

2015.12.01

4.5 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Social Security regarding the reduction in grant to the Jersey Employment Trust:

Has the Minister imposed a grant reduction on the Jersey Employment Trust and, if so, does she accept that this influenced the board's decision to cease any role currently operating at a loss, leading to the termination of the contracts of horticultural assistants, who are people with disabilities in supported employment, and replacing them with seasonal contracts, and will she advise what full-time alternatives she will be proposing?

Deputy S.J. Pinel of St. Clement (The Minister for Social Security):

I can confirm that the Jersey Employment Trust grant from Social Security for 2015 is set at the same level as the 2014 grant and is worth £1.8 million. Cash limits for the next 4 years are set by the Medium-Term Financial Plan process. Departmental officers have a good working relationship with the Jersey Employment Trust and discussions are ongoing in respect of the future level of the grant for 2016 and the following 3 years. I am very pleased to be able to confirm today that I have had discussions with the Jersey Employment Trust over the last few days and the board has agreed to withdraw the threat of immediate redundancy in respect of a small number of horticultural assistants [**Approbation**] and has agreed that J.E.T. (Jersey Employment Trust) will work in partnership with States departments during the first half of 2016 to identify alternative opportunities for sheltered employment. I remain fully committed to the provision of a full range of employment opportunities, including sheltered employment, and will be encouraging all States departments to consider suitable projects in their own areas.

4.5.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I thank the Minister for her prompt and effective reaction to being asked this question and to learning about the impact of the cuts she has proposed. I congratulate her for that. But will she look at the sheet accompanying question 5, which shows that over the year there have been 5 decisions increasing cuts throughout the year, starting way back in January and going through to March, June and now November, which have continually shifted the goal posts of this body and, I believe, other bodies, which are grants aided, and deliver services to the public in various ways? Does she consider that this is an efficient and effective way to organise the provision of services in this case for the disabled, in particular, and their employment chances? Does she think this is a good way to behave over the year?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

I thank the Deputy for his congratulations. There is always a way round difficult situations. As regard the way forward, this is not something that ... the Jersey Employment Trust is a grant-funded body but an independent board. There has been no political presence on the board for a year so the board have decided their way forward with the business plan. We were informed of it fairly recently and we are working together to move forward so that the withdrawal of those redundancy notices is implemented and we will work forward with them to make sure that there is some employment for these people.

4.5.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

In particular, I understand that the gardening service has been withdrawn at the moment. Is she confident that that will not be cut from the range of activities that J.E.T. supervise up at Acorn.

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

The gardening service that the Deputy refers to is a separate business from Acorn and I cannot guarantee that it will be cut. It was the suggestion of the board that it would be seasonal work rather than full-time work and so, as I said in my previous opening speech, that we will work together with other departments to make sure that there is suitable sheltered employment for the people concerned.

4.5.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

There is more, Sir. One of the longer term problems with the services provided by J.E.T., and in particular at Acorn, is that they are at present completely unaware of what plans are to be set out for the potential outsourcing at T.T.S. (Transport and Technical Services). Will T.T.S. and Parks and Gardens provide a major outlet for the nursery services for the pot plants that they provide? Has the Minister been in contact with the Minister for Transport and Technical Services and has she had any preliminary conversations about what the future holds over the next 2 years rather than over the next one year or the next 4?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

I think I have already answered that question by saying that over quarter one and quarter 2 of 2016 we are going to be in discussion with the Jersey Employment Trust and other departments to establish a way forward.