

2020.03.09

1 Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade of the Chief Minister regarding the staffing dedicated to the portfolio of the Minister for the Environment: (OQ.54/2020)

Will the Chief Minister commit the Council of Ministers to considering the staffing dedicated to the portfolio of the Minister for the Environment to ensure that it is sufficient for the portfolio's requirements?

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

As Members will be aware, the current structure of G.H.E. (Growth, Housing and Environment) is in the process of being reviewed and changed and that process is currently underway.

3.1.1 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Would the Chief Minister consider there is an imbalance in that given the Data Protection Department has the capacity to employ some 16 members of staff, is Government totally focused on the finance industry to the detriment of the environment in our Island?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

No, the Environment, under the Government Plan, is going to receive £15.2 million over 4 years as an increase in funding, that was what was approved in the Plan and that, I think, from my recollection, represented a reasonable increase in previous positions. What I will say is that we know that where there are current pressures, such as the Island Plan, Brexit, carbon neutral strategy, or the countryside natural environment issues, we have allocated additional funds as a result of that process, which was approved by the Assembly, but of course if there are any future changes and pressures, such as those imposed by the future relationship between the U.K. and Europe and wider jurisdictions, that will be monitored and assessed. If any decisions are needed they can be made in respect of future Government Plans as to whether any additional resources are required in those areas.

Deputy J.H. Young of St. Brelade:

I think the Minister's answer requires me to seek a point of clarification in his answer from the Chief Minister. I know it is contrary to the previous direction, but I think when a question specifically adjoins a Minister's portfolio and crucial things like resources, I think I should at least be entitled to ask a question.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Deputy, the position at the moment is that there is a ruling by the previous Bailiff to the effect that a Minister cannot question another Minister. Until that is changed by the Assembly agreeing an Amendment to Standing Orders that is the position.

Deputy J.H. Young:

Does that include, for example, if a figure was quoted in an answer, which in fact does not reflect, I think, the answer in the question about the revenue expenses and staffing, is there no means of asking that?

The Deputy Bailiff:

No, there is not.

3.1.2 Senator K.L. Moore:

The Chief Minister's answer gave many figures, but did not give the Assembly a timeline as to when this work will finish.

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Which work?

Senator K.L. Moore:

The work the Chief Minister outlined in terms of reviewing this Department.

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Sorry, because I referred to Brexit, carbon neutral strategy and Island Plan in there as well and I would not like to put a date as to when those will be completed in the next few months. The G.H.E. restructuring, as the Senator will know from the updates that we provided to the One Gov Review Panel, has taken longer than we expected but is due to hopefully reach its conclusion in the next few months.

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

Is it the case that of the £15 million he quoted, only £500,000 is going to Environment and the rest is going to the Infrastructure Department in that time?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I cannot give the split, I said Environment, which is obviously the overall objective from the C.S.P. (Common Strategic Policy) and obviously quite a lot of that is in the Climate Emergency Fund, but some of it is directly going to the Environment and obviously the detail is in the Government Plan.

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

While the Chief Minister has helped clarify a little bit, was it not the case that the original question was about funds for the Minister for the Environment and not the environment in general; therefore the Chief Minister's answer should have been regarding the funds for the Minister for the Environment and therefore his Department specifically?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

It said: "To consider the staffing dedicated to the portfolio of the Minister for the Environment" and what I said, in reminding Members, that we are putting some more money into the area of the environment, the objective of the environment in the C.S.P. I think that is all I can say. We have put some additional funding, we did have discussions with the Minister, the Deputy will recall, which was a specific request he raised, which we accommodated. This I think is more around the resourcing side, which, as I said, is an ongoing process.

3.1.5 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Would the Minister then confirm that is a sum of £500,000 extra which is going into the Environment Department, as asked by Deputy Ward?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Doing some very rapid maths, there is just over £1 million and a bit over the 4 years that is going into the Environment Department, there is £13 million, I believe, that is going into the Climate Emergency Fund, which is then going to be split across those 2 Departments that the Deputy has been referring to and so do not forget that was a first cut that essentially ... or a first tranche of

funding as the climate emergency measures are brought more and back to this Assembly as appropriate. There will be additional funding going into those measures. So, that is the initial funding that was agreed in the Government Plan, that was approved about 12 weeks ago.

3.1.6 Deputy J.H. Perchard of St. Saviour:

The original question pertains to the consideration of staffing dedicated to the portfolio of the Minister for the Environment.

[15:00]

So I would just like to clarify how many members of staff are currently dedicated to the portfolio for the Minister for the Environment and does the Chief Minister think that that is sufficient and if not, will the money that he has put aside in the Government Plan go towards staffing specifically?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I do not have the direct numbers to hand for the level of staffing now and partially because the whole of G.H.E. is going through a restructuring process and that level of change. In terms of what we said is that as part of that assessment and if the Minister does still have concerns he is obviously very welcome to come and talk it through with me. What we have said is that as demands arise and it might be out of the changes and the relationship between the U.K. and Europe, for example, in fisheries, that that will have to be assessed and if greater resource is needed I am sure greater resource will be forthcoming. What we must not forget is there is not a bottomless pit, i.e. we have to make sure that within all of our funding we make sure that it is balanced before the other needs that we face, as an Assembly and we have basically had a very extensive debate some 12 weeks ago in which this Assembly vastly approved. That is about cutting one's cloth accordingly and meeting the priorities that this Assembly have set.

3.1.7 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Would the Chief Minister confirm that the Minister for the Environment is in fact comfortable with the responses he has made today and if not, agree to discuss the matter further?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I am always happy to discuss matters with the Ministers. As has happened in the past, if Ministers do have concerns of particular areas they do come and talk to me. I do expect that conversation to be taking place.