

3.5 Deputy J.N. Le Bailly of St. Mary of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding funding the cost of water tests by the States Analyst for residents of properties not served by mains water:

The Bailiff:

We come next to a question which the Deputy of St. Mary will ask of the Minister for Treasury and Resources.

Deputy E.J. Noel of St. Lawrence:

I am happy to answer that on behalf of the Minister. I would like to give the Deputy the opportunity to wait for the Minister to arrive, or I can answer it now.

The Bailiff:

Deputy of St. Mary, are you happy to proceed now?

The Deputy of St. Mary:

I am happy to proceed now. Thank you. Given that there are a lot of properties throughout the Island that are not on mains water and are therefore reliant on bore wells and springs for drinking water, and in view of the risks of the water table being polluted by slurry spreading and domestic soakaways, would the Minister consider funding the cost of water tests by the States Analyst for residents of these properties?

Deputy E.J. Noel (Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources - rapporteur):

It would not be right for the Minister for Treasury and Resources to become involved in policy matters around water safety for Islanders not connected to mains water supply. This question might have been better directed at either the Minister for Health and Social Services or the Minister for Planning and Environment. As far as funding goes, the Medium-Term Financial Plan and the contingency funding processes are well established and provide opportunities for departments to bring forward requests for additional resources. More importantly, the M.T.F.P. (Medium-Term Financial Plan) process provides departments with the longer term certainty of funding and allows them to reprioritise spending as broadly as they wish.

3.5.1 The Deputy of St. Mary:

Would the Minister then agree that it is somewhat ironic that one of the richest places in the world cannot provide infrastructure to the outlying areas of this Island, causing the people who live there to endure facilities no better than a third world country? Would the Minister consider that perhaps now would be the time to invest in that infrastructure or it may never happen?

The Bailiff:

Deputy, that is 2 questions, so it is probably all right.

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I would disagree with the Deputy of St. Mary that our outlying water supplies are akin to a third world country. Towards the end of last year in fact we did ask the Chief Executive of Jersey Water about this very matter. We were informed that the company has looked into this and the estimated average cost per property is high at some £10,000 plus and the company would not be able to subsidise the private householders and would also end up

subsidising developers. Therefore they have no plans at present to extend the mains water network.

3.5.2 The Connétable of St. John:

Given the Minister's reply, would he agree that it would be far more expensive if people are poisoned through contaminated water supplies with medical bills indirectly to his department in having to treat with long-term illness a number of people than putting potable water supplies across the Island?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Let me say again, I cannot agree with the Connétable of St. John. There is a process in place where those on bore holes and on wells can have their waters tested, and that I believe is through the Environment Department and the States Analyst. That is the route they should take to see if their water is fit for human consumption, and if it is not then alternative measures can be taken.

3.5.3 The Connétable of St. John:

Will the Minister give serious consideration to, if not putting a free of charge testing service in place, to reduce the charges which currently are charged up to £93 per household each time you have a water test? Would he consider subsidising that or giving a free service?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

It does not really come under the remit of Treasury and Resources. This really is a matter for the Environment Department who I believe the States Analyst is part of. It is within their remit and within their gift to appropriate their budget as they see fit.

3.5.4 Deputy J.H. Young:

Could the Minister confirm his answer that he and his political master have a hands-off policy in respect of important policy? Could he confirm that he has no views therefore on funding for how we may extend the sewage network to eliminate this risk of water pollution in the future?

The Bailiff:

I am sorry, Deputy. I think that is straying too far. At the moment this is a question about the cost of water tests.

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

Could the Assistant Minister confirm whether he has had a request from the Environment Department to fund the cost of water testing as per the Deputy of St. Mary's question?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

As far as my knowledge, the Treasury has not received such a request.

3.5.6 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains of St. Clement:

When the Assistant Minister is next speaking with the Water Company would he address the issue of efficiency, because I know there are occasions where ... in fact, one case where they wanted to refill a trench in order to open it up again in order to justify a £1,000 charge per 3 feet of pipe?

The Bailiff:

Again, Deputy, I think that is off the topic of testing of bore holes.

Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

I was referring to what the Assistant Minister had said earlier about the discussion with the Water Works Company.

3.5.7 Deputy M. Tadier:

This one does relate to something that falls under the Minister's remit. Does the Minister accept that funding for big projects like this, and it could be Housing and Health which the Treasury has not been loath to support proactively in the past ... does he accept that if we had a more progressive tax system and those Deputies who also asked questions about the provision of infrastructure on the Island support a progressive taxation, there might be enough money sloshing around to provide infrastructure of this nature?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I believe we have a progressive taxation system in the Island that suits our needs.

3.5.8 Deputy M. Tadier:

I forgot it was 1st April, but does the Assistant Minister agree that it could be made more progressive insofar as those who earn the most could pay the most and also have access to the mains water supply?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I believe that we have a tax system that suits the needs of Islanders.

3.5.9 The Deputy of St. Mary:

The Assistant Minister claims that this is not a remit of Treasury. In fact it is the remit of Treasury to provide the funds to be able to put this infrastructure in place. This matter is continually passed by. We need to find ways of funding this infrastructure, maybe by putting a penny on income tax which would generate between £25 million and £32 million per year. Couple that with a 10-year programme and we could complete these works quite easily.

The Bailiff:

Do you agree I suppose is the question.

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I am afraid again I have to disagree with the Deputy of St. Mary.