

3.10 Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré of St. Lawrence of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding the police relocation budget:

Further to the recent presentation of the States accounts, which included a reference to the effect that the police relocation budget is £19.2 million, could the Minister confirm that the full cost spend will be £20.492 million as per his response on 23rd October 2012 to a written question submitted by Deputy Martin?

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

The 2013 accounts showed that the remaining unspent budget for the police relocation project was £19.182 million from an allocated budget of £20.789 million as of 31st December 2013. A further budget of £1 million was added in the 2014 capital programme to bring the total allocated budget to £21.789 million. To say that the budget in the question is £19.2 million is, therefore, inaccurate. Expenditure on previous schemes of £718,000 has reduced the available budget to £21.071 million for the current scheme as has been set out to answer question 7159, which has been recirculated to Members. In that response, it clearly stated that the forecast for the project is now £22.142 million comprising the £20.492 million plus a sum of £1.65 million in respect of inflation and other contingency allowances. The most recent cost estimate, including inflation allowances and contingencies, is now £22.938 million which reflects, among other things, the inflationary cost impact since October 2012.

[10:45]

It is my intention that the difference should be met through a contribution, upon the advice of the Attorney General, from the Criminal Offences Confiscation Fund to meet the cost of various identified items within the construction project. This is an entirely appropriate use of the Criminal Offences Confiscation Fund. So the scheme has planning permission. It is fully designed and local shortlisted contractors will shortly be asked to tender for the works. It is vital that we achieve this as soon as possible to meet all the requirements of the police.

3.10.1 Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

If I have understood that correctly, then the police headquarters project is, therefore, presently over budget compared to what was previously projected. Could he confirm that the transfer from the police confiscation fund was done by way of exempt decision? I was wondering why he felt it necessary to make an exempt decision.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

It is an estimate of cost. Of course, the actual cost will be dependent upon tenders, *et cetera*. Having consulted with the Minister for Home Affairs to ensure that the site and the whole of the budget meets all of the police requirements, it was decided, and it was a request, which I take to the Council of Ministers under my normal practice and my revised practice of seeking withdrawals from the Criminal Offences Confiscation Fund. I cannot recall exactly what the status of that request is but I will, of course, revert to the Assembly when those decisions have been formally made.

Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Is the Minister saying he has not made a decision as of today?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The decisions have been, as I understand ... I have been to the Council of Ministers and I am awaiting advice, but I need to check that. I do not have all the facts of the modalities of the exact arrangements. I am often in the position of answering questions on a wide remit.

Ministers are expected to be in charge of their briefs, but it is not a memory test, so I will answer any questions that are needed to be answered because Deputy Le Fondré I know is very particular that I give accurate information. I do try to but if I do not have it in my head I am not going to answer it.

3.10.2 Deputy S. Power:

In the process to finalise costs for the police relocation project, could the Minister answer: (a) whether he expects projected costs to increase to a figure in the region of £25 million over the next 18 months and whether he has made any exempted decisions based on that; and (b) whether he could confirm that the States accounts at the moment give an accurate reflection of the costs to date of the project to relocate the police headquarters building?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Yes, I am sure I do not need to give the Assembly a lesson on what accounts are in respect of money spent. Of course, any money spent in relation to the police budget will be completely accurate because the audit has been completed and we have, of course, one of the highest levels of compliance with any States accounts at all. There is a difference - and I know the Assembly does not need a tutorial on this - between budgets allocated and then amounts finally spent. At the moment, we are speculating on an up-to-date number which, of course, will change because Members would expect us to hold substantial contingencies for numbers and not also reveal exactly what we expect tenders to be. To send out a statement of what we expect a tender will be will give market information and will not get best value.

3.10.3 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

I wonder if the Minister would share my concern. As I understand it, he is saying that not all the tenders are in yet. I hope I am correct in understanding that, in which case I would ask does he share my concern that discussing budgets before the tenders are in encourages contractors to work up to a figure rather than work to the lowest possible cost? **[Approbation]** In fact, I would say that contractors themselves have told me that is what they do.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I could not agree more and, if I may say so, condemning a Minister for apparently an overspend on something that we do not know about is also wrong, which is the attempt, I think, being made here. The States Treasury with Property Services delivers best value for taxpayers. If I may just say one point about that to absolutely hammer home the point that Deputy Baudains made, last week I understand that we got a tender in a housing scheme which was 20 per cent below what we expected. We deliver best value, we will deliver best value, and the police station will achieve best value, certainly while myself and my Assistant Minister are at the Treasury.

3.10.4 Deputy J.H. Young:

Would the Minister confirm that the estimates that he has given the Assembly do include offsite works, for example, any works necessary on Snow Hill, to the road system and the additional floor at Green Street?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Deputy Le Fondré asked that I answer these questions. These matters are dealt with ably by my Assistant Minister who deals with all the granular information. I believe those other matters have been held with other departments and I am not in a position to answer all the road issues, which are not relevant to this particular question. They may be related issues and

we certainly agree with improvements in Green Street where we have been making also sensible decisions about allocating more public car parking spaces for the public.

3.10.5 Deputy J.H. Young:

Just to clarify, does that mean that they are extra, that we will get that information later?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

They are not extra costs about the police relocation. That is the point. They are related costs that could be regarded as improvements and are certainly helping the facilitation of Green Street that would be developed in any event for some point, of course. But I will deliver whatever detailed matters as I am sure the Deputy would want.

3.10.6 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

I do not think the Minister for Treasury and Resources and I will ever agree over the police station. Will the Minister report back to the Assembly if the Ministerial decision that we have been discussing is included in the 42 per cent of Ministerial decisions which have been taken as exempt in the States of Jersey website? This is not conducive to good, transparent Government. Will the Minister report back?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I do not think Senator Ferguson and I will agree on a lot of things and I do not think we will ever agree that building a police station on a dual site and having policemen moving across town is ever going to be the right thing.

The Bailiff:

Minister, the question was not about the merits of the ...

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Well, that was the question originally.

The Bailiff:

The question was about exposing information.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Okay, we will never agree that this is the best value for taxpayers in the longer term. In relation to exempt decisions, as the previous question by Deputy Baudains made clear, there is guidance on what can be effectively an exempt decision. Exempt decisions are when we should not put information into the public domain which is commercially confidential. When information can be made public it is, of course, always done. It would be completely wrong for Senator Ferguson to make a statement that somehow there is a lack of transparency in relation to Ministerial decisions. That simply is not the case when we have some of the most transparent accounts, detailed disclosure, of any jurisdiction in the world.

3.10.7 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

A supplementary: I have been under the impression that there has been a certain amount of disagreement about some of the Ministerial decisions being taken as exempt. Would the Minister like to confirm or deny this?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I am not aware that there has been any disagreement about exempt decisions and exempt decisions as a code of conduct, a code which is set out. If the Senator wants to say which one

there has been a disagreement on, I am certainly not over all my department. If she can say which one, please say.

The Bailiff:

No, she has had her 2 questions. Now the final question, Deputy Le Fondré.

3.10.8 Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

It is all around the whole principle of transparency. I am glad the Minister and I do agree about achieving best value for the taxpayer, which is why I would appreciate if the Minister could clarify why he considers his actions on the whole police station project to have been in the public interest. Because having severely delayed the conclusion of the Lime Grove House transaction to theoretically save half a million pounds, the present solution is starting to look like it is costing at least £8 million to £10 million more than the Lime Grove House option, which was basically the cost of the entire building. That is made up from the extra £2 million we have added in the M.T.F.P. (Medium-Term Financial Plan) ...

The Bailiff:

Deputy, I am sorry, as a supplementary question this is way out of order. Bring it back to the ...

Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

The Minister stated in answering that he is acting in the public interest in achieving best value for the taxpayer. I am saying that as a supplementary question could he explain that given those 2 comparable figures.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

What I do wish is that the former Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources would move on from what has been a never-ending set of issues about criticising my decisions in respect of Lime Grove House and casting aspersions ...

The Bailiff:

I am sorry, I am going to have to stop you. We cannot go back to a debate about Lime Grove House and the police station in relation to this question so I am going to call a halt to it. Thank you.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Thank you, I am grateful.