

3.12 Deputy S. Pitman of St. Helier of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding the Central Market Post Office

Would the Minister inform Members whether the 2 members of staff of the former Central Market Post Office, who had not found alternative jobs by 30th June 2010, have been asked to remain at the Market Post Office until 30th October 2010, and, if not, would the Minister advise who will be staffing the sub-post office until it closes and why?

Deputy E.J. Noel (Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources - rapporteur):

I must point out that the States of Jersey is a shareholder in Jersey Post and under the Memorandum of Understanding the States does not directly control internal resourcing decisions of this nature and nor should it. However, Jersey Post have advised the Minister that the closure of the Central Market Post Office impacted on 2 members of their staff. Both these staff members were employed under fixed-term contracts. These contracts expired on 30th June and they are no longer employed by Jersey Post. In the interim, until Jersey Post ends its lease, the Central Market Post Office will almost likely continue to be resourced by staff from the Broad Street Post Office.

3.12.1 Deputy S. Pitman:

Would the Minister inform Members when he found out that the lease for the sub-post office was up on 30th October?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I personally found out about that at a meeting I held with Jersey Post and my fellow Assistant Minister Deputy John Le Fondré some 2 weeks ago now.

3.12.2 Deputy S. Pitman:

There were 2 members of staff who had found work and 2 members who had not. Why could Jersey Post not offer jobs to those members of staff who were still there? Also, does he not think it inappropriate that this decision to extend the lease, or the finding out that the lease was over on the 30th, and informing the public that this should have been 2 members already working in the post office as soon as possible, because they had found alternative jobs at the very last minute?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I do not believe that it is this House's position to incur its might to interfere with a State-owned business. Jersey Post has to be the ruler of its own day-to-day destiny. With regard to the terms that the former post office staff were under, they were under fixed-term contracts that were due to expire at the end of June and have done so.

3.12.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Will the Minister confirm that 2 of the members of staff, one of whom had been working there for 20 years and there had been another working there for 9 years, both received only the equivalent of 2 weeks' pay when their contracts terminated? Secondly, would the Assistant Minister give an undertaking to talk to Jersey Post and ask why redundancies were made when the post was still carrying on and to ask if this is best practice and then report back to the House?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I believe that Jersey Post made their decisions based on inaccurate information. They believe that they could close the post office on 30th June which coincided with the dates that the contracts of their staff expired. I believe Jersey Post made an error there because they should have understood what was in their lease that they had signed which meant that they had to keep the post office open until October.

3.12.4 Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour:

The Assistant Minister commented that as a shareholder it is not appropriate for the States to get involved in operational matters of a company. However, would the Assistant Minister help the same company if the business goes into a nosedive and will the Assistant Minister acknowledge that from time to time it might be appropriate for the shareholders to get involved if the operations were not being as successful as they should be or the company was not being well managed?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

The shareholders have certain obligations and one of those obligations is to consider its investment. If it becomes appropriate that there is a deficit in management then it is up to the shareholder to exert pressure on the board to change that management. I do not believe that that is relevant in this case.

3.12.5 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Now this follows on exactly from Deputy Tadier and Deputy Maçon. I have the ear of lots of people who work in Jersey Post and I think Treasury, and if not careful, Economic Development are trying to get rid of Jersey Post by stealth [**Approbation**] and if some serious talking does not go on, they can bury their heads in the sand, they are in trouble. The Assistant Minister will not admit this but would he ensure that he talks to the Minister for Treasury and Resources, who has promised me that he will make further investigations, because this is exactly what is happening?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I do not believe that the Minister for Treasury and Resources, nor indeed the Minister for Economic Development, are actively or inactively seeking to terminate the services of the Jersey Post Office; far from it. The truth of the matter is exactly the opposite is going on. Postal services throughout the world are changing and are under immense pressure. The old models are not necessarily sustainable for the future given the current financing of such services. We are, within Treasury, and I know the Economic Development Department, are actively working with the post office to ensure that we have a service that the public want and that it is sustainable going forward.

3.12.6 Deputy S. Pitman:

In fact, I believe that the closure of the sub-post office has been conducive to the opening of one in the Co-op which is taking over all the sub-post offices and it does seem to be a policy of Jersey Post. Does the Minister think it appropriate still, given the level, the years of service and the fact that this post office won awards for its customer service, and also the fact that it has made a profit? Despite what the Minister for Treasury and Resources has said twice in the House, this sub-post office is one of 2 out of 22 in the Island that is making a profit, so why its closure?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

The closure of the Central Market Post Office is part of Jersey Post restructuring to ensure that they have a sustainable future in providing postal services to the public of the Island. They are looking at many ways of replacing the historical post office network which is including liaisons with the Parish Halls and, indeed, the Town Hall to provide postal services at those locations to give Islanders a greater choice. As I mentioned before, postal services throughout the world are having to re-evaluate how they deliver their services.