

2.5 Connétable P.J. Rondel of St. John of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding the maintenance budget for Plat Douet School:

Further to the report in the media on 20th October 2012 where a group of children were photographed near a gaping hole on decaying wooden decking at Plat Douet School, would the Minister advise what the maintenance budget is for this school, who is responsible for keeping the fabric of the school in good order and who inspects these structures?

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

I am delighted to answer a matter important to the Constable's heart. Jersey Property Holdings is responsible for maintaining the fabric of Plat Douet School and I am pleased to say has an allocated budget of £24,661 for 2012 for planned and routine maintenance. In the period since 2009, I can advise that Jersey Property Holdings has spent a total of £390,000 on all types of maintenance at this excellent school. In addition, the Education Department also holds a minor works budget that is used by the school for small-scale works and projects and in 2012, this budget was £22,745. I think the *J.E.P.* (*Jersey Evening Post*) article was somewhat unfortunate as I am advised that the damage to the decking only recently happened and that the only area, as misreported by the *J.E.P.*, was in fact the decking, not half the playground. The school had also not unfortunately contacted either Jersey Property Holdings or the Education Department over the matter. Had normal reporting processes been followed, this would have already been dealt with. The responsibility for the cost of the repair lies with the school, not with J.P.H. (Jersey Property Holdings) or the Education Department. Inspections are also carried out by both J.P.H. maintenance staff and by the school's caretaker. I can also advise that my Assistant Minister and I offered yesterday to go round and fix the hole if it had not already been dealt with.

2.5.1 The Connétable of St. John:

It would be interesting to see the Minister with a hammer and chisel in his hand. Given the Minister for Treasury and Resources sanctioned some months ago Jersey Telecom keeping certain fundings so as to invest in broadband, would it not have been better for that funding to go into the Exchequer so as to help fund all our existing infrastructure instead of adding more infrastructure to the Island's budget in the long term? Given that Telecom is wholly owned by the Island, and we are not maintaining our current budget - this proves it - as it should be, is he really happy that we have got this right?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The Connétable requires the Minister to answer the questions and, of course, Property Holdings are ably dealt with by Assistant Minister so I had to do a lot of work yesterday to understand all these issues. I have to say that I am very impressed with what I learned yesterday about the repairs and maintenance budgets. We can see here that Plat Douet School has got money allocated for preventative maintenance and reactive maintenance. I very much regret that a *J.E.P.* story which was designed to achieve, I think, other things, where a group of schoolchildren were used to try and make a political point about repairs and maintenance which I am afraid does not exist. There are good budget arrangements for preventative maintenance, so I have offered the Connétable if he wants to come and join me and take a trial of an iPad, I want to see iPads in schools across the Island. That is the kind of forward-looking world that we should be looking at. It is not the case any longer - and we are going to be discussing this in the Medium-Term Financial Plan - that repairs and maintenance are not sufficiently funded. It is properly funded and I am afraid the Connétable should not be drawn into a frankly *J.E.P.* improving circulation report in order to conclude that there is a problem with repairs and maintenance at Plat Douet School.

2.5.2 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

He has not been able to fix the “black hole” so I am not sure I have confidence that the Minister can even fix a hole in the floor. I was going to ask the Minister about this. I know journalism is a bit cynical but it does seem that this was a bit exploitative of children. I think he agrees with that so I probably have not really got a question as he has touched on it.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I do agree...

The Bailiff:

I am sorry, he did not ask a question. Deputy, this is question time.

Deputy T.M. Pitman.

Does the Minister think it was exploitative to have that story done in the way?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I think the Deputy, as I indicated, makes an important point. The One Foundation who were doing some fantastic work in allocating £10,000 to Island schools - and I have a list of all the projects - they have been made not because there is a problem with the maintenance, because schools have had, like Helvetia House, Mont à l'Abbé School, St. Christopher's School, St. Clement's School, St. Saviour's School, a number of exciting additional projects to include in their facilities. The One Foundation are doing great work but I think it is really unfortunate that schoolchildren were photographed looking at a hole in decking which is a small hole that could have been replaced. It could have been dealt with straight away by the arrangements that have been put in place and this story gave the impression of a misleading problem at Plat Douet School. It also inaccurately reported that half the playground had been shut off. That is not the case.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I thank my friend, the Minister, for his answer.

2.5.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

What mechanisms does the Minister have for perhaps speaking to the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture to make sure that funds are used to fill these kinds of health hazards first before we go issuing hand-held devices to primary school kids when they could easily fall over in that hole and break their hand-held devices and that would be a terrible waste of money? I am sure the Minister would agree.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I agree but really there will be, of course, a problem from time to time in the fabric of a school and, as I have indicated, there are sufficient resources both at Property Holdings and the Education, Sport and Culture Department for the school to ring the helpline and a problem will be fixed straight away. On this occasion, it did not happen and that is a matter of regret. No doubt the schoolteacher was trying obviously to get that £10,000 allocation from the One Foundation and perhaps they wanted to make a point, so I am not criticising the school, but there certainly is not an issue about the repairs and maintenance arrangements for our schools which have now been significantly strengthened. I have been impressed to learn all that I have done so in the last 24 hours by Property Holdings and what they have been doing to keep the fabric of our schools which is generally excellent in a good state of repair.

2.5.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Minister agree that if this newspaper article was not about some hole in decking that the *J.E.P.*, all of our media, could be full every day and every night with the results of the funding cuts? Because I have constituents in my district who have seen their social security cut for apparently no reason, who are so desperate - and this is right across the board in the States - and

they do not see any action taken when reasonable requests are made to the point that where they say: “Should I go to the media about this? I think this is the only way.” Does the Minister acknowledge that we have to have more joined-up Government, we have to target our funding more directly so that the public do not have to feel that the only option they have got is to blow the whistle in a very public way of what are shortcomings of this States Assembly?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

We are going to enter what I hope is going to be an excellent debate on the Medium-Term Financial Plan and we are going to be debating exactly how we should allocate resources over the next 3 years. This is not an example of a failure of a States department in terms of lack of funding. The Deputy raised a number of other important points and frankly if he is unhappy or was unhappy with the allocation of funding set out in the Medium-Term Financial Plan, then we should be debating amendments to that in order to effect to allocate where money where we are doing and the Medium-Term Financial Plan that we are going to go on to discuss is a plan about investment in public services.

2.5.5 Deputy T.A. Vallois of St. Saviour:

As in Housing, is there a decent standard in which Jersey Property Holdings have to ensure that schools are at an appropriate level of building maintenance? If so, are we at the appropriate levels?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I think that is an excellent question and I have certainly, as I say, examined yesterday with my Assistant Minister and got information from officials at Education and Property Holdings about whether or not the budget was available. If we take this case study for Plat Douet School, I have already mentioned the numbers and I think that £390,000 for this school on improvements and maintenance is, in fact, a pretty good figure. It also should be said that now Property Holdings are getting much better value for money out of not only the money that they are deploying but also getting in effectively the revised procurement arrangements. So if this is a case study, then this is a good issue and I think we can say that our schools generally, having had tens of millions of investment in recent years, are in a good state of repair and where they are not, in terms of St. Martin’s school, for example, we are correcting it.

[10:15]

2.5.6 The Connétable of St. John:

I am pleased to hear that the Minister has been doing a lot of research in this area because he will have seen a letter that I wrote to the Education Department at the early part of my term of office, just under a year ago, about maintenance at St. John’s school which I had to draw to their attention that needed doing. Therefore, he will have seen that letter so this is another one, another school in another part of the Island that has not had the maintenance. Will the Minister agree that by having raised this, it has brought to the fore to the Minister exactly what goes on within his department and that if he brushes up by having questions like this on all the other areas of his responsibility, it may help him to know exactly what is going on out there in the Island?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I am always happy. The area of Property Holdings has been deputed to Deputy Noel who is doing an excellent job in relation to this whole issue of reform in Property Holdings. **[Approbation]** I do not know what the Connétable’s point is. We have investigated a problem of an unreported piece of plank on a piece of decking.

The Bailiff:

Minister, I do not think you need to repeat what you have already said.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I do not think there is a problem so he is trying to get me to conclude that there was a problem when effectively I think I have explained quite clearly that in this case, there was not. If he has got any other problems, then please go to the Assistant Minister because he certainly will solve it.

Senator L.J. Farnham:

A very brief point of clarification, has the hole been fixed or not?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I am advised that as of yesterday, because it had not been reported, it had not been but if it has not by lunchtime, then the Assistant Minister and I will go down with our hammers and solve it ourselves.