

2020.07.13

6 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding parking for hospital staff at Patriotic Street: (OQ.189/2020)

Will the Minister advise what progress, if any, has been made with regard to providing free, dedicated parking spaces for hospital staff in Patriotic Street Car Park?

The Deputy of St. Ouen (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

The Minister for Infrastructure has recently replied to a petition on this identical subject and I share with all those who have supported the petition my own appreciation of everything staff in health and social care have done during the past few months. They have been a source of pride and a credit to our Island. It is the case that during the earlier stages of the safe exit strategy the Department for Growth, Housing and Environment generously gave over the use of Patriotic Street Car Park to support the hospital and also 2 laybys on Victoria Avenue to support the Nightingale wing. While traffic volumes were lower during the lockdown, the impact of this on the St. Helier environment and economy was small. Now that businesses are opening and more cars are on the road and need parking spaces we need to find the right balance between the priorities of healthcare workers and those of the wider community. The 2 are linked. Taxes paid by business help pay for our healthcare services. I would point out that staff parking in Patriotic Street is not free, although there is no charge to staff, but the Department for Health and Community Services pay to the car parking fund for the lease of those spaces. Were we to take on more free spaces then this would need to come from the healthcare budget and therefore other costs would need to be reprioritised. I hope that answers the question.

3.6.1 Deputy I. Gardiner:

I am a bit surprised from the answer because during the lockdown there was an exchange of emails that looked at this and I was thinking that some of the progress has been made. So during the last Scrutiny hearing the Minister for Infrastructure said they are not ready to subsidise the Department for Health and Social Services and from my perspective it is the silo thinking that we are trying to avoid. Would the Minister advise if he had any joint meetings with Infrastructure and Treasury to find a solution for provision of dedicated and free parking spaces to the hospital staff?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I have not personally met with the Ministers for Infrastructure or Treasury and Resources but I know that there have been discussions between the Health and Community Services officers and Infrastructure officers about the car parking around the hospital, because it is very constrained and we are making better use of the parking we have on the hospital site. That is freeing up for patients and people who need to go to and from the hospital during working hours. I am also keen to see more space set aside in Patriotic Street Car Park, if possible, for visitors to the hospital, particularly those who might be disabled and renal patients who need to attend appointments, blood donors, *et cetera*. There is some limited capacity for them there. As to staff parking, well there are huge numbers of staff who were using it, I think 400 to 500 spaces were being used for staff parking, that is during the COVID emergency. If we took over the car park it would occupy most of the car park if all those wished to come and use it. The question arises, is it appropriate to provide free parking for staff, much as I would love to, and what would happen to the displaced traffic, because all that traffic is out there now and it is building up again? We have to find that balance, how best to use that car park and Island resources.

3.6.2 Deputy K.F. Morel:

The Minister partly answered my first supplementary question, which is how many spaces in Patriotic Street were set aside for use by Health and Social Services staff and how many were regularly used during that period?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Five hundred spaces were set aside for healthcare workers. The car park has 610 spaces in total. Occupancy was typically between 300 and 400 vehicles per day.

3.6.3 Deputy K.F. Morel:

With that in mind, what initiatives are being undertaken by the Department for Health and Social Services to encourage staff to find alternative methods of transport to work at the hospital in order to reduce the need for parking?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

In the same way we are encouraging all Islanders to consider alternative means and we are encouraging the use of bicycles and public transport, where it is appropriate, to use that. We have installed additional bike racks on the hospital site and we have repurposed the park on the hospital site to those who strictly may need it. Either because they are clinicians who are moving between a community setting and need to call into a ward and then move away again or staff who may have mobility issues and the like. We are looking at the need to use spaces on the hospital site but those spaces are limited.

3.6.4 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Is this not a question of the treatment of our healthcare professionals who we stood outside and clapped and now we are not giving parking to? Would it not be a solution to offer a parking permit of the type that States Members have, for example, or to offer cheap subsidised access to electric bikes or bus services in order to show our appreciation of the work done by these members of our community that we have relied on so far?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Yes, so just because we are moving through the stages of lockdown and the car park has been returned to its previous use, does not mean that we do not want to consider how we might support healthcare workers and professionals under their terms and conditions. It is not one that I am able to determine, it is a matter for the States Employment Board. Those sorts of discussion are constantly ongoing and I can take out some of those ideas and pass them on. Of course, I would like to support our healthcare workers but I am sure the same argument could be made for many other classes of workers who have given great service during the recent emergency.

3.6.5 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Does the Minister know whether the £100 voucher could be used to pay for parking?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I do not know. It could be used to pay for a season ticket, quite possibly. I cannot give a precise answer on that, sorry.

3.6.6 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour:

The Minister has slightly answered what I was going to ask but what I wanted to know is: could this measure be potentially looked at as a part of a package of things to improve the terms and

conditions of healthcare workers? Has the Minister had any dialogue with healthcare workers or their representatives about what things they would like to see, either free parking or other things, to improve their working lives and ultimately help to make them more productive and happier in their work?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I would like to support healthcare workers. We have, I think, come to a realisation in recent months of just how valuable they are. We have clapped them on many Thursday evenings. They need to be properly rewarded in our society. Not just the healthcare workers employed by H.C.S. (Health and Community Services) or specifically those working in the hospital, because let us remember there are a lot of other healthcare workers, for example those who have worked in care homes around the Island and kept those residents safe. They also need to be recognised. I would certainly be for enhancing that role and rewarding it, not just for the sake of those presently in those positions but to make that profession more attractive to work in and solve some of our recruitment issues.

3.6.7 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

What does the Minister see as the first step in that potential piece of work then? Would it be for him to have a conversation with the vice-chair of S.E.B. (States Employment Board) perhaps? If he does think that is the first step, when would he be able to do this?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Yes, I will have a meeting or a talk with the vice-chair of S.E.B. but this is not just something for the Minister for Health and Social Services to organise; I think this is an Island-wide wish. How we wish to place our healthcare workers from the top consultant down to the ward cleaner, how we are going to treat them and regard them within our community. This is something that is going to be coming forward in the months ahead. We will just have to find ways of reflecting the worth that we want to place on them. I will have that discussion as the Deputy has suggested.

3.6.8 Deputy I. Gardiner:

I wanted to ask the Minister about parking fines that were issued for the nurses and doctors from the Emergency Unit, for example from special care baby unit because they were late on their night shift to put in new park fees. I would like to ask the Minister if he would reconsider to check possible practical arrangements and support instead of appreciation and clapping, which is also important but I am talking about practical support for hospital staff, or at least ones who work at the emergency units and needed to pay parking fines or to ask to waive them just to avoid this extra stress during their work?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I was not aware of any fines that had been imposed and I assume that this has occurred since the car parks became chargeable once again. So just from 1st July, I think.

Deputy I. Gardiner:

To clarify, it was before the parking and it would be now as well as its normal work of emergency unit.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I understand the Deputy. So it will be if somebody has been unavoidably detained and overrun their parking time. We are all subject to the law, that is the trouble but I can understand why exemption

or ... I would hope that parking officers would not prosecute if confirmation can be obtained that somebody was detained by necessary duties in the hospital.

[15:15]

I will enquire how we support our staff in that way and I will report back to the Deputy.