

2.7 The Connétable of St. John of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding the use of Departmental underspends to extend mains drains across the Island:

Given the recent savings which have been made across States departments, what consideration, if any, has the Minister given to using some of these underspends to extend mains drains across the Island?

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

I am sure the Connétable of St. John will welcome the T.T.S. request and Treasury approval of £381,900 of the departmental underspends to be used to continue to develop the Liquid Waste Strategy this year. These funds will be used to finalise the work done to put in place a new strategy, and prepare for a consolidated strategy document which will be consulted upon. It is this Liquid Waste Strategy that will deal with the issue of mains drains extensions, along with all other Island drain issues. The completion of the strategy is obviously primarily an issue for the Minister for Transport and Technical Services, although he has set up a ministerial oversight group consisting of Planning and Treasury, and I would expect that the Minister will discuss with the Treasury the funding requirements as it is likely to be outside of the funding envelope of the M.T.F.P. (Medium-Term Financial Plan) capital programme and could involve some borrowing. This will be especially important as we all want to deliver the new strategy within 18 months. It is also important that I remind the Connétable of St. John that besides the work on the T.T.S. strategy, T.T.S. have already made enormous progress on a number of drainage projects through the Infrastructure Rolling Vote, but also in the Fiscal Stimulus Programme and a good example of this is the work currently underway with the Philip Street shaft in the north of town area.

2.7.1 The Connétable of St. John:

I have heard some answers in my time but that one takes the straw, given that in my time on Public Services, we put strategies in place to extend mains drains and to be looking at it yet again, year on year, to me is wasting time and public money, having officers doing this. Will the Minister please consider, given we have had 12 months of non-stop rain, the water table is so high in many areas of the Island, that soak-aways are not working. People are having to pump crude effluent from their soak-aways on to land, and it is finishing up into the watercourses further down and, in fact, into reservoirs and the like, and will he please start spending some of this excess cash that he keeps on finding, on the areas of the infrastructure that need dealing with some urgency because at the moment, you are drinking my or my neighbour's bath water.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

It is important that in the Parliament of Jersey, I think we do ensure that we have a certain standard of comments that are made, and it is important that we do not scaremonger. I fully understand and agree with the sentiments expressed by the Connétable that we need to extend mains drains to more people, and we need to deal with the inequity of people that are connected to the mains drains for nothing, and those that have soak-aways that need to be paid for in terms of being emptied. He will know we were both members of the Public Services Committee for a number of years. The extension of the mains drains network is going to be more challenging. We have done the easy to connect properties. Those properties that remain to be connected are going to be longer and much more expensive and the strategy that I referred to, under the leadership of the Minister for Transport and Technical Services, is designed once and for all, to deal with the expectations of connecting other properties to Jersey. But we should not scaremonger. There is work to be done. We have a good drainage infrastructure which is improving and we are determined to reinvest and extend where possible, but not everywhere will be possible to extend.

2.7.2 Deputy T.M. Pitman of St. Helier:

They say words are cheap. In support of the Constable, does the Minister not agree that in reality making more funding available, as the Constable requests, would, in fact, be a sensible and long-term money saver for the taxpayer rather than a drain on resources?

[10:15]

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I fully agree with the Deputy on the importance of infrastructure spend and I will be tabling later today a report which for the first time analyses infrastructure and capital spending by every quarter in 2013. It underlines and signals the huge and significant amount of capital and infrastructure spending which is being done, in order to support the economy and improve services and prepare for the long term and being delivered at good value for money. I agree with that and the focus on infrastructure spend is what we are doing in terms of our long-term planning, but we cannot do everything. I would remind the Deputy that connecting all properties to Jersey, and those last properties, will be more expensive in the rural Parishes and this is the strategy that I repeat is designed to deal with this and reinvest in our drainage infrastructure for the longer term.

2.7.3 The Connétable of St. John:

Given the Minister's challenging remarks, we were told by Presidents and Ministers of the past, that money was going to be spent on our infrastructure for mains drains and they would be all in place by 2013/2015. We are in 2013 and there is still 9 per cent of this Island without a connection to mains drains. Yes, it is the most challenging area because of their locations, but not all of them are in that kind of location. Will the Minister agree that absolutely nothing has been spent by T.T.S. over recent years on extending mains drains into the countryside, nothing whatsoever?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

That is absolutely right, and I would remind the Connétable that he is a Member of this Assembly and he is able, just as we all are, to challenge forward forecasts and forward spending limits, in terms of the Medium-Term Financial Plan, and he will again have the opportunity because we agree capital spending a year in advance. If he is unhappy with the allocation of capital spending, he can amend the capital programme in the Budget this year. It is important that we remind ourselves that while the Connétable rightly talks about drainage, we have infrastructure in terms of schools, hospitals, the road network, waste and energy also, and these need to be prioritised and for the first time, under my leadership of the Treasury, we have a 25-year capital programme setting all of the infrastructure and capital requirements out and we will resolve the issue which he cares about, and I care about, and the Minister for Transport and Technical Services cares about, in terms of drainage infrastructure and we will settle this issue during the course of this administration before the end of next year so progress will be made.