

2020.04.21

1 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade of the Chief Minister regarding the consultation with States Members in respect of the Field Hospital: (OQ.108/2020)

Will the Chief Minister provide a list of the States Members who were consulted before the decision to build the field hospital was signed off?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré (The Chief Minister):

The decision to approve the construction of a Nightingale hospital in Jersey was ratified by the Emergencies Council on 8th April. The decision was duly and properly taken with broad ministerial involvement and leadership and followed the decision of the Competent Authorities Ministers, who had approved the matter previously. The decision to construct a Nightingale hospital was necessarily a prompt one given the time required to construct, fit out and fully staff the Nightingale hospital and the necessity to do so before Jersey's current critical care capacity came under any significant pressure. Furthermore, the Minister for the Environment was consulted, as per the answer which is coming in an oral question, before the Emergencies Council made their final decision. All States Members were informed of the decision in advance of the public announcement and all have since received briefing on the subject. So to be specific, in terms of the Emergencies Council, the political Members of the Assembly who were present: the Chief Minister, Deputy Chief Minister, i.e. Senator Farnham also as Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture, Minister for Health and Social Services, Minister for External Relations, Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Infrastructure. Also the Chair of the Comité des Connétables. Other political Members of the Assembly, the Minister for Education and the Minister for Treasury and Resources, had been invited to that particular meeting. In addition, bearing in mind I have also mentioned the Minister for the Environment **[Interruption]** ... I have got an interruption there by someone. On top of that, in terms of non-voting Members of the Assembly, His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor, yourself as Bailiff, Sir, the Attorney General and Solicitor General are also members of the Emergencies Council. I believe that is the list who were consulted at that point in time and all party to the decision.

3.1.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

I thank the Chief Minister. If I may have a supplementary. The Chief Minister has effectively just listed the members of the Emergencies Council there. But we were told on 16th April, so last week, in a briefing by one of the Chief Minister's officers while the officer was present, that although the main discussions happened in the Emergencies Council in between that time, the officer said that he was aware that the Chief Minister, the Minister for Health and Social Services and others had various discussions with various groups of States Members. I am trying to establish who those various groups of States Members were other than the Emergencies Council who might have known about the field hospital and why they were chosen to be informed and not all States Members.

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I cannot honestly recall the statement by the officials. What I have given are the States Members who were a party to the decision that was made on that particular evening, which is the important point as to when that decision was ratified by the Emergencies Council and then it was signed off by the Minister for Treasury and Resources from the funding point of view on the following day.

3.1.2 Deputy S.M. Ahier of St. Helier:

Did the Chief Minister have access to the projected number of COVID-19 patients that would need to be hospitalised prior to the decision to build the field hospital and, if so, why was this information not supplied to all Members?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

There is a projection, which I thought had previously been shared with States Members, because it is the projections on the graph as the curves come through. But obviously the bed numbers projections that we are presently operating on is up to potentially 450, but I think that is deemed to be the extreme level. The anticipation is less than that but there was still a requirement for the field hospital. What we have explored is the existing in-patient capacity at the Jersey General Hospital, the capacity of the Jersey field hospital, the Nightingale hospital at 180 beds, and in addition what else can be found either in the wider Health and Community Services community hospital capacity, which means Overdale, Sandybrook, *et cetera*, and also within the private sector. Sir, unfortunately, I cannot hear anything.

The Bailiff:

Can anybody hear me? **[Members: Yes, Sir.]** I am assuming that everyone can hear me?

[Members: Yes, Sir.] And people are marking “yes” back on the chat but I cannot actually hear anybody myself. We left the matter when I was asking Deputy Ahier if he wished to have a supplementary question. Do you wish to have a supplementary?

Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Nothing further, Sir.

3.1.3 Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier:

When the decision was made over the building of the hospital was the ability to staff the facility also fully considered and planned for?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Yes, in terms of the ability to staff it was obviously taken fully into account. As we have said, this is one of the issues around not laying too much pressure on staff is important and that is where that has been translated into the term using resources efficiently, which is a fairly horrible term. But, yes, it has been taken into account. Exact details are being worked up this week, and I will have some more information. But as an overall principle, the staffing levels have been taken into account for the hospital.

3.1.4 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Was the consideration taken to have the correct staff available, i.e. fully trained nurses, a right ratio to make the Nightingale hospital safe at the time of the decision being made to build a facility? Because that is absolutely vital if this is going to be a success.

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

On the basis of the interest on the subject and the importance I will make sure this, as a subject matter, is included in the next briefing to States Members. But in terms of the ratio, the Council of Ministers did receive a briefing on a variety of staffing ratios that may or may not apply as pressures increase. But the whole principle of the Nightingale layout is to use a ratio of greater patients to a nurse under the scenario. Because it is not single rooms the requirements on staff that results from using single rooms is slightly less. Therefore that enables one to have a greater ratio of

patients to that member of staff. What that means is that patients can still be properly cared for within all that context. I think, on the basis before we go down a whole set of questions on that area, I will arrange in the next States briefing for this to be fully presented to Members because it is quite a complicated subject. But the short answer is that we have had presentations from the health professionals and the nursing professionals as to how the ratios for staff will be managed as matters potentially move through the curve.

3.1.5 Deputy K.F. Morel of St. Lawrence:

I am just keen to get a full answer to Deputy Tadier's question. Would the Chief Minister please explain outside of those present at the Emergencies Council, which States Members were consulted upon the Nightingale hospital in advance of the announcement being made public?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I do not think I can add to the list I have already given. In terms of, as Council of Ministers, there are 9 with the Minister for the Environment. Can I just pause one second; I am just looking for another sheet of paper? Sorry, I was also just checking. We did have Council of Ministers immediately after the Emergencies Council so obviously all of C.O.M. (Council of Ministers) were present for that. Some of the Assistant Ministers would have known about it as well. But I think that is probably all I can elaborate on at this stage unless the Deputy wishes to infer anything else.

[10:00]

Obviously the Chair of the Comité des Connétables is the Connétable of St. Lawrence and so therefore she was aware, as a result of those presentations/decisions at the Emergencies Council, of the impact from her parochial perspective as well.

The Bailiff:

Do you want a supplementary, Deputy Morel?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

No, Sir, but no inferences were being made; just asking for an answer to the question.

3.1.6 Deputy M.R. Higgins of St. Helier:

Will the Chief Minister confirm to Members that the reason why the decision was taken at the time it was, was the importance of having the facility in place? Can you give Members an indication that the reason why they had to make the decision is the time lag and can you give the time that it would have taken had we needed to get a hospital at a later stage?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I thank the Deputy for his question. He is absolutely right, provided I have understood the question correctly. But the point is that you cannot magic one of these things up overnight. There is a time lag in getting hold of the building structure and obviously the kit that goes into it. We are working on 3 to 4 weeks. So obviously from the date of the announcement and the get-go on the Thursday/Friday, the first part of the field hospital is due to be operational on something like I think it is 4th May. That gives Members an indication of the time lag that you have to take into account. That is why, bearing in mind at that point in time, that is the projection of where we were on the curve. We have obviously subsequently seen some other results from the testing but obviously we put caveats on that. So to date that is what we have got to plan for. Obviously if the curve goes through slower, yes, we could have delayed that decision. But I think we would have had a lot more

criticism and, most importantly, risked more lives if we delayed that decision and then the curve had come through a lot quicker. So the decision needed to be made. It needed to be made swiftly, which we did, and I am very pleased at the progress which we are seeing that is going on down at the Millbrook Playing Fields. So, I thank the Deputy for his question.

The Bailiff:

Supplementary, Deputy?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

No, the Chief Minister has answered my question fully. Thank you.

3.1.7 Deputy M. Tadier:

If I can just preface this role. I think the decision to build the field hospital is the correct one and I congratulate and thank the Chief Minister and his team for all the hard work they are doing. But the purpose of the question is to ensure that when States Members are given information at a briefing and we are told that apart from the Emergencies Council discussions were being had with various groups of States Members - and I am glad that I wrote those exact words down so I could follow up on them - it is important that we know who the States Members are so that we can check the process and that information is ...

The Bailiff:

Deputy, I am sorry to interrupt you, we have encountered time difficulties, as I am sure all Members know. I want to try and get all the questions out if at all possible. Is this a question or is this just merely a statement as to why you asked the question? Because if it is a question, could you please ask it?

Deputy M. Tadier:

I understand, Sir, thank you. It is more difficult over the time lag. The question is: does the Chief Minister think it is important that when information is given in briefings that it is accurate?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

It is always important that information given in briefings is accurate. I suspect, and I honestly do not recall that particular response, but it may have been ... obviously a number of these decisions will be, I suppose the word is sometimes socialised among relevant Ministers almost as a sounding board or if there are specific issues that might be rising within that Minister's remit, and I think that was probably what was being referred to. But unfortunately that briefing is a few days away now and I honestly cannot recall the exact context in which it was said. But the principle that any information given to States Members in a briefing needs to be accurate is absolutely true and valid. I always do make the point that we are in very swift moving times. We act on the best advice we have at that point in time, sometimes things do change. That is not necessarily because information was given that was inaccurate, it has just moved on. But the basic principle that the Deputy is referring to is absolutely correct.