

22.10.04

1 Deputy R.J. Ward of St Helier Central of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding under 18 bus passes (OQ.93/2022)

Will the Minister advise what involvement he had in the sale of LibertyBus from HCT Group to Tower Transit, and what reassurances, if any, he has received regarding the continuance of the Avanchi18 bus passes for those aged under 19?

Deputy T. Binet of St. Saviour (The Minister for Infrastructure):

My involvement in the ownership transfer of LibertyBus between HCT Group and Tower Transit has been limited to ensuring that the terms and conditions are guaranteed and unchanged by Tower Transit. However, I am grateful to both companies for keeping the I.H.E. (Infrastructure, Housing and Environment) Department well-informed. The Avanchi18 travel pass scheme remains funded as per the amendment to the 2022 Government Plan, which has not been varied. Going forward, continued funding has been included in the 2023 Government Plan, subject to approval by the States Assembly.

2.1.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:

What consideration was given to taking the service in-house in order to directly control the use of significant subsidies given to our bus company?

[9:45]

Deputy T. Binet:

I do not think that was particularly considered in light of the fact that the service at the moment appears to be perfectly good. I do not think we were looking for any disruption, particularly as this had to be handled in a relatively short space of time.

2.1.2 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier Central:

Could the Minister indicate whether the terms and conditions he was referring to apply equally to the staff involved?

Deputy T. Binet:

I do indeed.

The Bailiff:

Supplementary, Deputy Southern? Normally one person gets a chance when there's questions of this nature so do you have a supplemental question?

2.1.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

It is a sort of supplementary. Now that I know it applies to the staff as well, could the Minister indicate to Members when the contract with this now particular company will take place?

Deputy T. Binet:

The terms and conditions ongoing are exactly as they were previously.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

When will the new contract be debated?

The Bailiff:

That was the supplemental question, Minister. It was when would the new contract come in?

Deputy T. Binet:

I believe there is a report going to be issued at Christmas, a discussion, to the best of my knowledge. Further than that, I cannot give any further guidance.

2.1.4 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Deputy Southern has just asked the exact question that I was going to ask so if I could follow it on by asking the Minister what consideration, at the point of renewal of that contract, will be given to alternative providers for a bus service, including the option of providing that service in-house so that the democratically elected representatives of the public of Jersey will be able to determine what kind of bus service meets our needs?

Deputy T. Binet:

I think that will depend entirely on the performance of the new company that has just taken over.

2.1.5 Deputy L.V. Feltham of St. Helier Central:

I would just like the Minister to confirm what governance measures are in place between the department and the organisation in consideration that it has in receipt of public money, and how often the company is required to provide reports to the States of Jersey and the department that manages that contract?

Deputy T. Binet:

As I have said, the governance arrangements will be whatever they were when the contract was put in place in the first instance, and I have to hold my hands up and say that I am not aware of anything further than that because having been in post for 12 weeks there is a limit to what you can actually physically get to doing. I am afraid, that is an area that I have not looked at in any detail.

2.1.6 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Will the Minister commit to putting governance practices in place with regard to the bus contract?

Deputy T. Binet:

We can certainly look at that and if there are any deficiencies we will address them. But I should imagine that it is unlikely.

2.1.7 Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade:

Given that this change of ownership circumstance in the middle of a contract is new to us and one we have not experienced before, will the Minister confirm that in the new contract adequate provision will be made for these possible changes should they arise in the future?

Deputy T. Binet:

That can only happen at the point where the contract expires and, assumedly, that would be best practice and that is a practice that would be pursued.

2.1.8 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

In the departure of LibertyBus, would the Minister confirm that LibertyBus have actually provided the Island with a very good service, far in excess of that which we had experienced previously? Could he confirm that?

Deputy T. Binet:

Yes, it appears to be appreciated by everybody and I would say that from my limited ... well, perhaps more knowledge than I did have in the past, I would say that is absolutely the case and I would thank them for so doing.

2.1.9 Deputy R.J. Ward:

I ask the Minister, and it leads on from the governance, HGT was a social enterprise company; I believe a registered charity. What can we expect from a non-Jersey company that has a profit motive at its heart rather than being a social enterprise?

Deputy T. Binet:

I think I am being asked to predict the future. At the moment I cannot tell. I am not as frightened as Deputy Ward is of the profit motive. The parent company are doing very good work in Australia. They are at the cutting edge of electric public service vehicles and I think we could be expecting possibly an even better service from them.

The Bailiff:

For guidance for Members, Members would have noticed there are only 7, now 6, questions in this particular question period for which 2 hours and 20 minutes are allocated. Strictly that is 20 minutes a question, which is well in excess of the 15 minutes, even for questions without notice, and I am normally allowing 10 minutes but of course if there are reasons why it needs to be more than that I will maintain an element of flexibility, just so that Members are aware.