

2019.06.04

6 Deputy M.R. Higgins of St. Helier of the Minister for Home Affairs regarding the wages earned by prisoners at H.M.P. La Moye: (OQ.148/2019)

Will the Minister explain why the wages earned by prisoners at H.M.P. (Her Majesty's Prison) La Moye, have risen by approximately 5 per cent following the last pay rise, when the goods that they can purchase with this money have subsequently risen by approximately 25 per cent?

[10:15]

The Connétable of St. Clement (The Minister for Home Affairs):

The uplift in the wages paid to prisoners is broadly similar to the increases received by the civil service in the last 3 or 4 years. The prison canteen, where these goods are sold, is a non-profit making unit, but it does, of course, have to cover its running costs. A recent review of prices, which was instigated by the prisoners themselves, found that a number of items were cheaper in the prison than the rest of the Island but some, indeed, were more expensive. As a result of this review, prices have both risen and fallen. For example, if I can give just a couple of examples: a 4-pack of Duracell Plus AAA batteries has risen from £2.58 to £3.31, some 28 per cent. But, on the other hand, a packet of Jaffa Cakes has decreased from £1.47 to £1.21, a decrease of nearly 18 per cent.

4.6.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Bearing in mind the wage of a prisoner is 84 pence an hour, does he not think that some of the prices he has quoted are rather extraordinary compared to what most ordinary people pay, especially when they are limited in choice, they cannot shop around, they have one place to get their goods from?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I am not quite sure what the Deputy is getting at, because how can you compare what a prisoner earns - with board and lodging all found - compared to the Deputy and I, who have not had a pay increase for, what, 8, 9, 10 years, but have seen prices increase, as well. The prisoners live in the real world, as well as the Deputy and I do.

4.6.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Was the pay rise funded directly, or was it from substantial savings and efficiencies, as is expected of so many other States workers?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

The prison do run a very tight ship, a very efficient and effective ship and I pay tribute to some of the excellent initiatives, which are taking place at the prison, where the well-being of the prisoners and indeed their families and indeed the staff are being given a much higher priority, perhaps, than it was in the past. I pay tribute to the management of the prison, who are doing an excellent job, on a constrained budget, out of which the wages of the prisoners are paid.

4.6.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Would the Minister agree with the following observation that 84 pence an hour is vastly below the minimum wage, but it may well be that all prisoners, who receive this wage, are effectively on a living wage for their needs?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

That may well be the case.

4.6.4 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Is the Minister aware that the produce that is grown in the gardens of the prison and other things produced in the prison, in terms of produce anyway, is destroyed, rather than used in most cases? With one or 2 exceptions most of it is destroyed. So, they grow produce and then it is destroyed. Is that an efficient way of using resources in the prison and, equally, could it not be used to reduce the cost of the goods that the prisoners have?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I am well aware that much of the produce grown at the prison is used in the kitchen of the prison mainly and I think it would be extraordinary if good valuable products, which can be used ... if something cannot be used for any reason obviously it would be destroyed, but I know that much of the produce is used in the prison kitchen.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Very little.