

2018.09.25

2 Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier of the Chairman of the States Employment Board regarding public sector pay awards: [OQ.128/2018]

Will the chairman request the Communications Unit to issue a new public statement about public sector pay awards, taking into account the information contained in the response to Written Question 136/2018?

Senator T.A. Vallois (Chairman, States Employment Board):

The response to Written Question 136/2018, and the reply provided to the Deputy's letter to the States Employment Board, outlines a full and accurate rationale for what was communicated on the pay offers to each bargaining group and why. The response emphasised that the data published both internally and externally was structured to enable different pay groups to understand the value of pay increases, and in some cases unconsolidated lump sum payments over the 2-year period covered by the pay reviews 2018 and 2019. Where the value of increase is represented as an average, this was clearly shown. Equally, where amounts to be paid were unconsolidated lump sum payments, which would not increase pay permanently, this was also clearly shown. Consequently, there is no need for any further press releases to be issued in relation to the statement already published. However, I will confirm what was stated in the written question in (a) and (b) whereby the answer to the number of workers who have been offered a pay award for 2018 below June 2018 R.P.I. (retail price index) of 4.5 per cent was 5,797 States workers, which represents 86.1 per cent.

5.2.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:

I do believe that the statement put out originally to the press was misleading for some who would see that the average pay rises were higher than the majority of people received because a simple average was taken. Plus it included the continuation of a non-consolidated pay rise from the initial year, which would have been removed, therefore the averages were incorrect. I think it is very important that a public statement is put out regarding the percentage of public sector workers who are receiving a below average pay rise. Would you not agree that that would aid transparency in our Government?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

I can only apologise if the information that was put out was seen as misleading. However, the response to the Deputy's question is in the public domain. I am not sure what we are expecting to achieve by putting out another press release and seeking for that information across the media.

5.2.2 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier:

Surely, the function that Deputy Ward is after is to correct so-called facts as being - I hesitate to use the word - misleading to the public about the size of the awards. The figures were simply wrong. They need correcting for clarity's sake.

Senator T.A. Vallois:

I have just clarified in the first answer to the question by Deputy Ward, clarifying exactly the number of workers who will be receiving a below June 2018 R.P.I. pay award, and I just need clarification in terms of the exact figures that Deputy Southern refers to that are incorrect. Because the figures that are in the table, other than the percentage of the workforce, which I have just clarified now in the public domain, and is on the Government website, I am not sure exactly which figures Deputy Southern is referring to.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

The figures I am referring to are the figures for average increase as being misleading. They are not actual real averages.

Senator T.A. Vallois:

I am happy to remove that part of the press release that is on the gov.je website and confirm that the actual amount is what is stated in the numbers under the consolidated and unconsolidated amounts.

5.2.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister further review the process by which unconsolidated awards are made in general and report back to the House over the effect that these unconsolidated awards have on overall levels of pay?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

I am happy to take that up at the next States Employment Board meeting to discuss the unconsolidated pay offers.

5.2.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

More generally to do with public sector pay, does the rapporteur believe that in a week when we hear that departments that used to be in-house, which are now arm's length bodies, their directors are receiving in the region of 50 to 60 per cent pay increases and that the bottom-end workers have been outsourced and often working for poverty wages? Does the representative of the S.E.B. (States Employment Board) believe that that sends out a good message to States employees at the current time?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

Quite simply, no, I do not believe it does send out a good message to States employees.

5.2.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the rapporteur support the current offer ...

The Bailiff:

She is the chairman. The Senator is the chairman.

Deputy M. Tadier:

The chairman, sorry, Sir. I appreciate that clarification. Does the chairman support the offer that is being made; the below inflation offer that is being made to States workers in many cases?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

In an ideal world I would like to be able to offer more money. Unfortunately, we are within parameters of the Medium Term Financial Plan and we are trying to do all that we can do, to support the lower-end workers in uplifting their basic pay at this precise time. There are a great deal of legacy issues to deal with, with regards to employment in the States. I recognise the concerns that are expressed by employees but they are valued members of our public sector, all of them are valued. They do a great deal of work and it is not just about pay, it is about the terms and conditions and the working environment that they are in as well.

[10.00]

That comes along with owning a certain amount of money that we have within the Medium Term Financial Plan.

5.2.6 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Is the chairman of the S.E.B. aware that the Auditor General is commencing a piece of work looking at the procedures and governance of the processes by which the salaries of the executives of these States-owned subsidiaries are made, the levels are decided, and no doubt she will agree that the States Employment Board will read the report with interest?

The Bailiff:

Good try, Senator, but this is about public sector pay awards.

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Yes, but it was raised in the last question by Deputy Tadier and I felt that perhaps ...

The Bailiff:

I should have stopped it. Are there any other questions relevant to this question?

5.2.7 Deputy R.J. Ward:

May I make a plea to the chairman and the S.E.B. that when communications are made with regards to public sector pay a full detailed picture is given of the actual numbers of workers who are receiving particular pay awards? Because simplistic averages that have been given at this time are not helpful at a time when public sector workers are feeling under pressure and morale is low, as recognised in so many reports made by the States. In terms of money, it is interesting that £3.4 million can be found for what is effectively a P.R. (public relations) firm, when there is not enough money to pay a decent pay rise to our public sector workers, such as teachers, nurses, *et cetera*, who are so vital to our Island.

Senator T.A. Vallois:

I thank the Deputy for his question and his comments are duly noted. I understand the concerns that are expressed and it can only raise more concerns and queries for people when some things can be seen as misleading. The States Employment Board are going through restructuring at the moment so I would be happy to take on board the communications and the way that we express the information to the public.