

21.01.19

16 Deputy K.F. Morel of the Chief Minister regarding the independence of Statistics Jersey (OQ.7/2021):

Just before starting, just to mention I appreciate some elements of this question have been answered in previous questions. In light of the incorporation of Statistics Jersey into Strategic Policy, Performance and Planning, will the Chief Minister explain what further measures, if any, are planned in respect of the status of Statistics Jersey and will he state why the chief statistician has been placed on gardening leave?

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

Yes, as the Deputy has said, the question has been partially answered, I hope, already. I reiterate, being I hope absolutely clear, as I have emailed to Members, as far as I am concerned the independence of Statistics Jersey is fully assured. I am committed to ensuring that that not only remains the case but is further strengthened where necessary. As I have also said, there has been no change to the statutory independence or status of Statistics Jersey who have been part of the wider development for SP3 since government departments were recognised in 2018, and obviously before that Statistics Jersey were part of the Chief Minister's Department, and I understand their accounting officer was the chief executive officer. I have confirmed my support to S.U.G. in October 2020. I understand policy officers have subsequently been in touch and also, as the Deputy will be aware and I hope that it is an appropriate time to mention it, I have also asked that he take this on and expedite matters. I hope we will get that resolved during the course of this week because that is a discussion that is going on. I hope that demonstrates my commitment to make sure this is expedited and this is done in a strong way. As I have said previously, I do not really want to comment further. I am not at liberty always to comment further on employment matters, but again I have the highest regard for the chief statistician, who is leaving after nearly 20 years of dedicated public service to pursue other endeavours and I very much wish him well.

10.16.1 Deputy K.F. Morel:

With regard to the dual role of the new chief statistician as being the chief statistician and also head of analytics in S.P.P.P., does the Chief Minister consider there in that dual role, and because of the reporting lines via S.P.P.P. to the chief executive, does the Minister see there the potential for a conflict of interest or for undue influence being placed upon the new chief statistician?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I will try to make sure I stay within 1½ minutes this time. In terms of the reporting line, to be really clear, no one can tell the chief statistician what to do. The chief statistician remains part of Statistics Jersey and remains covered by the law. What we do have to consider, and I am sure that will be part of the considerations of the Deputy, is that there needs to be some form of line of oversight in some shape or form - and this is a recommendation so I am looking down at the recommendation - of the Comptroller and Auditor General in relation to any arm's length organisation, which may be a way to go for independence. There are some issues around that, but there is a responsibility to ensure that proper governance is taking place within that organisation. So there still has to be some form of reporting line that comes up within the organisation. That does not mean influence; that does mean essentially governance. But let us be really clear. We have had an exchange of emails. Hopefully the Deputy has understood my position. I want to see the independence of the Stats Department enhanced if it needs to be but if there are any matters that need to be resolved for that to be

resolved. I have given my guarantee on that earlier and that is my position and that has always been the case.

10.16.2 Senator T.A. Vallois:

Can I ask the Chief Minister whether he believes that it is acceptable that no announcement was made of the changes with regards to the chief statistician and the fact that we are required to meet international standards? Therefore, the current law in place in terms of the strengthening that he refers to is actually just making it independent, the fact that we have not made it completely independent through the legislation which we currently have.

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

There are 2 remarks. One is obviously the legislation was only brought in in 2018. I think we probably all assumed that they had achieved what they needed to achieve by that law. Evidently, there have been one or 2 issues that have come out of that. I think just in relation to the first part of the question the Senator may have missed my point earlier. The existing chief statistician does not formally leave until 20th January. I had always understood that he had asked if his departure could be very low key and without any fuss and, therefore, we were respecting his wish for privacy, which seemed to be the least we could do after 20 years of dedicated public service. We had planned to make an announcement following his departure - as I said, his last official day was tomorrow - in accordance with his wishes. I did make the point that rather felt like a moot point at this stage.

10.16.3 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Does the Chief Minister have a feeling, like I do, that there is an opportunity missed? He has just stated 20 years of experience of a known Jerseyman who has been essential to this role. He is not having any say in the succession of this. Does that not concern the Chief Minister, as it does me, and many other Islanders?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

It is my understanding that he has helped to design the new structure so from that perspective he has had some input, as I understand matters, into the structuring and was, I think, very supportive of the principles that it meant that someone from within the department could then continue a career and progression and was promoted up to the next level. So I think that is the principle of growing our own and that is something we were all very, very keen on. In terms of somebody who departs the organisation having input into their successor, I am sure as a process that does not normally happen and I think from memory it is not encouraged under the normal H.R. employment conditions that we follow.