

2018.09.11

13 Deputy M.R. Higgins of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the provision of information relating to the Future Hospital to Ministers, the States and the public: [OQ.118/2018]

Further to reports that information regarding possible sites for the Future Hospital may have been withheld from Ministers, the States or the public, will the Minister confirm whether information was withheld and, if so, what information and who was responsible for this action?

[11:00]

Deputy R.J. Renouf of St. Ouen (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

I thank the Deputy for his question. The Future Hospital team has undertaken the gathering of information to assist with the site selection of the Future Hospital and, as Minister for Health and Social Services with some responsibility for that team, I believe it has acted with professionalism and dedication throughout the site selection process. I am assured that it has not withheld information regarding possible sites for the Future Hospital, with the limited exception of some material which in the normal way is not disclosable into the public domain, under normal freedom of information principles.

4.13.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Can the Minister explain why the Constable of St. John, who is looking into possible sites, has stated that information was withheld and has he had any discussions with the Constable of St. John regarding this matter?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I am answering this question, of course, as it is directed to the Minister for Health and Social Services, but I am also a member of the Hospital Policy Board. The Constable of St. John is making comments also as a member of the same board. I can confirm that we have discussed those comments and at a recent meeting of the board, we determined that we had reached no conclusions thus far, except to conclude that the Island urgently needs a new hospital.

4.13.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

The Minister mentioned F.O.I. (freedom of information) in his initial answer, suggesting that some of the information was not available and exempt under F.O.I. Can he confirm that States Members' level of access, and particularly that of Scrutiny, should never be equal or less than what the public can expect in a freedom of information request and that there are mechanisms in place for Scrutiny to receive information confidentially, where the issues are of a sensitive nature? Was this considered and is the information that Scrutiny requested been given to them at least on those grounds?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Yes, I do not believe this causes any concern. I was a Member of the Scrutiny Panel in the previous Assembly and the 2 review panels, obviously the one review panel that looked at the Future Hospital project also. Those who served on those panels may remember that Scrutiny was asked to sign confidentiality agreements to enable all the information to be provided to the Scrutiny Panels. In a similar way it would have been provided to, for example, Concerto, who were the experts externally selected as the Scrutiny experts. Ernst and Young were also engaged internally by Ministers and I am confident that they would have received also all relevant information.

4.13.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

I gleaned from the last part of the answer, I am still not clear whether the information that is requested has been given to Scrutiny, but you said it had been given to the advisers of the Scrutiny Panel, but not to the Scrutiny Panel itself. Is that what the Minister is saying?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

No, I am not saying that at all. I am saying that in my experience in Scrutiny all the documentation was available to us. It was given without redaction after the completion of confidentiality agreements, for which I fully accept the reasons for those. Thank you.

4.13.4 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

For the avoidance of doubt, can the Minister tell us whether he believes that the Constable of St. John was wrong to state that information regarding the Future Hospital was withheld from Members and the States?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

All I can say is that this matter is still under discussion by the Hospital Policy Board. We have reached no conclusions thus far. I hope that Members of this Assembly, and indeed the wider discussion among the general public, might dampen down a little while the Hospital Policy Board continues its work being charged to examine all of the evidence that led to the previous decision to build on the current selected site. In my view, it is important to wait for the conclusions of the policy board.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

With respect, the Minister did not answer the question. Does he accept that the Constable of St. John was wrong in his statement that information was withheld from the States and from Members?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I cannot say whether anyone is wrong or right in the views they express, because we are still considering the evidence in the course of our work.