

2020.06.16

**3 Deputy S.M. Ahier of St. Helier of the Chief Minister regarding the provision of funding to ensure all Island properties were connected to mains water (OQ.166/2020):**

Will the Chief Minister advise the Assembly whether the Council of Ministers will make £30 million available as part of the Government's fiscal stimulus package in order to ensure all Island properties are connected to mains water?

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

I am happy to look at some form of expansion of the mains water, and I would suggest mains drains network, as part of the fiscal stimulus measures. That would need to be properly evaluated in terms of what achieves the best stimulus in the economy, as a whole, relative to the amount of money involved. Achieving good water quality is therefore an aim which I would support. I would just make the point that mains water, in particular infrastructure rollout, is obviously the responsibility of Jersey Water and so usually funding decisions and how longer-term infrastructure investments are paid for is initially a matter for them. But whether, in other words, the objective that the Deputy is referring to is best achieved, for example, through some form of government assistance, whether by grant or by loan, I would be very happy to look at as part of the process of the Government Recovery Plan over the coming few months. I know it is a long shot, just before he gets too excited though, I would point out that obviously £30 million cannot be delivered in the timeframe available. It would be one of the evaluations to rightly stimulate the economy. On the other hand, if it was something that could be phased through over a number of years but we put some commitments in that would be something I would be very willing to look at. I think that is all I can say at this stage. So very happy to look at and then we would come back.

**3.3.1 Deputy S.M. Ahier:**

A number of Jersey households rely on boreholes and wells for their water supply. These are susceptible to pollution from pesticides and can have high levels of nitrates. After the comment of the Chief Minister, would he be willing to supply a loan for the full sum of £30 million to Jersey Water?

**Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:**

What I said is I would be very happy to look at it, and it no doubt will come out in some of the other questions that are being asked today as well, is we must be under no illusions as to the size of the financial challenge, which we are still just trying to put more flesh on, if that makes sense, over the coming year, 18 months going forward. That is within the context when we start dealing with additional sums of £30 million and how best to spend it, that is where I would be cautious. But within the context of that, I could certainly see some scope but please bear in mind this is also then subject to Treasury and other competing challenges for finite resources. I can certainly see scope for phasing in some form of funding to get this back into train again because I know in various parts of the Island, in fact many parts of the Island, and I understand St. Helier would be one of the biggest beneficiaries in terms of people who are not connected to mains water, that in the 21st century would seem very reasonable, that we should try and do what we can on that area. What I would just add is that the £30 million basically gets, as I understand it, the mains water to the foot of the drive. So effectively to the road in where the house is located. Then it would be a matter also of personal choice as to whether the householder wishes to connect or not.

**3.3.2 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:**

The Chief Minister has already talked about the fact that Jersey Water is a private company. They are responsible for the water supply and connection but the Government of Jersey, the States of Jersey, are responsible for connection to the sewer network. Does the Chief Minister think that there is some way of streamlining that so that one organisation could be responsible for both?

**Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:**

I think I have always said there is nothing off the table and everything is on the table at this stage. Anything that we look at, which makes our services more efficient, I would be delighted to investigate and obviously make a conclusion thereon. If that is something the Deputy thinks we should be looking at I would certainly be very happy to do so if we are not already doing so.

**3.3.3 Senator K.L. Moore:**

The Chief Minister has previously committed to ensuring that the future economy of Jersey will focus on well-being as well as economy. Given that ensuring the quality of water supplies to every household in the Island is a matter of well-being will he commit to looking at this issue through that lens? Also will he commit to providing a framework for developing fiscal stimulus packages in the very near future?

**Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:**

In answer to the first part of the question, I have already done that. The second part, yes, there is already an initial framework which is the targeted, timely and temporary is the usual milestones that we apply, as the Senator will no doubt recall from previous times when we have been facing these types of issues. Essentially, that framework basically exists but it does need a slight finesse, which is in the process of happening.

**3.3.4 Senator K.L. Moore:**

An answer to an exact date would be helpful I think to the Assembly and also focus the minds of the Government.

**The Bailiff:**

Are you able to provide a date, Chief Minister?

**Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:**

I think the early indications would be after the summer recess and probably in September. The question is coming down to understanding the various parallel pieces of work of what we call the Government Recovery Plan and getting that in play and where the fiscal stimulus sits or the economic stimulus sits, that is a lot of work which is going to be going on over the next obviously few weeks, June/July. If there are some certain fiscal stimulus elements that can be done earlier they will be. It will always be based on the advice as to timing where we think the best value will arrive and when in relation to the pressures that are going to arise on the economy.

**3.3.5 Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier:**

Given that one of the products of not having mains water is water require nitrate levels, which disproportionately affect young babies and young children and prevent uptake in oxygen in their red blood cells; what has happened to putting children first?

**Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:**

There are 2 or 3 answers to that. I would make the point that I am supportive of looking at this issue and we have to bear in mind that we are facing the biggest economic shock potentially that this Island has seen in many, many decades. Therefore that is one of the issues we have to deal with. As other Members have rightly pointed out, it is also about well-being. It is also around personal choice. If people are aware that they have higher nitrate levels they either can make the connections themselves, which some people have done, they can put a filter on or they can, in certain circumstances, use bottled water. I am not too sure what else I can say. I do believe that the number of impacted houses is very much at the lower end in terms of numbers.

**3.3.6 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Can I surmise from this that the economic shock may mean that we lose the notion of putting children first?

**Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:**

No.

**Deputy S.M. Ahier:**

I am pleased that the Chief Minister is considering making funding available to Jersey Water to connect the 3,000 remaining properties and I thank him for his response.

**The Bailiff:**

That was not really a question, Deputy, and that is what the opportunity is there for.