

STATEMENT TO BE MADE BY THE CHIEF MINISTER ON TUESDAY 2ND NOVEMBER 2020

There has been much public and political speculation and discussion about the correctness of the Chief Executive of the Government, Charlie Parker, accepting the role as a Non-Executive Director (NED) of New River, a UK real estate company

I wish to briefly set out some of the events that have taken place, to bring Members up to date, and, in making this statement, to allow Members to ask further questions.

Much of this speculation is taking place without the necessary clarity on all of the facts, and with a misunderstanding about the role of a NED, the time commitment it would require, and the steps that the Chief Executive took to ensure that there was no real, or perceived, conflict of interest between his appointment and position as head of the Island's public sector.

The Chief Executive has accepted that there were errors, made by him, in seeking agreement to the appointment. He has met with the States Employment Board (SEB) and has offered them his sincere apologies for his oversight. He has also apologised to me.

I have also apologised to the SEB and we have agreed that the shortcomings that led to this situation will be corrected immediately.

I also recognise the anger that has arisen among Members, Ministers and the public.

The Council of Ministers has been briefed on this position recognising the heightened level of concern about this appointment. The Council has agreed that I should meet with the Chief Executive at the earliest opportunity to relay their concerns and allow the Chief Executive to respond to them.

Whilst the Council of Ministers expressed their support for the Chief Executive in the role he is doing, they have felt that the Non-Executive role is not compatible with the demands of his duties at this time.

I am expecting to have further clarity for the Council of Ministers and SEB tomorrow.

Sir, I completely believe that management of conflicts of interest, actual or perceived, should be of paramount importance to the Government and this Assembly.

And I also believe that there should be no circumstances at all where an officer, Minister or Member of the Assembly are in a situation where they are benefiting from a position that puts them in direct conflict with their responsibilities to the public.

As a result of the concerns that this matter has thrown into sharp contrast, I have asked that a process be commenced to instigate a Government-wide review of the way we identify, manage and resolve these types of issues, including related-party transactions.

I agree with the Chair of Scrutiny and the other Members and Ministers who have said publicly that we must set an example in terms of transparency and accountability, and that nothing less should be expected of our public sector leadership.

I will therefore be inviting the Chair of the Privileges and Procedures Committee to join me in this work, focusing on the declaration of interests of Members, related-party transactions and any other such issues as Politically Exposed Persons, to ensure we do apply the same standards across the board for elected members, Ministers and public officials, and to determine whether any processes need to be strengthened.

I am proposing that this review, and subsequent guidance, be founded on key principles of best practice on managing conflict of interest in the public service; which includes serving the public interest, supporting transparency and scrutiny, and promoting individual responsibility and personal example.

I undertake to return to the Assembly to provide an update on this work and the steps that we will be taking, as a Government, to implement the measures.

Sir - Ministers, the Chief Executive and officials have been working throughout the weekend, and indeed in the last few weekends and weeks, on critical Brexit-related matters integral to our future economy, yesterday we responded to the planned lockdown in England, and this morning we announced our COVID-19 winter strategy.

These are all matters that have a tangible impact on Islanders lives.

Sir, Members will recall that at the start of the pandemic I said that we would all need to work together to navigate the challenges we are facing.

With this in mind, I am disappointed that some Members chose to make public statements on the issue regarding the Chief Executive without approaching me directly to understand the facts.

However, I would like to recognise and thank the newly appointed Chair of PAC who has issued her own balanced statement expressing her wish to understand the matter in detail.

Sir, I believe some Members would like to capitalise on this opportunity for political gain and to see the Chief Executive, myself, or the Government fall.

I believe that this type of behaviour would result in a manifestly disproportionate outcome given the circumstances.

It is for Members to consider if they really feel that such a move is in the interests of the Island.

It is for Members to consider if they want to initiate a situation where the proposed Government Plan, and the planned funding arrangements for schools, for healthcare, for investing in our economy and for managing the COVID-19 pandemic are all put at risk.

It is for Members to consider if they want to focus on removing a Chief Executive at a time when we instead should be focusing on improving children's services, delivering changes to health care and mental health services, building a new hospital, delivering a revamped Fort Regent and key public service reforms, sorting out the huge number of legacy issues facing our technology systems, and of course improving our estate.

And it is for Members to consider how the public will view such unnecessary and all-encompassing politicised disruption to the work of Government, in the middle of a severe pandemic on our borders and preparations for the new UK-EU relationship.

Sir, this is a challenging time, but we are dealing successfully with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in a way that has allowed us to avoid significant Island-wide restrictions.

Members will recall the briefing on legacy challenges facing the Government that I set out last year. A Deputy of this Assembly said it was the best and most honest briefing he had ever received. We are still focused on addressing those issues whilst managing the pandemic and preparing the Government Plan for the next four years.

We have a new healthcare model which we are debating this week, and a plan for the new Hospital, which this Assembly will debate this month.

On 17 November we will debate the establishment of the fiscal stimulus fund.

And, in December we will be debating both the proposed Migration Control Policy and the Government Plan.

The Chief Executive has been integral to all of these projects and many more, and has provided leadership and direction to the officials tasked with taking them to fruition.

He works tirelessly, and is always available to Ministers whenever called upon, at any time of the day or night. I have never questioned his commitment to the Island or his integrity.

And I do not believe that this matter should continue to distract us, or him, from continuing the critical work of Government that needs all our focus.

Sir, I have outlined the thoughts and processes that have gone into managing this matter.

As I have said, the Council of Ministers have asked me to meet with the Chief Executive to relay their concerns and allow the Chief Executive to respond to them.

I expect to be in a position to update them and SEB tomorrow.