

22.10.04

4 Deputy L.V. Feltham of the Chief Minister regarding policy changes and the licensing of new businesses (OQ.95/2022)

Will the Chief Minister indicate whether she has considered making any policy changes concerning the licensing of new businesses, either for those starting up or entering the Island, given potential constraints upon local employment, housing markets and inflationary pressures?

Deputy K.L. Moore of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter (The Chief Minister):

I thank the Deputy for her question. It is an important topic. As part of our 100-day action plan I formed a new Ministerial group, the Population and Skills Ministerial Group. This brings together a significant group at the centre of government that will hold explicit responsibility for monitoring population, accommodation, skills gaps and employment issues in co-ordinating policies across government to address these issues. The group will provide advice to me, as the Minister who has responsibility for the Control of Housing and Work Law, and within which business licensing falls to improve and adapt these controls where necessary and to offer support to local businesses appropriately. We are mindful that both the public sector and existing local business is struggling to recruit at this time and therefore we will be considering carefully the impact of any new licence application when taking decisions.

2.4.1 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Given the work that the Chief Minister is undertaking, would she be giving any advice to government-funded organisations that may be seeking to attract new businesses to the Island currently?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

I think everybody needs to be really mindful of the impact and the difficulties that we have in finding appropriate accommodation for any newcomers to the Island. This is of course something that is at the very heart of some of the issues that we have in terms of providing for our public sector and the critical services of health, education and also social work. It is an area that we are very mindful of. It is an area where we need to ensure that we recruit and retain the very best possible people to provide our critical services and perhaps that is not the specific area that the Deputy might be driving at. But I hope it illustrates to her how very important we believe this topic is.

2.4.2 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

In my constituency in months to come, substantial new amounts of business premises will be opening on the waterfront, having been provided by our States-owned developer. Does the Minister have any concerns about the viability of businesses that may attempt to set up in these premises in getting staff in areas that we know existing businesses are already struggling significantly with, and does she believe that there may be a risk to our States-owned developer of having these premises remain empty for long periods of time.

Deputy K.L. Moore:

That is a wide-ranging question. But to answer the first part of it, I think every business should be considering staffing and recruitment, and I am sure they do as part of when they consider the viability of any new business that they wished to open. That would be a matter for themselves. With regards the J.D.C. (Jersey Development Company) and the situation that they might be in, that is also a matter that I am sure their board will be considering.

2.4.3 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

In order to help their board consider these matters, could the Minister confirm that they are being included in discussions with this new people and skills group, that they can be aware specifically of what the needs of the Island's economy are for new business premises like this and that they do not inadvertently end up allocating resources to creating premises that will end up being a liability to them because they cannot fill them?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

I think absolutely every business or organisation considering growth in the Island is taking this situation very seriously indeed, and it is a matter for them and their decision taking. However, what I would like to say about this Government is that we see our relationship with the States-owned entities as something that needs to be nurtured. It needs much greater care and attention and we are already taking steps to ensure that those communication lines are opened and that they continue to be conducted. So, for example, we are now inviting both Andium and the Jersey Development Company to attend meetings of the Future Places Group in future so that we can maintain that conversation and keep a really fluid dialogue.

2.4.4 Deputy M.R. Scott of St. Brelade:

In light of the tensions regarding limited staff and housing resourcing in the Island, will the Population and Skills Strategy Group that the Chief Minister has just mentioned be publishing its methodology for evaluating licence applications for Scrutiny? If so, when please?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

Licence applications come before H.A.W.A.G. (House and Work Advisory Group), which is a subgroup of the Population and Skills Group. We have been asking for a meeting so that we can sit down and reconsider our criteria so that we send out a very clear message. Because we understand that people making applications to us, whether it be to come to the Island as an individual or whether as a business we need to make our criteria very clear. That group is really looking forward to sitting down and defining our criteria moving forward so that we have clear rules that people will understand prior to their applications being made.

2.4.5 Deputy M.R. Scott:

Could the Chief Minister please advise when Scrutiny might see the evaluation strategy?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

As I say, we are champing at the bit to hold this meeting. We have been asking for it for some time. But it has not been able to happen in our diaries. As soon as it is agreed then we would really appreciate the views of Scrutiny upon it.

2.4.6 Deputy R.J. Ward:

May I ask the Chief Minister what the make-up of the group is - and I am sorry I have forgotten the name even though it was just said - and what criteria was used to choose the membership?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

This is something that is set out in law, so the Housing and Work Advisory Group is chaired by the Chief Minister. The Deputy Chief Minister also is a member - I think that is probably as his role in

Economic Development - the Minister for Social Security, the Minister for Home Affairs and the Minister for Housing and Communities. Thank you to those who have assisted my memory.

2.4.7 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister inform Members how many meetings have been held by this new body and what action points and for what Ministers arose out of those meetings?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

As I have said in answers to my previous questions, it has been a matter of some frustration that a formal meeting has not yet occurred for this particular group. We have taken some informal meetings where there have been specific decisions to take and at those times we have expressed our frustration that we have not had a formal meeting as yet and we have asked for it to be put in the diary several times.

2.4.8 Deputy G.P. Southern:

In short then, does the Minister agree that that means no meetings and no actions on this particular point?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

That is his interpretation but I can absolutely assure the Assembly that we are committed to meeting and to setting out these criteria because we consider it to be of extreme importance.

2.4.9 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Would the Chief Minister consider that one of the criteria for new businesses starting in the Island ought to be the provision of staff accommodation?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

I think that is quite right, yes. As we said in answer to a previous question, when considering the viability of any business I am sure the consideration of where staff might accommodate themselves would be a key part of the decision making. Of course the bridging Island Plan rezoned sites for accommodation and Andium have also plans to deliver over 1,000 new properties for people to live in over the coming years but, of course, that is a longer-term process. That is why in our 100-day plan we also included a commitment to modern methods of construction because that is the quickest way that we can see to allocate homes and good quality homes for Islanders so that we can continue to support our local economy.

2.4.10 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Just shortly, will the Chief Minister commit to making that recommendation to H.A.W.A.G.?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

Yes, thank you.

2.4.11 Deputy L.J. Farnham of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter:

On the back of that question, will the Chief Minister commit, with the Minister for Housing and Communities perhaps, to reviewing the relevant regulations, whether they are building regulations or housing regulations which allow for a new type of key worker accommodation to be developed?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

The Minister for the Environment is working on the supplementary planning guidance at the moment and I think was a matter that came before the previous Assembly. It is certainly an area of minimum standards that needs some very careful consideration.

2.4.12 Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I wanted to make it clear, would the Chief Minister agree that any new type of key worker accommodation would have to be developed to the highest of standards but be able to permit a sustainable and realistic opportunity for businesses to provide accommodation for their staff without having a negative or detrimental impact on the local housing market?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

Sustainability, quality of life and affordability are the key tenets when we will be taking decisions through the life of this government. I have to say that with regards the previous project that came to the previous Assembly with regards temporary accommodation, my interpretation was that what was on offer were windowless ghettos and I absolutely rejected that proposition because, of course, if we are attracting new people to the Island we should offer them a quality of life. I think we are in good hands here with the Minister for the Environment who will take this issue and give it his fullest consideration.

The Bailiff:

Deputy Scott, you have asked to ask another question. For these kinds of questions we normally allow one question with a supplemental for each Member. I know there is a lot of time available but I think if we break that rule we will be left in a very uncertain position, so the answer is no I cannot allow the question.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Sir, do you not consider that a little unfair since you allowed me to have a second question?

The Bailiff:

I do not think I did, Deputy Southern. You mean during the course of this question, Deputy?

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Not for this question.

The Bailiff:

Well, yes, but the asker of the question always gets a supplementary question and then a final supplementary. They ask their question, they get a supplementary and then a final supplementary. You were the asker of the question and I can assure you I have written down every time you have asked to be listed and you have never been asked more than once.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

I stand corrected.

The Bailiff:

Thank you very much. Always happy to be challenged. I have Deputy Tadier and then a final supplementary.

[10:15]

2.4.13 Deputy M. Tadier:

The line of questioning seems to have gone down the road where the Chief Minister is telling us that she would like to build staff accommodation for workers in Jersey. I am not sure when ordinary workers - because most people in Jersey are workers and therefore staff ... she seems to be saying that she wants to build accommodation for the low-paid economy sector, so presumably agriculture and hospitality, businesses who do not pay any corporation tax ...

The Bailiff:

I am sorry, Deputy, this is a speech. Could you please ask a question now or do not ask a question?

Deputy M. Tadier:

Sorry, I will not ask the question.

The Bailiff:

Thank you very much for the speech then, Deputy. Final supplementary, Deputy Feltham.

2.4.14 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Can the Chief Minister confirm whether public money is currently being spent in attracting new businesses to the Island and, if so, whether she thinks that is a good use of public money, given the constraints that we have discussed during this questioning? Does she think it would be much better to redirect that public money to the public sector recruitment that is so sorely needed?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

That is a very thoughtful question and one I think that we as H.A.W.A.G. need to give a clear view to those people who are working in Locate Jersey because it is something that continues to be advertised; the Deputy is quite correct. We, so far, have taken one decision in relation to a business, we rejected it because we considered that the level of employment that they were looking to achieve was not going to be fulfilled for the proposed salaries that were described in the application process. This is another example of exactly why we need to get our meeting in our diary and set some clear criteria so that everybody knows exactly where we are moving forward at the moment, and we absolutely need to support Islanders and put their needs first by supporting recruitment and retention of people in our critical services.