

2016.02.23

3.12 Deputy R. Labey of St. Helier of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the consultation process for the future hospital:

How does the Future Hospital consultation process propose to measure and record the public preference for each site?

Senator A.K.F. Green (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

Another really good question today. The public will be able to record a preference for a single site either electronically or in paper form. This will provide key quantitative records. The Consultation Institute, an independent organisation I talked about earlier, have experience in public consultations in health and social care and they are advising us on the governance relating to this process, i.e. numbered preference forms, a risk of double voting. The forms will also contain a section where Islanders can express other comments about sites when they feel the need to do so. These will be recorded and analysed. The analysis of the data recording the public's preference for each site will be undertaken in an auditable form by an agency independent of the Future Hospital project.

3.12.1 Deputy R. Labey:

So will a Survey Monkey-type exercise be binding on his department?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

I have taken advice on this and I have always been really clear that if there is a clear outcome then that is what I will work to in delivering a hospital for the public. But it is very difficult to put what a clear outcome might look like but it will be, as the Deputy said, some sort of Monkey Survey system. I am hoping that there will be such a clear outcome for whichever site the public prefer that it will be very easy then for the Council of Ministers to come back with a preferred site.

3.12.2 The Deputy of St. Ouen:

How will the Minister ensure that these forms are available to all, even those who do not have access online to Monkey Surveys? **[Interruption] [Laughter]**

Senator A.K.F. Green:

For those of us that cannot afford to go to Durrell, I think. **[Laughter]** No, seriously, we have costed it out and we intend, once we know what the sites are, how many we are consulting on, once we know the date of the consultation process because we need to have all of the documentation evaluated, we intend to send a pamphlet out to every home, every postal address in Jersey, with information on all the sites with a voting slip post-paid in there as well and then people can either pick that up or go online and hopefully we will engage as many of the public as possible.

3.12.3 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

I understand Channel Television held a survey and within 24 hours over 2,000 people responded and the result of the response was that I believe something in the region of 46 per cent voted for the Waterfront as the new location and only 14 per cent for the People's Park. Is that a clear enough indication to the Minister of what the public want?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

The last time I looked I thought we had about 100,000 people in the Island. The indication of the way that 2,000 people want to go is possibly a good representation but is not as good as a proper survey.

3.12.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Minister accept that the best methodology that we have in a democratic system for a survey is called a referendum and that based on my costings in 2015 when I asked for one it was £30,000? Now I do not know what the current figure is for consultation. That has already happened on the hospital but we have got an answer today which says it is £30,000 already spent, most of that on videos being made, for propaganda purposes, no doubt. If the Minister is genuinely committed to getting a feel from the whole of the Island to give people a democratic say, should the Council of Ministers not be looking at a referendum where Islanders could list their preferences from one to 4 or 5 and with all the information provided?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

It seems to be that sometimes in this job you cannot win. If you try and provide all the information, you are spinning and providing propaganda, and if you do not provide the information, you are secretive and in a conspiracy. It is right that we get the information out there for people. As to the answer about a referendum, the Deputy knows full well that referendums done properly are yes or no answers. You do not do a referendum for 4 sites with 4 different combinations of what might be in there. A referendum is yes or no.

3.12.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

The States has a pedigree of not having simple yes or no referenda when they ask questions. He knows full well that you can have referendums which ask multiple choices when the actual decision is a multiple choice one. So will the Minister acknowledge that that is a red herring and if there was the political will there to genuinely consult with Islanders that they could do it much more cost-effectively, much more democratically, through the use of a referendum?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

The Deputy knows full well that referendums done properly are yes or no. There are no grey areas on that, there are no red herrings. I have not been out fishing. It is yes or no. I am consulting genuinely on the site that the public may wish to have for their hospital and to that end I am ensuring that we have a robust and transparent consultation. Sorry if the Deputy does not agree with me but that is a fact.

3.12.6 Deputy J.A. Martin:

On the question of the papers that people will be signing, can the Minister confirm that it will be first past the post or will there be transferrable votes?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

It is not an election and, as I said, I have to seek advice from the Consultation Institute who warned me that when there is a very clear quantitative outcome, that is fine, but sometimes when it is close you need to look at other information. That is why we will have an auditable system of ensuring that votes are recorded properly and that comments are taken into account if they are very close. I am hoping that the public will overwhelmingly come down on the side of one site and it is very clear for us.

3.12.7 Deputy D. Johnson of St. Mary:

Will the Minister confirm that the public will not be asked to express their preference until such time as the Scrutiny Sub-Panel have issued their report and have been able to obtain public comment on that?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

We cannot do that. We are going out to consultation at the beginning of March in order that the Council of Ministers can then come up with a preferred option based on that survey and then place a preferred option to this Assembly to make a decision on. The Scrutiny Panel have got all the information they need to look at how we reach the process at the sites. The acting chairman told me the other day that he - I cannot remember which one now - also wishes to look at the way that we go out to consult to ensure that that is fair, open and transparent. There are lots of opportunities for Members of this Assembly to quality control what we are doing but we will not know what proposition to bring forward to the States Assembly until we have done the consultation.

3.12.8 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Whatever mechanism is used to divine the will of the people, does the Minister not agree that that will should be an informed will and that in fact the system cannot be transparent while the Council of Ministers hide some of the figures, the breakdown of the figures, of the costings? If we do not know what costs have been put into what figures, opportunity cost or otherwise, then we cannot get an informed answer.

Senator A.K.F. Green:

All I can give is totals. I can show the things that were taken into account. I have been as open and as transparent as I can be. The Deputy knows full well that if we want to force up the costs of a project, and this is many, many millions of pounds to pay for it, we lay all the figures open for the people that will be competing for the contracts. I will know exactly what it is we are expecting to pay in each area and, lo and behold, I remember when this Assembly used to go for a vote to do a project and they would go out to tender and the tenders always surprisingly came out the same as the vote that this Assembly approved. We cannot go back to that.