

2019.03.26

10 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding the prospect of connecting those properties which use boreholes to mains water: [OQ.86/2019]

Will the Minister, as a shareholder representative, advise how many properties in Jersey still use boreholes and what percentage of properties that represents and will she state what plans, if any, there are to connect such properties, currently using boreholes, to mains water over the next 3 years?

Deputy S.J. Pinel (The Minister for Treasury and Resources):

Sir, may I ask the Assistant Minister, who has delegated responsibility for that, to answer this question?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Yes.

Deputy L.B.E. Ash (Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources - rapporteur):

There is currently no register of properties not connected to the mains water network. Accordingly, Jersey Water use the register of boreholes, maintained by the States of Jersey, as an estimation of the number of properties not connected to mains water. There are currently approximately 3,500 registered boreholes in Jersey and just over 40,000 properties supplied directly by Jersey Water, inferring that approximately 8 per cent of properties are not supplied by mains water. Jersey Water has a programme of extending the mains network and in 2018 funded 1.1 kilometres of network extensions at a cost of approximately £350,000. The company's appetite to extend the mains network is, however, constrained by the need for the company to prioritise the essential maintenance of its existing water supply infrastructure, management of water quality and the renewal of the existing 580-kilometre pipe network. Jersey Water's capital programme is approximately £4 million per annum and the amount available to fund mains extensions varies each year. Jersey Water regularly assesses the demand for mains water, to assess the viability of mains extensions that are being considered. While there is certainly some demand for mains water, it is often challenging to get a sufficient level of interest and commitment from homeowners, who would have to pay a connection charge and for internal plumbing changes, to accommodate the connection to make the schemes viable.

3.10.1 Deputy I. Gardiner:

In light of the latest several reports about water contaminations by nitrates, weed killers and others, as somebody who is sitting on the main water I am protected and water will be redirected. How can we ensure that the population, who use boreholes, are aware at the real time of the possible risks for their health and they can act as quickly as possible to clean their boreholes?

Deputy L.B.E. Ash:

It is an interesting one. I guess it is one for Environment to take forward and regular testing of borehole water, should you have borehole water, for its health-giving qualities probably should be conducted. I would say, though, if there was an appetite for the States to implement a new policy of connecting the remaining properties to the mains network, Jersey Water would be more than happy to listen to that.

3.10.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

As the political representative and shareholder representative for Jersey Water, can the Minister advise whether he is happy about who picks up the bill when there is pollution in the public waterways?

Deputy L.B.E. Ash:

Generally we have picked the bill up, that is the States' role, via the Ports of Jersey, for some of the contamination in areas that occurred in St. Peter with PFOS (Perfluorooctane Sulfonate). What has been disputed is once it has been connected to the mains and the house is sold, the property has been sold, it is then disputed that whether the person then moving in we should continue to pay those bills, because they knew that they were moving into a house connected to mains water and had not suffered any damage because of it.

3.10.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

My supplementary: the point of the question was not so much about the PFOS issue, but about when water pollution happens from the private sector, perhaps from farmers; it gets into the public water supply. Who pays for the cost of remedying that pollution and is it currently just?

Deputy L.B.E. Ash:

I would believe that at the moment, if it gets into the public water supply, it is Jersey Water who are having to pay for that. Whether we wished to then encourage them to get into some legal debates with the causes of the pollutants; that would be a matter for this Assembly to decide. Generally, we do not sue one another, if you like, between the various constituent bodies, but if it was necessary I am sure it could be done.

3.10.4 Senator K.L. Moore:

It was concerning - deeply concerning - last week to hear on Radio Jersey the chief executive of Jersey Water describe the efforts that that organisation goes to to divert the mains water supplies when some reservoirs become unfit, in their view, for the mains water supply. Given that less than 10 per cent of borehole users, or owners, request testing of their private water supply on an annual basis, when prioritising and considering any investment in our mains water supply and extending that, what consideration does the Treasury give to the public health aspect and the danger to public health that, potentially, people are using a private water supply that is untested and they are unsure of its fitness for drinking?

Deputy L.B.E. Ash:

I think public health has to be one of our main considerations in anything we do; water, electricity, anything that we do as a government body. However, privately-owned boreholes really have to be the responsibility of the person who owns that property. It would be the same with a chimney stack, or something else on their property, that could have potential health consequences. It is really their responsibility to make sure the water is regularly checked.