

2016.03.08

3.5 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding the timetable for the implementation of the outsourced provision of cleaning and gardening services:

Can the Minister advise whether it is the intention for the new outsourced provision of Department of Infrastructure cleaning and gardening services to be in place by September 2016, which was the original target, or if the date has changed and if so what is the new timetable?

The Bailiff:

This question was only about the date, Minister.

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

Let us be crystal clear here. A decision has not been made on whether to outsource these services. Formal consultation with the unions started in December and employee consultations will commence shortly. September 2016 was used last year as an indicative date. This date was suggested to coincide with the gardening works undertaken for the schools at the commencement of the school year. Again, I repeat for the avoidance of doubt, the decision to outsource has not been made and as yet it is subject to the completion of the service we use, the union and employee consultation programme, the pre-qualification questionnaires and ongoing process. It is recognised that this process is very difficult for all involved, especially the uncertainty of not knowing one's future. Officers are ensuring that all employees are being treated with respect and dignity. If I could give Members some examples of where we are providing support to the staff, and they include union and employee consultation programmes whereby they can provide feedback and alternative suggestions to how the services can be taken forward and mitigate redundancies. We are providing up-to-date information through team briefings. We have held drop-in events where they can ask questions of Human Resources, Social Security, Pensions and of Jersey Business. We are issuing staff new letters for all employees to keep them up to date of progression and we are working collaboratively with the Ports of Jersey, Andium, other States departments and the Parish of St. Helier to ensure that these services are run as effectively and as efficiently as possible.

3.5.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The question still remains, when will this review of these services be complete and when does he intend to bring something to this House in order to complete this outsourcing project? Will it be this year or next?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I have already said that it is an ongoing process. The service reviews have to be completed. The consultation with the unions and the individual consultations with the employee programmes need to be completed. The whole P.Q.Q. (Pre-Qualification Questionnaire), I.T.T. (Invitation to Tender), and the whole tendering process needs to be looked at. There is no end date. It is an ongoing process. What we need to do is by the end of 2019 have reduced our costs by some, I repeat, £4.6 million on a year-on-year basis.

3.5.2 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

The Minister mentioned the union consultation and suggested that it provided an opportunity for those Members to relay their concerns and suggest alternatives. Is he aware that the union has no faith whatsoever in this process and considers it a box-ticking exercise for no purpose other than to

legitimise what the Minister is trying to do for political reasons and would he therefore understand that the workers who are concerned by this have no faith in this process whatsoever?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I have to admit to Deputy Mézec that I am not aware of the unions' views on this. They certainly have not expressed that they believe that this is a box-ticking exercise. There was one letter I recall from the head of the union. It certainly is not a box-ticking exercise. We are working with the unions through the appropriate process. This is a process driven activity and once we have finished the process with direct consultations with the unions and the service areas have been reviewed we will be working with individual employees through one-to-one meetings, *et cetera*, and for group meetings to understand if there are other ways that they can suggest that we can mitigate the circumstances and avoid any compulsory redundancies and that is exactly what we are doing.

3.5.3 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Supplementary. The reason that I used the phrase "box-ticking exercise" is because it happens to be exactly the phrase used by the union's regional officer when in discussions with the Minister for Infrastructure's chief officer. So my question to him then is, does he talk to his chief officer about this or has he simply given him free rein to do what he wants? Would he not think that given that these are people's jobs and livelihoods at risk that he might take a more involved approach at this so that he can understand the issues these people are facing and perhaps take a more compassionate political approach?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I am in daily contact with my chief officer and I am involved in the process at the appropriate level, and that is all I can say. This is a detailed programme. Perhaps Deputy Mézec would like to come up to the department and we can take him through the detailed process. In fact any States Member is welcome and we can take you through the detailed process that we are going through.

3.5.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

The Minister said that no decision regarding outsourcing had been made. So if that is the case what is the alternative if the outsourcing does not end up happening? Has the Minister got a Plan B to make his £4.6 million without outsourcing or privatising jobs in his department?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Simply put; no, we have not. We have already harvested the low-lying fruit over a number of years and we are now left with ... if we are to maintain services to the public, the only way we can do that is to do it on a cost base in terms of staffing that is less.

3.5.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Minister not accept that his position is not tenable or realistic? There will be members of staff listening possibly to this or hearing later on. The Minister is saying that it is not a done deal but we do not have an alternative if this does not happen. Does he not recognise that that is not sustainable and it is also highly irresponsible to not have a position for something which is not a done deal, and should he not go back and make sure that he does have alternative provisions otherwise it smacks of complacency in the fact that this is a done deal?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

It certainly is not a done deal. There is no complacency here at all. If we are unable to make our savings targets we will miss our savings targets. That will create an issue within the M.T.F.P. One

potential solution would be to increase our user pays taxes or user pays charges but it is certainly that without stopping doing something we will not be able to make those targets. We are already down to the bone in terms of the infrastructure spend that we spend on our roads and our sea defences. We would have to stop doing something to be able to make the £4.6 million in savings that we are not currently pursuing.

3.5.6 Deputy J.A. Martin:

The Minister said, if they get to the point, that there is going to be in-depth employee consultation with everybody across the board. At one point he did mention Social Security Department. So for the questions that we are even here today, question 2 could be answered. Question 4 could be answered. This question could be answered if the Minister will just say he will get Social Security down to see the impact on these workers' lives. The Minister has admitted Deputy Southern may be saying flippant figures but he is in the position to find out and know. He might be saving £4.6 million and they are running down to La Motte Street and the Minister for Social Security is picking up £3 point whatever million. He should commit to do this when he is doing this in-depth consultation. It is not rocket science. Ministries working together and finding out who will be picking up this tab at the end of the day.

The Bailiff:

And the question, Deputy, was?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

The question was: will the Minister commit to bringing in Social Security and speaking individually to his workers that he may be outsourcing?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Deputy Martin has probably got a bit excited there and probably did not hear what I have said previously this morning, is that we already have had Social Security come in with our drop-in sessions with individual workers to go through their individual circumstances to find out what their positions would be should they lose their job for whatever reason from the public sector. So we are doing that and it is also part of the ongoing process as and when we identify individual members of staff that will be affected by the outcome of the service review.

3.5.7 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Well, then the Minister should have answered yes to the Deputy of Grouville's question. In-depth social survey studies, exactly what the Minister has described, but he told us earlier he is not doing it. Which is correct?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Both are correct because what we are talking about here is individual circumstances not the social economic impact.

3.5.8 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Since I cannot pin him down on any timescale for developing and finalising this outsourcing scheme, when the Minister has agreed an outsourcing scheme for cleaning and parks and gardens will he bring to the States a full analysis of the business, social and economic case for approval by the States when he has decided what he is going to do?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I am quite happy and prepared to issue a report to the States showing the outcome of the journey that we have been on, and I am sure the Chief Minister will ask the States Economist to do something similar on a social economic outcome but I am not going to bring this back to the States for a States debate. This is 'business as usual' in providing our public services. We have been set a target to achieve by the end of 2019 and that is what we are going to do.