

21.06.29

12 Senator T.A. Vallois of the Minister for Children and Education regarding heads of transfer report (OQ.150/2021):

Further to the presentation of R.105/2021, regarding transfers between heads of expenditure, will the Minister advise what consultation, if any, he had with the political oversight group regarding the deferral of £2,086,000 worth of funding for education projects until 2022, and why the school extension improvements and Rouge Bouillon site review outcome projects were deferred in particular over other projects?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden (The Minister for Children and Education):

I thank the Senator for her question. I did not have any consultation with the political oversight group regarding the deferrals but I was involved in discussions at the Council of Ministers and briefed by my officers before approving the deferrals. My officers were asked where the budgets might be reprofiled to release funds for the hospital on the understanding that our projects would be repaid to meet the costs when they were more likely to be incurred. My officers took a view on which projects might have natural lag in them from practical reasons, for example, how far along they are and the necessary planning and building permissions. Do they have a project manager assigned by I.H.E. (Infrastructure, Housing and Environment)? The idea was that if the money was not going to be spent normally it would fall away to the Consolidated Fund, as per the Public Finances Law. We looked where that money might not be spent so we could reprofile it and use it for something for the benefit of the Island.

5.12.1 Senator T.A. Vallois:

I thank the Minister for his answer. It refers to school extensions and improvements, there is a sum of money that is taken out of there but we do not know which projects that refers to. Could the Minister expand on whether it is, for example, Les Landes Nursery, Mont à l'Abbé extension, or J.C.G. (Jersey College for Girls) and J.C.P. (Jersey College Prep) playing fields? Could he give us an indication of what particular projects are now lagging, as per his answer?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

The school extensions improvements have not been affected, as such, it is just that due to COVID we knew that we were not going to be as advanced as we are, but they are still online to be started by October. That is the extensions to La Moye, Les Landes and Mont à l'Abbé. This money would not have been spent this year but we will have the money and the projects are still going ahead 100 per cent. It was just that due to certain things that happened, like COVID, that we were not going to be able to deliver on spending that much money throughout the year. Therefore we reprofiled it. But it has not stopped or slowed down much more the projects which are the improvements.

5.12.2 Deputy I. Gardiner:

Would the Minister please explain why this money was not reprofiled within the department? For example, we will go back to January and the department knew that they have the money and we always have the need in education and this money was not reprofiled within the department and they have gone out to different projects.

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

The capital programme money cannot be reprofiled in a way that we just bring it back into the department and spend it somewhere else, in that way for the department. It has to be looked at in a

different way. The money that we got through the Government Plan for these projects will still be there. We will still get the money that was approved by the Government Plan. If we would have wanted to reprofile it and spent it on something else we would need to have done that in a different way.

Deputy I. Gardiner:

If I understand it correctly, it could be reprofiled within the capital project and we have, for example, a field that was allocated to the First Tower School that we never got the budget to look into this and to see how it can be developed. So why would the money not be reprofiled to that project within the department?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

The piece of work on the hospital has been delayed due to other factors that are out of our control, which meant that there was a cost associated with that. We needed to look where we could find money for that, which is an important project for the benefit of all Islanders, and that is why we chose to go down that route.

5.12.3 Deputy C.S. Alves:

Can the Minister clarify what he means by the projects have not been referred? Is it a lag or is it due to poor forecasting?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

It is more to do with trying to get the project managers and trying to get the planning work done. All the plans submitted at this stage, we hope to have contractors on site by October this year. There are projects like the 3G pitches at St. Clement's, Plat Douet and Granville, which will be installed for the start of the September term. But because of the inability to do certain things through the COVID period we were not able to get the contractors or the work done in that way. But there is a full intention to deliver them, as was requested by this Assembly.

5.12.4 The Connétable of St. John:

Is the Minister aware that his department claimed they do not have sufficient funds to draw up a lease at St. John?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I was not aware. I am happy to speak to the Constable about that if he wishes with some officers to find out what is going on.

5.12.5 The Connétable of St. John:

Would the money have been better spent on things such as drawing up leases than deferring to another department?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I think the money is best spent on the health of the Island in this way. The need was right there, right now. So I am happy with how this has gone on.

5.12.6 Senator T.A. Vallois:

I appreciate the position that the Minister is in. I am very much an advocate of openness and transparency and I would like a clearer picture, exactly what has been deferred within the school

extensions and improvements, particularly with the question from the Constable of St. John, where there was funding put in place for that. Would the Minister commit to providing the deferral of funds indicated under page 143 of the Government Plan for school extensions and improvements with the funding that was put in place for £5.9 million; what of that was deferred to 2022 and a clear explanation as to why that was the case?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I am absolutely happy to provide that and, as the Senator is on the Scrutiny Panel that oversees the Education Department, I will happily go and get officers together to do a briefing for the Scrutiny Panel if she so wishes.