

4. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Chief Minister

The Bailiff:

Very well, that brings questions to the Minister for Treasury and Resources to an end. We now move to questions to the Chief Minister. The Constable of St. John.

4.1 The Connétable of St. John:

Can I ask the Chief Minister whether the Island will be doing anything to commemorate the Great War of 1914-1918 given the U.K. Government have set aside £50 million to cover this historic period of their history and our history. Given many Islanders fought and died on the battlefields of the Somme and the Western Front, will we be doing anything to commemorate that? At the same time, if we do, will we be including our European friends who live on-Island, given that some 3,000 French people at the time were on-Island working within mainly agriculture and other areas and 3,000 of them were called up...

The Bailiff:

Connétable, I am going to have to cut you short; that is a very long question. Questions must be concise, please.

Senator I.J. Gorst (The Chief Minister):

I think the simple answer is yes. As the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture has indicated in a written answer this morning, they are already working on that and they are liaising with your own Chamber, Sir. I expect that in due course you will be setting up the usual type of committee to oversee and co-ordinate the events of celebration.

The Connétable of St. John:

I thank the Minister for his reply.

4.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Let us hope we get equally brief answers. Has the U.K. asked Jersey to move to full automatic exchange under the European Union Savings Directive: yes or no? What was the Minister's response: yes or no?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Of course, the U.K. and the European Union have requested that members who are signed up to the E.U. Savings Tax Directive go to automatic exchange. The reason, while we agree in principle and are committed to that principle, we are still awaiting for a final date of conversion to come from the E.U. in that regard.

4.2.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Has the U.K. also asked Jersey for a F.A.T.C.A. (Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act) equivalent agreement like with the U.S.A. (United States of America) to provide the same information to the U.K.: yes or no? What was his answer: yes or no?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I am not sure whether the Deputy would prefer to answer the questions he has put to me or he wants my answer. He seems to be indicating how I ought to be answering. As he knows, and as I answered in a written question to him at the last sitting, we are in negotiations with the U.S. Government around a F.A.T.C.A. agreement in co-ordination with the other 2 Crown Dependencies. Of course, the United Kingdom are themselves exploring whether a similar agreement could be entered into with the Crown Dependencies, as are O.E.C.D. (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and the E.U. Officers are in conversations to understand exactly what that might be. Thank you.

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4.3 Deputy T.A. Vallois:

Could the Chief Minister confirm or otherwise that the current Council of Ministers are working to the social policy framework agreed by the first Council of Ministers in 2007? If so, will he be considering any change to it during his time?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Yes and yes.

4.4 Connétable J. Gallichan of St. Mary:

Is the Chief Minister convinced that the Council of Ministers is effective in providing joined-up government responsive to the Island's needs? To illustrate my concerns, I would cite the current wrangle over the deployment of the Bouley Bay raft at a really almost insignificant cost when other agencies are calling for increased facilities for tourists and locals alike. Are we still working *en solo*?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I am proud of the way that we as a Council of Ministers and Assembly have worked together over the course of the last year and I hope that we will continue along that same road. We are working better and in a more joined-up approach than we ever, I believe, have done before. Is there room for improvement along the lines that the Connétable is suggesting? I have no doubt that there is and it is on my agenda just to ask the Minister for Economic Development, whose remit I believe this falls under, to perhaps review that particular decision as another Member has already approached me about that this morning.

The Connétable of Trinity:

The person who had asked the Chief Minister was myself so I will not ask my question. He knows what I wish.

4.5 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

The Department of the Environment yesterday proposed to enforce energy efficiency on the Island through fiscal policy. While it is hoped there will be encouragement rather than charges, governments being what they are, there will no doubt be increased charges. How will the Chief Minister curb the enthusiasm to create yet another cash cow?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The question arose at the briefing yesterday when the energy policy was launched and I simply say that the Department of the Environment and the officers have done a lot of good work in finally bringing forward a document that can be consulted upon and I hope drive forward our energy policy for the next 20 to 50 years. So the question arose from the floor around fiscal incentives and it was not perhaps in the way that the Senator outlined; it was more whether people who had fuel and energy-efficient homes should receive a rebate or a reduced rate. There was no Connétable presence at that briefing. I am sure we would have had an interesting debate if they had been present. But as the Senator also knows the Treasury and Resources Department is looking at property taxes in the round and I think this is something that should be included in that because it is about delivering changed behaviour and providing a carrot rather than the stick that she indicated.

4.5.1 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Does the Chief Minister consider that using fiscal means to force behavioural change to conform to his idea of the norm is the way to govern?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

First of all, I would say not “force” but “encourage” and I would say that it is not simply my idea and it is rather disingenuous for the Senator to suggest that. It was of course raised from the floor of that presentation yesterday. But it is, we must not forget, to a large extent an accepted way of government encouraging positive outcomes. Perhaps we could simply look at the way that we deal with cigarette sales and the duty there.

4.6 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Could the Chief Minister clarify why the Plémont proposal is now in his name as Chief Minister and not his Assistant Minister’s, which I think was very much his personal - I will not say “hobby-horse” - but I think you know the gist. If the Minister has changed his mind since the vote last time, what changed his mind as to now supporting this decision? Maybe he did not; I cannot remember, to be honest.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

May I be absolutely clear, on every single previous occasion while I have been sitting in this Assembly that the issue of Plémont has come to this Assembly for a decision, I have voted - and I am proud of my voting record - to return it to public ownership and to remove the eyesore that is there now at the headland. I know that the Deputy does not like my consensual form of government. I believe that I am supported and I work with 2 very effective Assistant Ministers. When I was newly-elected to this office and they were newly-appointed as Assistant Ministers just under a year ago, we had a conversation in one of our normal meetings.

[11:45]

I asked, and we agreed, that my Assistant Minister would go away and try and give effect to what it was that this Assembly had asked the previous Chief Minister to achieve. Therefore, we are absolutely united; there is no surprise that this proposition should be in my name. In the proposition I say that I am grateful to my Assistant Minister who, I fully admit, has done a lot of the work and a lot of the negotiation, but it has always been undertaken with my blessing, with my approval. I hope that this Assembly will decide to vote to return that headland to nature once and for all for the benefit of future generations. **[Approbation]**

4.6.1 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

The Chief Minister says he has always supported the move for Plémont and I respect that. However, does he not think anything has changed given that we cannot even give public sector workers adequate pay, *et cetera*; things show no sign of getting better? Is there not money that needs to be spent on other things, as much as I supported Plémont last time myself?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I have stood in and sat in this Assembly and heard Members of this Assembly say that we could not possibly purchase the headland via a compulsory mechanism because market values were so high. It would cost us so much we could not possibly warrant the expenditure and that was in good times when we were not facing the difficulties that we do today. Now when I believe that that piece of land can be purchased for a smaller cost, and no doubt we are going to debate that in due course, I am being told that now is not the right time because we cannot even afford that reduced amount. There will always be, as we know, some pressing opportunity today, some issue that we feel we should spend the money on today which might give short-term benefit. This is a decision that we can make later this year that I believe when look at in 5 or 10 years’ time we will not even be asking ourselves was it worthwhile. It will be absolutely accepted that it was the right thing to do because we will have safeguarded part of our heritage, part of our nature and part of our culture. It is absolutely the right thing to do, to be making decisions in the long-term best interests, not only of this generation, but future generations.

4.7 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Is the Chief Minister aware of the discussions in the United Kingdom for the adoption of a living wage as opposed to a minimum wage, for example, Boris Johnson seeking £8.20 per hour in London? Does he not think, as Jersey's cost of living is equivalent to London, that we should adopt the equivalent living wage and thus help those on lower incomes and stimulate the economy?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The Deputy raises a very good point and he is right that there is a living wage calculation done in the United Kingdom which is followed by some businesses in the capital. I heard a number of weeks ago a most interesting interview with a business owner in the capital and how he felt that that benefited his business. It is a very difficult area. We have the employment forum who are independent of the States, who come forward and consider what the appropriate minimum wage should be. If we did wish to consider a living wage - and I know that it was partially considered while I was Minister for Social Security - then the appropriate body, I believe, to undertake that consideration would be the employment forum. But of course what we have to also bear in mind is that if we raise salaries too much, then we create even more unemployment and we reduce economic growth. What that means is that the economy continues to struggle and will not grow and that is something which we must be mindful of in all these deliberations.

4.8 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Could I ask the Chief Minister because of his comments, will he ask the States Statistics Office to calculate what a living wage would be in Jersey and inform Members?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

As I have indicated, I think the appropriate body to consider it would be the employment forum, rather than doing a theoretical calculation which would not take into account the economic circumstances of our community.

4.9 Connétable D.J. Murphy of Grouville:

At a recent meeting of the British-Irish Parliamentary Association in Glasgow, I found that I again had to refute suggestions that Jersey is in fact a tax haven. When I pointed out to the members that in fact we had received a cheque for \$2 million from the New York Attorney General, together with a letter of commendation for our help in winding up a money-laundering ring, I was then told: "Why are you not plastering that on the walls?" Can I ask the Chief Minister if he could ask the Communications Unit to perhaps communicate more and to communicate more with people in power in the U.K. and the Islands?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

It sounds to me as though the Connétable is wholly in favour and I look forward to him speaking later with regard to the establishment of a London office which is part of the Medium-Term Financial Plan, the aim of which is to do exactly that which he has outlined we should be doing. Let us not forget we are liaising more and more, undertaking more and more visits to the United Kingdom, to various ambassadors to the Court of St. James and having visits also in Jersey. We are doing more than we ever did but we recognise that more must be done because we must ensure that people understand what Jersey does, the benefits that it provides to the United Kingdom economy and to the city. We have more work to do and we believe that that is a strong reason why Members should be supporting over the next few days the creation and the funding of a London office.

The Bailiff:

Very well, I am afraid that brings questions to the Chief Minister to an end. Before we move on, can I just inform Members that 2 matters have been presented to them. R.136: Land Transactions under Standing Order 168(3) Chez Marguerite Day Care Centre, 3 Elizabeth Place, St. Helier disposal and Medium-Term Financial Plan - third amendment comments by the Council of Ministers.