

13. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Chief Minister

The Deputy Bailiff:

If Members agree, just in time, the Chief Minister has returned to take Question Time. It will take us beyond 5.30 p.m. but I am assuming that Members want to proceed in that way. The Chief Minister's questions are now open; I call on Deputy Trevor Pitman.

13.1 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I think it was 2 sittings ago that I was accused of bringing a malicious, fictitious document purporting to be an email from a constituent; basically that I and the constituent were liars. Could the Chief Minister at least inform the Assembly that he now knows that that person is not fictitious but is a real person who has requested to meet the Chief Minister with his travelling business partner who also saw the same things?

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

As Members will be aware, I, in my role as Chief Minister, have any number of confidential meetings where individuals wish to pass information to me and until I have undertaken such meetings I do not think it is right for me to talk about them in the public domain.

13.1.1 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

With due respect, I think the Chief Minister should be at least confirming if the gentleman has contacted him otherwise it really does look like he has got something to hide.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I do not believe I have anything to hide at all. I think it is right and proper that when a Minister is approached on a confidential matter and individuals have asked for matters to remain confidential it is not professionally correct for a Minister to talk about that publicly.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

With due respect, I was copied in and the Chief Minister knows that full well and the gentleman is very happy that his reputation is cleared.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I do not believe that was a question.

13.2 Deputy T.A. Vallois:

Could the Chief Minister advise what consultation the Treasury Department has with his department with regards to the Treasurer of the States advising the Council of Ministers?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

With regard to issues like that there is always consultation undertaken officer to officer. There was also a full and frank discussion around the Council of Ministers' table and as a result of that a number of issues were raised and further information was requested with regard to the amendments being proposed.

13.3 Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Regarding matters ongoing with the Dean and the Bishop of Winchester, would the Chief Minister release the terms of reference for Dame Heather Steel investigation into the Korris Review on safeguarding?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

They are terms of reference which are of a review which is instigated by the Dean. I have had other requests by the Bishop - it has been a long day, but perhaps not as long as it has been in here, however. I have asked my officers to inquire of the Bishop whether those terms of

reference can be made public and, as far as I am aware, I have not yet heard back why they have not been made public and whether they will be in the future.

13.3.1 Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Just obviously to emphasise, it is not only a matter of public interest but it is also relating to a Member of this Assembly so I would hope those terms of reference will be made public at some point.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

As I indicated, I have requested of the Bishop and his office that they are made public.

13.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I thought you had already seen me, Sir. Is the Minister aware of further aggressive tax avoidance cases reported in the *Guardian* and in *Accountancy Live* involving a company which is described as “Jersey-based N.T. Advisers” which H.M.R.C. (Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs) has taken out cases against in the previous week? If not, will he investigate the activities of this company said to be operating through SG Hambros Bank and report back to the House?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I am sure the Deputy means not “taken out” but win cases against such schemes and, as the Deputy will know if he has read around that issue, they are historic schemes and have not been involved with the Jersey Administrator Provider for a number of years. They were historic schemes. It does, however, take a number of years and take a great deal of time to bring such schemes through the court process and that is what we have seen, a successful completion of that in the last week.

13.5 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Following complaints to the Chief Executive, copied to the Chief Minister on 7th May regarding allegations of perverting the course of justice by the Chief Officer and Deputy Chief Officer of Police and others, has an external police force been appointed to investigate the allegations and if not, why not?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

One of the joys of modern transport is that one can listen to the radio and I did just that on the way from the airport to the States Assembly this afternoon. The report of the answer given to that question by the Minister for Home Affairs I fully agree with and can add nothing further to it in this matter.

13.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:

How pleasant it is to have the real Chief Minister back. Can he confirm the impression given by his Assistant Minister that Jersey has no population target at the moment, reduced from the previous immigration target of 250 heads of household?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The Deputy knows as well as every other Member in this Assembly that a population strategy policy, if I might use that word, was included in the Strategic Plan and that is the policy that the Migration Advisory Group have been working towards ever since and, in fact, prior to the approval of the Strategic Plan. The Deputy knows that there is no number attached but that Migration Advisory Group is being robust and being firm and, once again, the reports of the decision of this Assembly might infer that Members of this Assembly believe that we are being too robust with regard to control of population.

13.6.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

A point of clarification, if I may, is the Chief Minister saying that the 250 heads of household as a target for inward migration was never accepted by this House because I believe it did come to the House and was accepted by this House?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

There is no population number in the policy that is being followed by the Migration Advisory Group, as detailed in our Strategic Plan.

[17:30]

13.7 The Connétable of St. John:

Over the last couple of months we have had a number of French delegations attend the Island. I had sent an email to the Minister and he failed to give me a response. I suggested that given that we have a limited amount of French speakers within the Chamber that he should make use of the French speaking A.P.F (Assemblée Parlementaire de la Francophonie) members to assist the Council of Ministers when these delegations arrive. But I have not had a response. Could he respond now in public?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The Connétable makes a very good point and we do indeed endeavour to include French speakers in such delegations to make up for my woeful ability in French speaking. The Connétable is absolutely right and he will be aware that when the French Ambassador to the Court of St. James visited earlier this year we had a full States dinner and all States Members were invited to be a part of that event and to meet with that delegation. We try to include as many Members as we can because we recognise the importance of relationship building, not only with Ministers, but right across States Assembly Members.

13.7.1 The Connétable of St. John:

If I can come back in on that? There was a delegation, I think, last week or the week before from Normandy. How many non-Council Members from the A.P.F. attended, please?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I do not know, off the top of my head. It was a great privilege for me to welcome that delegation. The report that I have of it was that productive work was undertaken and again it was work being undertaken and this time not only with La Manche but the region as well and the Préfet, and we are building on that relationship and it is going in the right direction.

The Connétable of St. John:

He still has not answered my question. Could he answer how many non-Council Members were from the A.P.L.F.?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

If he is referring to non-Council of Ministers members, there were at least 2. But, as I say, I did not know the number of non-A.P.F. Members, which I think was the initial question.

13.8 Connétable J. Gallichan of St. Mary:

Following on from my colleague, I was going to congratulate the Chief Minister on the effort that has been put into strengthening the relationships we have with our French counterparts. To inquire further to recent visits, will he be pursuing the matter of a bilingual school with the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Yes, indeed, I also think it a very good idea. I think that there would be a great deal of interest from parents across the Island but a lot more work needs to be undertaken and we need to ensure

that all issues have been considered prior to a launch. It is rather remiss of me, I am due to visit France tomorrow evening for an engagement on Thursday and perhaps the Connétable would like to come with me.

The Connétable of St. John:

He is very remiss.

The Connétable of St. Mary:

I was not sure which Connétable the Chief Minister was talking to. **[Laughter]** I will, of course, be away on A.P.F. business myself on that day, unfortunately.

13.9 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

We have had a very useful list of consultants' reports that have been given to the States. Would the Chief Minister like to explain why the particular page of the Register of Reports is no longer to be found anywhere on the website?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I am not aware that it is no longer to be found. I think that it may not be up to date and that is an issue which I have taken up with staff to make sure that the protocol of updating reports on the website is understood by all and that same protocol is undertaken by all. I do not believe that it has been in the past.

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

I can assure him that it is almost impossible to find it.

13.10 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Could the Chief Minister give the Assembly an update on where we are with the Committee of Inquiry into Historic Abuse? How is that progressing and what is his estimation of getting the whole thing completed?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Of course, as the Deputy knows, this is no longer an issue for me other than bringing forward for what I hope will be ratification of a chairman in due course. It is being undertaken by the Greffier with the assistance of Verita and one other individual whose name escapes me at this moment in time. However, I understand from the Greffier that he is standing by the timetable that he announced to the Assembly earlier this year and is on track to deliver that. But I must make it clear, it is nothing to do with me in that regard, it is an independent selection process as this Assembly agreed.

13.11 The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Would the Chief Minister confirm whether or not an agreement has been reached with the nurses regarding their improved pay offer and proposed settlement and also how that may or may not affect the stance that he has taken up to now regarding all States employees being treated equally?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I am not aware that agreement has been reached. The nursing representatives, together with my officers, have been meeting, together with J.A.C.S. (Jersey Advisory and Conciliation Service) and I hope that we will shortly be able to reach agreement. The Deputy should be aware that we have taken a different approach to nurses than we have to every other pay group and that is for very good reasons which I have outlined before.

13.12 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

On reading that very useful list of consultants' reports and the costs thereof, could the Chief Minister tell us what conclusions he arrived at?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

That sometimes answering States questions is a costly, timely process. What I hope is that we will be able to learn a lot from the modernisation process in its initial stages. This will be helpful in that it is gathering data and when we gather that data together we can start to look at trends and, therefore, we can start to see where we can change, where we can create efficiencies, where we can create costs savings and perhaps if there is a benefit of that answer, it is just that.

13.13 The Deputy of St. Martin:

The Chief Minister has been out of the Island on States business today, could he give us a very résumé of his day?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

It was a great honour and a privilege for me to be invited to the 60th celebration of the Coronation of Her Majesty. As I said earlier, it was a traditional and timeless service and I think that our invitation reflects the regard in which Her Majesty holds this Island and it is one that is reflected, I know, of loyalty to Her Majesty by every member of this community.
[Approval]

13.14 Deputy J.H. Young:

The Chief Minister is, I think, nearly halfway through his 3-year term heading up the Council of Ministers' team. Does the Chief Minister consider there might be some mileage in producing a half-term report of the Council of Ministers and their greatest achievements and priorities for the remaining half-term?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

In my experience, and it is a while since I have had a half-term report, half-term reports are compiled by other individuals and they do not necessarily say what you want them to say. Perhaps in this office I am in the position of being able to produce a half-term report which perhaps does say what I want it to say. The Deputy makes a very good point and I am not aware whether we are due to be considering such a report, but if we are not then I think it is something that we should.

ARRANGEMENT OF PUBLIC BUSINESS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

The Deputy Bailiff:

That brings the 15 minutes for Chief Minister's question time to an end.