

2024.07.16

## **2.2 Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs regarding an update on the Haut du Mont explosion investigation (OQ.144.2024)**

Will the Minister provide an update on the Haut du Mont explosion investigation and state when the public will be informed of the likely cause of the incident?

### **Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat of St. Helier North (The Minister for Justice and Home Affairs):**

I thank the Deputy for the question. As the Deputy will appreciate, the ongoing investigation is complex and while a working hypothesis was established in the immediate aftermath of the explosion, a definitive understanding of the cause requires detailed expert opinion and evidence. The final expert's report has been received and has informed the investigation strategy. The 3 suspects continue to be released on conditional bail. A charge file is well advanced and will be submitted to the Law Officers' Department in due course. The States of Jersey Police remain in close contact with the Law Officers' Department and the file will go to them in due course. They remain in close contact with the families and will ensure that updates are made on a regular occasion, and I would suggest that if they do not hear anything from their dedicated family liaison officers that they make inquiries with them because it is very important that they keep them updated. As this is an investigation, and a file will be submitted to the Law Officers' Department for consideration of charge, the public will not be informed of the cause at this stage.

[9:45]

### **2.2.1 Deputy M. Tadier:**

I hope the Minister appreciates that I asked this question not lightly, and she knows that I have also made inquiries directly with her, but I have had communication from a member of the public whose family was directly affected and he talks of the need for closure in this issue. Not just for those directly affected but I think because it is also a matter of public interest that many people in the Island would like to know what is going on and if, indeed, the houses that they live in are safe. Does the Minister accept that this is a matter of public interest that the information needs to be brought forward as soon as possible?

### **Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Yes, of course, I do appreciate this. However this is an inquiry in partnership with the Health and Safety Inspectorate. The police inquiry team and major incident room have been busy undertaking 1,991 actions, which involved pursuing lines of inquiry to process 6,975 documents, 1,850 exhibits and 1,118 statements to date. This is a very serious incident, and let us make no bones about that. It is probably the most serious thing that has happened in Jersey for a significant period of time and there are 10 victims of this to which obviously, from my perspective, I send my condolences to those families. I fully appreciate that people want closure but what I am minded of is that it is appropriate when we have something of such a serious nature that the investigation teams in all of the areas that are looking at this need the time and space to be able to do that, and I fully appreciate that that sometimes can be a challenge for a member of the family because it is difficult to wait, and it has been 18 months, so I fully appreciate that. But it is also very important that this file is put together in a professional manner and that no stone is left unturned so that whatever the outcome is, it is the best that we could possibly do. Also of course, once the file has completed it will go to the Law Officers' Department and that means also they have got significant work to do to be able to look at to see where this goes next.

### **2.2.2 Deputy S.M. Ahier of St. Helier North:**

Can the Minister inform the Assembly of what the total cost of the investigation into the Haut du Mont explosion Operation Spire actually cost?

### **Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Just bear with me for a minute or 2 because I just need to check in my paperwork. I have somewhere got the detail of ... in fact, just bear with me for a second. My apologies, I cannot find the actual policing plan at this particular time. I know that the detail is fully published in that particular policing plan which was recent ... or policing annual report, I should say, in recent days and I must apologise to the Deputy because I cannot find that particular document at the moment. I do not want to delay the Assembly any further.

### **2.2.3 Deputy S.M. Ahier:**

Thank you, Minister, for trying to obtain that information but, as I understand, the information that the Minister is looking for is from the police investigation. I wondered if she might be able to advise the Assembly how much the total cost of the whole operation was and whether she might be able to supply that information to Members.

### **Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

I found the annual report and that detail will only be up until the end of 2023, so I will actually do that. I apologise to the Deputy for not having that information at hand.

### **2.2.4 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf of St. Saviour:**

May I start by thanking my constituents and Members for their kindness and understanding during my period of absence, and I am pleased to be here and to ask a question in person. While I completely understand the seriousness of the matters which the Minister addresses, I wonder whether she would be kind enough to give the Assembly and the public the assurance that she is apprised, and other Ministers are apprised, of any issues that are emerging that ensure that continued safety. While the court process must take its natural course, there are issues of a wider public interest, and that is the public safety. I wondered whether the Minister has seized upon those issues and is able to advise, at least in confidence, that Ministers are aware of these issues and are dealing with them in the most speedy and efficacious way?

### **Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Yes, I thank the Deputy for that question and of course that is in the forefront of our minds. Of course my colleague and I at Infrastructure meet on a regular basis with the Emergency and Resilience Group, so that is of our mind, and we fully accept and understand that there is a concern from the public in relation to this incident because of the nature and the potential cause of that particular major incident. What I can say, in relation to what my previous colleague had asked me, was that the actual cost of Op Spire in 2023 was £2,707,745, but I will get the Assembly the actual up-to-date cost.

### **2.2.5 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:**

I am grateful for the Minister's reply. Would she please advise the Assembly whether or not she and other Ministers have received a risk assessment, albeit in confidence, that actually addresses some of the potential issues that this tragic incident is potentially the cause of? Have they received a risk assessment? It would be normal that that would be done. A yes or no would be sufficient. I am grateful.

### **Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

As I said, I meet regularly with the Resilience Emergency and risk assessments have been done in relation to this, but obviously that is an ongoing matter.

### **2.2.6 Deputy M. Tadier:**

I hope the Minister agrees with me, and I think most people, that the cost at the moment is not the most important matter here in this, but there is information that could be put in the public domain. Does the Minister agree with that? Would she consider releasing information which would not be prejudicial to the ongoing investigation about the cause and the progress made to date and also the content of that report about the cause of the explosion, so that there can be some progress made towards closure, not just for the families, but also for the wider public in this matter?

### **Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

At this stage, I would not want information to be put into the public domain that could have any impact at all on any process that will happen thereafter. I will speak to the investigating team and will ask that question but, as far as I am concerned, the most important thing at this time is that the investigation can be continued unimpeded and that whatever the result is, is that it is important that there is nothing that has come out prior to anything that may happen following the review of the file and the decisions that are made. I would want to be totally sure that that would not impede it in any way shape or form because for me that is the priority.