

## **Questions to the Minister without notice - The Chief Minister**

### **The Bailiff:**

Very well, that brings questions to the Minister for Home Affairs to a close so we move now to questions to the Chief Minister.

### **4.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:**

Given the concerns that were raised earlier about a media consultant that was employed, I wondered if the Chief Minister could inform the House how much he is in control of the use of the Information Department and particularly when, as we know with information, it sometimes spills over into spin? How much is the Chief Minister consulted about initiatives in that area?

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

I wonder if the Deputy could clarify what he means by the Information Department because, of course, I.T. (Information Technology) areas are now referred to Information Systems Department or is he talking about the Communications Department?

### **Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:**

Yes, the Communications Department.

### **Senator I.J. Gorst:**

I am not sure that that has anything to do with the answer that I gave in relation to the question asked of me by Deputy Higgins. Of course, the Communications Department is a central department, the oversight is from my department and that is right and proper. Each department, however, does and can feed into that department for help with their individual communication strategies normally around particular initiatives that they might be undertaking.

### **4.1.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:**

Supplementary. Could the Chief Minister inform us, is he asked for advice on how a story should be presented to the public?

### **Senator I.J. Gorst:**

Am I asked for advice in my role as Chief Minister potentially by other Ministers? Yes, I am. As one would expect we try to have a collegiate approach across the Council of Ministers involving the Communications Department because we recognise that in the past Government has not necessarily been good at communicating. Good communication is important. Of course, what we must guard against is what has become known as spin because I do not think that helps, but good appropriate communication is absolutely fundamental.

### **4.2 Deputy T.A. Vallois:**

Is the Chief Minister satisfied with the current H.R. (Human Resources) policy? What support is he providing to the newly appointed H.R. Director to address the problems that are ongoing and that he is not left fire fighting like the last director?

### **Senator I.J. Gorst:**

That is a very good question. Inevitably, when a Minister moves into a new department that Minister sees areas which need improvement, potentially a resource and people allocation. No doubt the Minister for Social Security is saying the same about his department. But it has become apparent to me in very early course that one of the areas that I am going to need to concentrate on throughout the next 3 years strongly is the area of human resource. I have asked for some work to be undertaken and uniquely, perhaps, in Ministerial government, it is an area which is appropriately also covered by a committee, that committee is the States Employment Board. I want to work closely with the States Employment Board to make sure that it is properly resourced; that we have

got the right people in the right places because I am afraid to say it is my opinion that it is far from fit for purpose as it stands. I believe that, perhaps, if we put much resource in, we have the right people in the right places, then in the long run that is going to save us a lot of money and it is going to have a much more motivated workforce that we can rely on. Thank you.

#### **4.3 Deputy J.H. Young:**

Given our dependence on the finance industry and the damaging effects of uncertainty for the future and pressures from ... uncertainty of Zero/Ten, attacks from the U.K. Members of Parliament and Eurozone, can the Minister outline to the Assembly what are his thoughts on developing long term strategy? Have we, for example, got a think tank of local experts and practitioners that he, his Assistant Ministers and officers are working on to try and provide a framework for a route out, if there is one, of the uncertainty?

#### **Senator I.J. Gorst:**

If I had a magic wand to remove uncertainty from the future that, I believe, would be a very valuable tool. I do not have such an instrument. However, I do not believe that uncertainty can be viewed from 2 directions. First of all I do not think that Zero/Ten is, any longer, uncertain. The E.U. Code Group, as I have mentioned earlier today, has said that our provisions and our Zero/Ten is not harmful and thereby removing uncertainty. Of course, there is great uncertainty across the Eurozone so the question is right in that respect. As that uncertainty continues, inevitably, other jurisdictions are looking, in one respect, for people or other jurisdictions to blame but also considering their own domestic legislation and how they might make changes to that and that, of course, may have effect upon us. I said in answer to a question some moments ago, with regard to H.R. the issues that I was finding there, and although this is an area which is largely delegated to my Assistant Minister, with regard to international affairs there is also work that needs to be done there because it fits fairly and squarely in that area. We need to be getting out more. We need to be making representations to other jurisdictions, particular in the United Kingdom, in the European Union and further afield.

[12:15]

But I believe this uncertainty, perhaps he is talking about Vickers, comes with great opportunities for us as a jurisdiction. We have always, in the past, been nimble and sought to find new markets for the products that we are offering and the expertise that we have. We still have that expertise here and I believe that we can find new markets and we can meet those uncertainties in a way which will benefit the long term interests of our community. Sorry, I am aware that I have waffled on a bit there.

#### **The Bailiff:**

It was a very general question but I would invite both Members and Ministers to try and keep it concise.

#### **4.4 Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

My question is to do with the Committee of Inquiry into historic abuse brought successfully by Senator Le Gresley. Could the Chief Minister confirm that a proposal/suggestion was brought to the Council of Ministers by his Assistant Minister, Senator Bailhache, to scrap that Committee of Inquiry and, hopefully, confirm that the Council of Ministers will not be bowing to that?

#### **Senator I.J. Gorst:**

As the Deputy knows, the area of a Committee of Inquiry has been a difficult one. The previous Council of Ministers, of which I was a member, lodged a report suggesting that a Committee of Inquiry was not an appropriate way to proceed at that point. Senator Le Gresley lodged a proposition saying the reverse, that there should be a Committee of Inquiry. This Assembly agreed that there should be a Committee of Inquiry and instructed the Chief Minister and Council of

Ministers to come forward with terms of reference for that inquiry. Inevitably, some new Members of this Assembly will be of the opinion that a Committee of Inquiry is not necessary. Therefore, it is incumbent upon me as Chief Minister to come forward with terms of reference for that Committee of Inquiry. As I said, each Member will have to consider whether that is the appropriate way forward and I believe that that is right and proper. It should be in the hands of this Assembly to make that decision and not one individual Member. I suspect that, when I am in a position to lodge those terms of reference, they will potentially be amended and that is absolutely right and proper as well.

#### **4.4.1 Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

I think Senator Le Marquand said he was meeting the Chief Minister's Assistant Minister to do with this. So could the Chief Minister clarify what Senator Bailhache's role would be in this and would he not be conflicted?

#### **Senator I.J. Gorst:**

That appears to be a question for Senator Bailhache and not me. As I said, some new Members of the Assembly inevitably will not feel the Committee of Inquiry is the right way forward and others will remain of the view that, equally, they do not think it is the right way forward. As I have said, it is a difficult area. I am committed to bringing forward terms of reference for a Committee of Inquiry and I stand by that commitment that I gave.

#### **4.5 Deputy M. Tadier:**

Would the Chief Minister provide an estimate of how many jobs may be at risk in the finance industry should the British Government pursue the removal of the stamp duty loophole as recently reported in the *Times* and, I think it was yesterday, in the *J.E.P. (Jersey Evening Post)*?

#### **Senator I.J. Gorst:**

I must apologise, I was reading a note. Is the Deputy asking me to give an estimate of the number of jobs should the U.K. change their legislation when it comes to stamp duty?

#### **The Bailiff:**

Yes.

#### **Senator I.J. Gorst:**

I am not in a position to be able to do that. Inevitably those structures will be across a wide range of financial services firms and, as I said in answer to a question some moments ago, just because one piece of legislation changes it does not mean to say there are not opportunities elsewhere for those people who are employed by those financial services firms.

#### **4.5.1 Deputy M. Tadier:**

I appreciate the answer. First of all, will the Minister confirm that this is an area of concern for him? Given the significance and the implication if this does materialise any time soon, would the Minister consider making a statement to the House to reflect the seriousness of this state of affairs?

#### **Senator I.J. Gorst:**

I do not quite understand the Deputy's interpretation of the seriousness of the matter. It is not for me in my position in this Assembly to come forward making statements every time another jurisdiction might change its domestic legislation.

#### **4.6 Deputy M.R. Higgins:**

Can the Chief Minister confirm or deny that the former chief executive, who was reportedly paid £500,000 when he left the Island, threatened to take the States of Jersey to an industrial tribunal or

court on the grounds of constructive dismissal? If he can confirm this, can he also confirm that it was because of actions attributable to the Minister for Treasury and Resources?

**Senator I.J. Gorst:**

I have no knowledge of the matter to which the questioner refers.

**4.7 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Again, this is a “when” question and I am not having very good luck with those today. Every fortnight I rush down to the postman to get my States of Jersey Order Paper and turn to Section K: Statements of Matters of Official Responsibility. When will the Chief Minister bring to the House such a statement on what the co-ordinated plan is for dealing with unemployment on this Island, because I think we have waited long enough? He is been in the position for at least 2 months and we have seen nothing. Unemployment numbers, especially among the young, rise and rise and rise and we have no co-ordinated plan for dealing with that and making sure we do not have a lost generation. When will he come to the House with a co-ordinated plan?

**Senator I.J. Gorst:**

I thank the Deputy for his question. There is indeed a co-ordinated plan. The plan is more co-ordinated than it has ever been before and the Deputy will be aware of the public statements that I have made with regard to that plan. However, he should not ... and I believe it is inappropriate to try and indicate that things are going to suddenly get easier because we have a co-ordinated plan. I have been absolutely certain and clear that I am of the opinion that, unfortunately, the issue with regard to unemployment is inevitably going to worsen throughout the course of 2012. That does not mean that we should not continue to put in place appropriate proposals and programmes, as we are doing, in a co-ordinated fashion to ensure that we limit that growth in unemployment and, in due course, throughout the next 3 years and as part of the Strategic Plan, ensure that that number reduces. There is a co-ordinated plan. As I said, it is more co-ordinated than ever before and I hope that this Assembly will approve the Strategic Plan which has as one of its highest priorities getting people back to work.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

The Chief Minister just then went on to talk about the plan and talk about the Strategic Plan. Strategic Plans are not concrete and I do not see very much concrete activity on the part of the Council of Ministers for getting young people in particular back into meaningful work.

**The Bailiff:**

That was not a question, Deputy. What was your question?

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

You are right. I do apologise.

**4.8 The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Prior to the in committee debate on the Strategic Plan, will the Chief Minister provide States Members with not only a summary of the responses received up to that point from the public consultation but also information on the overall resources required to deliver that plan?

**Senator I.J. Gorst:**

A very good question from the Deputy of St. Ouen. I am not exactly sure of the timing. I believe that I could provide a summary of responses. To date there has been a steady response rate to the Strategic Plan. I cannot necessarily speak on behalf of Treasury, whether they will be in a position to have their resources statement fully prepared by that date, but I will certainly give an undertaking to ask them to endeavour to do so. Even if they cannot give a more detailed resource plan, I will ask them to try and provide a high level resource plan.