

2014.12.09

8.7 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding meetings held between the Minister and representatives of Jersey Telecom in respect of the Gigabit project:

Will the Minister release the notes or minutes of the quarterly meetings held between the Minister and the representatives of Jersey Telecom throughout the period over which the Gigabit project was developed and agreed, that is from 2011 to date, and if not, why not?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean (The Minister for Treasury and Resources):

The answer is no because the shareholder minutes and notes of the meetings are prepared for internal use and not published due to the generally confidential nature of their contents.

8.7.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

In that case, the Minister is telling us that he is allowed to have minuted meetings with other public bodies, which are recorded and fully minuted, and yet we cannot hold the Minister to account. I am told that the Minister does have the power to call for an extraordinary general meeting and I have a proposition in process of being formed which does that. But I am then told that at an A.G.M. (annual general meeting) or E.G.M. (extraordinary general meeting) the only person allowed to be present who represents the shareholders, i.e. the public of Jersey and the States of Jersey through them, is the Minister himself. Is there any way that we, as a body, can hold the Minister to account over the issue of Gigabit Jersey on which he has just withdrawn £6 million of funding and put it into deficit possibly; how can we hold the Minister to account? When will the Minister come to this body and say what is going on with Gigabit Jersey?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

The Deputy and any Member of this Assembly can hold the Minister to account at any time, indeed question times are exactly for that purpose. I would go on to say that J.T. (Jersey Telecom) hold regular briefings for Members of this Assembly, and specifically on the Gigabit project. Not only that, they invite Members to go round to J.T. to meet members of the staff, to see the facilities and to ask whichever questions they so desire. I am also advised that to date the Deputy has not taken up any of these invites to visit J.T., and I think as a starting point that might be quite valuable. But I am always available to meet him as well if he would like to make an arrangement to come and see me and discuss any concerns he might have.

8.7.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Supplementary, if I may. Does the Minister assure the House that the progress of Gigabit Jersey is on time and being delivered on budget and that there are no problems with the funding of Gigabit Jersey going forward?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

A project of this size and magnitude and complexity is always going to have problems. It would be impossible to expect anything else to be the case. What I can tell the Deputy and Members is that so far this project - which is a fantastic opportunity for this Island, striving to be and to develop a digital economy - is world leading. So far 98 per cent of premises have been passed by fibre. One-third of all homes have been connected. We are more connected in Jersey with fibre than anywhere else in the whole of Europe, and that, surely, is something to be celebrated. There have been problems with this project but, as far as I am aware, I have been told by the company that the project is progressing. There is going to be a review undertaken within the next 6 months and I am happy to report back to Members on that when I receive it.

The Bailiff:

Final question, Deputy Southern? I am so sorry, Deputy Higgins.

8.7.3 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Sorry, a bit late. Will the Minister publish the figures for broadband connections in Jersey relative to the U.K. and other centres? He mentions we are ahead of everybody else. I have heard contradictory figures. Will he produce for Members the full figures showing how we relate to the rest of the U.K. and other centres in the U.K.?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I was talking about the whole of Europe, but yes, I am sure there are some statistics available that support the data that I have given to Members which was supplied to me by J.T., and I am happy to circulate that.

8.7.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Just for absolute clarification, the Minister has just given an assurance that there are not budgetary or financial problems likely to get in the way of the final delivery of Gigabit Jersey.

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I said: "Not that I was aware of", to the Deputy, and I said that there is a review being undertaken to update us. I did give him further details that the project so far is progressing very well but by the middle of next year we will have had a review undertaken by J.T. on the entire project, and I am happy to update Members further at that point