

2020.07.13

10 Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding George Carteret statue: (OQ.200/2020)

Just for the record, I am having trouble with my chat function so I will not necessarily be able to type, I will just say I probably will need a supplementary. Further to Written Question 246/2020 on the subject of public funding for the George Carteret Statue, will the Minister explain why an incorrect answer was originally given; and will she also state whether it was common, at the time, for “no specific due diligence” to be undertaken in relation to such grants?

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

It is disappointing to have to deal with this matter as a States question when I personally rang the Deputy over a week ago to apologise and provide him with the correct information. When the Deputy’s original question came in it was dealt with by an officer who made reasonable enquiries as to whether there had been any grants. The information that officer received suggested there was no grant and indeed no grant is listed in the annex to the 2014 Annual Financial Report and Accounts. Shortly after the answer was submitted Treasury officers were advised of a draft response to a freedom of information request to the Parishes. That draft response suggested my written answer was incorrect. I was advised on Tuesday, 30th June that that might be the case and that further checking would need to be done. Following that further checking of historical information I was advised of the correct answer on the morning of Thursday, 2nd July. As a result I contacted Deputy Tadier and the States Greffe to arrange correction. In response to the second part of the Deputy’s question, I cannot really comment on the ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Minister, you are breaking up. Do you want to just go back about 15 seconds and go from then in your answer?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

I have not moved so I do not know. Anyway, I will try again. That draft response - I think that is where we were - suggested my written answer was incorrect. I was then advised on 30th June that that might be the case and that further checking would need to be done. Following that further checking of historical information I was advised of the correct answer on the morning of Thursday, 2nd July. As a result I contacted Deputy Tadier and the States Greffe to arrange correction. In response to the second part of the Deputy’s question, I cannot really comment on the decision taken by the then Minister and the then Treasurer to make a contribution of £15,000 towards the cost of the statue. The Treasurer will have had obligations under the Public Finances (Jersey) Law at the time and I must assume that officer was satisfied that those obligations had been met. I can comment even less on the payments from Jersey Airport and the Planning Department. My understanding is that these are not from taxpayer provided funds but are payments made by developers relating to planning obligations to fund public art.

3.10.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

First of all, the Minister does not need to be disappointed I have asked this oral question. I would have like to have dealt with it via a written question but the deadline had passed because I was only given the information about the incorrect answer after the deadline. That is the first point, if I can just clarify. Would the Minister clarify that the money given by Ports of Jersey was in fact airport money and therefore, by proxy, taxpayers’ money because it was paid for a development ...

ostensibly for a planning application presented by the airport not by a separate developer and therefore it would have been public money in that regard?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

No, as I said in my first answer just a few minutes ago, I cannot clarify that - this was in 2014 - it is not listed as a grant and if it was paid for by the Ports of Jersey or the airport, as it would have been, as a percentage for art then that would then come under the then Environment and Planning obligations not under Treasury to have any notification of that.

3.10.2 Deputy K.F. Morel:

If, as the Minister has mentioned, the grant was not mentioned in the 2014 Annual Report and Accounts, would the Minister please explain why this was the case and would she also speak as to whether the public can continue to have faith in the accuracy of the 2014 Annual Report and Accounts due to this being one in accuracy? Are there others?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

Once again, I am not part of the Parish of St. Peter in my Deputy alignment nor does the Treasury - we are talking 6 years ago now - know how these matters arose. There possibly were different obligations and due diligence 6 years ago than there are now. I do not think necessarily the circumstance would arise now but that does not mean to say there was any wrongdoing at the time. I think the Deputies would have to apply to the Parish of St. Peter for further information or, as I said earlier, to Environment who have the planning obligations for things like the erection of a statue.

3.10.3 Deputy K.F. Morel:

I understood that this was a grant from the States not from the Parish. As we have now discovered there was an inaccuracy in the 2014 Annual Report and Accounts, will they be revised as a result and can the Minister confirm to the Island that Islanders can have continued confidence in further Annual Report and Accounts?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

Well, I hope we will have continued consultation or whatever in future reports and accounts but that does not answer the question of 6 years ago. When I said it was a grant from the Parish, I meant from the airport which is in the Parish. The grant from taxpayers' money, as the Deputy quite correctly suggested, was £15,000 of the almost £50,000 total with the amount that came from taxpayer funding. Another £20,000 was from the airport. Now whether that was part of, as I said in my opening remarks, development proceeds for art I am afraid I cannot answer.

3.10.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Was it not the case that the Constable of St. Peter was the Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources at the time of the awarding of this grant?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

No, that was not the case.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

If that is the fact then that is the fact.

3.10.5 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

As the Ports of Jersey was not incorporated until 2015, any money that was given by the airport was public money. Will the Minister for Treasury and Resources look into this please, because if on the one hand the States are giving money to the Parish of St. Peter for this and then other States bodies, which were taxpayer owned at the time and run for the taxpayer, surely this should all be fully accounted and should be totally transparent?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

I think I have already answered that inasmuch as I did clearly say that it was the airport and not the Ports of Jersey because they were not incorporated as a shareholder, arm's length organisation unit at the time. What the airport wished to do would not necessarily ... and I do not think it was but I can confirm that to the Deputy, but I will not categorically say it now, but I do not think it was taxpayers' money.

3.10.6 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Can the Minister tell us which Government department the airport came under at that time then?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

No, I cannot, is the short answer to that. I will get back to the Deputy on it. I will find out and get back to him this afternoon.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Again, if she could ask that department why they gave the grant. Thank you.

3.10.7 Deputy M. Tadier:

I just wanted to check with the Minister for Treasury and Resources, is she absolutely sure that the ... if it was not the former Constable of St. Peter who was the Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources at the time, who were the Assistant Ministers for Treasury and Resources at the time the grant was made?

[15:45]

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

The information that I have was that it was Deputy Eddie Noel who was the Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources in 2014.

Deputy M. Tadier:

That was the time when the grant was made; is that correct?

The Deputy Bailiff:

You have asked a final supplementary question, I think.