

2019.02.26

4 Deputy R.J. Ward of the Chairman of the States Employment Board regarding the pay dispute with public sector workers: [OQ.47/2019]

May I ask the Minister what solutions will the chairman be offering to end the pay dispute with all public service workers and to prevent further strike action?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré (Chairman, States Employment Board):

Yes, the States Employment Board has agreed with unions that while discussions and mediation with unions are under way neither side will make any public statements and the States Employment Board is holding to that agreement. What I can confirm is that meetings have continued and have been taking place since my last update to the Assembly and that includes last week and even yesterday. The States Employment Board met both yesterday and last Friday and authorised the continuation of those talks. When a result or a resolution is finalised, I will ensure all States Members are updated accordingly.

4.4.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can the Minister confirm whether more money has been made available?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

We continue to operate within the financial constraints that I have outlined previously. However, negotiations are very productive within the constraints that we are operating under and what I do not want to do is jeopardise negotiations at what is a delicate stage. So we are sticking to the agreement with the unions that we are not making any public comments while negotiations are in hand, but discussions have been productive to date and discussions have been continuing both last week and yesterday.

4.4.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Within the financial restraints that we have, does the new offer refer to 2018, 2019 or 2020 or any of those 3?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I think I had better stick to the position that I do not want to jeopardise negotiations at this stage. All unions are fully apprised of what our position is, but we said we will not make public comments until offers have been resolved and finalised.

4.4.3 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Can the chairman advise whether the S.E.B. (States Employment Board) is still operating at arm's length from the union negotiators or, when I say that, are politicians getting involved in the talks or is it still remaining with officers?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

In terms of formal negotiations it is still done ... it is the officers who negotiate and they report back very regularly and very frequently to the board. In terms of informal, face-to-face meetings, there have been informal, face-to-face meetings with politicians, including myself, but that is not for negotiation. That is mainly to allow some communication to have taken place. I would say I believe that is a change to previous positions.

4.4.4 Deputy R.J. Ward:

It is really just to confirm that the officers that are involved in talks do have the ability to offer something concrete during those talks.

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

The usual process of negotiation is that the officers are authorised to a certain point. As negotiations continue, if things get outside their mandate, they come back to the States Employment Board for a further discussion and negotiation and that is why the States Employment Board are very actively involved in matters at the moment and are meeting very regularly to consider matters.