

2021.09.14

**4 Deputy D. Johnson of St. Mary of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding Foul Sewer Extensions (OQ.189/2021)**

Following the Ministerial Decision of 3rd September 2021 to transfer up to £750,000 from Foul Sewer Extensions to the Replacement Assets capital head of expenditure, will the Minister advise the extent of the consultation with him prior to that decision and its effect on extending the foul sewer network?

**Deputy K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour (The Minister for Infrastructure):**

My officers formally briefed me as part of the Ministerial Decision process and I have also received periodic updates on the progress of items within the department's capital programme. COVID and staff shortages in the Drainage Design Department have delayed some foul sewer extension projects delivery in 2021. However, we will deliver one scheme this year, currently serving 15 properties, with the potential for a further 20 to be connected later. Funding originally requested for replacement assets in 2021 was £4.3 million, however, only £3.5 million was allocated in the capital programme in the Government Plan. £1 million unspent last year, due largely to delays in manufacturing in the U.K., was requested to be carried forward from 2020 to cover the contractual liability. As this request was not supported, funding has had to come from the 2021 allocation. Our projects supporting the existing pumping stations, including odour control networks, replacement pumps and tunnels and hydraulic improvements, are key to enabling foul sewer extensions to be successfully undertaken in future years and from the bulk of this request. Any foul sewer extension funds not transferred to replacement assets at the year-end will be requested to be carried forward to 2022 to support the delivery of foul sewer extensions next year, which are currently in design.

**8.4.1 The Deputy of St. Mary:**

I thank the Minister for his reply. I note that in the report accompanying the transfer decision, reference was made that an average allocation to the capital expenditure account would in one year be £4.5 million, whereas in 2021 it was only £3.5 million. In the circumstances, would it not have been appropriate and more open to have allocated that full £4.5 million at the time, rather than perhaps give rise to hopes that an additional sum would be available in the year for foul sewer extension?

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

We are working very hard as we can on the foul sewer extensions. We have the new sewerage treatment works coming online in 2023, which will obviously increase capacity.

[12:00]

But we are doing an awful lot of work at the moment. With the weather we have had we are doing stormwater separations and we are doing everything we can to alleviate the problems. But, as I say, at the moment 92 per cent of the Island homes are on foul sewer extensions and it is my desire to increase that as much as we can. There will always be a few areas which cannot be connected for various reasons, in which case we make other contingencies, such as tankering and small package plant.

**8.4.2 The Connétable of St. John:**

In answer to Written Question 289 the Minister stated that we need to replace ageing infrastructure. With the need identified and funds available, why has the money been returned?

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

I am afraid those funds are not necessarily available. We have to prioritise. It is a very expensive network to build and indeed maintain. If we so much as lose one pumping station that could be £25,000 for a new pump; it is very, very expensive. Of course, we have had to do our share in Infrastructure in supporting the COVID regime.

**8.4.3 The Connétable of St. John:**

What discussion has the Minister had, if any, with the Minister for the Environment, who, as he knows, was keen to get fiscal stimulus funding for extension of main drains prior to moving these funds?

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

Indeed, we are both very keen to extend the main sewerage, it was not supported is the bottom line.

**8.4.4 The Connétable of Trinity:**

Will the Minister agree with me that it is very disappointing when funds are taken from the foul sewer extension budget to prop up the existing infrastructure? I say this on behalf of the circa 320 households in the Parish of Trinity who have no option and live with third-world private drainage systems. While the Minister may think that the extension of the system is less critical than replacement of assets, I doubt most of these householders and, may I add, taxpayers, would agree. My question to the Minister is: at a time when we are all trying to reduce our carbon footprint, is it environmentally acceptable that this wealthy Island continues to rely on a fleet of tankers for the collection of sewerage and waste water?

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

As I have said many times, it is my desire to increase the foul sewer network to the whole Island wherever possible. Trinity is up to 74 per cent now and I would like to increase that even more. But all of the rural Parishes are obviously much trickier. There are quite a few hamlets that need to be connected to main sewers, which will mean going over private land; there are lots of negotiations going on there. But basically it is one of capacity at the moment that we have to upgrade the network. We are doing a huge amount of work with the stormwater separation to prevent any flooding of any kind from the sewer network. But it is ongoing work and we are doing our best.

**8.4.5 The Connétable of Trinity:**

Is the Minister also aware that several potential housing sites put forward in my Parish in the recent call for sites as part of the draft Island Plan were rejected, purely due to drainage issues? By that I mean the existing system, I am advised, is already overloaded.

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

The Constable is correct, the system is overloaded and the team at Drainage are doing an absolutely fantastic job maintaining what we have. We are trying to increase it as much as we can. We do have a new estate coming online very shortly, which is in St. Lawrence, and that will be a new estate coming online. That is a relatively easy win in a sense that gravity will take care of that one, we do not need huge pumping stations to assist in that. But we are doing our very best with what we have.

**8.4.6 Senator T.A. Vallois:**

Can I ask the Minister whether he believes it is irresponsible to put a bid into the Government Plan that is below that which is required to keep key equipment operating and the legal responsibilities that go with the requirement to do so?

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

Everything is maintained to the correct standard. We have to move things around to do it. But, as I have said, we have had to do our bit. We have not had as much money as we would have liked for the sewerage network. But everything is maintained to a high standard and the team are doing an excellent job. We are doing our best to maintain the system.

**8.4.7 Senator T.A. Vallois:**

Could the Minister advise then what exactly is the delay to the foul sewer extensions now with the £750,000 being transferred? Where was that set out in the plan, as per the requirements of Article 18 of the Public Finances Law?

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

As I say, we have a capacity problem. We need to finish off the sewerage treatment works, which will be in 2023. But we have had obviously pressures on our budget and we have had to adjust them accordingly. But I think 92 per cent of the Island are now on mains drains. It is my desire to increase that to possibly 96 per cent, 97 per cent in the not-too-distant future but these things take time. As I have said, we have also got a shortage in our Design Department, which is being remedied.

**8.4.8 The Deputy of St. Mary:**

I thank the Minister for his various replies and note that there has been an increase in the percentage of properties on mains drainage but will he not confirm that that is due largely to the fact that this is represented by major developments which are able to tune into the existing foul sewer network? As demonstrated by the Constable of Trinity, certain developments are in fact prevented from taking place due to the lack of foul sewer network and, in that context, will he please advise what money is he bidding for in the next Government Plan to extend the network? Thank you.

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

Well I think eventually we are trying to rollover as much funds as we can because, as I said, I am very keen to get as many people on mains drains as much as we can. Some people are quite happy to stay as they are but most people obviously would like to be on mains drains. There will always be families, et cetera, that live so far away from the main sewer system it would not be economically viable to have them on mains drains, but the main part of the Island I would like to be on mains drains as quickly as possible and we will be putting in money to that effect.