

2018.10.23

10 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Assistant Chief Minister regarding prospective funding cuts to departmental budgets: [OQ.161/2018]

Will the Chief Minister inform Members what cuts in funding, if any, he has under consideration for departmental budgets (apart from savings to be made from Workforce Modernisation measures) in the light of the projected £30 million to £40 million shortfall in revenues to fund public services?

Connétable C.H. Taylor of St. John (Assistant Chief Minister - rapporteur):

The Chief Minister has committed to a £30 million savings in 2019 through productivity improvements and by managing our vacancy in staff turnover. As Members will know, there is extensive work taking place to restructure our public services and to deliver improvements to our customers. Many corporate organisations have done precisely this. As to department budget limits for 2019, these are being finalised at present and are under detailed consideration, which will then be presented to the Council of Ministers.

5.10.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

On the surface, the answer seems to cover the question. But I ask the Assistant Minister whether he has looked, paid attention, to the written question 14 and the answer therein, which have 4½ tightly-packed lists of 335.6 vacancies in the Health and Social Services Department, which surely cannot be modernised throughout, but will make it very difficult for him to manage vacancies as a way of saving £40 million. Does he not accept that that will be a difficult task and that there are other cuts in the pipeline?

The Connétable of St. John:

Vacancy management was something that was brought to this Assembly as an amendment in 2016 to the then budget. The Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel proposed a reduction from 12.9 per cent vacancy to 3 per cent, which would have given a £35 million saving. This, therefore, is a smaller saving of £30 million on vacancies. It is also, I believe, Deputy, that you supported the £35 million savings when proposed by the Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel. **[Members: Oh!]**

The Bailiff:

Through the Chair, thank you. That means you do not say “you” in the Assembly. A supplementary?

Deputy G.P. Southern:

I have done a supplementary.

The Bailiff:

You have been given an opportunity for another one. **[Laughter]**

Deputy G.P. Southern:

It helps if I can prepare the supplementary first.

5.10.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:

May I ask the Assistant Minister, which of the 639 vacancies he considers to be unnecessary in the public services? Is it the nurses? Is it the teachers? Is it the civil servants? Is it the police? Is it in Treasury and Resources? Could you prioritise the loss of these jobs for me, please?

The Connétable of St. John:

I am sorry, but I could not prioritise them.

5.10.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Can the Assistant Minister offer any assurance to this House that, apart from the workforce modernisation measures, which he suggests are likely to produce a more efficient service, there are no further cuts in the pipeline to funding for departments in the coming years?

The Connétable of St. John:

I cannot make such an undertaking in the coming years, but for the coming year, as I have already said, department limits have been set in the M.T.F.P. (Medium Term Financial Plan) and these figures will be finalised and presented to the Council of Ministers in the coming weeks.

5.10.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

In a couple of weeks, to coincide with the Budget, so we may debate them, or amend the Budget, will we see these proposals before the Budget so we can amend?

The Connétable of St. John:

That is my understanding.