore, benefiting the whole Island. The Assembly delegated governance of the fiscal stimulus plan to the Minister for Treasury and Resources. I have, in turn, set up the Fiscal Stimulus Steering Group which is chaired by the Chief Executive to the Council of Ministers and comprises the Treasurer of the States and the Economic Adviser. It is not appropriate, therefore, for any contracts relating to specific projects, most of which have already now been made, to be brought back to this Assembly but what I should say is that I have shared decisions on fiscal stimulus with the Council of Ministers before making them and indeed I have shared the decisions with the Corporate Affairs Scrutiny Panel, too.

4.14.1 The Deputy of St. John:

Will the Minister explain why the extension of £3 million is required, given there is currently a restaurant and a 25 year-old visitors centre at Durrell, and does he not believe demolishing something that is only 25 years old is not a good way of spending public money or, even if it is only part - 50 per cent of it - it is not a good way of spending that money because extensions and the like could have been added at a far less figure?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The Deputy is, I am sure, aware of Durrell and its important work that it does locally and internationally. Indeed Durrell set out a much larger vision of what they wanted to do in terms of an expansion plan but, because of the difficulties in global financial markets and fundraising, it has not been possible. This is designed, as I understand it (and it is some months since I have seen the plans) to reformat the whole arrangement for a visitor at Durrell; putting a restaurant facility on the car-park which people will be able to visit instead of going straight through the grounds. It is designed to attract more people. I think it is a very good example of money which has been doubled by the States' investment for fiscal stimulus. I should also say that, with Deputy Gorst yesterday, I held a discussion with some leading members of what should be properly referred to as the third sector in Jersey, and we undervalue the third sector, which Durrell is a very good example, I think at our peril. They are an important part of jobs and providing Island life. **[Approbation]**

4.14.2 Deputy D.J. De Sousa of St. Helier:

Does the Minister not concur with me that Durrell and the work that they do is invaluable and that we need to support them and continue to? **[Approbation]**

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I absolutely concur with that and I think that the difficulty that we face is how we help and how we build capacity for such organisations such as Durrell. Durrell would not have had this money, of which they have had money in the past for some of their previous facilities, and they would not be in the very fortunate position that they are in with the good work that they do without States assistance in the past. If it were not for fiscal stimulus money we would not be able to take them, hopefully, on to the next level. They have suffered because of the tourism decline but I share the Deputy's sentiments.

4.14.3 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

As the Minister has said, fiscal stimulus projects had to be timely, targeted and temporary. Why has he funded Jersey Finance officers in China and the Advance to Work Scheme at Highlands College, both of which will require ongoing expenditure from the Economic Development Department and the Education, Sport and Culture Department?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The Deputy highlights 2 excellent schemes from fiscal stimulus. Advance to Work has put in and given young people - over 100 young people - opportunities to get into the workplace. It has been such a success due to the credit of Education and Social Security and the Skills Board with Economic Development that they want to replicate it. That is a good thing. We have problems with under-24s unemployment and we need to focus resources to it. Unfortunately that recurring funding is not going to be available from fiscal stimulus but no doubt departments are thinking about how they can re-prioritise that money to direct money on an ongoing basis into Advance to Work-type schemes. In relation to finance, I ask the Deputy to look at the labour market report. Look at how many jobs have been left out of finance and, while we are confident that Jersey has a strong future in financial services, just how much work we have to do to ensure that that industry grows. He does not agree with growing business in Asia and the Middle East. I do and I think that is where the future growth is going to happen, which is why I have got money.

4.14.4 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Sir, with respect, he is putting words in my mouth. First of all, I have no problem with the particular schemes. What I am showing is the inconsistency in the policy of the Minister in terms of timely, targeted and temporary. He did not follow his own prescription.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The Deputy is wrong. Fiscal stimulus is one-off funding. If the department thinks that the scheme requires ongoing funding after the fiscal stimulus money has been withdrawn then they have to reallocate from their own department. I think Economic Development is doing the right thing for building the finance sector of the future for 2020 and 2025 in the growing markets of the world. Fiscal stimulus has provided the first part of that funding and that is a good thing.

4.14.5 The Deputy of St. John:

It is claimed that a Lear jet is parked at the airport, purported to belong to the directors of the zoo. Possibly keeping a jet on-Island could be rather extravagant, to the detriment of Jersey taxpayers having to fund extensions.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I have previously referred to the ... I will not use the actual word but the group that the Deputy has, which is beginning with B: "B All To Do Club" and he is remarkably well informed sometimes but sometimes he also should not, I think, perhaps, cast aspersions - and I am not sure whether he was - in relation to senior people within Durrell. I hope he was not. Durrell is a charitable trust which has a separate governance body which is chaired independently by some significantly experienced Islanders and I would have thought that that gives Members and the Deputy every confidence that the financial probity within Durrell is at the highest level.

The Deputy Bailiff:

In case the expression should gain any sort of credence with Members, I do not regard a "B All To Do Club" as a parliamentary expression. We now come to question 15, which Deputy Trevor Pitman will ask of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture.