

2016.06.14

3.8 Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding proposals to cut departmental revenue expenditure: [9499]

Will the Minister inform Members whether he has under consideration proposals to cut his departmental revenue expenditure by up to £30 million with the loss of up to 103 posts over the period 2016 to 2019?

Deputy E.J. Noel of St. Lawrence (The Minister for Infrastructure):

Neither I, nor my department's officials recognise the £30 million figure used by Reform Jersey in this question. In fact, it is greater than my department's annual net cash limit for 2016, excluding Jersey Property Holdings. Perhaps Reform Jersey would share their calculations with us so we can reconcile their figures with what will be published in the M.T.F.P. 2 addendum at the end of this month. Any numbers regarding posts are estimates which change as service reviews progress and I have said many times in this Assembly that we cannot unfortunately reduce the overall staff costs of the States of Jersey by some £70 million out of a total spend of approximately £350 million without a reduction in head count numbers. But let us not forget why we are making these savings. This Assembly agreed in the States Strategic Plan to prioritise investment in health, education, economic growth and the Island's infrastructure while balancing budgets by 2019. As highlighted in last year's M.T.F.P. debate, this means spending and staffing in some areas need to be reduced and in other areas expanded. So we are restructuring our organisation and reprioritising our spending, and my department is going through that necessary but difficult process.

3.8.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

I think we can take the preamble of reprioritising in health and education as read for every Minister and every written question from now on. Would the Minister specifically talk then about waste charges or waste reductions in posts? Is it true that there are projected to be 19 posts being lost when it comes to waste with £6 million in cuts and, if so, what form will these take and what form will the waste charge in the future likely take?

The Bailiff:

The question is about loss of posts and not waste charge so the very last part is not allowed.

Deputy E.J. Noel:

As I have said previously in this Assembly, we are carrying out service reviews across the whole of the organisation and some of those reviews are near completion but many of those reviews have not yet been completed, and those regarding our waste disposal have yet to take place, so we do not have actual figures. It is a moving target and I am unable to verify whether or not that savings target is the actual target that we will end up with or the head count reduction in that particular area will be anywhere near the figure mentioned by the Deputy.

The Bailiff:

The Deputy of St. John. No?

Deputy T.A. Vallois of St. John:

I was not asking a question. Apparently there was an issue with the microphone.

3.8.2 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Can the Minister tell us that in terms of job losses that he is proposing whether they are all basically associated with manual workers and not associated with senior civil servants? Because we were told

very, very early on that this process would be across the board. Are you planning on losing any senior civil servants within your department?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Again, it is a question I have already answered a number of times in this Assembly and I just point to the voluntary redundancy figures that came out for the latter part of 2015 and 2016. We had a total of 25 V.R.s (Voluntary Redundancies) from my department, 4 of which were from civil servants and 21 were from manual workers, so it is clear, as I say, that it is across the board. We are looking at our service reviews and the way you slice a cake is you cut it from the middle outwards so there are always going to be less of the higher-grade jobs going because that is the nature of how you cut the cake.

3.8.3 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

A supplementary? Can the Minister give an assurance that any of those senior posts that are removed will not be replaced later on?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

That is a process of the V.R. process, and unfortunately for those that will have compulsory redundancy those posts are made redundant, they cannot be replaced.

3.8.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I remind the Minister, as I did previously, that the question refers to whether he has under consideration proposals. The supplementary must be proposals for changes to the waste services and has he yet started the consultation with the employee representatives in that particular service?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

The service review for waste is yet to commence and therefore the consultation with those employees in the waste area is also yet to commence.

3.8.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

As I walked here this morning through Howard Davis Park I noticed how well it was maintained. Someone was walking there and, as I walked further up, I noticed how clean the streets were, and the roads were also very clean, because the work is being done very well by our manual workers in that area and I think it is important to congratulate them for their jobs. Does the Minister agree with me that our manual workers, those who work for the States, are doing a very good job and that we should reward them and that when we have people at the top echelons who are doing a bad job but get to keep their jobs when they are not providing value for money, but we have good workers at the bottom who are doing a good job get rewarded with either redundancies, voluntary or compulsory, something is deeply wrong in our system?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I certainly recognise the comments from Deputy Tadier about staff who keep our streets clean and our parks looking immaculate but I do not recognise the comments about senior staff not doing a good job. All of the staff that I have in my department... I have been in charge now for some 18 months, I have not come across anyone - I can say that hand on heart - who does not do a good job