

2018.11.06

3 Deputy R.J. Ward of the Minister for External Relations regarding funding allocation for the purpose and preparation in respect of Brexit: [OQ.176/2018]

Given that the draft 2019 Budget states that the previous Council of Ministers supported additional recurring expenditure for 2016 to 2019 for the response and preparation in respect of Brexit, will the Minister advise how much of that funding has been spent to date and how much is allocated for spending to the end of 2019; and what the main areas of expenditure have been?

[10:00]

The Connétable of St. Ouen (Assistant Minister for External Relations - rapporteur):

I thank the Deputy for his question. The figures are as follows: for 2016 £328,000 was allocated, none of which was spent; for 2017 £1.18 million was allocated of which £703,327 was spent; for this year £1.553 million was allocated of which £838,315 has been spent to date; for next year, 2019, £1.95 million has been allocated and obviously we have not spent it yet. In terms of breakdown of the costs, for 2017 £541,000 was spent on staffing costs and £161,000 was spent on non-staff costs and essentially those were travel, equipment and use of consultants. For this year's to date we spent £737,778 on staffing costs and £100,537 on non-staffing costs. The Government departments that have incurred these costs are External Relations, the Law Officers, Financial Services and Digital Economy, the Offices of the Chief Executive, Growth, Housing and Environment, the Law Draftsman, Justice and Home Affairs.

4.3.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:

May I ask, given from my calculations £328,000 were left in 2016, £479,673 were left in 2017, and £714,809 was left in 2018, if this money is to be then removed from the Budget do we not require more flexibility given the uncertainty of Brexit, as there is nearly £1.5 million left there that could be lost at the time when there are recurring costs that could affect members of our society?

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

I thank the Deputy for the question, I have some sympathy with his views about the M.T.F.P. (Medium-Term Financial Plan), which is proving to be very inflexible, and all I can do is take his request back to the Minister and get back to him with a response to it. But, yes, I have some sympathy with his point of view on that.

4.3.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:

May I follow up? Is there not a point in the Jersey Finance Law ... there is a provision in part 2(c) of one: "If the Council of Ministers are satisfied there is a serious threat to economic, environmental or social well-being of Jersey which requires an immediate response" the money can be retained for expenditure, and would Brexit not come into this criteria given the huge uncertainty that we have and the effect on Islanders and the direct effect on some of our Islanders?

The Bailiff:

I think that is outside the scope of the Assistant Minister for External Relations.

4.3.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Given the huge amount of underspends that have occurred, or not occurred I suppose, in terms of the Brexit spending, how does the Minister's department justify putting effectively a tax on E.U. (European Union) residents who are already in the Island, perhaps arguably when they are the least able to afford this and they did not decide or vote for Brexit at all?

The Bailiff:

Deputy, are you referring to the proposed charge, which the Minister for Home Affairs is introducing, because, if so, that does not seem to me to be a matter within the responsibility of the External Relations.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Thank you for the clarification. I know that we have a One Gov policy and that money is easily moved.

The Bailiff:

Good try, Deputy. Good try.

Deputy M. Tadier:

But does the Minister believe that, given the controversy that is about to erupt about this charge and whether it is justified, that some of that underspend could be allocated to the Home Affairs Department?

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

I thank the Deputy for his question. I am impressed by his efforts to let it land on my table, but all I can do, because clearly it is not something I am in control of... but I will have a discussion with the Minister in question and we will get back to him with a response on that point. I cannot give any assurances at this stage unfortunately.

The Bailiff:

Final supplementary?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

No, thank you.