

22.11.01

6 Deputy R.J. Ward of the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture regarding financial security of Jersey Bulls football and Jersey Rugby Club (OQ.106/2022):

Will the Minister advise what assessment, if any, has been made of the financial security and adequacy of facilities of Jersey Bulls F.C. (Football Club) and Jersey Rugby Club; and whether there are contingencies in place should any potential issues arise?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

The Deputy has asked for this to be answered by Minister for the Environment in person, which is absolutely fine, but I would suggest that my Assistant Minister, Deputy Stephenson, answers it as she knows the subject more in depth than I do.

The Bailiff:

Well I am afraid that on the list it is directed to you, Minister, and you are required to answer it. We cannot chop and change around the Order Paper, I am afraid.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can I just make a point? I was not aware you could do that; I thought questions had to go to a Minister. Just to say.

The Bailiff:

No, it is possible to ask someone with Ministerial responsibility for it who is not necessarily the Minister but, Minister, if you would deal with it.

Deputy K.F. Morel (The Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture):

Absolutely. As noted in the answer to Written Question 178, the former Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture met with Jersey Bulls earlier this year and requested details on their longer-term vision for the club. This enables the Government to consider future support, including a long-term lease of government land by Jersey Bulls or any investment of taxpayers' money on the project. Officers and the Assistant Minister are still awaiting receipt of this information but stand ready to assist Jersey Bulls on the development of their long-term vision. In the short term, new spectator improvements and fencing works were completed this summer at Springfield Stadium. This project which involved around £1.2 million of spending now allows Jersey Bulls Football Club to progress through the leagues. It is recognised that both the Bulls and the Reds are an important part of the sports landscape in Jersey and adds huge value to the community. As the Minister, and on behalf of the Assistant Minister, I can say that we celebrate their ongoing success as they move up through the ranks and wish them all the best for their seasons.

4.6.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Jersey Bulls are self-funding in some way; can I ask the Minister whether there is support for an additional hospitality facility on the site of Springfield for Jersey Bulls so that it can extend their income and extend the level of hospitality that they offer on match day in particular?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I am personally unsure whether there is anything with regard specifically to hospitality but I can say that the long-term vision for the club means that there is a 5 to 10-year plan. If that is developed

then we will be able to identify how we can best help and how we can enable them to provide the sustainable funding that they need going forward, whether that involves hospitality or not.

4.6.2 Connétable D. Johnson of St. Mary:

In the Minister's reply he makes reference to the Jersey Reds. Just for clarification, the question refers to Jersey R.F.C. (Rugby Football Club). I just wish to make the distinction, there is a distinction between Jersey R.F.C. which is an amateur-based section of the club and Jersey Reds which is entirely professional. I interpret the question ...

The Bailiff:

Connétable, that does not sound anything like a question.

The Connétable of St. Mary:

I will come to the question now. So will you please ...

The Bailiff:

Yes, when I used the words "prefatory remarks" and "preamble", I was conscious that I might be giving a lot of licence to people to make short speeches, and that is not my intention, nor will it be my practice, but please do ask your question.

The Connétable of St. Mary:

I apologise, my point was to seek clarification that he would not be giving facilities to Jersey Reds as such, given that they are a professional club and that the question relates to Jersey R.F.C., the amateur side.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I believe the Constable is absolutely correct, it does refer to Jersey R.F.C. in the question, so I would have to make sure that the answer pertains to that but right at this moment, I am unable to do so.

4.6.3 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

As a Jersey Bulls seasons ticket holder, could I impress upon the Ministers the importance of ensuring that there are adequate catering and commercial spaces available at Springfield Stadium when those matches are occurring? Could I impress upon him the importance that there could be for going to meet with those involved in running that team to discuss ideas with them and endeavour to find out what the Government can do to help support them so that they get those commercial opportunities to make the club more financially viable?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Again, that does sound like a lot of sense. I can understand why catering facilities are important, particularly from not just a financial income perspective but also from keeping the crowds happy during cold winter nights when they are watching some fantastic football, so I am happy to do that.

4.6.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Minister agree that it is important to safeguard the future of both clubs and that there is a paradox in that when either team become more successful, the cost of them participating in the sport also goes up perhaps, shall we say, exponentially? I am not sure if it is the correct use of the term. Does he think that, therefore, in order to stop a situation whereby we find ourselves then having to approach the Government for bailouts all the time, that we need to look at a formal

relationship and what level of government funding in the long term that they can expect with a mutual service level agreement from that?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

It is a really interesting question and it is one that I think as our sports teams - not just football or rugby - but as our sports teams improve and become increasingly professionalised, and even the amateur area kind of become more and more involved and their expenses increase, I think we do have to find a way of understanding what level we want the Government to fund that. Some of these decisions are taken by clubs entirely as private decisions. It can be suggested that it was a private decision; therefore, the consequences of those private decisions should fall upon the clubs themselves. Or do we as an Island want to support that ongoing kind of professionalisation, but that does come with a cost. I agree technically it is probably not an exponential increase in costs but it is certainly a sharp increase in costs as these clubs rise through the leagues. So I think we need as an Island to discuss what do we want, how much do we want to support this?

4.6.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

If it happens that the Government is repeatedly giving money to these clubs, which I think personally is a very good investment, I have seen the tourism and the interest locally that it generates, does there then become a question at what point we consider being shareholders in those potentially very successful clubs?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Again, a very valid question. It would also depend upon the status of those clubs in terms of the legal entity. You can only be shareholders in certain types of entities. Clubs and associations may not be the case, so again there are so many technical elements to this but I think those sorts of questions we do need to ask ourselves. We have seen this with the Jersey Reds how, as they have gone up through the leagues it does, in such a small place with such a small catchment area of fans, become very difficult to sustain financing. So, yes, the Island does need to think about how we best want to deal with that.

4.6.6 Deputy R.J. Ward:

I have changed my rugby one because of my mistake in the question. Thank you to the Constable for pointing that out. Can I ask the Minister is he aware that Jersey Bulls are 100 per cent responsible for the cost of airfares, travel and accommodation for visiting teams? That is one of the huge costs that they have just to put those games on and be part of a league.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I am sure that is the case. As I said, the thing that I find interesting is that the decision to go into those leagues was a private decision made by the club itself as a private club. Therefore, how much the public purse should be responsible for that is the question we have to decide. These are private decisions and they are ending up with public consequences. So, if we want to support, that is fine, but as an Island I think we need to have that debate openly.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Could I just point out with this question, I have just noticed that it is slightly amended to the one which I submitted? It has included some extra words in it which I am not sure reflect what I wanted to ask. But can I ask it as it is on the Order Paper anyway and we might deal with it in supplementaries?

The Bailiff:

Well I think if you ask it as it is on the Order Paper. If you need to delve deeper with a supplementary, then perhaps that is the way to do it.