

2015.07.14

4.10 Deputy A.D. Lewis of the Chief Minister regarding the servicing of information requests made by the Public Accounts Committee:

Does the Chief Minister consider that his department and other executive departments are affording sufficient priority and exercising due diligence when servicing information requests made by the Public Accounts Committee and, if he has any concerns in this regard, how will he seek to improve current response times? Thank you.

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

All departments should be prioritising requests for information from the Public Accounts Committee. The work of P.A.C. (Public Accounts Committee) helps ensure that public money is properly managed and used well. If any improvements to the arrangements are needed, I would be more than happy to work with the chairman to ensure officers discharge their responsibilities under those arrangements.

4.10.1 Deputy A.D. Lewis:

In which case does the Chief Minister think that it is reasonable for the Executive to take almost 25 weeks to respond to the C. and A.G. (Comptroller and Auditor General) report concerning the J.T. (Jersey Telecom) shareholding; 15 weeks for the response on financial management? Will the Chief Minister accept that the extended timescale for responding to P.A.C. is indicative of something being wrong with the resource allocation and information management in executive departments?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

There is a short and a long answer. The short answer to the first 2 elements of that question is, no, it is not reasonable and it should be done in a more timely manner. Of course there is a long answer of all sorts of reasons why departments have got various priorities and are not able sometimes to prioritise it in the way that I would expect officers and departments to do so. I recognise that there are issues which need to be overcome and I reiterate what I said earlier that I am happy to work with the chairman on a new protocol to endeavour to deliver information in a more timely basis.

4.10.2 Connétable C.H. Taylor of St. John:

I have the privilege of working on P.A.C. as well as Corporate Services Scrutiny and it has become my experience that we would receive information quicker through a Freedom of Information request, which is probably why the general public know more than we do. **[Laughter]** Would the Chief Minister please ensure that we do receive information in a timely manner? Thank you.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

There are obviously 2 slightly different functions between the work of P.A.C. where officers should be attending upon P.A.C. and providing the information and Ministers need to ensure that they are doing so and that needs to be reviewed. It is slightly different when it comes to Scrutiny Panels where it is Ministers who are being held to account and need to endeavour to ensure that blockages are dealt with. It is quite apparent that the processes are not working as well as they should do and I have endeavoured to address the issues that the chairman has raised and the chairman of Corporate Services has raised with me, and ultimately I look forward to us agreeing a new protocol in due course as well.

4.10.3 Deputy A.D. Lewis:

I must thank the Chief Minister for his reassurance. But in the absence of party politics or Shadow Ministers, this is one of the routes through Government to enhance our democracy so it really is very important. But during a recent visit to the Welsh Assembly I discovered that my counterparts

in Wales received government responses within 2 weeks, with 4 weeks being the default time. The C. and A.G. is minuted in a recent P.A.C. meeting as saying: "The response times in Wales are broadly consistent with their experience of working with other public bodies." Does the Chief Minister not feel that such delays are disrespectful of the democratic process?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I do not think there is any intention for that to be the case. I can see that when delays have taken so long, that can be how it is interpreted though I am not aware of any intention from either Ministers or officers for that to be the case. But I continue to say to the chairman that I am aware that issues have arisen, they have to be resolved, and I am happy to work with him to resolve them.