

20.09.22

7 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding allocating 1% of States revenue expenditure to the arts (OQ.236/2020):

Will the Minister confirm that the States decision to adopt P.40/2019 will be honoured and 1 per cent of overall States revenue expenditure will therefore be allocated to the arts, heritage and culture by 2022; and if not, why not?

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

In the current circumstances the Government Plan has involved a lot of difficult decisions to ensure that we are on the right path as part of our response to COVID-19. This does involve managing costs and expenditure in a number of areas, and culture, arts and heritage are not excluded from this. We support the arts and respect the States decision that as a Government we have to make difficult decisions in the interests of Jersey. That is what we are doing and the whole package in the Government Plan will be lodged on 12th October.

4.7.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Could the Minister therefore say what percentage will be allocated if she is not planning to honour the States decision?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

I cannot at this stage because it is part of the Government Plan and the figures and finances, costs and expenditures are all part of the whole plan which, as I said in my first answer, will be lodged on 12th October.

4.7.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Following on from the answer for that question where current circumstances were used can I ask the Minister: does this mean that propositions that were voted on in this Assembly we can expect to be habitually ignored in the coming weeks and months?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

No, in answer to that, P.40/2019, which is the proposition in question was in the previous Government Plan but, as the Deputy and the Connétable will be aware, circumstances have changed considerably and it is not a matter of ignoring these propositions. It is a matter of every department and area having to adhere to the different circumstances that we find ourselves in than when the proposition was agreed by the Assembly.

4.7.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can the Minister explain the mechanism then for not following propositions voted on democratically in this Assembly, and is that mechanism via the Council of Ministers, via unelected officials? Because I think the Assembly needs some clarity if propositions are not to be adhered to.

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

As I said in my last answer, the propositions are not being ignored or ... obviously I understand it has agreed by the Assembly, they are not being ignored, but we are in very different circumstances than we were in 2019 and adjustments have to be made to deal with the current circumstances; and that is across the board.

4.7.4 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Following on from Deputy Ward's question, if in the Government Plan the Minister intends not to honour P.40/2019 will the Minister adopt proper procedure and bring a proposition to the Assembly to rescind that States decision, as that would be the only suitable way to provide the Minister for Treasury and Resources with freedom to ignore that proposition.

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

No, I think the Deputy has slightly misjudged this. It is not a matter of ignoring the proposition; it is a matter of adapting to our current circumstances which when this proposition was passed we were not having to face the difficulties and the expense that we are now facing. It is not just a matter of P.40, it is the situation across the board that we will be bringing with the Government Plan on 12th October and then if amendments are required then obviously the Assembly is free to do so.

4.7.5 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Given the Minister's answer that it is a matter of adapting, would the Minister not feel it is more appropriate to free herself of the bindings of P.40 and to bring a rescindment of the proposition in advance of the Government Plan?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

No. The Government Plan will be lodged on 12th October and then it is up to States Assembly Members; if they wish to bring an amendment they can do so.

4.7.6 The Deputy of St. Mary:

It was at one time mooted that the proceeds of the Channel Island lottery would be applied to the same sectors as those referred to in the Constable's original question. Will the Minister confirm that in coming to any calculations as to reduction of percentage going to those sectors she will not take into account the prospect of the Channel Island lottery proceeds being used as well?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

I think the Channel Island lottery benefits can be applied for by anybody, I understand, so there is no reason why arts, culture and heritage could not apply for some of those financial benefits.

4.7.7 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier:

Is the Minister not announcing here that no budget is safe and that what we are proceeding with now is the lowest common denominator; salami slicing budgets left, right and centre in the new Government Plan?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

No, I am not saying that at all, I am just saying that we have to adjust to the current circumstances, which everybody knows that we have to do. It is quite apparent that there is a huge amount of expenditure and cost that has had to be directed to deal with the current situation of COVID-19 and therefore not everything can go ahead as planned in 2019.

4.7.8 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is the Minister not directly announcing then that no budget is safe and that cuts will occur willy-nilly across the board; no project is safe?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

No, I am not directly announcing that. The Deputy is trying to put words into my mouth. I am not saying that at all, I am just saying that the restrictions have to be applied because of the current situation. I cannot say it more than that.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

You cannot say more, then indirectly you have said it.

4.7.9 Connétable S.A. Le Sueur-Rennard of St. Saviour:

I am very disappointed with this, to be perfectly honest with you, because in the very beginning I thought that the sums that were going to be distributed with everybody was very poor anyway. But I would like to know now what is going to happen to our speeches. You say there is going to be no help now when we all voted for P.40 for help to be given. What I find very sad about this is that ...

The Bailiff:

Connétable, I am afraid this cannot be a speech; this has to be a question.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

In that case, could you tell me why the Back-Benchers vote, when it is going to be overruled by the Council of Ministers anyway, because that is what happened to the hospital and that is what is happening now to the arts. Maybe the Minister could tell me why we are even voting for anything when we are going to be overruled as Back-Benchers?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

Sorry, I had difficulty in hearing what the Connétable was saying. There is no question of propositions being overruled; it is just that when we have to consider the extraordinary expenditure that we are having to deal with, with the current situation of COVID-19, that we have to make alterations in all areas. It is not just one particular one. Every department area has had to come forward with suggestions as to how they can make savings in order to function with the enormous expense that we have with COVID-19. But it is not a matter of overruling Back-Benchers or Assembly propositions; it is just Government has to make some very strong decisions as to how we fund the expenditure that this pandemic is causing.

The Bailiff:

Deputy Alves has asked to ask a question. I had called the list which normally indicates that that is closed, but 2 supplementaries have been passed up on so I am prepared on this last occasion to be flexible.

4.7.9 Deputy C.S. Alves of St. Helier:

Thank you very much, Sir, I really appreciate that. I am not sure whether I had misunderstood, however, it was my understanding that the Government Plan is a 4-year plan with annual budget updates so, therefore, can the Minister just clarify if that is the case and did P.40 not apply to the Government Plan as a whole?

[10:45]

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

Yes, the Deputy is absolutely correct; it is a 4-year plan with annual budget updates. But of course when the Government Plan was produced in 2019 of course we were not in the pandemic situation

that we are now, so adjustments have had to be made going forward in order to finance the situation that we find ourselves in.

4.7.10 Deputy C.S. Alves:

Can the Minister clarify then: did P.40 apply to the Government Plan as a whole?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

It did, and I thank the Deputy, she is absolutely right, it did apply to the Government Plan as a whole, which was 2019 to 2023. As I have repeatedly said, we had no idea when that Government Plan was produced that we would be in this kind of situation, so all expenditure has to be reduced because of the current situation. The P.40 was adhered to in 2019; going forward we will have to adjust that, and it is not just P.40, everything has had to be recognised and re-established in the current one which will be lodged on 12th October.

The Bailiff:

Senator Moore, you have asked for a question. I am afraid I cannot give you a question; I have already called the questions closed. I allowed one extension because Deputy Alves mistakenly asked for a point of clarification when she clearly should have asked a question, but we now close the questions for this and a final supplementary, Connétable of St. Helier.

4.7.10 The Connétable of St. Helier:

The Minister I know has a professional commitment and a great deal of skill when it comes to the arts and I must say I am surprised that she does not recognise that in a time of a pandemic the public - Islanders as well as visitors - have more requirement for the support provided by culture, arts and the heritage than at other times. Does she not feel that now is a good time to increase the investment and financial support for the arts rather than subjecting it to the same kind of salami slicing that other departments are experiencing? Will she not reconsider that in these difficult times people need that access to the arts just as much as they need, for example, access to open space?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

I completely agree with the Connétable and I thank him for his compliment. My entire history and career prior to politics was in the arts and culture and I am a great, great supporter of the arts. But in my current situation as Minister for Treasury and Resources I have to be balanced across the whole of expenditure and the balance sheet to be fair to all departments. You cannot say that the arts, from my position, are more demanding or need more attention than education or health or any of the other demands on the purse, for want of a better description. But there is no question that I am a great supporter of the arts, so we are trying to be balanced across the entire expenditure for the next Government Plan.