

# STATES OF JERSEY

## OFFICIAL REPORT

**TUESDAY, 21st JANUARY 2025**

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[10:30]

**The Roll was called and the Deputy Greffier of the States led the Assembly in Prayer.**

## **COMMUNICATIONS BY THE PRESIDING OFFICER**

### **The Bailiff:**

#### **1.1 Welcome to His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor**

On behalf of Members I would like, in the usual way, to welcome His Excellency to the Chamber this morning.

## **QUESTIONS**

### **2. Written Questions**

#### **2.1 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity of the Minister for the Environment regarding noise complaints (WQ.440/2024):**

Further to Written Question 289/2024, will the Minister state the total number of noise complaints received over the last 15 years from house owners or tenants of new or redeveloped residential housing sites located next to any type of industry or business that existed at the time of construction or redevelopment; and advise what steps, if any, were taken to resolve each complaint?

#### **Deputy S.G. Luce of Grouville and St. Martin (Minister for the Environment):**

There has been no change since Written Question 289/2024, in September 2024.

- a. Environmental and Consumer Protection within the Regulation Directorate have recorded two noise complaints from owner or tenants of properties built in the last 15 years next to growers, horticulturalists and small business parks.
- b. The directorate has live investigations into potential noise nuisance relating to these types of complaints. As previously informed, details relating to live cases cannot be disclosed because it could prejudice the investigation.

### **3. Oral Questions**

#### **3.1 Deputy A.F. Curtis of St. Clement of the Chief Minister regarding the Digital Government Platform in 2024 (OQ.6/2025):**

Further to Written Question 380/2024, will the Chief Minister provide specific examples of expenditure on the digital government platform in 2024, including details of the expenditure on “consultancy” and “managed service” mentioned in his response, and will he outline how the project budget will be spent in 2025?

#### **Deputy L.J. Farnham of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter (The Chief Minister):**

The digital government platform progressed well during 2024 and the total expenditure for that year was £1.41 million and was focused on 3 key projects: the digital registration cards, which moved into final testing, will be available to the public in the first half of this year; the integrated appointment and queuing system, also in final testing, which will enable Islanders to make and manage appointments online initially with employment; social security and further development to the “Tell Us Once” project for when Islanders change circumstances such as their address and need to tell various departments. A staff with high levels of technical skill are needed to deliver the complex projects, especially at user-testing stage. Their expertise has resulted in enhancements and stronger security. In 2024, £290,000 was spent on consultancy roles such as systems architects, business and business analysts, and £826,000 was spent on the development of specific projects by technical experts. These, as the Deputy knows, are managed services.

##### **3.1.1 Deputy A.F. Curtis:**

I thank the Chief Minister for providing the response, and I note that the figures provided by him for the total years shows a significant increase in expenditure between his response on 4th November, where managed services spent £526,000 to what is now £826,000 within only 2 months. But I would press the Chief Minister to be more specific in how that money has been spent. £826,000 is a huge amount of money and I would like the Chief Minister to be specific in how that money is broken down and how he can assure us that that was value for money on those specific projects.

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I am sorry, I cannot break that figure down here and now in the Assembly, but I am happy to provide a written breakdown to the Deputy and discuss an analysis of that later, if necessary.

**3.1.2 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:**

Would the Minister please clarify if all this expenditure is now managed by the newly-created department, Digital Services, that he has a political oversight of?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

Yes.

**3.1.3 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Would the Chief Minister advise when the Digital Services, as a standalone department with a dedicated chief officer, has been created?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

It is just a name change; it is the same department.

**3.1.4 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier Central:**

Could the Chief Minister explain why he has not got a breakdown to the figures that he knew he was going to refer to in his answer?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

We can provide a breakdown. I do not have a detailed breakdown in front of me but I will provide it in writing. It is a lengthy piece of information, maybe hundreds of lines of detail, and I would not have time to read it all out now.

**3.1.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Not having time to read an answer to a question is really a poor excuse for not having the facts at his fingertips, which he should have had if he knew he was going to rely on the figures he was quoting. Does the Chief Minister think that what he has produced is an inadequate answer?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I would be happy to provide the information, but I think we are constrained by the time allowed for oral questions.

**3.1.6 Deputy A.F. Curtis:**

In Written Question 380, the Minister answers that the funding for the project in 2024 was reduced by a Treasury-led reprioritisation exercise from £2.194 million to £1.051 million. Today the Minister has told us that they spent £1.41 million in 2024. Could the Chief Minister advise how the budget increased £400,000 post-Treasury reprioritisation and how the Assembly can know what is spent on any project, given the numbers so quickly change?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

If I recall correctly, the budget related to the consultancy and the managed services costs were additional to that, which were part of the bigger budget, were internal costs of approximately £300,000. The capital budget for 2025 is reduced to £600,000. I think that the spread of the expenditure will work out about to where we wanted it to be over the course of the project.

### **3.2 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity of the Minister for Housing regarding the veterans at Princess Elizabeth Court (OQ.13/2025):**

Will the Minister advise whether the veterans who live at Princess Elizabeth Court, have returned home following the extensive damage caused by Storm Ciarán, and if not, will he clarify when they are likely to be able to do so?

#### **Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier South (The Minister for Housing):**

My understanding is that all but one of the residents at Princess Elizabeth Court have been able to return home so far. We have asked Haig Housing for an update as to when the last can go back. I have not yet received that. I am hoping to hear back from them later today, and of course I am happy to share that information with the Deputy or any other interested Members when I receive it.

#### **3.2.1 Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

There are concerns regarding the quality of repairs and the habitability of the houses, even though the tenants were required to return.

[10:45]

Can the Minister outline what steps tenants could take if they are faced with this situation?

#### **Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Indeed, this is something that we have been aware of for a while now, including going back to before Storm Ciarán. My team have been in constant communication with Haig Housing, and myself and the Minister for Home Affairs have met with the Chief Operating Officer of Haig Housing and, in fact, the residents as well. I understand that the Environmental Health Department are paying close attention to this and in contact with residents frequently. So, I would urge them to maintain that communication with them directly; with myself on top of that, if that is helpful, if they need quicker answers or responses from Environmental Health. That is of course all well and good but I would like to assure Members that in the long term, in ensuring that the support that is offered to these military veterans, let us not forget that they are people who we owe a special duty towards because of the Armed Forces Covenant, that we as a Government need to work with Haig Housing to find a better arrangement for them on-Island to better maintain their homes rather than, as has too often been the case in recent years, them forgetting about those homes because they are in Jersey and they are a U.K. (United Kingdom) charity rather than the Jersey-registered social housing provider.

#### **3.2.2 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:**

Thank you to the Minister for his answer. The Minister mentioned that he was aware about problems at this home before the storm. I assume it is more than a year. Would the Minister advise to the Assembly what has been done in practical terms, what is different happened on the ground and what specific areas he is planning to address and when?

#### **Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Just to reiterate the last point I made, just to remind Members that they are a U.K. charity; they are not a Jersey-registered social housing provider. In the last year, since the storm, the priority has been to work with them and do what we can to enable them to make the necessary repairs to those homes as quickly as possible so people can go back home, and many now are back home. But we have also been engaging in discussions with Haig Housing and Andium Homes about forming some kind of partnership between them whereby Haig Housing can benefit from the expertise and the access to

contractors that Andium has, so that they can respond much more quickly in future when there are problems with maintenance. Because one of the problems last time round is that they just were not familiar enough with the Island and the way we do things here and who is available to physically do works on properties. I hope that if we were able to sign off that kind of arrangement, which there is interest in, then hopefully that will improve things in the future as well.

### **3.2.3 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

I got a bit concerned that, if I understood correct the Minister's answer, because it was a U.K. company the Minister has limited ability to influence and to make changes. Are there any other U.K. providers and if the Minister is planning to put something in place that the tenants from the U.K. providers will have the same support and assurance from the Government as the Island providers?

### **Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

They are not a U.K. company; they are a U.K. charity. It is important to make that distinction. I am not particularly aware of a large presence of U.K. companies running large housing estates in Jersey. I know that there will be smaller investors around about the place, but they would be covered by the private sector arrangements through the rental dwellings licensing scheme, through the Residential Tenancy Law. But I would encourage those, if there are others beyond Haig Housing that operate with a social ethos, as it is meant to be, that they have an open and willing partner in Andium Homes who are happy to partner up with them to help them manage their properties and provide much better on-Island services.

### **3.2.4 Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

Does the Minister believe that he has sufficient tools to ensure independent social housing providers deliver quality services if dialogue fails?

### **Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

No, to be perfectly honest. But I reiterate, Haig Housing is not a Jersey-registered social housing provider so even if we had the framework of social housing regulation it still would not necessarily apply to them unless they went through the effort of registering as a social housing provider. In the absence of establishing a social housing regulator, which is something this Assembly has voted against previously, my team are working with the non-government-owned social housing providers to update our frameworks of working with them. In particular, there is one that we are hoping to have a new memorandum of understanding with soon and that would, in the absence of a full-blown regulator, provide better accountability for Government to make sure they are meeting their obligations.

### **3.3 Deputy S.M. Ahier of St. Helier North of the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development regarding the Future Fit Retail Roadmap (OQ.7/2025):**

Is the Minister fully aligned with the strategy proposed within the recently published *Future Fit Retail Roadmap*, R.190/2024, and does he consider the cost of its production to be justified?

### **Deputy K.F. Morel of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity (The Minister for Sustainable Economic Development):**

I am pleased to say that I am aligned to the *Future Fit Retail Roadmap*. It has been a Ministerial commitment of mine to design and publish such a roadmap, and it addresses the rapid shifts in customer behaviour and technology that are affecting our retailers. This roadmap was produced entirely in-house, without the use of any external consultants. We are fortunate to have a very strong expertise among our sector officers, and they have engaged heavily with members of the industry in developing this strategy, including, of course, as well as individual retailers, but also organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Hospitality Association, and so forth.

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

The roadmap that has been described in the media as having the turgid prose being beyond rubbish, junk and laughable, how does the Minister respond to these accusations?

#### **Deputy K.F. Morel:**

I would ask those people to actually read the roadmap.

### **3.3.2 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:**

Is the Minister saying that the person who made those comments, and I will read them, which is that: “This is beyond rubbish and to think we have paid civil servants to write this junk.” Does he think that that person has not read the retail strategy? Is that what he is telling the Assembly?

#### **Deputy K.F. Morel:**

It strikes me that that is possible.

### **3.3.3 Deputy M. Tadier:**

Would the Minister consider the counterfactual that we have an experienced businessman in Jersey who has read it and that he simply thinks that this is as he says it is, and would he seek to consider engaging with both that author who wrote those comments and the wider community to see if in fact the retail strategy could be enhanced?

#### **Deputy K.F. Morel:**

I always am happy to engage with any businesspeople on the Island, and I do so. I believe, in this case, the person being spoken about, I have engaged with in the past as well. I think if we are talking about the letter in the paper, I think most of the comments that were there were about a frustration over a lack of deregulation that was proposed in the roadmap. So that would be around things such as minimum wage, et cetera. This Government is clearly committed to increasing the minimum wage, so having a retail roadmap which spoke about the opposite would be contradictory and highly problematic. It is not what this roadmap is about. This roadmap is about talking about the retail ecosystem. It is about recognising that retail is private businesses selling things to the public and it is for their own private gain, but that the public sector has a role, particularly in the environment of the town, and can provide an enabling role for those retail businesses to thrive upon that. It is also about enabling those businesses to access greater technology, access better data and access better skills training so that they can have much higher performing businesses at the same time. I would suggest that this retail roadmap, when read with the right intent, speaks to what the public sector can actually deliver. Beyond that, it is absolutely up to the private sector to make sure that their business is thriving.

### **3.3.4 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:**

Perhaps coming at it from a slightly different angle: is the Minister at all concerned by the negative reaction from the retail sector to the retail roadmap?

#### **Deputy K.F. Morel:**

Absolutely. I am always concerned, and it did come from a perspective ... when I read some of the commentary, I did sit there and think: “Hold on a sec, this is about the Government saying we can play a really key role in helping this ecosystem work in these areas.” Other areas the businesses have to take responsibility for themselves, and it felt to me as though just because certain particular elements of regulation were not addressed in the roadmap, such as the minimum wage, which obviously it could not be, that the roadmap was, from some people’s perspective, turgid, as Deputy Ahier said earlier. I strongly disagree with that. This is a retail roadmap, which is about trying to help those businesses to give them a better platform upon which to thrive. We have a really good

town centre in Jersey. It faces challenges, but it is doing much better than most other town centres. There were comments that I read in the paper which were just unrecognisable. I would say go to any town of 40,000, 50,000 people in the U.K. and show me a thriving town centre in the way that Jersey's is. Jersey's has 7.5 million people footfall; that is absolutely superb. It has extremely low crime; that is absolutely superb for retailers. My officers, upon my instruction, have gone and spoken to retailers in the U.K. They spoke to 5 or 6, all of those 5 or 6 said: "We have not thought about Jersey." When they looked at the stats around our town centre, they suddenly said: "Hold it, we should be looking at Jersey." Those 5 major retailers are now looking at and interested in potentially opening stores in Jersey. That is because they see that the town centre has a huge amount to offer. But we need to work with the Parish, as Government, and work with those businesses to make sure that the town centre is an even better place for the future.

### **3.3.5 Deputy J. Renouf:**

Does the Minister have anything to say about the criticisms that some of the bigger issues were ducked; for example, empty retail space, improvements to the material infrastructure of the town and so on?

### **Deputy K.F. Morel:**

It is when I hear comments like that, that I think people have not read the retail roadmap. The retail roadmap absolutely addresses empty retail spaces, absolutely addresses town centre infrastructure. Those are very much in the retail roadmap. So anyone who comes to me and says it does not address those issues, in my mind, has not read the document.

### **3.3.6 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:**

I hope the empty spaces will be addressed because I was really surprised to see most of the Queen's Road of the left-hand side completely empty for a long time and hope we will see the solution. I would like to check with the Minister: what are the concerns did he hear from the retailers and the Chamber of Commerce follow the publication of this roadmap, apart from the minimum living wage, and what he is going to do to address it?

### **Deputy K.F. Morel:**

I have spoken to the Chamber of Commerce. I do not recall them raising any issues with me. They were consulted throughout the development of the retail roadmap. If I am mistaken, but I do not recall them in the last few weeks raising any issues with me.

### **3.3.7 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

One of the issues that was raised in the public domain by retailers and various business people is to create a P.R. (public relations) agency to enhance the retail, which retailers will be expected to contribute after paying the tax, the rates and the other levies. Does the Minister rethink this part or he has positive feedback from most of the retail space?

### **Deputy K.F. Morel:**

Okay, and again this speaks to the people have not read the document perspective. The officer has written in my notes here: "There is not one reference to business owners paying for a P.R. company in the retail roadmap. This is inaccurate. There is an action to be delivered by the town team, which is to look into what funding would be required for them to promote the town beyond the destination marketing that Visit Jersey does for our Island to attract tourists. If funding was sought, it would need to have a business case put to the Minister or the Parish to consider."

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

The Minister mentioned that he intends to help retailers. Will the Minister advise shop opening hours to include all retail units being able to open on Boxing Day, one of the busiest high street sales days of the year, to aid local retailers?

**Deputy K.F. Morel:**

That's absolutely something that I would be pleased to consider and it is referenced - not specifically Boxing Day - but opening hours regulation around opening hours is referenced in the retail roadmap as something that we would be happy to do to make it wider. I know in the last few years, I believe when the Chief Minister was Minister for Economic Development - I think it was in the last term rather than this term, my memory is failing me - we revised regulations around Sunday openings to make it easier to open on Sundays. I am pleased again to liberalise that further if that is something that would be preferred and required.

[11:00]

**3.4 Deputy D.J. Warr of St. Helier South of the Chief Minister regarding applications fees for Registered status workers (OQ.3/2025):**

Given the reliance of the hospitality industry on staff with registered status, will the Chief Minister advise whether the registered classification remains appropriate in the current economic climate and if any consideration has been given to waiving the associated £53.80 application fee for each registered staff member, and if not, why not?

**Deputy L.F. Farnham of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter: (The Chief Minister):**

With the permission of the Deputy, Deputy Alves will take this role in her capacity as Assistant Chief Minister.

**Deputy C.S. Alves of St. Helier Central (Assistant Chief Minister - rapporteur):**

I would like to thank the Deputy for allowing me to answer this question. Yes, I can confirm that the registered classification remains appropriate as part of the overall population controls for the Island. There are currently no plans to waive the fee for registered workers. These fees are currently used to fund skills training to local industries including hospitality. Improving productivity and improving skills in our local businesses is a vital part of our future economy programme and I strongly support the work of this Skills Jersey team.

**3.4.1 Deputy D.J. Warr:**

My business is currently in the process of hiring a new member of staff. Over the past 3 weeks 2 local interviewees turned up drunk and we have had 2 fraudsters apply for the job. We have had 60 off-Island inquiries. Does the Minister not agree that the licence fee is effectively a tax on jobs when it is virtually impossible for any hospitality business to find entitled staff. Is this just not another unnecessary cost imposed by Government to the detriment of small businesses on this Island?

**Deputy C.S. Alves:**

I will say that I do not agree with that. Registered fees are currently used to fund Skills Jersey and Skills Jersey receives £300,000 each year, specifically from these fees. I will also make the point that these fees were originally introduced in 2013 and they were not increased for 4 years. In 2017 it was announced that they would go up to £50. So the current rate of £53.80 represents a significantly lower increase when compared to R.P.I. (retail price increase) over the last 8 years.

**3.5 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding spending on the new hospital facilities programme (OQ.9/2025):**

Will the Minister explain what steps she is taking to ensure that spending on the new hospital facilities programme adheres to best practice for major capital projects and represents good value for the taxpayer?

**Deputy M.E. Millar of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity (The Minister for Treasury and Resources):**

I thank the Deputy for his question. As a major project, which is a defined term, the new healthcare facilities programme is required to comply with the requirements of the Public Finance Manual. This includes adherence to the corporate portfolio management office's delivery frameworks for major, strategic and other projects. These robust governance structures are designed to ensure that spending on the programme aligns with best practice and delivers good value for the taxpayer. There is a Treasury finance business partner embedded in the project, and the project team meets regularly with Treasury officials. While Treasury monitors compliance with those requirements, the programme is also subject to regular review by internal audit. As Members will remember, a phased approach to delivery is being used, which will ensure affordability for the taxpayer at every stage. As Minister for Treasury and Resources, I have been kept updated on the programme's progress, including meetings with the Minister for Health and Social Services and other key Ministers. This involvement ensures that financial oversight, strategic direction and value for money are continuously prioritised throughout the delivery of this essential infrastructure.

### **3.5.1 Deputy J. Renouf:**

Is the Minister satisfied that the outline business case, which provides the framework for Government spending on the hospital, is robust and of the required standard.

**Deputy M.E. Millar:**

The outline business case, I believe, follows the principle of the Green Book, and it will shortly be followed ... there is already a strategic outline case that meets Green Book standards. There is the outline case, and it will very shortly, following the procurement exercise, be followed by a full business case, which will set out the full details of the project.

**Deputy J. Renouf:**

Could I ask whether I could get an answer to the question of whether she is satisfied that the outline business case meets the required standards?

**Deputy M.E. Millar:**

I have no reason to believe that it does not meet the required standards. It follows Green Book principles, I believe.

### **3.5.2 Deputy A.F. Curtis of St. Clement:**

Following announcements by the Minister for Health and Social Service to restructure the Island's health system, to paraphrase, create a standalone department which operates independently, will the Minister for Treasury and Resources advise how she has been involved in the financial assurances that the proposed new healthcare facilities will also work efficiently and effectively for that operating model?

**Deputy M.E. Millar:**

I am sorry, I do not believe that has been formally announced and that is something that will be considered as that whole programme is considered and taken forward.

### **3.5.3 Deputy A.F. Curtis:**

Prior to the announcement, I am aware that the Minister for Health and Social Services has spoken to the media to an extent on this. Has the Minister for Treasury and Resources been involved in

conversations regarding this, and so has she had an early influence in ensuring that these plans align to good governance over facilities as well as the healthcare service?

**Deputy M.E. Millar:**

I think the funding for the new healthcare facilities is a different matter from anything else that is happening within Health. The hospital will have to follow, as I have said, the structures and procedures for a major project, and that will not change regardless of what happens in the wider Health Department.

#### **3.5.4 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:**

Would the Minister for Treasury and Resources advise if she has seen the total full cost for the healthcare facilities that are planned to be built across 3 sites?

**Deputy M.E. Millar:**

I think that this is revisiting a Budget debate. We know we have a budget of £710 million, and whatever happens the programme must stay within that budget.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

I asked not about a specific budget, I asked if the Minister for Treasury and Resources has seen the overall number for ... I am not asking what the number is, but does she know the overall number for cost for all healthcare facility programmes?

**Deputy M. E. Millar:**

Again, the overall cost is the number in the Budget. I have not seen a breakdown of that I could ... I personally, I am sure some of my officials will have seen that though.

#### **3.5.5 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

If I understood what we have in the Budget, it is the cost for the next 4 years. We are all aware that the healthcare facilities over 3 sites - Overdale, Gloucester Street and the planned healthcare visit - will take longer than 4 years. Would the Minister for Treasury and Resources know what estimated cost for the Island beyond the 4 years we could expect? I am not asking the number, if she is aware.

**Deputy M.E. Millar:**

I think that is really a question for the Minister for Health and Social Services. We have a budget to build the facilities, to build the new hospital at Overdale and to make meaningful progress with St. Saviour's and Kensington Place. The team are working on that, and I think that further detail is really a matter for the Minister for Health and Social Services.

#### **3.5.6 Deputy J. Renouf:**

The Minister for Health and Social Services in the foreword to his Ministerial Plan says that he will create a single central fund to manage all health-related finances. Presumably, this does include the new hospital. Therefore, the question remains to what extent has it been discussed that, under these new arrangements, financial governance of the new hospital will step outside to this new board? Has that been considered? Is it being discussed in Government?

**Deputy M.E. Millar:**

That will, of course, be fully discussed in Government, but I think that the cost of the hospital ... I think the Deputy referred to services. There is a distinction between a budget to provide services and to provide what happens inside the hospital, and a budget to build the building within which that happens. The 2 will be kept and monitored separately, I have no doubt of that.

### **3.6 Deputy K.M. Wilson of St. Clement of the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning regarding the Children and Young People Survey (OQ.1/2025):**

Further to the response to Written Question 212/2024, will the Minister advise whether he has reviewed the responses to the Children and Young People Survey (2024), and if so, what conclusions he has reached in relation to the use of smartphone and social media, and what actions he will be taking to protect children from the harms associated to this technology?

**Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier Central (The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning):**

I thank the Deputy for her question. The Statistics Jersey survey, as mentioned in the question, was undertaken between 7th and 18th October 2024; years 4, 6, 8, 10 and 12. Stats Jersey are aiming to publish the final report in the spring of this year. Their website lists an intended date of publication in March. Because the results are not yet published, neither I nor the Minister for Children and Families, who answered the Written Question 212/2024, have reviewed the responses yet.

**3.6.1 Deputy K.M. Wilson:**

We will await the review. In the meantime, there is a growing body of evidence and, certainly, a lot of content in the media about the important public health issues that are arising as a result of smartphone use. Can he tell us whether or not he is alert to this and minded or has previously had conversations with the Safeguarding Partnership Board and the Minister for Health and Social Services on addressing the public health and safeguarding issues that are so prominent in this arena?

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

I am very cognisant of the issues. I can speak for schools, because I think there is an important point to be made here. Schools across our Island led the way in, if you like, putting the genie back in the bottle when it comes to mobile phones by not allowing mobile phones in the classroom or in schools. There is some range in which they do that, but schools best know their children. The respite from mobile phones and social media really happens in schools. I remind the Deputy that children spend 15 per cent of their year in schools and 85 per cent out of school. In terms of the Safeguarding Partnership Board, it has not been a specific item on the agenda. It is an interesting one and I certainly will raise that. As a health issue, yes, there does need to be some joined-up thinking. What I will say, is that schools can only do so much in school time. We cannot be parenting children at home. But yes, I would support any action taken to protect children from the bad effects of devices.

**3.6.2 Deputy D.J. Warr of St. Helier South:**

How does the Minister ensure safeguarding for all children on school sites when some children bring unrestricted smartphones to school?

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

As I have mentioned, schools have policies across our estate now of not allowing phones in schools. One school in particular, I can give an example because we visited and spoke to the children - we do actually visit schools quite often - told us very carefully how they have initiated what one could call a complete ban. I do not like that word, because I think it is very negative. Children simply do not have phones in schools. The best way of safeguarding against those issues is simply not to use them. One of the issues was that they had to buy more footballs. I was quite happy to fund that.

**3.6.3 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour:**

I think it is clear that more research is needed into this. Would the Minister agree that there needs to be some guidelines, perhaps from Public Health, that is based on evidence that parents and schools can understand what safe levels of usage are and what is a safe way of using these smartphones? Would the Minister seek to obtain these guidelines and this clarity on what that research is?

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

I believe they already exist as well. Some work has already happened on that. A document was produced for schools in terms of safe use of mobile phones recently. I was trying to look it up, but I

cannot find it in my documents. But I can get that to the Deputy and to the Assembly. But, yes, I agree. In terms of a Public Health issue, I think one of the things to ensure is that as we ... and as I mentioned, there is a genie that is out of the bottle. To control social media is very, very difficult. I think education, working with parents, is one of the most difficult things. Sometimes, as a parent, it is really difficult to say no, but I think that is what we need to try and support. I agree with the Deputy that this issue needs to be taken on board. I will reiterate, and I would say it would be nice at some point in this Assembly if Members were to recognise the work that has gone on in schools, to recognise the support that teachers have given to put that genie back in the bottle. The work they do in saying no to children when sometimes parents are really struggling to do that, I think that does need to be recognised at times.

#### **3.6.4 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:**

I absolutely echo what the Deputy says about the excellent job that our teachers are doing. Could he comment then on specific examples, for example, children who might have autism or A.D.H.D. (Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder) and their neurodivergence means that exposure to screens can be extremely harmful? Experts are actually recommending complete abstinence in some of those cases?

[11:15]

How will the Deputy ensure that the curriculum can still be delivered to children whose healthcare doctors have recommended that they do not access screens at all?

#### **Deputy R.J. Ward:**

It is nice to speak to someone who is an ex-teacher and used the word “differentiation” because one of the things that we should be doing is ensuring that young people in our classroom are able to access in the best possible way for them. I am very confident that teachers will address those specific issues, depending on the level of need, particularly if a child has a record of need, that should be recorded very carefully on that record of need. Certainly also funding accompanies that. But also, within the Special Educational Needs Register and the recognition within schools, those things should be recorded. We have a balance, and I can remember - I will not say how many years ago - when I.T. (information technology) was the be-all and end-all in schools, and we used to battle for the computer room. I think we have gone much further along, and I think we are at a stage where we have to think about screen time and the effects of that, and the best use of information technology to deliver education for our young people and support them but not do the harms that are becoming more obvious as we go into that world of I.T.

#### **3.6.5 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:**

Of course the harmful effects of screen time has been spoken about but also, as we have seen recently with the rowing back of fact-checking ethics and any moral understanding around social media and the oligarchs that are taking over that space, what will the Minister be supporting the schools in being able to give the tools that our youngsters, but quite frankly also adults, would need to understand when a fact is a fact and when rubbish is rubbish?

#### **Deputy R.J. Ward:**

I am not sure what power I have as the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning to take on the oligarchs, but I will give it a go. I do agree with the Deputy. I think what we need to do is we need to be very careful at what we are looking at here. I agree about social media and those social media channels, which I share the concerns about the lack of fact-checking. But I.T. in schools is not simply used as social media. That is a separate issue. The delivery of education using very well thought through, very specific and very well-designed pieces of information technology can enhance the curriculum, and we have got to get that balance right. I do not think social media outlets are particularly useful in any form of education, but things such as simulation packages, use of data

loggers in science, for example, which are remarkable pieces of equipment, the access to multimedia to open up the whole world of literature and information is useful. It is about that skill and that balancing of those 2 things. But in terms of what we can do with social media, that is a real serious issue. What schools have done is simply take the mobile phones out of schools, which I think is the simplest way to do it.

#### **3.6.6 Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

Something has just popped into my head in a supplementary question on this. But maybe the Minister could look into the great work the Greffe does around political education and the work that States Members do when we go into schools that we ourselves could also talk to youngsters about the worry on social media and that way, especially around politics, is manipulated through social media. That is something that we could, as States Members, do when we go into schools and talk about our work there.

#### **Deputy R.J. Ward:**

I absolutely agree with the Deputy, and I thank Members from across the Assembly for their work with schools, because I know there is a huge amount of that that goes on. I certainly have been myself. I forgot to say, every time I have been in school, which was on numerous occasions last year, and we have talked to groups of young people, the use of social media and mobile phones comes up because I ask them the question, and we start those discussions. I think we need to recognise that there is a growing awareness among young people themselves about the issues that they face. So there was an open door there for us to support young people. How we talk about the validity of information and the validity of sources of information is a very interesting thing and I think it is something that probably is addressed in some subjects, certainly subjects that look at R.S. (religious studies) and psychology, for example, look at the validity of information. But, yes, I would agree that is a really good thing that we could do as States Members. It is not easy but perhaps with the Deputy and with the C.P.A. (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association) we could produce a document, if you like, a lesson that Members could take in and use and that might be a really constructive thing to come from this discussion.

#### **3.6.7 Deputy K.M. Wilson:**

Thank you to the Minister for his account. I think there is a danger that we constantly engage in describing what is and I wonder if the Minister would be prepared, when he has got the information available to him, to make a specific statement about the interventions he will deliver, specifically as the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, to lead and direct the issues associated or the issues that come out of the findings of the review that has been done? Will he commit to put in a framework around that to monitor the effectiveness of the interventions that he intends to put in place?

#### **Deputy R.J. Ward:**

That is not difficult to agree with because I think there are so many interventions that schools are already putting in. I would invite the Deputy to come in and perhaps talk to one of the schools with me. That would be a really constructive thing to do. In terms of the report, yes of course we will take on board the information from important reviews of young people. But yes, absolutely, I think we do need to look really carefully about how we are addressing these issues with young people to get the balance between the unfettered use of social media and mobile phones, but also the education piece, which is to say when you are 18 or 17 and we are not controlling whether you can look at your phone or whether you are at home and we are not controlling from schools when you look at your phone, what is safe around its usage. It does happen in schools already. It does happen in many, many years. We were told that by a group of year 9s, myself and Deputy Alves, who said to us: "Yes, we probably know more about it than you." So it was a really interesting conversation and I would encourage coming to school, that would be a really useful thing to do. But yes, if there are

interventions, and I can make a statement of course. I will also say, if you look back at my answers to questions on 11th November and 11th June last year, I have covered this topic quite extensively in this Assembly.

**3.7 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the suspension of Jersey's home birth service (OQ.2/2025):**

Will the Minister explain why Jersey's home birth service has been suspended, advise what actions are being undertaken to reinstate the service, and when this service is expected to recommence?

**Deputy T.J.A. Binet of St. Saviour (The Minister for Health and Social Services):**

I wonder if the Deputy would allow me to hand this matter over to the Assistant Minister with responsibility for women's health.

**Deputy A. Howell of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity (Assistant Minister for Health and Social Services - rapporteur):**

The Minister for Health and Social Services and Assistant Ministers for Health and Social Services very much regret the temporary pause to the home birthing service. However, because we do not have enough trained midwives, we have been advised by the director of midwifery and nursing that the service has to cease temporarily. We have an obligation to support her expert professional opinion. This is to ensure that our maternity service is safe for our mums. There will be no exceptions. We have a duty of care and all our mothers and their babies are precious. The plan is for 40 local midwives to be trained in home births by a U.K. company who are to come over to Jersey to undertake the training in April/May 2025. Unfortunately, it cannot be sooner due to the training team having prior commitments. Concurrently, a review of the home birthing service is also taking place, with the outcome due by the end of June at the earliest. The plan is to reintroduce the home birthing service when all the staff have been appropriately trained, any recommendations for the review have been implemented and it is deemed safe to do so. In the meantime, all women have been offered care and support for the delivery of their babies within the maternity unit at the General Hospital. Women can use the midwife-led delivery suites, both with operational birthing pools. They can bring in their duvets, any items to personalise the space, and can return home as soon after the birth as it is safe. Finally, I would like to reiterate to Members and the public that the decisions being made are clinically-led, prioritising women on this Island and their safety.

**3.7.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:**

I thank the Assistant Minister. The main purpose of this question is to assist with communication with members of the public. I note that the website currently states ... it is one sentence stating that home births are not possible currently. Could the Assistant Minister commit to updating that website to ensure that all of the information that she has just outlined, and more detail if possible, including some photos of the new facilities at the hospital and details on how women can make it more home-like, and critically information on when the service will be back up and running, that that is provided publicly on the website as soon as possible?

**Deputy A. Howell:**

I am very happy to provide that information.

**3.7.2 Deputy P.M. Bailhache of St. Clement:**

Bearing in mind that there are 46 midwives in the department, of which 5 are fully trained in home birthing, would the Assistant Minister be prepared to consider reinstating the home birth service for the benefit of those who wish to use it, subject of course to the availability of midwives and safety considerations while the internal review is being carried out?

**Deputy A. Howell:**

It is with regret but I have spoken to the director of midwifery and nursing and the interim chief nurse and the nurse who has come over with the change team, who is also a midwife, and they say unfortunately we can make no exceptions. The trouble is that if we send trained midwives out to look after a home birth it then might compromise the running of the maternity unit, because we have to run that maternity unit 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. It is with regret that we can make no exceptions at the moment.

**3.7.3 Deputy P.M. Bailhache:**

Would the Assistant Minister agree that, during the past 18 months or so, ad hoc arrangements have been made for home birthing?

**Deputy A. Howell:**

I understand that one more midwife has retired or gone on to other work, so we are unable to provide the service. It has been teetering on the edge during the whole of 2024. One day it may have been on, but the next day it was not on. That was not fair for people expecting that they might be able to have a home delivery and then being last minute told. I can assure the Deputy that any mother who is due to give birth was told ... since last June they have been given that information that they cannot be guaranteed home delivery.

**3.7.4 Deputy H.M. Miles of St. Brelade:**

What advice has the board given over the safety of our maternity services in general?

**Deputy A. Howell:**

I thank the Deputy for her question. There has been a very large review of our maternity services and 127 recommendations were made, of which I think we have now completed 87. The whole of the maternity unit has been refurbished, and it is now as safe as it possibly can be.

**3.7.5 Deputy H.M. Miles:**

When did the board alert the Minister that there was a problem with maternity services?

**Deputy A. Howell:**

Thank you for the question, Deputy. I do not think it was the board ...

**The Bailiff:**

Through the Chair, please.

**Deputy A. Howell:**

I am sorry, Sir. The maternity review was undertaken by the Government.

**3.7.6 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:**

When did the Assistant Minister first become aware about safety concerns for home births?

**Deputy A. Howell:**

I thank the Deputy for her question. I first knew about this last October, but the director of midwifery was very clear that she had made contact with all the mothers who were due to have any delivery.

**3.7.7 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Thank you very much for the questions today for the Assistant Minister.

[11:30]

Just to clarify if in the previous answer I have heard that the people were made aware about concerns in June, does it mean that between June and October officers tried to sort it out without notifying the Minister, and if yes, what actions were taken to ensure that their home births can continue safely?

**Deputy A. Howell:**

Operational matters within the hospital are not up to politicians and I was made aware in October.

**3.7.8 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier Central:**

Is the Assistant Minister in a position to state how and why the company chosen was chosen?

**Deputy A. Howell:**

This is again a matter for the director of midwifery and nursing, but I believe it is a very highly thought of training service and it is very important for our midwives.

**3.7.9 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Could the Assistant Minister outline for Members how and why this company was chosen?

**Deputy A. Howell:**

I have to repeat that it was down to the director of midwifery and nursing.

**3.7.10 Deputy K.M. Wilson:**

Can the Minister explain why we have got to a situation where the recruitment of midwives with this level of skill and competence has fallen to such levels given the considerable focus on maternity services over the last 12-18 months?

**Deputy A. Howell:**

I think it is as a result of the review that these matters have come to light, and I think we have also had the retirement of some very experienced midwives.

**3.7.11 Deputy K.M. Wilson:**

Could the Minister then provide some detail about how she intends to increase the number of midwives, not just through training and development but what is the wider recruitment plan for this?

**Deputy A. Howell:**

I do think the maternity unit is fully staffed at present.

**The Bailiff:**

Final supplementary. I am sorry, I had already called last questions.

**3.7.12 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:**

Given the Assistant Minister has just stated that the unit is fully staffed, could she explain is it a rota issue that midwives cannot also go out to home births? That does not really seem to add up and further explanation would be helpful.

**Deputy A. Howell:**

It is a matter of training for our midwives that is key. They have to be trained in home births, and it has to be current training, and that is the reason that the home birthing has had to cease at the moment.

**3.8 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf of St. Saviour of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding budget amendments in Government departments (OQ.11/2025):**

Would the Minister explain how the government departments are implementing budget amendments aimed at reducing cost-of-living pressures and confirm timeline for delivery?

**Deputy M.E. Millar (The Minister for Treasury and Resources):**

I am not aware of any amendments to the Budget that were adopted by the Assembly that specifically aimed to reduce the cost-of-living pressures. Nonetheless, any amendments that were adopted will be reflected in heads of expenditure in 2025 and in departmental business plans as appropriate. One of the measures in the proposed Budget was a freeze on alcohol and fuel duty and this has already been implemented. Waste charges have also been deferred until 2027. We are also continuing the plan to transition towards the living wage with a support package for businesses and charities and that work is being led by the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development.

**3.8.1 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:**

Apologies if the Minister is ... the Budget amendments, in other words the changes to the Budget, and maybe that was not made clear in the question. Obviously, the reason why the question is being asked is inflation and does the Minister share the view that given the fact that over the last 2½ years inflation in Jersey has risen by nearly 60 per cent versus the U.K. and 45 per cent, that this is basically meaning that on a budget of £1 billion, she has lost the ability of about £158 million? I am trying to ask the Minister to agree or otherwise the importance of rising inflation continuing, is the F.P.P. (Fiscal Policy Panel) concerned and whether she, as Minister of Treasury and Resources, will be focusing on this issue based upon the budget concerns that were raised in this Assembly before Christmas?

**Deputy M.E. Millar:**

In that case, I think the Deputy's question was rather cryptic and if he had perhaps mentioned inflation, it would have been easier to answer. Of course, we care about inflation, but the Deputy will also know that there is a limit to what we can do about inflation because so much of it comes from off-Island. Inflation is falling; we have seen that. September inflation was 3 per cent so it is starting to slow down. Inflation in the U.K. is falling broadly in line with forecasts, and we are waiting to see if that will translate to Jersey. Of course, prices are still higher following a period of high inflation, and we are aware of that but pensions, benefits and tax allowances have all been up-rated, I believe, by R.P.I. to protect Islanders who rely on those benefits. While earnings have lagged over a period of time, they are also now starting to catch up, and 2024 saw a positive growth and real earnings of 1.3 per cent.

**3.8.2 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour:**

I have previously asked questions about the cost of living for specific groups that may be more vulnerable to cost-of-living pressures, namely single parent families and pensioner households. There was a commitment to go to the Cost-of-Living Ministerial Group and come forward with some measures to help these groups. Can the Minister advise what stage that work is at, please?

**Deputy M.E. Millar:**

The Cost-of-Living Group, I think, last met in October where we discussed transition to living wage. The group was meant to meet in December, but that meeting had to be cancelled due to budget plans and absences and the group will next meet in January. I am sure that will be on the agenda then.

**3.8.3 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:**

Would the Minister provide an update to States Members on the considerations of those issues, please?

**Deputy M.E. Millar:**

I am not necessarily sure that sits with me. I think that really sits with the Minister for Social Security if she is interested in specific groups, but I am sure an update can be given in due course.

**3.8.4 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:**

I said in my supplementary that cost of living equals inflation and the cost of living in Jersey has risen by 60 per cent versus the U.K. 45 per cent. Does the Minister agree that that indicates that there is a domestic inflationary issue that is maybe caused by the issues and having to be paid for out of public funds by rising all these pensions and other things at a higher rate of inflation? If the Minister has not had a meeting about inflation since October, does she not think this is a massive issue of public importance and would she take an opportunity of meeting with people, such as myself, who are concerned about the divergence of these 2 figures? We have a cost-of-living crisis, would she not agree?

**Deputy M.E. Millar:**

Sorry, I have slightly lost my train of thought. I am not quite sure what period the Deputy ... yes, clearly, we have had a period of high inflation but, as I have said, inflation is coming down, which is a good thing. Government here has a limited number of levers they can pull as regards to inflation, which he is well aware of, but what I said was that the Cost-of-Living Group had met in October. That is a different thing from whatever Treasury may choose to do with its economists and with the wider Council of Ministers about dealing with inflation as a concept. There are very many ways and many, many impacts on inflation and, as I say, the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development is working on the plan to support businesses. The Minister for Social Security, I am quite sure, is very well aware of the impacts of the cost of living on groups in this Island and we are keeping a very close eye on it.

**3.9 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North of the Chief Minister regarding a reorganisation of the Civil Service (OQ.8/2025):**

Will the Chief Minister advise what work is currently taking place or planned to reorganise the Civil Service, what departments will be affected, the expected outcomes and the timeline for this work?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter: (The Chief Minister):**

As we stressed in both the C.S.P. (Common Strategic Policy) and the Budget debate, this Government is committed to curbing the growth in public spending and one of the ways we are doing that is by some right-sizing, some reorganisation of the public sector without affecting essential front line services. The reorganisation is aimed at grade 11 and above and mainly at reviewing the senior management levels right across the public sector. This is essential because the number of jobs at a headcount in the public sector has risen by, in the region of, 2,500 in the last 5 years. The 2025 Budget includes £50 million of non-front line payroll savings. That is how it will be reflected, savings across the workforce and departments. And departments, I should say, all of the departments are developing their own measures to achieve what is needed. Basically, we said to every single department: "Have a good look at your structures to make sure you are not overstaffed and make sure you are appropriately staffed." This is not going to be a one-off. This is the sort of housekeeping that any Government needs to maintain. We always need to be monitoring our headcount to make sure our public sector is appropriately sized and effective.

**3.9.1 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Thank you, Chief Minister, for the answer. I do believe that we always need to look at what is happening. It feels that the civil servants have gone through the restructure from 2017 without stopping and evaluating what has happened. We had one Communication Department; now we have all communication officers gone back to the departments. I looked at the current chart that is published on the government website and I was surprised to see that the chart has not been updated since September, and at least 4 out of 9 chief officers do not work anymore for the Government or their positions. For the transparency and the understanding of the States Assembly and the public, would the Chief Minister present a clear vision for the restructure of the Civil Service?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I am not sure how much clearer we can be. I will make sure the organisation chart, which I have not seen myself, is updated on the website but we have asked each and every department to look at their staffing structures and headcount to make sure they are appropriately sized. I think that is a clear instruction from us that is being led by the chief executive officer and the Executive Leadership Team. We are not planning a root-and-branch restructure of the public sector. We are simply doing what any good organisation should do and monitoring it on a regular basis to make sure it is appropriately sized.

### **3.9.2 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:**

The Chief Minister has just said that the Government is not planning a root-and-branch reorganisation of the Civil Service, but we have just heard published in the last few days the Deputy Chief Minister for Health and Social Services' plans to substantially reorganise the Health Department, including transferring functions out of government to a new board and so on. At least in one department there is a significant restructuring, it seems to me. Is he prepared to rule out any further restructurings of this kind and of this nature within the organisation of the Civil Service, not relating to redundancies?

### **Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I am not prepared to rule anything in or out because I believe an organisation of this size needs always to be flexible and needs to be able to respond to circumstances as and when they appear. In relation to the health service, it has always been the Deputy Chief Minister for Health and Social Services' intention to put quite a disparate portfolio together in one place and perhaps give it more autonomy in focusing on the delivery of all health and health-aligned services. The Health Department, I think, has been possibly misrepresented in the media because greater autonomy and to focus on health is not the same as being removed from government. It cannot be removed from government. It is funded by the taxpayer. It is managed by a team of Ministers and Assistant Ministers who report to the Council of Ministers and ultimately to this Assembly. The health function will always be part of the government, but I support Deputy Binet and the Minister and the Assistant Minister's move to bring it more together to create a more collaborative and effective health service.

[11.45]

### **3.9.3 Deputy J. Renouf:**

Let me come at it from the other angle. Can the Chief Minister assure us then that there are currently no discussions about reorganisation of the major departments in government that currently exist, despite the fact that many chief officers have left?

### **Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

There are ongoing discussions and there will be, I hope, through the course of this Government and future Governments continuous ongoing discussions and monitoring of staff levels and staff numbers throughout the public sector in every area of the public sector. There are ongoing discussions at senior management level always about how we might make sure we continue to deliver in the most productive way. As I said at the start, the public sector in the last 5 years has grown by over 2,500 headcount. That is unsustainable, unaffordable and this Government will stem that growth and put it back to a size that we need.

### **The Bailiff:**

I have Deputy Southern, then Deputy Ozouf and Deputy Jeune, then final supplementary. No further questions.

### **3.9.4 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier Central:**

What specific measures does the Chief Minister have in place to ensure that front line services are not damaged by these changes in staffing?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

First of all, in relation to this, front line services are exempt. We have not applied recruitment freeze to all the front line services. The States Employment Board are going to be reviewing that. What we have put in place is a process where each and every new position has to be approved by the chief executive officer. We can monitor what is going on on a regular basis. The original plan is not so such ... while we are looking to save some money on payroll costs with senior management levels, we want to go further than that; we want to reprioritise. Once we reach those savings, where we are making savings, we want to put that money into front line services. We know that health, police and other areas are going to potentially need increases in budgets, but we do not want that to be extra expenditure. We want to deliver that support to those front line services by making savings in other areas.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

The question was: what specific measures does the Minister have in place? Could the Minister give an example of how, despite staffing changes, services will maintain delivery?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I thought I did give a specific answer insofar as the front line services are excluded from the recruitment freeze so if they need more staff they can employ following a process. I am not sure what ... unless there is something I am missing from the Deputy's question, I thought that was quite specific. Front line services are excluded from the recruitment freeze.

**3.9.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Could I just emphasise then all front line services will remain unaffected? Is that a statement he would be prepared to back up?

**The Bailiff:**

I will allow that, but I think the Minister has answered the question because your first question was: what is being done to preserve front line services? The front line services are not subject to the freeze, so the Chief Minister has said, but if he wishes to answer the supplemental question you have asked, Deputy, it is up to him to do so.

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

It is a good question because we need reassurance on front line services. I am not sure I can add any more than that other than the whole object behind reorganisation to make sure our public sector is right-sized is not just about making payroll savings. It is about redirecting money that is not well spent on payroll into areas that need it, such as front line services.

**3.9.6 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf of St. Saviour:**

My question is in relation to 2 issues which came to my attention over Christmas and New Year. We are aware of - the Chief Minister has explained and we have heard other questions about - the recruitment problems within, for example, front line services, education and health. The Chief Minister has also explained that he is wanting to do a ban on consultants. I wonder if the Chief Minister could assuage the concerns of the 2 constituents I have spoken to over Christmas and New Year that are both engaged in providing consultancy services; local consultancies. They provide consultancy services because the staff at the hospital and teaching cannot get the staff so they provide local consultancy but, as a result of a ban on consultants, they cannot do their consultancy to help the schools, et cetera. I wonder whether the Chief Minister is aware of such unintended consequences. If so, would he do something about it? If not, now he has heard about it, will he do something?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

We are aware of the consequences of ... it is referred to as a consultancy ban but it is not a total ban. Departments when wanting to bring in consultants now have to make a strong case and, again, can apply to the chief executive for that. Some consultants are allowed to come in. Some are essential, especially where ... managed services, for example, in digital areas and where it is needed, they are allowed. We are aware that it is impacting upon some local consultant businesses. Figures will be out a little bit in the next month or 2 but the figures at the end of the third quarter last year showed a significant drop in consultancy spend from somewhere in the region of £90 million to £60 million, which is a good start, and we want to continue along those lines. I would like to get into a place where when we do need consultants, we source as much of that expertise from the local market where we can in relation to the Deputy's responsible, of course recognising that some expertise we need is just not available on Island, but I hear what he is saying. I know it has had an impact on some small consultancy firms here but once we get things straightened out, once we get that reliance, that dependence - that over-dependence - on bringing consultants under control, I hope we can start to go back into the local markets and grant business to our local firms.

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

I am grateful for the assuagement of concern but does the Chief Minister agree that in saying ... and I understand that budgets need to be cut and we need to get value for money but he says that reducing consultancy down from £90 million to £60 million is a good thing but is it a good thing, I ask the Chief Minister, when you have got schools and health services that are affected by a ban that has now got red tape that has to go right up to the chief executive to get permission to approve a local contractor that is providing local services to schools and other front line services but cannot because of this ban? It is a mixed message. I understand the difficulty, but it is a mixed message. Will he be careful how he explains it?

### **Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

It is a fair question. I am not aware whether reduction in use of consultants or managed services or temporary staff - under the bracket - is having a detrimental impact, is causing any major problems. Like I said, some departments have become over-reliant, over-dependent. I mean the Deputy and I go back a long time, and we have always had a battle against consultancy in recent times, and we have seen the use of consultants from when I started in the States in 1999 where consultants were used very rarely to it being almost a *fait accompli*. When you ask for something to be done, we bring consultants in. That is a culture that has to stop. In relation to local firms who have provided excellent service to us when we need it but there are also circumstances where firms had consultants in place for a number of years, and that is the culture we are trying to change. The message to local firms is we will try and work with them with their expertise as much as we can, but our duty is to the taxpayer and making sure that our expenditure is appropriate in alignment with what we need.

### **The Bailiff:**

Deputy Jeune, I have already called last question.

### **3.9.8 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:**

Sorry, I was thrown by the Chief Minister saying when he started in the States when I was still at school, so I have got a lot to learn from him. **[Laughter]** Could the Chief Minister explain what he means by making the Government an appropriate size when he answered in his first answer, when the first question was asked, and appropriate in comparison to what?

### **Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

It struck myself and fellow Ministers that an increase in 2,500 employees over a 5-year period seemed to be excessive and so we decided we needed to have a look at that and what we have discovered is that we were overstaffed in senior management levels right across the public sector. What we are trying to do is reorganise that and reduce senior management levels to an appropriate size, to a size

that will deliver the best value for money, is productive, without compromising the service delivery and without compromising front line services.

### **3.9.9 Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

I think those are the 2 words that the Chief Minister answered about still having that productivity and service delivery in all departments, not necessarily just front line but those important services behind the scenes to deliver. Does the Minister feel that the public understand that there is this balance to be had to ensure that they see that there will not be any delays to essential productivity or services? Because unfortunately, still to the public, the Government are seen as very slow in their delivery of many services or promises and commitments that they have made. How will the Minister ensure that these will continue, that there is a timeline that is seen appropriate to the public even though there has been this cutback to - his words - appropriate size?

### **Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I think the public quite rightly expect the very best service we can offer. We have not always delivered that in the past. The public certainly expect from those who have shared their views with me that they feel our public sector ... and we do have an excellent public sector. I will not criticise the public sector or the people that work in it, but it has got too big, slightly unwieldy and the public expect we spend their money appropriately, we deliver a public sector that is appropriate, that is nimble and able to deliver more quickly and that is what we are working to do. We are not there yet. There is a long way to go but this Government will do its very best to point the ship in the right direction and I hope future Governments will keep moving. It is important future Governments do not ever let happen again what has happened before where we took our eye off the ball, and we allowed exponential growth in the headcount of the public sector that we are now having to resolve. Once we get it back to a level which is commensurate with the needs of the Island, we hope we can keep it that way.

### **3.9.10 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

I would like to ask the Chief Minister if he remembers the Public Accounts Committee, Comptroller and Auditor General back in 2022 when the Chief Minister was Deputy Chief Minister and accepted recommendations that any further restructure or reorganisations or organisational change - regardless of the name - should be presented business case evaluation of the situation, what expected outcome and how much it will cost? It was a clear recommendation, and it was accepted by the Government that Chief Minister was Deputy Chief Minister. Now, has the Chief Minister been presented with the changes for the Health and Community Services Department, which is now called Health and Care Jersey, and with C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills) because at least these 2 departments who have more than half the budget are not recruiting permanent top staff, they have interims, because they are going through a restructure. The simple question is if the Chief Minister has been presented with the business case which clearly states the expected outcomes of this restructure?

### **Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I do not specifically remember the recommendation of the C. and A.G. (Comptroller and Auditor General) back in 2022, but I cannot remember what I had for breakfast, so that is not surprising. I do not recall seeing a specific business plan from the Children's Ministry; it is not there at the moment or Health on this because these are areas of work in progress. I said before the reorganisation of the public sector, we are not working to a specific business plan, we are working to the principle, making sure it is right-sized, making sure it is more affordable and making sure it is delivering the services we need with the right number of headcount. We do not need to get every single department producing business plans specifically around the headcount.

[12:00]

We will be publishing the business plan for the departments, as promised later this month; it is a general one. But in relation to the headcount, the size of the payroll, we will continue to monitor that, as any good organisation should do.

**3.10 Deputy K.M. Wilson of St. Clement of the Chief Minister regarding the safety of the gas network (OQ.17/2025):**

Following recent incidents in St. Clement and St. Saviour, will the Chief Minister advise what actions, if any, the Government is taking to ensure the safety of the gas network and to address any current and potential future risks to Islanders?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter (The Chief Minister):**

Yes, of course public safety is paramount. Every reported incident receives an immediate response as a priority and is investigated by the Fire and Rescue Service, working in conjunction with Island Energy. Residents are evacuated without delay, as they were in the 2 recent incidents. Ministers met the new chief executive of Island Energy before Christmas and had constructive discussions. Since the new chief executive has taken over we have seen a marked improvement with their communication, both with the Government, with officials and with the public. Safety of the network was and is and remains a main issue and the chief executive can confirm that I.E.G. (Islands Energy Group) are accelerating its renewal programme and doubling their investment in the gas infrastructure. This as well as following the U.K. best practice on protocols on disconnections, so they have carried out a thorough review. We are in more regular and direct contact with the management of I.E.G. now and they too recognise with Government the need to provide greater reassurance to the public moving forward. The Council of Ministers receives regular updates ,and another one is due in 2 weeks. The chief executive is committed to a briefing for States Members, which we will organise in the near future. In addition to the Island Energy work, the Infrastructure and Environment Department has undertaken its own assessment of drains and tunnels throughout the Island with over 1,000 measurements taken in the past 2 years. We will continue this monitoring programme to reduce the risk of further gas leaks or certainly an early warning system.

**The Bailiff:**

I have to ask you to bring your answer ...

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I am sorry this is taking long, Sir. I wonder if I might have leave to ...

**The Bailiff:**

We are over 2 minutes and against allowance of one minute 30 seconds, Chief Minister.

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I understood, Sir, but it is such an important issue. I wonder ...

**The Bailiff:**

I think Members would say all issues are important issues, Chief Minister. I am not sure that is a judgment.

**3.10.1 Deputy K.M. Wilson:**

Does the Chief Minister believe there are more accidents waiting to happen? Does he now think this is a matter of urgency for Government to intervene and get some independent assurance to assure Islanders that all steps that he has just outlined that are being taken are the right steps?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

The Government has been aware this is absolute top priority since the terrible tragic incident at Haut du Mont. The previous Government took the lead in moving things forward to put us on a much firmer footing in relation to how not only we respond but how we perhaps look to improve things, so we can take pre-emptive action wherever possible. We are working to provide greater assurance to ensure that things are as safe as they possibly can be. Jersey Gas, as I said, doubled their investment and the new management team are placing this firmly as a top priority. I suppose one of the consequences, as we have seen when infrastructure utility companies are privatised, we do not see the investment in the infrastructure network that we should do. Here is a prime example and I am pleased to say they are taking that far more seriously now. The Emergencies Council also receive regular updates. Every meeting we have has also led work to update the gas legislation, giving the Government more powers, including to request information from the gas company to reflect more modern practices and this is due to be lodged imminently. We are doing everything we can. Of course in any sphere of life we can never guarantee that accidents will not happen but we are doing everything in our power to reduce the risk.

**The Bailiff:**

I have a number of Members who wish now to ask questions in relation to this. At the moment I have noted down interest from Deputies Ozouf, Jeune, Renouf, Tadier, the Connétable of St. Saviour and Deputy Gardiner. That is simply too many to allow a reasonable time for each question. But I do remind Members that the Chief Minister is answering questions without notice and any difficult questions that are left over can be asked at that point. I will, therefore, allow another 4 questions; Deputies Ozouf, Jeune, Renouf and Tadier. But then I have to draw the line I am afraid and move on from there and then a final supplementary.

**3.10.2 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf of St. Saviour:**

I am grateful for my colleague in St. Clement asking this question and the Chief Minister said he remembers us being here since 1999. He will recall then that this has been a regular refrain of mine in relation to the problems that Jersey Gas had. I do not like saying it, but I worry that there is not another accident waiting to happen. Nothing that I have heard from the Chief Minister is going to help my constituencies and those parishioners of St. Clement and across the Island.

**The Bailiff:**

I have to impose a discipline on asking questions as well.

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

Fine, okay.

**The Bailiff:**

Would you just ask the question?

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

Yes, Sir. Will he recognise the absolute importance of people understanding that we are dealing with Jersey Gas with L.P.G. (liquid petroleum gas), propane and butane versus L.N.G. (liquefied natural gas) that is natural gas in the U.K. and there are significant problems? This is a legacy system and does he really think that it is appropriate for more investment in a legacy system because it is, effectively, a past system? Does he not agree that we need to deal with Jersey Gas in the round and take some courageous decisions before there is another accident?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

No, I do not fully subscribe to that. We have spoken over many years about how we might manage the gas situation and what that looks like, how that relates to our Carbon Neutral Roadmap, whether we are going to continue with the use of any form of fossil fuels and such like into the future. Of

course it is not that easy. There are many households and businesses and Government buildings that rely on this live gas for various reasons. I think, as I said before, we are seeing an accelerated programme of expenditure and renewal of the gas infrastructure, which should provide some reassurance to Islanders. The Infrastructure Department have, I believe, over 1,000 monitors deployed or have taken over 1,000 measurements and continue to do so to monitor the potential for leaks. We are updating the legislation as well to give the Government more power, which is outdated. With hindsight, that should have been done a long time ago. There is no simple solution and no Government can give guarantees that there will not be further incidents or accidents, not just with gas but with any emergency in the Island. This Government will continue to do everything it possibly can to reduce the risk and provide greater confidence to the Island. I am not surprised that confidence ...

**The Bailiff:**

Sorry, Chief Minister, I have to ask you to bring ...

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

... is shaken by recent incidents. But I want to reiterate we are doing everything in our power to reduce the risk.

**3.10.3 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:**

Sir, we are not going to do justice on such a matter of public importance in question time. I understand your frustration. Indeed, the Chief Minister is not really going to be able to answer questions fulsomely. He did say in his question that he is going to get a briefing from the chief executive on this. I would ask and encourage the Chief Minister, in my final supplementary, would he accelerate that and let us have a discussion? Because some Members have been raising concerns about this and I am afraid words are simply not going to be enough when there is another fatality that could happen, and it is a real risk. Could he bring forward that so that we can have an urgent debate either openly or privately to discuss these issues? It is really serious; does he not agree?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

It is a cluster of accidents. Yes, the chief executive will be holding an open forum with States Members as soon as possible, so we can have full and frank discussion; we will get that arranged.

**3.10.4 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:**

The Chief Minister has listed an impressive amount of changes since the new C.E.O. (Chief Executive Officer) came on board but is this not a concern that it just takes one person to create confidence or not in the system? Does the Chief Minister believe that there needs to be firm action by the Government to assure the Jersey public that they are getting an appropriate and safe gas service and what could these be?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

As I stated in my earlier answer, I believe the most important work for Jersey Gas is to continue to accelerate the renewal, the updating of the gas infrastructure, and that is what they are doing. We have seen a significant improvement in the commitment to that and to the resources deployed by Jersey Gas's new management team that have taken over. The Government has deployed monitoring units throughout the network to provide an extra layer of safety. We are updating the law to give the Government more power and we are doing everything we can to reduce the risk. I look forward to the forum with States Members because we will have officials there and the senior management team from I.E.G. to explain in more detail what that looks like and to provide greater reassurance to members of the public.

**3.10.5 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:**

In most jurisdictions the major utilities are regulated. Does the Chief Minister believe that Island Energy should be regulated, and this would give us the levers that we need and the assurance that we need to deliver a safe and effective service?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I think that is a matter for further debate. Certainly not ruling out regulation of Jersey Gas in the first instance. We are going to be strengthening the legislation to give the Government more power and let us see what that looks like before we discuss regulation further. But what I am sure of, if Members agree, is we need to see this improvement to the gas infrastructure, this increased expenditure, this work to continue to be accelerated so we can be sure that our gas network is safe.

**3.10.6 Deputy J. Renouf:**

I am not quite sure if we are dancing on a pinhead here but when he talks about bringing forward further laws and powers, could he give us any detail on what those powers are because that sounds like the beginning of regulation at the very least?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

For example, in certain instances we cannot even request information from the gas company. The Jersey Gas Law, which is looked after by the Minister for Infrastructure, is badly out of date and it needs updating to give the Government more powers; they might be regulatory powers. But the Government needs to be sure that it has the power and the authority to hold the gas company to account and to force it to take action more quickly than it has done in the past and that is what we are looking at. Whether we do that in legislation or we need to go into regulation is another matter.

**3.10.7 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:**

Let us put this in context. Jersey Gas put their prices up 12 per cent last year, 7.5 per cent they are going up this year, for what many people in the Island think is an unsafe service. I get contacted every time there is an incident. It was not just St. Clement and Le Geyt, there was an incident on 5th December on the border of Trinity and St. Helier. I get contacted by relatives of the Haut du Mont disaster asking: "When are we going to get closure?" In June last year and in November last year: "Will we get any closure?" Can the Minister say that he will take this issue very seriously? It is a matter of life and death. It is about people feeling safe in their own homes. Will he say whether he considers that an independent inspection of the gas infrastructure in Jersey is something that he could back and something that needs to be done urgently?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I cannot reiterate the seriousness of this; the Government takes it seriously. It is discussed at every Emergencies Council meeting. I am not sure what more can be done. We have been working closely with the Health and Safety Inspectorate, who are independent and who are reviewing it independently. We will have further discussions on whether we need a complete independent review of the gas network. But we have infrastructure officials and Jersey Gas work closely together, again with the Fire and Rescue Services but in relation to the network; that is being thoroughly reviewed and updated. But I undertake to continue with those discussions and take whatever action we need to provide that reassurance. It is not so simple. In a simple world we might say: "Well, let us just eliminate the use of gas altogether." But of course that is not easy or straightforward and that would take time. Of course you have the hospitality industry rely on gas to run their businesses. Then there is a capacity of transferring all of that business to our electricity grid, which at the moment could take many, many years to achieve.

[12:15]

It is a complex issue. I would like to reassure Members that we are doing everything we can, not only to reassure the public but to provide greater powers for the Government and a safer and a secure

network with the caveat that we can never rule out incidents happening across any sphere of the public realm.

**3.10.8 Deputy M. Tadier:**

I pick up on the point that he said it is not easy, and it is not straightforward, and that is probably exactly why the Government needs a policy and a strategy in this area. Can the Minister confirm, given the fact he said that environmentally and from a safety point of view, probably the lifespan of gas is limited? Rather than investing more money, either customers' money or taxpayers' money in updating a dilapidated infrastructure which may not be long-term viable, will he bring forward a policy and strategy in short order and bring it to this Assembly?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

The policy and a strategy on gas is a work in progress and we are bringing that as soon as it is ready. Do not mistake necessarily the work on updating the gas network with the fact that it could be here for ever or it could expand. We know it is a challenging circumstance for them because we are seeing a reduction in the use of gas. More people are coming off it and switching to other sources of power. But either way, whatever we do, gas will be with us for a number of years and it is important - whether it is with us for another year or another 10 years - that the existing network needs to be repaired and updated, regardless of that. That is why we are pushing that work forward.

**3.10.9 Deputy K.M. Wilson:**

I think certainly this question was asked because of the considerable emphasis that people are placing on their individual and also corporate and business safety. One of the questions as a final supplementary I want to ask is: does the Chief Minister have any intelligence as to where there are key areas of risk that the chief executive and the Infrastructure Department are focused on in particular, so as to give some confidence that there is some proactive activity going on to manage the risk, rather than waiting for incidents to happen?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

Those areas have been identified by the measurements we are taking, and most measurements have been well within safe levels. But we do occasionally see a spike here and there and the measurements we are doing are enabling the Jersey Gas and the authorities to get to it before it does become an issue. Also, in light of the public concern, the terrible tragedy we had and the recent gas leaks, the public themselves have been far more aware and reporting even the most minor potential smell of gas. I am pleased that is happening because it means we are being very, very careful, a lot more mindful and also that we are carrying out evacuations now where there is a problem, where there might not be a risk of exposure or further, think that we are carrying out evacuations regardless just to make sure that public safety comes first. When we do the presentation with Jersey Gas and officials, I will ask that all the detail in relation to your question is discussed at that meeting.

**3.11 Deputy J. Renouf of the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development regarding the Route Development Grant allocated to Ports of Jersey (OQ.12/2025):**

Will the Minister detail how the £2 million Route Development Grant allocated to Ports of Jersey from the Better Business Support Package to "increase connectivity" will be spent, or advise how he anticipates this being spent?

**Deputy K.F. Morel of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity (The Minister for Sustainable Economic Development):**

I thank the Deputy for his question. Route development is a common industry practice to support the market to identify new connectivity opportunities that, ultimately, underpin all parts of our economy. The support package will boost Ports of Jersey's ability to attract new airlines and secure additional new routes. This will be delivered in close partnership with Visit Jersey, with their role

being to market the Island to potential visitors on those routes. Any new routes will, ultimately, be a decision for the airlines in collaboration with Ports of Jersey. But I know Ports of Jersey share my ambition to boost the Island's connectivity by increasing existing U.K. connectivity and exploring new European links to provide greater choice for Islanders and to support our visitor economy.

#### **3.11.1 Deputy J. Renouf:**

Could I press for information on what exactly the money will be spent on; £1 million a year is, presumably, not going to go on increasing staff at Ports of Jersey or at least only a portion of it would? What exactly will the money be spent on? Will it be handed over to Ports of Jersey to spend as they see fit? Might it be spent directly with airlines to incentivise them? Where will the money be spent?

#### **Deputy K.F. Morel:**

It is absolutely to incentivise airlines to create routes to Jersey; that is what it is for. It is not to be used by Ports of Jersey for their own operations. It is not to be used for Ministers to visit anywhere. It is entirely for Ports of Jersey to pass to the airlines to incentivise them to fly to Jersey.

#### **3.11.2 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:**

Yes, I would like to drill down further into the Minister's welcome comments about trying to engage European airlines or rather routes to Europe is probably more accurate. Will the Minister confirm that he will be looking specifically to either bring back or get new lines perhaps to regional airports, such as Rennes, San-Brieuc or even to one of the Paris airports, to make sure that Islanders have the opportunity to fly to the mainland?

#### **Deputy K.F. Morel:**

The Deputy asks a very interesting question because the Better Business Support Package is there to improve productivity throughout the Island's economy. From that perspective - purely from that perspective - it would be the larger routes that you would be seeking to achieve because that is where you will get the bigger impact on the Island economy. But there are still regional benefits to having regional routes but the payoff economically is less than ... quite simply, a route to Rennes is, potentially, less economically appreciable than a route to Paris or to Frankfurt, with larger aircraft, more visitors coming to the Island. But that in my mind does not close down the many other benefits that may come from a route, for example, Touraine. Yes, Ports of Jersey do speak with airlines, such as Blue Islands and also smaller airlines. We have had interest from a small French airline called Finist'air that is interested in flying routes from Brittany to Jersey. Potentially, I have also mentioned to them that it might be useful from an ordinary perspective as well to create a Jersey all new route. But these are very small planes, just 90 to a plane. The economic impact is much less than a Boeing 737 to Frankfurt. That balance has to be taken into account, but it is something that is definitely being discussed.

#### **3.11.3 Deputy M. Tadier:**

I think we are allowed to name airlines but we know that, for example, there are existing low-budget airlines that operate to the U.K., which also they operate from the U.K. to France, to Rennes, to Toulouse, et cetera. Does the Minister accept that even if regional airports might be limited in terms of demand, there is a possibility then for connectivity once you get to the mainland?

#### **Deputy K.F. Morel:**

The Deputy is absolutely correct and one of my critiques of the way previous Rennes routes had been marketed it was that the benefit in terms of Rennes as a hub for travelling to the rest of France by T.G.V. (Train à Grande Vitesse) was not something that Islanders were being told about. In my view, Rennes is not just a lovely city to visit, which it is, it is also a fantastic hub for Islanders to travel through the rest of France and indeed Europe. But I do not believe that messaging ever came across properly in previous marketing elements; that is something which would need to be looked at as well.

### **3.11.4 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:**

I think we have seen this before, for example, in the route to Amsterdam but then, unfortunately, it had to be abandoned. How does the Minister know that these new routes will be more successful and what went wrong with the Amsterdam route?

#### **Deputy K.F. Morel:**

I thank the Deputy for a very interesting question. Ninety seconds is almost certainly not enough time to explain elements around the Amsterdam route particularly, except that Schiphol Airport for number one has capped the amount of airline movements because of their own carbon targets, et cetera or carbon rules. As a result, experimental routes are less likely to be maintained. That, for instance, is one reason why that route did not continue beyond the first year. We must appreciate commercial airlines only operate where there is profit to be gained. They are talking about 14 per cent and 15 per cent returns that they expect on any routes. If Jersey is to succeed in having sustainable air routes over many years, they have to deliver that to the airlines and that is where the Better Business Support Package comes in. Because it provides that incentive for the airlines to try it. But if an airline sees that it is not getting the return it wants it will cut any link. Airlines, and I mean this in the most neutral way possible, have no loyalty to any route and I have no issue with that. That is where the smaller regional airlines, such as Blue Islands, come in because they can be asked to undertake routes which perhaps do not provide the return they need but would need to be subsidised. The commercial airlines, commerce wins.

### **3.11.5 Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

To make sure that any of these new routes that Islanders see and then, hopefully, will be sustained rather than quickly folded, how will the Minister ensure that Visit Jersey makes the impact it needs to in those countries to ensure that visitors come here? It is not just about us going to those places but very much more is about those people coming here. Has the Minister put any emphasis on measurements for impact for Visit Jersey to make that successful?

#### **Deputy K.F. Morel:**

The Deputy is absolutely correct and I met recently with Ports of Jersey and Visit Jersey in the same meeting to highlight the fact that it is them working together that will make this succeed. There are lessons to be learned from previous routes, et cetera, and we want to make sure that those lessons are learned. This is something which will happen over time as well. We are here at the beginning of 2024, the first routes that we would see being established in terms of large commercial airlines flying to Jersey will be 2027; it will not be 2025 because the cycle of these things takes longer. It can take up to 3 years to get certain routes in there. That also gives time to ensure those K.P.I.s (key performance indicators) are met or are designed and they are met. Such K.P.I.s would be around the number of visitors coming to Jersey, the sustainability of those routes, et cetera. But, yes, there will be performance indicators but there is time to design those properly, as along with the choice of routes. This is not a situation where Jersey gets to pick towns. The airlines lead on this. They tell us which routes they are willing to try. We do not get to pick a city and just say we want a route there, unless we want to pay for it in its entirety.

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

The tenacity of the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development is laudable in his earlier remarks about retailers and going out to get people. Is he prepared in this route development to be as bold as past Ministers for Sustainable Economic Development, recalling that a previous incumbent was also criticised and challenged about route networks? But they ended up getting easyJet to Jersey, which is now our largest airline by a country mile. Is he going to be bold and brassy and go and talk to Wizz Air and T.U.I. (Touristik Union International) Airlines? The little ones are important but it is the big airlines such as these big operators, the operators of the future that he needs to go. Will he

give me encouragement that he is going to learn the lessons of the past and being bold can deliver big issues for Jersey?

**Deputy K.F. Morel:**

I will not be going anywhere, as the media have recently commented they do not want to see this money spent on me travelling anywhere. I will not be travelling anywhere into those negotiations. Apparently, that is not what Ministers are meant to do. But Ports of Jersey will be and Ports of Jersey will speak to all airlines. They are already primed for attending the appropriate conferences at which these deals are done and obviously the work in between. Yes, Ports of Jersey will be speaking to a range of airlines on these matters. But British Airways and easyJet remain the 2 biggest airlines serving these islands and they will also be people that Ports of Jersey engages with. This is something that Ports of Jersey are leading on, backed, as we are saying in response to Deputy Jeune's question, by Visit Jersey in terms of marketing to make sure that these routes work into the future.

**3.11.7 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:**

Very quickly, I would just invite the Minister to reconsider whether or not he should not go on these. I would not worry about what the media would say, if I were him. If the Minister turns up to a big organisation, such as easyJet or Wizz Air or T.U.I., then they know that Jersey means business and we want their business and we have to go for it. Could he please consider not listening to the media and the short-term headline-grabbers about Ministerial trips because they have worked in the past?

[12:30]

If he wants somebody to go with him, we have done it before and we can do it again and these airlines are not serving Jersey and they can in the future, does he not agree?

**Deputy K.F. Morel:**

Absolutely I do agree and I will travel wherever is necessary for Jersey on any element of the economy where it is important for a Minister to attend in order to get a deal over a line or to encourage any investment in the Island, no matter what form that takes.

**3.11.8 Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade:**

Would the Minister advise Members whether any of the Better Business Support Package will be allocated towards Visit Jersey - picking up from Deputy Jeune's question - given that the Schiphol route was abandoned through lack of passengers, I presume?

**Deputy K.F. Morel:**

I thank the Constable for his question. The Schiphol route, it was a load of factors but it only lasted one year. Normally a trial period would be 3 years and things such as, as I understand it, the carbon restrictions on Schiphol Airport were the sort of thing that were really forcing the airline to choose, should they carry on with a new experimental route or just focus on the routes that they know work today? From that perspective Visit Jersey are absolutely engaged. Visit Jersey, they are receiving £2 million a year from the Better Business Support Package over those 2 years to market Jersey from a visitor-destination perspective to do the destination marketing. They are working alongside Ports of Jersey as well on the specific routes that Ports of Jersey manage to get. They will be doing that marketing, so, yes.

**3.11.9 The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Picking up on Deputy Ozouf's point with regard to Wizz Air. Wizz Air is a strong central Europe Hungarian-based airline; can we not do more with them? Central Europe is a vast visitor pool, which we should be attracting. Will the Minister commit to looking in that direction as well?

**Deputy K.F. Morel:**

I am not the expert and I hazard a guess that neither is the Constable in terms of getting airline investment in the Island in terms of routes. Ports of Jersey are leading on that but the information that they have given me just very, very recently was that France and Germany look like the most likely areas for routes. In that sense, central Europe is absolutely on there and it is possible that the Netherlands would fit too. But I think France and Germany are likely to be the areas that they look at most.

**3.11.10 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:**

Looking into the annual reports and accounts for the Ports of Jersey, Ports of Jersey turnover in 2023 - because this is the latest - is £50.5 million, an increase of £5 million from 2022. Operating profit is £7.2 million in 2023, compared to £1.8 million in 2022. We know that 2024 was a much more successful year. Connectivity is one of their top priorities. Would the Minister consider the one importance within the Ports of Jersey business plan should be maintaining and increasing connectivity when we do have this healthy position in their accounts?

**Deputy K.F. Morel:**

Connectivity is absolutely one of the Ports of Jersey's key focuses and they use existing revenue to maintain that connectivity as well. This Better Business Support Package is to help them look elsewhere. I think it is really important to remember why Ports of Jersey was set up. Ports of Jersey was set up to enable it to be able to invest in the port and the airport, particularly those 2 areas, which is hundreds of millions of pounds worth of investment. The idea is that by setting up incorporating Ports of Jersey that investment could be undertaken from its own balance sheet and, therefore, take away the requirement for the Government and for the States of Jersey to find those hundreds of millions themselves through pure revenue taxation. Every time we ask Ports of Jersey to spend more money somewhere else they are not able to invest that in the infrastructure of our port and our airport. From my perspective, the port and the airport are absolutely vital for the long-term economic growth of this Island. We need to invest in them and we need to invest in them not for the next 10 years, we need to invest in them for the next 50 years. Because we need to make sure that the next generation have a harbour that can do more than just freight and passenger deliveries. It needs to be an economic enabler for the whole Island. Ports cannot do that if every time they make a bit of money they are asked to spend it somewhere else. They need to use that money to invest in the port and airport for the future.

**3.11.11 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Thank you for the answer. Would the Minister indicate how he can demonstrate or how Ports needs to demonstrate value for money for the £1 million that would be allocated? What is the specific outcome this £1 million would deliver to the public specific, not in general terms? What is the expectations?

**Deputy K.F. Morel:**

The expectation is new air routes from the U.K. and Europe; it is very simple.

**3.11.12 Deputy J. Renouf:**

Funding for better business is only in place for 2 years at £1 million a year. Is there a danger that the routes will survive only while there is an incentive in place? If so, is he considering at least the possibility that he might extend this support beyond the Better Business Package in order to maintain connectivity in the routes that may be generated or does he regard this as a one-off not to be repeated; it stops at 2 years?

**Deputy K.F. Morel:**

Again, a very interesting question. I do feel that we all, including myself, could probably learn a lot about understanding how the airline industry works. We already incentivise the London Heathrow

route. We already incentivise routes to Jersey. Heathrow exists as a route to Jersey because the Government, through Ports of Jersey, help pay for that route to be implemented. It is really important that we understand that this incentivisation is standard industry practice. It is how we get Jersey connected to the rest of Europe. The Deputy is absolutely right to raise the idea that this may need to be ongoing support. It is quite possible that that is the case.

**3.12 Deputy D. J. Warr of St. Helier South of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding scaffolding the Lido at Havre des Pas (OQ.4/2025):**

Further to his response to Oral Question 241/2024, will the Minister advise whether the total cost for scaffolding at the Lido at Havre des Pas remains £14,996.50 as a one off sum, or is this now a monthly charge?

**Connétable A.N. Jehan of St. John (The Minister for Infrastructure):**

I thank the Deputy for his question. I find myself in the regrettable position where I still do not currently have the final sum to give an accurate answer to the Deputy. In December I gave in good faith a figure of £14,996.50 as a fixed charge for the scaffold on the western wall of the Lido. Providing timing and accurate information to the Assembly is paramount and that is why I am today withdrawing the figure for the Lido scaffolding I gave in December and committing to revert to Members with a full and accurate position as soon as possible. It has become clear to me during the last week that the original figure is not correct. The fixed cost of the scaffolding is significantly higher, in part to additional works that were required to meet health and safety requirements. I offer my sincere apologies to Members and the Deputy. At this time I am still working with officers to establish the full facts behind the cost of the scaffolding. Once I have this I will share it with the Deputy and Members.

**3.12.1 Deputy D.J. Warr:**

I appreciate the Minister's response to that question. Can the Minister advise when his department is likely to publish how the £500,000 budget is being spent or has been spent on the Havre des Pas pool?

**The Connétable of St. John:**

Work continues at the pool, as the Deputy is aware, and good progress is being made, clearly weather-dependent. In response to the Deputy's email to me on 10th January, I asked the Deputy if he had information that was contrary to my original answer to share that with me and I will repeat that request again today. We will publish the information as soon as it is available.

**The Bailiff:**

Very well. That brings an end to that question. There are a number of questions still to ask if we continue to finish at 12.59 p.m. I now must ask Members if they wish for the luncheon adjournment or to continue.

**LUNCHEON ADJOURNMENT PROPOSED**

**The Bailiff:**

The adjournment is proposed. The Assembly stands adjourned until 2.15 p.m.

[12:39]

**LUNCHEON ADJOURNMENT**

[14:18]

**The Bailiff:**

Before we resume questions with notice, we have 20 minutes more time available of this set of questions. I then have to draw those questions to an end but I would allow one additional urgent oral question, which I propose to take immediately after that before moving to questions without notice. My thinking is probably the answers may inform what the questions without notice might be, I do not know. But that is what I am intending to do.

**Connétable M. O'D. Troy of St. Clement:**

Sir, I just would like to take the Assembly's leave to attend a medical appointment and leave the Assembly at about 3.15 p.m. and I will be back as soon as I can.

**The Bailiff:**

Thank you very much for telling us, Connétable.

**Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée of St. Helier:**

Yes, I have to leave as well at 2.30 p.m. I have got to take a relative to an emergency appointment at the hospital.

**The Bailiff:**

Thank you very much.

**3.13 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding changes in remuneration for senior officials within States Owned Entities (OQ.10/2025):**

Will the Minister detail any changes in remuneration for senior officials within States-owned entities that she approved in 2024; and further advise of any changes in remuneration for directors and office holders of States-established delivery entities and independent bodies, and advise if these changes adhered to the agreed framework for remuneration policies?"

**The Bailiff:**

Minister. You can move next door to the Chief Minister's ...

**Deputy M.E. Millar of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity (The Minister for Treasury and Resources):**

Thank you, Sir. Apparently the spare part is on the way to fix it. The memoranda of understanding with the wholly-owned States-owned entities requires Ministerial approval for, firstly, changes in the quantum or structure of remuneration of the executive board members and, secondly, for changes in the non-executive director remuneration. I can confirm that changes to the director remuneration for the wholly-owned States-owned entities have adhered to the S.O.E. (States-owned entities) remuneration framework, which includes increases in base salary being linked to inflation and the wider workforce increases within the relevant business. In the context of an oral question, time will not permit me to detail each of the approved changes but I am happy to provide these to the Deputy separately. I would also point out that the director remuneration is fully disclosed in each of the S.O.E's annual published report and accounts. I think there have been no changes as such, other than routine pay rises. The second part of the Deputy's question refers to States-established delivery entities and independent bodies. I do not have political responsibility or oversight for these organisations and I am not able to detail the changes in remuneration for office holders. I understand, however, that a remuneration framework for arm's-length bodies, which will apply outside the State-owned entities, is being developed and will be considered by the States Employment Board during 2025. This reflects a commitment made following the C. and A.G. report on oversight of arm's-length bodies published in 2024.

**3.13.1 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Thank you, Minister, for confirmation. If the Members would look into the oversight of arm's-length bodies, the Comptroller and Auditor General report that was published last year, they can see the structure and actual remuneration from the chief executives of the bodies. If we can see at least 3 of them, the first one it is between about £400,000-plus, touching £500,000-plus, my question is: the C. and A.G. suggested that when we are establishing the framework we need to look into the appropriate local and international benchmarks, given Jersey's relative position to them in the marketplace, for example, lack of competition and other things ...

**The Bailiff:**

I am so sorry, you really do have to pose a question.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Sorry, but my supplementary question ...

**The Bailiff:**

You have, effectively, had a 2-minute speech.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

No, sorry, apologies. The question is: what appropriate local international benchmark, given Jersey's relative position, was taken to establish the framework?

**Deputy M.E. Millar:**

I think the framework is not about benchmarking, although benchmarking, I think, forms part of it. The framework is more about the manner of increases. As I mentioned, the S.O.E. framework includes things like linking base salary to inflation and what else is happening in the workforce. You would not expect, or I certainly would not and have not agreed to, an increase, for example, if the workforce were getting 2 per cent and the chief executive was getting 8 per cent. I would be very unlikely to approve that. That has not happened; I would just emphasise that. But the framework, we are going to review the framework as part of our review of the M.o.U. (memorandum of understanding). We are going to review the framework to have the decisions made in a more consistent way. There is benchmarking for the State-owned entities, I cannot talk about the arm's-length bodies. There is something called Polymetrix, which they all look at and which does seem to benchmark global companies. That is one of the benchmarks that is taken into account in setting and reviewing salaries in State-owned entities.

**3.13.2 Deputy A.F. Curtis of St. Clement:**

The Minister said that she would not have time to detail all changes to salaries. But perhaps in the conversations she has had and the decisions she has made, were there any States-owned entities or individuals whose remuneration was significantly below the maximum that would have been permitted by the agreed frameworks followed? That could be individuals who are elected to take a pay freeze or a below-inflation pay rise that she felt that occurred. Can she recall any examples of organisations choosing to follow something lower than what would be the maximum agreed under the frameworks?

**Deputy M.E. Millar:**

Yes. I seem to have been talking about S.O.E. and executive pay for about the last 6 months because of the time periods in which they come forward, and that is something I want to look at. But, yes, I recently approved some pay rises which I think were ... no, they were in line with inflation and there had been a thought of upgrading them but the chair had refused to upgrade them beyond inflation. I do not think there would be any pay freezes. People are entitled to a pay rise when they are performing well.

**3.13.3 Deputy K.M. Wilson of St. Clement:**

Can the Minister just outline whether or not, as part of the review, she is going to include a review of bonus schemes for directors as well?

**Deputy M.E. Millar:**

If I could just clarify, this is not a review of bonus schemes. It is not a review of the remuneration in place at the moment. It is simply a review of the remuneration framework, which is how remuneration is structured. There are no changes, there have been no specific changes to any existing schemes; they are continuing as they are in place at the moment. We have to remember that it is very difficult to cut someone's pay when they are performing, as a matter of general employment law. I am simply looking at the remuneration framework and not the mechanisms that already exist in terms of how people are paid.

**3.13.4 Deputy K.M. Wilson:**

Would the Minister consider that the framework should include conditions around bonus payments?

**Deputy M.E. Millar:**

I think the framework probably does talk about bonus payments; they have structures. All bonus schemes are subject to I think generally a form of balanced score card, which is reviewed by the board. That then comes to me more than once during the year to look at performance against the score cards. Again, I am sure if you ask them I will challenge them on the score cards in their proposals. I have challenged more than once this year in terms of proposed pay rises. But where schemes are existing, new schemes will have to be considered carefully but those that are in place are continuing as they are.

**3.13.5 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Does the Minister consider that the bonus schemes are appropriate and sufficiently targeted at business performance with a sufficient weighting of K.P.I. linked to the States objectives and value for money, in particular quality of service performance?

**Deputy M.E. Millar:**

Yes, I believe that is the case. They all have very detailed balanced score cards with clear targets. They are rated, most of them have an Audit and Remuneration Committee who look at those as the non-executive directors who considered executive director pay or the Remuneration Committee does that. They look closely at the bonus schemes and performance against whatever score cards and criteria that bonuses are awarded against.

**3.14 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour of the Minister for Children and Families regarding outdoor and indoor play facilities (OQ.15/2025):**

Does the Minister have a long-term plan for ensuring that children in all Parishes have access to suitable outdoor and indoor play facilities and, if so, will he share details?

**Connétable R.P. Vibert of St. Peter (The Minister for Children and Families):**

I have asked my Assistant Minister, Deputy Ferey, to answer this question, as he has delegated responsibility for the area.

**Deputy M.R. Ferey of St. Saviour (Assistant Minister for Children and Families - rapporteur):**

I thank the Deputy for allowing me to answer this question. Currently work is being undertaken on a play strategy for Jersey to assist in developing an approach to play spaces in Jersey that meets the needs of children and young people in the long term.

[14:30]

The strategy will rather focus on available indoor and outdoor play facilities across the whole Island and will be a key document to advocate for long-term plans to ensure that play spaces are available and protected. As part of this work a mapping process will be completed to identify what resources we have, where they are, and our priority in the strategy will be to assess which needs further resourcing or facilities and what they should be, taking into consideration that not all Parishes will need the same facilities. We must have a range of play experiences for children. During the initial stages of this work stakeholders with experience and knowledge of play have been involved. Children and young people's comments on play will also have a key role in guiding this strategy. It is also important to note that there are already green spaces and open spaces for children and young people to enjoy. As part of the mapping process, we want to ensure those spaces are accessible and can be utilised by children and young people, both in the short and long term.

**3.14.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:**

I thank the Assistant Minister for his answer. Where gaps are identified, who is responsible for establishing and funding play facilities where there are gaps?

**Deputy M.R. Ferey:**

I thank the Deputy for the question. I think what we have already identified is that the play spaces that are available are controlled under ownership and funded by different organisations. They do not come all under the Department for Infrastructure. As we found out at a Parish meeting last night, some of them have incredibly complex ownership and funding arrangements, including insurance arrangements. The reality is there is no one single point that is in control of all of those play spaces. The strategy will seek to harmonise that as far as possible.

**3.14.2 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:**

The answerer may have touched on this already in that answer but the question focuses particularly on Parishes. But does the Minister accept that children of families from all over the Island can use these facilities wherever they are from irrespective of their Parish run? Will he look into maybe if there is a way that the renewing and maintenance of these facilities, which I use, by all Islanders should be partly funded centrally?

**Deputy M.R. Ferey:**

I thank the Deputy for the question. I think what we have already identified is lots of people from around the Island travel to their favourite play space, and we have probably all got fond memories of what our favourite play spaces were. Mine was Coronation Park where there was a big steamroller that had just been planted there and painted, and we had huge amounts of fun on that. I think play spaces have to be appropriate for the young people in that area that are going to use them. We are also looking at the opportunities for pop-up play spaces so that play spaces can be brought to where young people are and encouraged to play. We are looking at Play Rangers to again encourage and facilitate play and teach parents how to play, so, yes, we are looking at all the available options. We are meeting with the Comité des Connétables to get a good understanding of what is available in each Parish and how the Parishes would like to see those developed, but this is going to be a year-long piece of work which I am really happy to be guiding.

**3.14.3 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:**

I was wondering if the Assistant Minister could tell the Assembly a little bit more about if this strategy will also contain elements of what kind of play would be expected. What I was disappointed to find when I came back to Jersey with a little older children from Europe was that many of the play spaces are not very imaginative, they are quite risk-averse, bar one new one I think that is quite innovative, but otherwise they do not have the imagination and that kind of sense of adventure as many of the

play areas had in big capital cities I have experienced. I am wondering if there is a part element in the strategy to look at that and aversion to risk.

**Deputy M.R. Ferey:**

Yes, there absolutely is. We went to the school council last week and met with young people to understand their views. Lots of young people mentioned about having a play park which does have an element of risk, of controlled risk, but also they were really keen to make sure that young people with disabilities had access, young people with neurodivergence had the right play spaces for them. The strategy will look at this holistically and in the round and look at what play is available and how we can encourage young people to play better. Now we were speaking earlier about mobile phones, and particularly smart phones, and how we can divert young people from over usage of smart phones. Having really good play spaces is one way to distract people in a pleasant way and undertake activities, more enriching perhaps, and distract them from their mobile devices for a period of time. What I would say is the previous Administration put in place a play policy which has really been the key driver and a fundamental platform for launching the strategy, so I thank the previous Minister and Assistant Minister who was involved in putting that together.

**3.14.4 Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

Of course, many of us know that when we go to a playground we usually have different aged children trailing behind us. What ages are you looking at within this strategy to ensure that there is a wide range, especially for the older children?

**Deputy M.R. Ferey:**

I thank the Deputy for that question because again she has hit the nail on the head. There is a lack of play spaces for older young people. There are lots of play spaces for younger young people and we need to make sure that as long as children want to play we create those really good play spaces for them. We also need to communicate with Honorary officers and perhaps neighbours who see groups of what they consider teenagers congregating in play spaces and perhaps being a bit noisy and rowdy. They are still playing and we need to communicate that message that young people need to have good activities to get involved with in order to thrive.

**3.14.5 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:**

First of all, I would like to start with a thank you for the biodiversity government team and for structure officers who support natural materials rather than unnecessary rubber surfaces and they are working really well with natural play surfaces in the government schools.

**The Bailiff:**

I am sorry, is this part of the question, Deputy?

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Yes.

**The Bailiff:**

I do have to challenge you on this because it does sound like a couple of statements.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Fair enough. It was part of the question because I think that the Government is leading a really good way of natural play and not rubber play. I would like to ask the Assistant Minister if it would be part of the strategy and how the Assistant Minister will encourage Parishes that still prefer to work with the rubber than with green spaces.

**Deputy M.R. Ferey:**

I thank the Deputy for that question. Yes, it is really important that the right materials are used. We have got some really good opportunities with Millennium Town Park and Springfield Stadium to get it right and make sure that we are using sustainable materials and that it is not just rubber and metal. There are lots of other natural fibres that are a really good safe way for children to play, so, yes, I totally agree with that point.

**The Bailiff:**

We have 55 seconds to go, a supplemental question, Deputy?

**Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:**

Will government complete the refurbishment of the Sandy ...

**The Bailiff:**

No, sorry, I was asking Deputy Gardiner if she had a supplemental question. The next person to speak is the Connétable of St. Martin.

**3.14.6 Connétable K. Shenton-Stone of St. Martin:**

In St. Martin - I am going to blow my own trumpet - we are really innovative [**Approbation**] and we have got a natural playscape. We have got an inter-abled playground for neurodiverse children, we listened to the Youth Parliament so we have got a Viking swing that I think Deputy Jeune ...

**The Bailiff:**

Connétable, there is 25 seconds to go.

**The Connétable of St. Martin:**

Sorry. Will Deputy Ferey and his group come and visit us, please, because we would like to welcome him to see what we have done?

**Deputy M.R. Ferey:**

In all our conversations, St. Martin is held up as a beacon of light [**Laughter**] when it comes to play spaces and we certainly intend to replicate that model where it is appropriate for the environment where the play spaces can be situated.

**The Bailiff:**

Well on that lighter note, we have reached the end of the time for questions with notice. That leaves 2 questions unanswered and, in the usual way, I would invite those who were to respond to file written answers if they feel it is appropriate to do so. There is one further question, Deputy Doublet, which you raised by way of an urgent oral question. I will allow - which I have allowed for all of the questions thus far on a normal division into the numbers - 8 minutes for this particular question in the usual way. Would you like to ask your question?

#### **4. Urgent Oral Question**

##### **4.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the Government Annual Plan for 2025 (U0Q.1/2025):**

Given that the report has not been formally presented to this Assembly but instead appears on the gov.je website, will the Minister please provide further details on the plans to separate health services from government as outlined in his Annual Plan for 2025, including how the new devolved funding of healthcare would operate?

**Deputy T.J.A. Binet of St. Saviour (The Minister for Health and Social Services):**

If I understand correctly, the question relates to the Health Department's recently-released Annual Plan and the implication in the opening sentence is that the plan should have been presented to the

Assembly formally. If my enquiries of yesterday evening are correct, Annual Plans - or as they were called in the past, Departmental Operational Business Plans, Delivery Plans, and last year, Ministerial Plans - are plans that get published annually as a matter of course. At this point I think I should inform Members that the plan was put on to the government website without first being sent to States Members entirely without my knowledge or agreement. Anyway, I have revisited the Health and Community Services Annual Plan for 2025 and, while I stand to be corrected, I cannot find anything of a substantive nature that I have not explained to the Deputy on more than one occasion and to the Assembly as part of the States Members' briefing held on 5th December last year. While I have already made several attempts to explain my intentions for the coming year, I thought it might be helpful to provide Members with another copy of the layout plan that I have presented previously. This was going to be distributed to Members but that failed to happen over the lunch hour, so I do apologise. Anyway, I am happy to talk through my explanation using the very words that I am sure fuelled this latest urgent crisis. I was going to say if Members would be kind enough to look at the paper provided - but I had provided the paper - and in my view the layout is self-explanatory. Both at the briefing sessions and in written material I have been at pains to explain that in my view, and the view of many health professionals, the health service has been overcentralised in the Parker era and this had had an adverse effect on efficiency and the delivery of services. As a consequence, I have stressed repeatedly the importance of securing a high degree of autonomy for health so that it is able to have a more direct control of its essential functions. Bearing in mind that the service employs about 30 per cent of States staff and accounts for £300 million of our expenditure, and in 2023 under the centralised system it required a financial review by a major accountancy firm that cost £500,000, I do not think my actions are unreasonable. In the foreword to the Annual Plan I chose to suggest that it should be separated from but connected to government encompassing all health functions, including strategy, policy legislation, public health, digital health, commissioning, procurement and population data.

**The Bailiff:**

I must ask you to bring your answer to a close, Minister.

**Deputy T.J.A. Binet:**

There are 2 paragraphs and then I can stop. In addition, while it appears ...

**The Bailiff:**

They might be very long paragraphs. [Laughter]

**Deputy T.J.A. Binet:**

I think I can just get through the essential bits in 2 paragraphs. I think it is important to ...

**The Bailiff:**

Well, a few seconds more. A few seconds more. Yes, carry on.

**Deputy T.J.A. Binet:**

I have gone as quickly as I can but it is quite a long and complicated question; just bear in mind, I wanted to answer it comprehensively. I can wait for supplementaries and ...

**The Bailiff:**

Well I think the time has come to wait for supplementaries. The normal rule, as you know, is one minute 30 seconds for a Ministerial answer. There is some flexibility and that has been honoured more in the breach than the observance, frankly, during the course of the day, as has indeed the necessity for discipline and succinctness in asking questions but there we are. A supplemental question, Deputy Doublet.

#### **4.1.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:**

I thank the Minister for his initial answer, and I understand mistakes do happen and that the Minister has shared much of this information. I was alerted to this report by the chair of the Public Accounts Committee who drew my attention to an announcement on the radio. Upon analysing the report that was referenced, the phrases “a new standalone Health Department separated from but connected to government” and also references to a “devolved funding mechanism”, these are the specific issues that I would like the Minister to explain in more detail to the Assembly today. Could he first of all explain what exactly is meant by “separated from but connected to government”? Would the Health Department still be a government body? What status would the Health Department have?

#### **Deputy T.J.A. Binet:**

I thank the Deputy for giving me an opportunity to revisit my statement at an appropriate point because in the foreword - and I think that is what has drawn people’s attention - I go on to say that it is devolving, and this is the key point, which I quote: “Essentially to build the autonomous internal framework for H.R. (human resources), finance and procurement within the broader government system, along with digital I.T. which received particular attention.” There it is, that is the important point: an internal framework separated from government but built within the broader government framework. It is just simply what I had explained at all of the consultations in that we need Health to work as a cohesive whole, collaboratively, separated as we can from government with everything running through the central system.

[14:45]

We have done 12 or 14 consultation processes, we have done Scrutiny, and the Assembly and I have been at pains to be accurate about that throughout.

#### **4.1.2 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:**

I think the issue here is caused by possibly this phrase “separated from but connected to government” carries far more meaning than the Minister seems to be prepared to acknowledge, at least for many of us. If something is going to be separated from government it raises questions such as are the people working in the health service going to be government employees? Can he clarify that?

#### **Deputy T.J.A. Binet:**

Very happy to clarify, and I am really surprised that the Deputy has not been able to get his head round it. It says quite clearly “within the broader government system”. Perhaps the Deputy could suggest some wording that would be more appropriate than that, but I think that is fairly clear.

#### **The Bailiff:**

Well, are they going to be employees of the Government or not, Minister?

#### **Deputy T.J.A. Binet:**

On the assumption that it is within the broader government system then the answer has to be a firm yes. I will just make the point that I have never made any suggestions to the contrary.

#### **4.1.3 Deputy J. Renouf:**

I would respectfully suggest that the words “separated from but connected” does indeed seem to imply something that is not part of government. What I would ask is: has the Minister in considering this reorganisation of the relationship between government and health service looked for inspiration anywhere? Where has he seen models of this working elsewhere and has he considered any risks that might arise?

#### **Deputy T.J.A. Binet:**

No, I have to say that with problems of this sort I do not go looking over the fence particularly. I have approached this from an objective point of view as to what I would do if it were a business that were given to me to manage, and I make no apology for the fact. I am not sure if these have been distributed but I would invite people to take a look and perhaps the Deputy would tell me what he thinks is wrong with creating a partnership board where you have got all the component parts sitting round the table, making decisions together, and drawing from a central health fund. It cuts out a whole lot of administrative inefficiencies and I think it will serve us very well. It is fully integrated and, as I say, I make no apology for any of it.

#### **4.1.4 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:**

I completely support that we need to have a joint health approach, and I have seen this graph, so I would not be asking this question and talking about this crisis if BBC Jersey at 7.00 a.m. and 8.00 a.m. on Monday announced to the public of Jersey: “Health Minister Tom Binet wants to separate the service from government and let a new board run it with a new central fund.” This is what Jersey residents received on Monday morning as a statement. Now, would the Minister consider how he can communicate to the public of Jersey to make sure that this announcement does not hold a ground?

#### **Deputy T.J.A. Binet:**

Well, after I had spoken to the Assembly about this at the presentation on the 5th, I had spoken to the media; they have had all of this information. As I said earlier, I was not aware that this had been sent through and put on to the government website. The media went and issued a statement. They obviously had not, with respect, read the article in context and they had not read the part that says “within the broader government system”. It is very clear. Had they contacted me before they went out and put the story out, I would have drawn their attention to that. I am afraid I cannot be responsible for what the media have to say. I have done an embargoed interview with them at lunchtime because I know that I cannot be seen to be saying anything until I have addressed the Assembly, but I put the situation clear and that will be reported to the public once this Assembly meeting is over.

#### **4.1.5 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

I am looking at the report that was published. A draft was approved on 28th November 2024 and on 4th December edition a foreword which said about separation was approved on 4th December. The Minister has approved this foreword asking about separate from the government service on 4th December but can the Minister explain what has happened between 4th December and now that we are saying that it is no separation?

#### **Deputy T.J.A. Binet:**

Nothing has happened at all and I did not approve the foreword; I wrote it. It is my department, I care deeply about what I am doing. I think I am doing a good job; I think I have made it very, very clear. I will say that in all the consultation processes that we have had, not one person has failed to understand the intentions here at all. I rest my case.

#### **The Bailiff:**

That, I am afraid, runs us out of time. I allowed slightly more than the 8 minutes I said I was going to allow to make up for injury time and interjections. There is no further time for this question. We now come to questions without notice. The first period of questions without notice is for the Minister for Infrastructure and, to keep everyone in suspense, the first to ask a question is Deputy Coles.

THE STATES noted that, in accordance with Standing Order 63(9), a written response would be provided to the following oral questions that had not been asked during the time allowed at the meeting:

**4.2 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding an update on the tax of private jets (OQ.14/2025):**

Will the Minister provide an update on the progress to impose a tax on private jets?

**Written Answer provided in accordance with Standing Order 63(9)**

The Government Plan 2024-27 set out a commitment to investigate the introduction of a tax or charge on the operation of private aircraft, rather than a commitment to impose a new tax.

In line with that commitment, a working group, including representatives from Government and the Ports of Jersey (PoJ), met throughout 2024 to develop potential options. The group explored various options aligned with the current Common Strategic Policy objective to ensure that Jersey's business environment remains "attractive and competitive, which is essential if our economy is to continue to provide employment and funds for our infrastructure and public services".

Alongside but independent to this work, PoJ proposed increasing the current landing and take-off fees for private aircraft. This charge, currently set at £34 per movement which is comparatively low, will double (to £68). The revenue generated from this charge will be ring-fenced for PoJ's decarbonisation initiatives.

PoJ anticipates that consultation on this proposed charge will commence in Q1 2025 with implementation anticipated by mid-2025.

Given these developments, I intend to recommend to the Council of Ministers that work on a new tax is paused. This pause will allow time for the PoJ charge to be introduced, monitored and evaluated.

The work undertaken to-date to develop options for a Government tax or charge remains valuable and can be revisited by Ministers in future.

**4.3 Deputy P.F.C Ozouf of St. Saviour of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding the actions taken to ensure that the wishes of the late T.B. Davis continue to be met by Government (OQ.16/2025):**

Will the Minister outline what actions are being taken to ensure that the wishes of the late T B Davis, in relation to land or buildings gifted to the people of Jersey or the States of Jersey, and any associated terms or conditions, continue to be met by Government?

**Written Answer provided in accordance with Standing Order 63(9)**

I was, like many Islanders, surprised to read about the Howard Davis Hall and the restricted access in recent times. Property Holdings took back responsibility on 1st January this year. I was contacted by a member of the family from South Africa in December, on 13th December, and they asked if a Christmas tree could be put in place and if a carol service could happen before Christmas. I have to pay tribute to the officers who did all of that and I am still recovering from the actions of The Twelve Days of Christmas.

With the hall it is our intention to have that open far more regularly for the public and to display those artefacts which are quite splendid. Some of them are being currently restored by Jersey Heritage. In terms of Howard Davis Farm, I have put the department in touch with an organisation that is looking at experimental ways of farming, some new innovative kind of things to do in Jersey. It makes sense

to me that we explore whether we can use the Howard Davis Farm in the first instance rather than other land around the Island. I understand those talks are quite productive.

## **5. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Minister for Infrastructure**

### **5.1 Deputy T.A. Coles of St. Helier South:**

Will the Minister outline what conversations that Planning has within the foreshore defence plans to make sure that our slipways are more accessible in future?

#### **Connétable A.N. Jehan of St. John (The Minister for Infrastructure):**

The challenge we have with our slipways is most of them are one in 9 slopes and to be accessible for wheelchair users they should be one in 20 slopes. The work that we are doing around the Havre des Pas foreshore work includes access to the beach for these people. I would also like to compliment the work that is done by BeachAbility who do some good work around the Island, allowing people with mobility issues to access the beaches.

#### **5.1.1 Deputy T.A. Coles:**

As the Minister has alluded that Havre des Pas is the first port, and we will look forward to that work. Those who have attended the Planning Committee will have heard from people with mobility restrictions that the only slipway they feel they can safely access is the one on La Haule by the toilets because there is no vehicular access there. Will the Minister bear this in mind for other future projects to ensure that other slipways do become more accessible?

#### **The Connétable of St. John:**

Yes, we will consider that, and should also say that we have put in 4 blue badge parking spaces on the Five Mile Road to make it easier for people. We will continue to look where we have the opportunity to make it easier to do so. A big challenge for people accessing the beach in wheelchairs of course is the cobbled nature of many of the slips.

### **5.2 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour:**

I will ask my supplementary on play facilities. In terms of play facilities in St. Saviour, we do not have any as yet although I know the Constable is planning some. Residents in St. Saviour will travel quite often to the Sandy Park in Grouville. Are the Government planning to complete the planned refurbishment of the Sandy Park for which there was an extensive consultation which many children contributed to. Also, will the Government agree to fund at least one outdoor play space in St. Saviour?

#### **The Connétable of St. John:**

I thank the Deputy for her question. The Government fund a lot of play facilities which are attached to schools. I am working with the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning to see if we can make those accessible out of school hours, just as we are trying to make sure that sports facilities within schools are also accessible outside of the school day. I learnt at some surprise that the play park which the Government had been out to consultation at Grouville did not belong to the Government, but it belonged to a private group of individuals in the Grouville area and had been leased by the Government, and the lease had expired. I extended the lease by 12 months while we come to some kind of arrangement as to how they are going to take it forward.

#### **5.2.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:**

I am not sure my question was answered. Will the Government be funding a refurbishment of Sandy Park and will the Government fund a play park in St. Saviour?

### **The Connétable of St. John:**

There is no intention at the moment or monies indeed to fund play parks in Grouville or in St. Saviour. We have play parks that we are already responsible for - and I will give you Millenium Park and Springfield - which need refurbishment. Last year we refurbished Les Quennevais and we need to ensure that we look after what we have got before we add to our portfolio.

### **5.3 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:**

There seems to be a proliferation of the phenomenon of the dashed white lines on main roads being removed in certain parts of the Island which I personally think is quite dangerous. I think cars tend to drive over the white lines often anyway. Is this something that the Minister can talk to and explain if it is an active policy of his department or if it is something that has just arisen by stealth?

### **The Connétable of St. John:**

I thank the Deputy for his question because a road in St. John lost a lot of its centre white lines and found it had lines on the side of the road which I am not sure what they are for. The road safety team and the engineers are carrying out road safety audits, which we have requested on La Route des Issues in St. John. The perception is that people slow down when there is no centre white line and that is the reason that that has taken place, but we have asked for an audit to be carried out to see if it is working or it is not working. I have received many complaints about the road in St. John and other roads around the Island where that treatment has happened.

#### **5.3.1 Deputy M. Tadier:**

How many accidents will the Minister need to know whether the new experiment has been unsuccessful?

### **The Connétable of St. John:**

Certainly in La Route des Issues anecdotal evidence would suggest that there are fewer incidents of wing mirrors being broken. I am not a trained engineer or capable of carrying out a road safety audit; I shall leave that to the professionals and ask for their opinion.

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

I will ask the question that I was going to ask in oral questions. Would the Minister kindly outline what actions have been taken to ensure the wishes of the late T.B. Davis in relation to land or buildings gifted to the people of Jersey, and other associated terms or conditions, continue to be met by the Government?

### **The Connétable of St. John:**

I thank the Deputy for his question. I was, like many Islanders, surprised to read about the Howard Davis Hall and the restricted access in recent times. Property Holdings took back responsibility on 1st January this year. I was contacted by a member of the family from South Africa in December, on 13th December, and they asked if a Christmas tree could be put in place and if a carol service could happen before Christmas. I have to pay tribute to the officers who did all of that and I am still recovering from the actions of The Twelve Days of Christmas.

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

I am grateful for the Minister being so understanding, particularly it is an issue in St. Saviour, so this is of enormous sensitivity. I think one of the issues the family had was that the portrait of Howard Davis was one of those that I know is being safeguarded and improved. I wonder whether he could confirm, for the avoidance of any doubt, that the Government is going to review the other bequests of the incredibly benevolent T.B. Davis in the name of his son, the late Howard, and particularly in

relation to the Howard Davis Farm, which has not been respected, in line of which an experimental farm for the furtherance of agriculture.

**The Connétable of St. John:**

With the hall it is our intention to have that open far more regularly for the public and to display those artefacts which are quite splendid. Some of them are being currently restored by Jersey Heritage. In terms of Howard Davis Farm, I have put the department in touch with an organisation that is looking at experimental ways of farming, some new innovative kind of things to do in Jersey. It makes sense to me that we explore whether we can use the Howard Davis Farm in the first instance rather than other land around the Island. I understand those talks are quite productive.

**5.5 Deputy K.L. Moore of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter:**

Could the Minister outline what advice he has been provided with by Jersey Property Holdings in relation to the technical upgrades that are required to make the newly-refurbished Jersey Opera House a functioning modern theatre?

**The Connétable of St. John:**

I thank the Deputy for the question. I attended the handover of the Opera House recently and I recommend all Members to go, if they have not had the opportunity, to take a look. Property Holdings were tasked with the refurbishment of the building. I understand that shows could take place today on the stage but I understand the aspirations for enhanced systems for lighting and for staging were not part of the project that was given to Property Holdings.

**Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:**

That was going to be my question, so can I withdraw it?

**5.6 Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade:**

Time past, States Members were given details under Standing Order 168(3) regarding acquisition or disposal of land. They are still given those but they used to have a map attached. That seems to have stopped and I wonder if the Minister, through Jersey Property Holdings, could explain why that is the case?

**The Connétable of St. John:**

I would offer my apologies to Members if that is not the case and I will ensure that that happens going forward.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

I thank the Minister.

**5.7 Deputy A.F. Curtis of St. Clement:**

Will the Minister advise whether he still continues to install railings at La Haule and, if so, what his timeline for doing so is?

[15:00]

**The Connétable of St. John:**

I thank the Deputy for the opportunity to talk on this subject. Three applications were put into planning for these railings. I was not aware of the third application until I read about it in the *Jersey Evening Post*. I was then advised that there was no need for an application because it could be classed as permitted development. I have asked for a further risk assessment to be carried out at La Haule. There have been serious incidents there where somebody has been found on the beach unconscious with a rising tide. We cannot ignore that fact but I also want to explore what other treatments could

be put in place to make it more apparent that there is danger there. I also intend to consult with the stakeholders, particularly the elected representatives for that District.

#### **5.7.1 Deputy A.F. Curtis:**

The Minister has talked about balancing risk and pragmatism before, especially in regards to pavements. Noting that the Minister is currently relying that it can be done under permitted development rights and noting that the Bridging Island Plan itself has Policy 14 to review whether to limit and restrict permitted development rights within the protected coastal area of which this site fits, does he think, regardless of his ability to use such powers, he should at least consult the States or at least the wider public?

#### **The Connétable of St. John:**

I am happy to consult more widely. When I was a fit cyclist, I was one of those people who would jump off the wall on our bikes on to the beach. I am not fit anymore and I cannot ignore health and safety advice that we receive. We have to take that advice seriously, we have to look at what other treatments, if any, are available, and I am more than happy to consult widely.

#### **5.8 Deputy H.M. Miles of St. Brelade:**

In answer to a written question that I asked about play facilities back in April 2024, the Minister answered that £158,000 was allocated to the refurbishment of Sandy Park in Grouville. Given his earlier response to Deputy Doublet, could he tell us really what has changed and indeed where has that money gone?

#### **The Connétable of St. John:**

I thank the Deputy for her question. What has changed is that I discovered that we leased the land and we did not own the land. That is what has changed and I think we should be spending government money on government property before we start sponsoring other projects.

#### **5.8.1 Deputy H.M. Miles:**

I thank the Minister for his answer. I must say I am surprised by that, I think we are supposed to be putting children first and I think play facilities should be for all of the children ...

#### **The Bailiff:**

Well could you ask a question if you wish to, Deputy?

#### **Deputy H.M. Miles:**

Does the Minister agree?

#### **The Connétable of St. John:**

I do agree that we are putting children first but it is not just the Government that puts children first, I believe the Parishes also have a responsibility to do the same.

#### **5.9 Deputy J. Renouf:**

Could I ask the Minister about Les Creux and in particular whether he is in a position to advise us whether any further progress has been made in making available the facilities relating, say, to the Bowls Club and also to the country park areas for development for parishioners and wider Island use?

#### **The Connétable of St. John:**

I thank the Deputy for his question. I have met many Islanders to discuss Les Creux. I am delighted to confirm that we are able to do the work at St. Aubin's Tunnel which we were originally told was going to cost £700,000; it is going to cost £200,000 and we have got the money for that. We are

going to go out for expressions of interest for the facility at Les Creux. I was walking around Les Creux just on Sunday and was delighted to see the Air Training Corps doing some training there. It is a fantastic facility, one that I and many Islanders currently enjoy.

#### **5.9.1 Deputy J. Renouf:**

Could the Minister provide any more details on what exactly he is putting out to tender?

#### **The Connétable of St. John:**

Expressions of interest that we are going to go out for, we are going to see what suggestions and ideas we have from the community, from sports clubs and associations. We really want to see what ideas people have got for that area.

#### **5.10 Deputy R.S. Kovacs of St. Saviour:**

I am going to return to the topic of the Opera House because I think that people really want to see that in the public domain. There was also an email circulated by them saying that as a registered charity they raised £1 million through philanthropic donations and they urgently need this additional £1.5 million to be able to open it by March how it was agreed. This cost is in relation to the specifications and technical lights that the Connétable mentioned. Is there any possibility for the Government to look into this aspect and how they can support or match what the philanthropic donations were to be able to put into the public use as soon as possible the Opera House?

#### **The Connétable of St. John:**

I thank the Deputy for her question. I am responsible for Property Holdings who carried out the work and project-managed the work. The work was funded through a grant and Economic Development look after that side of things. We are there for the fabric of the building rather than the internal running of the building.

#### **The Bailiff:**

That brings this period for questions to the Minister to an end. The next question period is for the Minister for Social Security.

### **6. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Minister for Social Security**

#### **6.1 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:**

The Jersey Community Foundation and PwC launched a report on the value of Jersey's third sector which found the sector contributed £230 million to the Island's economy last year yet many are struggling. Can the Minister advise what she is doing to implement the report's recommendation?

#### **Deputy L.V. Feltham of St. Helier Central (The Minister for Social Security):**

I have not had the opportunity as yet because I have been focusing on other areas to review the recommendations of the report, although I know that there were recommendations in relation to government and the potential for a Minister to be responsible for the third sector in particular. I am meeting with the Jersey Association of Charities this Thursday evening where I will give a speech and take questions. I imagine that the findings of the Jersey Community Foundation research will also come up within that meeting as well. I will look forward to meeting with members of the third sector and progressing with whether or not we can take forward any recommendations.

#### **6.1.1 Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

One finding was that efforts are made by the third sector to influence government policies and commitments but they fail to see tangible benefits. This underlines the need to put the third sector on an equal footing with the private sector, which is to routinely consult it and be involved in policy making. How is the Minister going to support the third sector to engage effectively and feel that they

have a legitimate voice even if they receive government funding in strategy and policy making throughout government?

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

As a Minister I do try and meet regularly with key stakeholders, a broad spectrum of key stakeholders. I did recently meet with the chair of the Jersey Association of Charities just last week. I am overdue - and the Deputy has reminded me - to meet with the Jersey Community Foundation as well. I would encourage other Ministers as well to meet with their third sector organisations. I am also undertaking a piece of work with my chief officer looking at the funding that we provide as Government across the third sector, trying to map that out so that we have a really clear picture for planning how we fund the third sector across government.

**6.2 Deputy A.F. Curtis of St. Clement:**

Two months ago the Minister for Social Security published comments to an amendment regarding the Transform programme stating that the preferred supply contract is currently in the final stages of negotiation. Will she please provide an update on the Transform programme's procurement?

**Deputy L.V. Feltham:**

I can inform the Assembly that the contract is still under negotiation. It is in the final stages of negotiation and the team know that it is an absolute priority to bring those negotiations to an end so that work can start on this very important programme.

**6.2.1 Deputy A.F. Curtis:**

Can the Minister be any more specific in the timeline, given these were the same words that we received 2 months ago?

**Deputy L.V. Feltham:**

I know that the team is currently working to a deadline. I do not want to talk about the negotiations very specifically as it is a contractual and legal negotiation, and I do not think it would be appropriate for me to comment further on that. It is on my weekly list of updates that I get from the department and I just discussed it in the last number of days with the acting chief officer. She assured me that this is a priority and that they are working to meet the deadlines.

**6.3 Deputy K.L. Moore of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter:**

Is the Minister aware that some benefits recipients who receive their payments via the post are experiencing delays due to delays within the postal service? What is the Minister doing to resolve this issue?

**Deputy L.V. Feltham:**

I was not aware of those delays. I would encourage any Member who is aware of issues or delays in payments to let me know directly and then I can take action and speak to the department and identify what the root cause of those problems is.

**6.3.1 Deputy K.L. Moore:**

To assist the Minister, the delay is caused by the postal service which I referred to in my opening question. Officers have suggested that any person who finds themselves in this position should simply open a bank account so that they can receive the funds directly; however, of course, this does not suit all of the people that her department looks after. Therefore, the question is: what can the Minister do and will the Minister resolve to find an alternative solution for these people who are going without food and heat to cope with the lack of funds?

**Deputy L.V. Feltham:**

Nobody should be going without food or heat due to a lack of funds, and I would encourage anybody in that situation to contact me directly or contact the department. Likewise, I would encourage any States Member who is aware of people in that situation to contact me. I know that the department puts special provisions in place for certain people that do not have bank accounts and also makes cash payments available. Again, if I do not know about the individual circumstances I cannot do something about it. But I absolutely undertake to take action so that people get the money that they need when they need it.

#### **6.4 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:**

With regard to the amendments that the Minister is seeking to make to the Employment Tribunal maximum payouts, while there has been an amendment by a fellow Minister of hers to reduce that amount, would she use the delay to consider whether an alternative amendment might be to lift any kind of cap completely and just let the tribunal let the amount be decided on a case-by-case basis? Has she had any evidence to that effect to suggest that a higher figure might be needed?

#### **Deputy L.V. Feltham:**

The proposition and the amendments to the caps that I have made are upon recommendation of the Employment Forum. The Employment Forum undertook an awful lot of work and consultation to come to their recommended amounts and make recommendations to me. In accepting those recommendations, I accept that the Employment Forum have done that work. My understanding is that they thought in great depth about whether the cap should be higher or indeed removed completely as it is in the U.K. They came to their moderated position as they would do as a forum of the recommendations that they came to. I have to say I accepted those recommendations on the basis of the work and my respect for the forum. Had I been thinking around my own thoughts around this, I may well have been thinking of taking it higher rather than lower, but my job as the Minister was to consider the information given to me by the forum and decide whether or not I accepted their recommendations, and I accepted their recommendations.

##### **6.4.1 Deputy M. Tadier:**

Could I ask what the Minister thinks the risks are if the figure is lower than the one that she is putting forward?

#### **Deputy L.V. Feltham:**

I have been contacted by people who are concerned that there are risks if the amount was lower, that people may not bring claims to the tribunal, but also the risk to reputation of the Island as being a jurisdiction that is not taking discrimination claims seriously enough. I do think there are a number of risks in not taking the recommendations of the Employment Forum.

#### **6.5 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour:**

The previous question was one I was going to ask myself, so I will pivot and ask the Minister if she believes that income support is currently being targeted in the most effective way? Would she give consideration to looking at the terms of income support and considering specific measures for different groups such as pensioners and single-parent households?

#### **Deputy L.V. Feltham:**

Income support is an incredibly complex benefit system, which makes it very difficult to assess whether the correct people are getting the correct amounts of money.

[15:15]

I am working through the income support guidelines currently with my team to look at where I think improvements need to be made so that we can make those improvements as quickly as possible. I have spoken with the Deputy previously about the work that we will be undertaking this year on

minimum income standards, which I also hope would help to inform us on where we go in the future with income support and other benefits as well as minimum wage setting.

**6.5.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:**

I thank the Minister for her answer. Does the Minister think that we have enough data in establishing people's income levels and levels of poverty in the Island? Would she like to see more data being gathered so that we can address that issue effectively?

**Deputy L.V. Feltham:**

I think more data is always useful but you need to work with the resources that you have as well. The Transform system that Deputy Curtis asked about in the last questions will also help us to improve data. I would hope that that will enable us to also track applications potentially for people who do not get income support because at the moment we do not tend to have that data around people who may have applied but then found that they were ineligible, so I think that that would be useful. Of course, we have got the data provided to us by the Jersey Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, which I am always interested in because that does give us an indication of the groups of people who require more help.

**6.6 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:**

Could the Minister tell us about any discussions that might be underway to use the social security funds under her control to achieve Government's objectives, for example, in terms of using their investments to invest in Government projects or buildings or borrowing against the funds or reducing contributions or any other similar uses?

**Deputy L.V. Feltham:**

There are no such discussions currently taking place.

**The Bailiff:**

Does any Member have any questions for this Minister?

**6.7 Deputy J. Renouf:**

Could the Minister update the Assembly on plans for the Pension Saver Scheme and whether that is likely to be brought forward in this term of Government and, if not, what her views are about what should happen to it?

**Deputy L.V. Feltham:**

As the Deputy knows, I delayed the Pension Saver Scheme upon taking this office so that we could focus on improving the minimum wage. I felt that doing the 2 at the same time would put a lot of burden on the same businesses, and I wanted to understand more about how the Pension Saver Scheme may work before continuing. The officers are now working on other work that revolves around contributions and flexibility around contributions and the Pension Saver Scheme does remain on my work plan but for towards the end of the term. I had a very useful discussion with my counterparts in Guernsey around their introduction of a very similar scheme. I will continue to learn lessons from their scheme so that we can assure that when we implement such a scheme, we can do the best as we possibly can.

**6.7.1 Deputy J. Renouf:**

Given the anticipated increase in Government expenditure to cope with an ageing population, one of the methods of coping with that might be that people will contribute more towards themselves through such schemes as a Pension Saver Scheme. Would she commit to bringing it forward before her term of office ends?

**Deputy L.V. Feltham:**

The implementation of such a scheme if it were to be statutory would require some fairly significant work done on the legislation, which currently is not planned within the work plan, so I cannot promise to bring that legislation before the end of term.

## **6.8 Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

I was reflecting on the Minister's response to my questions about the third sector and it was a bit disappointing to hear that the Minister had not yet looked at the J.C.F.'s (Jersey Community Foundation) report because I remember when she came to this role that she was saying she was the Minister responsible for charities and would be working on that. My question then would be: would the Minister be looking at the role of the Government in commissioning charities for specific areas of work and how they can develop a proper strategy around this? Because many times it is seen that there is more of a legacy situation when contracts are awarded rather than a strategic view of really how to commission services from the third sector and will she be looking at that?

## **Deputy L.V. Feltham:**

I know that a lot of work is ongoing within the Health Department in particular around commissioning. It is an ongoing conversation that I often have with my officers around both commissioning and grant-giving to the third sector. I have asked my officers to look at how we can improve how we do give our grants to the third sectors; that is an ongoing piece of work. But just to clarify what the Deputy said, I am not the Minister for charities; I do have some responsibility for the promotion of the third sector within my role. What I said upon taking office was that a priority would be the disability strategy and the work on disability and inclusion.

## **The Bailiff:**

That brings the period of questions for this Minister to an end. There is now questions for the Chief Minister.

## **7. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Chief Minister**

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

The Chief Minister will recall the importance of the net zero plan and also the future of fuels and energies, which we have already discussed, gas. Could he confirm to the Assembly that the full Council of Ministers will be considering the future of the fuel farm and the particular break clause that is in place for 31st January?

### **Deputy L.J. Farnham of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter (The Chief Minister):**

Yes, I can confirm that the Minister for Infrastructure is leading on that and intends to bring it to the Council of Ministers.

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

Could he give an indication as to whether or not they are going to act in relation to the trigger clause even if it is by way of negotiation? Has a decision been made on it?

### **Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

Not at this stage because we have not had the discussion but it is on the agenda for our next meeting.

## **The Bailiff:**

Before I call on anyone else, could I just indicate who I have noted down in case I have given people false cause for confidence that I have noted them and I have not? Deputies Tadier, Warr, Renouf, Alex Curtis, Ahier and the Connétable of St. Saviour. Does anyone else indicate ... I thought that might be a more ... and Deputy Doublet, yes.

### **7.2 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:**

Insofar as this relates to the reputational damage of the wider Council of Ministers, does the Chief Minister think it is both that, a reputational risk for the Island when we refurbish an Opera House to the tune of £12 million but we find that the Opera House cannot open because basic technical specifications, which we as a Scrutiny Panel advised the department of because we were advised of that almost a year ago, is not spent and is not up to date?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

No, I do not believe there is any negative reputational risk. I think we have a very positive reputational opportunity because, as many Members will have seen when they visited the Opera House upon its completion the week before last, it is a building that we can all be proud of. There has been a significant - almost £13 million - investment and undoubtedly this will serve the Island and Islanders well for many, many years. The Jersey Opera House board and Government officials should be congratulated on the work they have done to bring it to this stage. Yes, it has been identified improvements can be made to the technology but it could be certainly open sooner rather than later. I would urge the board to get it open and start being in a position where Islanders can enjoy. I am very pleased that the board has grasped the nettle and launched a fundraising campaign. I am absolutely sure, having spoken to the Minister, that the Government will assist where possible. It is not always easy when a budget is put aside and the work starts and halfway through that budget we discover there is better technology we could deploy but it is going to cost an extra £2 million or £3 million. It is not easy just to find that money but we are committed to the future of the Opera House. The Minister is committed to making sure we have the best possible technology, I am sure the board is, and we will work together to find a solution. But in the meantime I would urge the board not to say: "Well we are staying closed until we get that extra bit of technology." I would urge them to get open and let us work together to cross the line and improve the technology in the months and years ahead.

**7.2.1 Deputy M. Tadier:**

I fully agree that it is an excellent building; I congratulate the contractors. If it were to be a museum, it would be a beautiful building that the members of the public could visit and tour around but it has to be also a working opera house for a variety of different performances. Given the fact that the Opera House themselves 18 months ago told the Economic Development Department that they needed this before they could open, and given the fact that this afternoon the D.f.I. (Department for Infrastructure) Minister says he has played his part and now it is effectively up to the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development to play his part, would he not think that a good gesture from Government would be to at least match the funding that they have had to raise through philanthropy on behalf of the Government so that we can get this Opera House open as soon as possible, not just as a museum piece, but as a functioning opera house?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

Well, firstly, I do not agree that the Opera House cannot open without some extra technology. It can open and they should get themselves open. There is a big investment and they should start putting shows on. The extra technology will mean that bigger shows can come along; that might mean half a dozen shows a year. I am not sure what the programme would look like or what the type of shows they are offering but, first of all, let us be clear, the Opera House can open in my opinion, should open, and I would urge them to do that. I would also urge the Minister, the Government, the board to work together with philanthropy-raising efforts, and if the Minister can find any extra funds to help then I hope that will be forthcoming. But this happened 18 months ago, it happened in the last Government with the Minister there, we have inherited it, and the Minister and the officials have got to this stage, and I am sure that a good solution can be found. But I do not agree that the Opera House should stay closed with a *fait accompli* that: "Unless you give us this extra £1 million or £2 million to upgrade the equipment even further, we are not going to be open." That is completely wrong after

a £13 million investment of taxpayers' money. So, please, Opera House board, we are right behind you, get the theatre up and running and we will do whatever we can to get the extra technology in.

### **7.3 Deputy D.J. Warr of St. Helier South:**

The Assembly has received notice under R.11/2025 that the Aviemore, St. Martin site is recommended for approval for the sum of £1.3 million. This is the same site that was advertised on 29th January 2024 requesting offers of over £3 million. Does the Chief Minister believe that this is the best value that can be achieved for the public of this Island?

### **Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

Yes, in January 2023 Ministers agreed to dispose of the Aviemore site. The full value of the revenue released from the sale would be used to create an endowment fund for the care leavers. To obtain the best value in return, Government put it out to tender, five bids were received but none of them came up to what was expected. Subsequently we have had an offer from S.o.J.D.C. (States of Jersey Development Company) of £1.3 million pending planning permission. Once that planning permission comes through, depending on what scheme they approve, that could lead to further additional payments taking the purchase price over £3 million. It is £1.3 million down and then further payments pending planning approval.

#### **7.3.1 Deputy D.J. Warr:**

As the Chief Minister has said, the report goes on to say that the property has been purchased by the States of Jersey Development Company. Given the sensitivity of this area, is it appropriate that an A.L.O. (arm's-length organisation) tasked with providing housing is the most appropriate purchaser for this site?

### **Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I think the provision of homes is important to key government policy and priority. Given that the money is going into the Care Leavers Fund, I think it is overall a pretty good arrangement.

### **7.4 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:**

Following the publication of R.184/2024 before Christmas, will the Chief Minister outline what he considers to be the most important features of his Government's population policy?

### **Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I think the most important features of Jersey's population policy over the years still remain, and that is the management of our population. More recently, the big challenge, the long-term challenge, is in relation to the working age population.

[15:30]

That is where we have seen potentially a decline, or projecting a decline, given recent geopolitical circumstances, not least Brexit and the shortage of skilled workers. The report that was presented led by Deputy Alves just before Christmas was pretty much a holding position, taking note of the changes that had happened, the new challenges that they presented, and how we might deal with them in the future. In answer to the question, I think it is ensuring that we always have the right population to make sure that our economy can function properly because without that we are going to be in all sorts of difficulties in relation to how we finance, not just the day-to-day business of Government, but future pension provision and so forth.

#### **7.4.1 Deputy J. Renouf:**

The States of Jersey Law 2005 section 18(e)(a) says that the Government must each year discuss and agree at least annually their common policy on population. I am not sure that I have heard anything from the Chief Minister that comes under the definition of a "policy", something that would give the

public an idea of the kind of decisions that the Government is likely to take about population over the next 12 months. Could he help fill some of those gaps in?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

As I have said, the Government as identified in the future sustainable economy strategy is working age population and how we manage that, and that is a key policy for the Government. Now, currently, we are in a reasonable position, although finding certain skills is still challenging, but we will continue to work towards solutions based on the medium to long-term challenges that have been outlined in the future economic projections and that remains a key priority. A few short years ago we were facing to close the borders and not let anybody in, we are becoming overpopulated, and now we have in a few short years a completely different problem that we are going to fulfil all the jobs we have. We could find ourselves in a situation where we are vastly oversupplied with public services such as schools and so forth. That is at the top of our list in relation to population and it is something that in relation to the economic aspect the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development and his team are leading on.

**7.5 Deputy A.F. Curtis of St. Clement:**

One of the common strategic policies is to reduce red tape and enhance opportunities for business, and a key way to do that as identified in the Barriers to Business report is through digital. Which programmes and systems does the Minister think he needs to prioritise in 2025 to replace to ease the friction that businesses have with Government, and what progress is he making on those?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

Sorry, I just cannot answer that off the top of my head. I would have to review the paperwork and come back to the Deputy.

**7.6 Deputy S.M. Ahier of St. Helier North:**

Does the Chief Minister intend to extend the watermains network to all houses in the Island and, if so, how will he ensure that Jersey Water implements such an action?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I would like to but I do not have the time so I am going to delegate to the Minister for Infrastructure. I am not making light of it but the plan is to extend water and drainage networks to assist the supply of more affordable homes. To do that there is a lot of work that needs to be done, for example the work that has started in St. Peter in relation to the installation of new attenuation tanks which will allow for more capacity in the west of the Island. That is being repeated as well. I understand there is a briefing to Ministers shortly on that particular project. I would like to see all Islanders, all homes, connected to mains and water but in the outlying areas that is very difficult and very costly to do. The plan is we make as much progress as we can, mainly for the provision of new affordable homes, and like I say, the Minister for Infrastructure is leading on that. He will be able to give a better idea of what the extension of the programme is going to look like and how we might build that into future budgets.

**7.7 Connétable K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour:**

Further to earlier questions regarding gas in St. Saviour, an area of St. Saviour I am sure the Chief Minister knows well from his old days, Elizabeth Villas which are terraced cottages just off Mont Pinel. Some time ago there was an explosion which cast rubble on to houses below. The whole front of one terraced cottage blew out; injuries, but I am delighted to say no fatalities. I have to state that I believe the cause of the explosion was undetermined. The front of the cottage is now boarded up and the public right of way has 6 foot gates on both sides of the area being closed. Will the Chief Minister endeavour to enquire when the cottage will be rebuilt and when the public right of way, and ironically a safer route to school, will be reopened?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I thank the Connétable for that question. I was not aware of that particular situation, but I will certainly make enquiries and come back to him.

**STATEMENTS ON A MATTER OF OFFICIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

**8. The Minister for the Environment will make a statement regarding the States of Jersey Complaints Board findings in R.143/2024**

**The Bailiff:**

There are only 10 seconds left so I am afraid there is no further time to call upon anyone to ask any further questions of the Chief Minister. That brings to an end the period allocated for questions without notice. Before we move on to Public Business there is under K a Statement on a Matter of Official Responsibility, the statement to be made by the Minister for the Environment regarding the States of Jersey Complaints Board findings, R.143.

**8.1 Deputy S.G. Luce of Grouville and St. Martin (The Minister for the Environment):**

Members will have seen that I presented a report in response to the States Complaints Board relating to a hearing held in August last year regarding the handling of an application for removal of a structure, a marquee, at La Mare Vineyard, La Rue de la Hougue Mauger, in St. Mary. The Board's findings and recommendations have highlighted the need for a service and process improvements in the development of land service, specifically in the manner that moveable structure applications are dealt with and how information and advice is shared with service users. I accept the board's findings in section 5 of the report for grounds (a), (b), (c) and (e). I have reviewed the board's recommendations in section 6 and I will act on them. Notably, I will include third party appeal rights for permissions under Article 7 of the Planning and Building (Moveable Structures) (Jersey) Order 2006 in Article 108 of the Planning and Building (Jersey) Law 2002. The amendments will be part of the planning service's reform programme. I would like to apologise to the complainant, and I wish to thank the Board for the findings and recommendations. I am using this opportunity to confirm my commitment to work with the development and land management team and officers to deliver on the commitment I have made to improve and reform planning services for the benefit of the Island.

**The Bailiff:**

Thank you very much, Minister. There is now a period of 15 minutes in which questions can be asked of the Minister on the contents of this statement.

**8.1.1 Deputy A.F. Curtis of St. Clement:**

The Minister's response to R.143 and recommendation 6.4 highlights very usefully for all of us that Article 81(2)(c) of the Planning and Building Law limit any permission for a moveable structure to a maximum period of 3 years. He highlights in the instance of the application for the marquee this permission will expire on 13th June 2026. As a further point of perhaps improvement, does the Minister think it would be wise that any moveable structure approval decision includes the expiry date within that document, as Members may find in the decision notice issued for P/2023/0229 that there is no informative or condition on its removal. So obviously both the applicant and neighbours would not necessarily have the knowledge of the law and an informative on every moveable structure would aid and assist everybody that the structures have a maximum of 3 years under the law.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

One of the other changes that I am going to make is to site notices and the templates are going to be updated. But the Deputy makes a good point; permission for this application was granted up to 13th June 2026. It was not necessary at this moment in time to agree that that was put on the notice

because the law was quite clear and the time period is defined, but I take the Deputy's point on board and it is certainly something that can be discussed and included so that both the applicant and objectors - in fact everybody - can know exactly when the time period expires.

#### **8.1.2 Deputy A.F. Curtis:**

Staying on moveable structures, Article 7, the Minister also highlights that he is happy with the current definitions of moveable structures and that it is suitably broad. Again, the application in question is approved, grants permission under Article 7, yet it is the case that there are other applications recently approved for what the Minister would define as a moveable structure approved under Article 19, which is of course a general approval of development. Will he give consideration to the implications that moveable structures have to date also been approved under both Article 19 of the primary law and Article 7, and what that means to the maximum stay for those applications?

#### **Deputy S.G. Luce:**

I will. Part of planning reform will be to look at appeals. Appeals came in under their present form some 10 years ago when I was previously Minister. It was a great step forward for the public of the Island to be able to have access to appeals at a relatively cheap rate, but it is clear that we still have a small amount of work to do and that will constitute work which will be done in the summer to upgrade all the rules that the Deputy talks about. Moveable structures at the moment are defined as marquee, tent, caravan or other conveyance with or without wheels, flagpole, radio, television mast, et cetera. While it has been suggested to me that I should be an awful lot more definite in how I define a moveable structure. Members may well agree with me that having a very broad and general definition is essential, because if we were very specific it may well be that somebody invented something which did not appear on a quite extensive list and would, therefore, claim that the order did not apply to them. So, I am happy that the way things are defined at the moment is correct, but again this will form part of the work that we will do between now and the summer.

#### **8.1.3 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:**

The Minister has referred to dealing with this through changes he is going to bring as part of his wider reforms of planning services. Could he give a bit more information to Members on what exactly will be included in those changes and what timetable he is working towards, in other words when might we see this in front of the Assembly?

#### **Deputy S.G. Luce:**

When I said to the Chief Minister earlier in the year, I was going to reform planning certainly the General Development Order was a big part of that. It was last reviewed some 10 years ago but I do believe that if we have constructive consultation with not only public but Members and officers in the department, we can come forward with another list whereby certain developments could be made permitted so that Islanders can enjoy a little bit more flexibility in the work they can do on their properties. So the General Development Order is something I am looking at and, as I said previously to the answers, we are looking at checking through the appeals to decide - after 10 years of work looking at the results to see whether the new system has worked - whether it could be even better or whether we need to look at going backwards closer to where we were previously.

#### **8.1.4 Deputy J. Renouf:**

Just on that appeals point, is that wrapped up in the same piece of work or is that going to come separately and, if so, when?

#### **Deputy S.G. Luce:**

It is part of the work that I am doing on planning reform and I am hoping to have that done by this summer.

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

I wonder whether the Minister in his review, and building on the findings of this review on the Appeals Board, whether or not he would in his absorption and consideration of these recommendations where he says he wants to make life easier for people, would he in so doing reform planning with the mindset that we have an inflationary backdrop in Jersey - there are builders going out of business and we have a lack of building generally - and look at his planning system as a way of making sure that we can get Jersey building and get the economy moving and getting economic growth which is not inflationary?

### **Deputy S.G. Luce:**

I have not seen the Deputy over Christmas but he may well have found a way of reading my mind. The Minister for Sustainable Economic Development, my Assistant Minister and certainly the chairman and vice-chairman of the Planning Committee received emails from me recently which very briefly went along the lines of: "I have thought a lot about the economy over the Christmas period and I would like to see what I can do, as the Minister for the Environment, to help."

[15:45]

I am going to receive suggestions and have discussions with the Ministers and Assistant Ministers that I have spoken about, and while I cannot change policy between now and the next Island Plan debate, I can issue guidance, and I am sure there will be other things I have at my disposal that I can do. The economy generally is something that is very close to my heart. I know things are not going quite as well as they could be for the construction industry, and while many may point the finger at the Planning Department it is much, much wider than that. There is the price of money, the cost of materials; a whole range of issues. I want to do what I can to help so, yes, the answer to the Deputy's question is very clearly I am on it and will do what I can.

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

Just to be absolutely enthusiastically receiving; will he work with other Ministers to get this real zeal of enthusiasm towards economic growth and action, pending a good response from his email?

### **Deputy S.G. Luce:**

As I have said, I have already emailed a number of Ministers, Assistant Ministers, chairmen and vice-chairmen and I will receive their responses, but mine is the decision to make and it will be me making it. I will happily listen to everything people have to tell me; I do not have to follow everything.

### **The Bailiff:**

Does any other Member have any questions for the Minister? If there are no further questions then I close the question period on this statement.

## **PUBLIC BUSINESS**

### **9. Draft Termination of Pregnancy (Jersey) Amendment Law 202- (P.79/2024)**

### **The Bailiff:**

We now move on to Public Business. The first item of Public Business is the Draft Termination of Pregnancy Law, P.79, lodged by the Minister for Health and Social Services. The main respondent is the chair of the Health and Social Security Scrutiny Panel. I ask the Greffier to read the citation.

### **The Greffier of the States of Jersey:**

Draft Termination of Pregnancy (Jersey) Amendment Law 202-. A law to amend the Termination of Pregnancy (Jersey) Law 1997. The States, subject to the sanction of His Most Excellent Majesty in Council, have adopted the following Law.

**9.1 Deputy A. Howell of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity (Assistant Minister for Health and Social Services - rapporteur):**

The amendment before us today seeks to amend the Termination of Pregnancy (Jersey) Law 1997 to remove the current residency requirements that govern women's access to terminations in Jersey. If the Assembly approve this amendment to the law it will allow a woman who is not a resident in Jersey to access a termination in Jersey, providing the other provisions of the law are satisfied. The law currently provides that the upper limit for a termination on the grounds of distress is the end of the 12th week of pregnancy. This means that after 84 days of pregnancy a woman cannot have a termination in Jersey unless that termination is a medical necessity or in response to serious foetal abnormalities. Given that the law currently requires the woman to be resident in Jersey for 90 days prior to accessing a termination this means that a woman who is pregnant on arrival or becomes pregnant shortly after arrival is unable to have a termination in Jersey and would, as a result, have to leave the Island to seek a termination elsewhere. The current residency provisions are known to create hardship for potentially vulnerable or isolated women who are in Jersey but ordinarily live elsewhere. For example, women who are here for the purposes of work or for an extended period while caring for a relative. Usually these women are away from home in perhaps unfamiliar surroundings and having to make an extremely difficult decision. While the removal of residency requirements does make it theoretically possible for a woman to come to Jersey solely for the purpose of having a termination, the likelihood of this happening is extremely low for a number of reasons. The first is that most people come to Jersey via the U.K. or France. In both these countries terminations are readily available at a later gestation period, i.e. later in pregnancy. Secondly, an amendment to Article 3 of the law further discourages health tourism as the person seeking a termination will be required to be present in Jersey during the 2 legally mandated preprocedural consultations. Furthermore, a woman who does not meet the residency requirements found in the Health and Care Jersey departmental charging policy will pay £511 for her termination as opposed to £185 for a woman who is resident, which further acts to discourage health tourism. The next steps and wider review of the law. The proposed amendment addresses a restriction that is known to create hardship for women. It is the first step in a wider reform of the law. In accordance with the decisions of this Assembly when debating P.51/2024, further significant amendments to the law will be lodged before the end of this year. These will include proposed changes to the gestation period and grounds of criminal offences currently associated with the termination of pregnancy. The proposed changes, which are currently being finalised, will be published in March for a short period of consultation ahead of law drafting. In the meantime, I recommend this amendment to the Assembly, which will bring immediate benefit and certainty to all women in Jersey. Therefore, I would like to propose the principles, thank you.

**The Bailiff:**

Are the principles seconded? [**Seconded**] Does any Member wish to speak?

**9.1.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour:**

I am the chair of the Health Scrutiny Panel and I wanted to thank the Assistant Minister on behalf of the panel for the briefings and information that has been provided to the panel, which has enabled us to scrutinise this area, and indeed we have published comments. Our comments are in support of this amendment and pretty much echo the points that the Minister made in her opening speech, so I will not repeat them and Members can view those comments if they wish. I would like to also speak about my own views and I would like to start by establishing that my view on termination of pregnancy services is that they are essential healthcare, which enable women to have agency and

autonomy over their own bodies, and that this healthcare service should be available to women who need it in our Island. The law, which was established in 1997, is extremely outdated and I fully support this amendment. I will make the case by talking about some of the broader elements of the law, as briefly as possible. I will make the case that this is the very least that we can do in this area, and there is so much more that needs to be done. I wanted to take Members back to 2020. Of course we were in the middle of a pandemic at the time and I - I think along with many other women in the Island - assumed that our legislation in this area broadly mirrored that of the U.K. I was under the false assumption that women who did not want to continue with a pregnancy could obtain a termination up to 24 weeks on demand, and that of course is not the case and it is up to 12 weeks on demand. I was made aware of this by concerns from some women during COVID that they were having to comply with certain aspects of the law which meant going in person to the 2 mandated medical appointments. There are many seemingly arbitrary steps that women have to go through as a requirement of the 1997 law in order to access a termination on request. I campaigned at the time for the Minister for Health and Social Services to change the policy of women being able to have the consultation with a G.P. (general practitioner) over the telephone initially and then to access a medical termination in their own home. There are 2 types of termination; surgical termination, but the vast majority of terminations carried out are medical terminations which involve simply taking tablets 2 days apart. Many jurisdictions around the world allow this to be carried out in a woman's own home so that she can be in the comfort and safety of her own surroundings with whatever support she might need, and not have to be travelling while she is experiencing the results of the termination, which of course is not the ideal circumstance. That policy was changed during COVID. I am unsure as to what the current situation is with medical termination so perhaps the Assistant Minister could clarify that in her response when she sums up. Following my successful campaigning around this issue during COVID I did some extensive research around this law and realised exactly how outdated it was. I resolved to bring an in-principle proposition to this Assembly for Members' consideration to seek approval for the previous Minister for Health and Social Services to modernise the law. It took me a very long time to do this research because it is a very complex area, and I engaged with local experts to whom I am very grateful for their time, and indeed national bodies including the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, and the British Pregnancy Advisory Service. I looked at the best practice that is set out by these bodies and also by the World Health Organization. Interestingly, I looked at Guernsey because Members might not know this but I am told that Guernsey's recent reforms in this area are exemplary, so I hope with the further work in this area the Assistant Minister is going to make sure that we engage with our neighbours in Guernsey and see what they have done. There are several areas of the law that I identified - and indeed the experts identified - as needing reform. Top of my list was a clause - and again I mentioned arbitrary requirements - a completely arbitrary and unnecessary forced cooling-off period of 7 days, so it was called the 7-day wait. So a woman who was granted access to termination services following these 2 consultations then had to wait for 7 days for no reason whatsoever. This infantilising clause, which I think made women possibly be in distress for much longer than they needed to be, I removed that ... of course with the support of the Assembly we removed that from the legislation in 2021, so a few years ago now. Then of course we had an election, and I had several conversations with the previous Minister for Health and Social Services and she committed to reform this law. So I have been sitting on that proposition, I have not lodged it. I thought I would have to at one point but I have not done so. But I wanted to share with Members some of the items that were on that draft proposition that I would like the Assistant Minister to ensure are covered in the further work beyond this amendment, which I do hope that Members will support today. Some of the other areas are the law requires a woman to be in distress before she can access a termination. So a woman who has made a rational, perhaps economically-based decision that their family is complete would not be able to access a termination on-Island, even if she met all of the other requirements. I think again that is infantilising and nonsensical. The requirement for the 2 separate consultations, again I think we need to have faith in women as competent decision makers who should have autonomy over their own bodies, and

that once a decision in this area has been made a woman knows her own mind, and indeed, the point that I have previously raised about medical terminations being able to be self-administered in the woman's home. I would also like to see that the time limit for terminations available on demand be extended. I think this is possibly where the debate will be had but I think that around 24 weeks seems like the right balance to strike. Possibly the biggest thing that I think the Assistant Minister will need to grapple with is whether termination should be decriminalised. I believe this is the approach they have taken in Guernsey. I have considered this; I have to say I would like to see the research that the Assistant Minister is going to do, but it has been said to me that when a health service is being provided - and termination of pregnancy is an essential health service - that that should be between the woman and her medical provider. Criminal legislation should not come into it and it should be regulated like any other medical procedure. So I would like the Assistant Minister to seriously consider that and I would welcome conversations with her about it. Those are just some of the other area - there are more - and the 90-day residency requirement was maybe the next thing on my list in my proposition, so I am delighted to see progress in this area. Back to my other hat now as chair of the Health panel. The amendment that we brought to the Government Plan, which confirmed the work that the Minister has committed to do, has a deadline of the end of 2025, so I would ask that the Minister gives an update on the progress of that to the Assembly at regular intervals as well as obviously the panel.

[16:00]

I believe she mentioned in her opening speech that it was on track; if she could just confirm that is still on track for lodging by the end of 2025. My last point has completely gone out of my mind but, yes, I hope that Members will support this amendment today. It is the very least that we can do. It will solve a very real problem that is causing hardship to, yes, a small group of women, but I think it is a no-brainer that Members should support this today.

**The Bailiff:**

Thank you very much. Does any other Member wish to speak on the principles? If no other Member wishes to speak on the principles I close the debate and call upon the Assistant Minister to respond.

**9.1.2 Deputy A. Howell:**

I thank Deputy Doublet and her Scrutiny Panel for the work they have undertaken in the area of termination of pregnancy. Guernsey has indeed revised their law and it is now fit for the 21st century. Just to say that although in the law it does say a woman can only seek a termination if she is in distress, I have spoken to many general practitioners and this is never the case, no one I have known has ever been refused on those grounds, although it is not in the law. The 7-day cooling-off period has made a significant difference to women seeking terminations and I do thank Deputy Doublet for that. So all of the points that Deputy Doublet has mentioned we were already considering and the law is on track to come back to the Assembly later on this year, but I will be asking my women's health political advisory group for their opinions and then we will be going out to consultation so that Islanders can also express their points of view, and then we can take those into consideration. One last point, I would just like to say if anybody is considering having a termination - which is a really, really hard decision - the earlier you can go to seek help from your G.P., from the Brook Centre or from the Le Bas Centre, the better, because then you can go into hospital and, as Deputy Doublet says, have the first tablet, and afterwards you can take the second tablet in the comfort of your own home. That is happening at the moment. So afterwards I would like to ... what do I have to do ...

**The Bailiff:**

You maintain the principles and call for the appel.

**Deputy A. Howell:**

I maintain the principles and I call for the appel, thank you.

**The Bailiff:**

The appel is called for, I invite Members to return to their seats. The vote is on the principles of P.79 and I ask the Greffier to open the voting and Members to vote. If Members have had the opportunity of casting their votes then I ask the Greffier to close the voting. The principles have been adopted:

<b>POUR: 42</b>		<b>CONTRE: 0</b>		<b>ABSTAIN: 0</b>
Connétable of St. Brelade				
Connétable of Trinity				
Connétable of St. Peter				
Connétable of St. Martin				
Connétable of St. John				
Connétable of Grouville				
Connétable of St. Ouen				
Connétable of St. Mary				
Connétable of St. Saviour				
Deputy G.P. Southern				
Deputy C.F. Labey				
Deputy S.G. Luce				
Deputy L.M.C. Doublet				
Deputy K.F. Morel				
Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat				
Deputy S.M. Ahier				
Deputy R.J. Ward				
Deputy C.S. Alves				
Deputy I. Gardiner				
Deputy I.J. Gorst				
Deputy L.J. Farnham				
Deputy K.L. Moore				
Deputy S.Y. Mézec				
Deputy Sir P.M. Bailhache				
Deputy T.A. Coles				
Deputy D.J. Warr				
Deputy H.M. Miles				
Deputy M.R. Scott				
Deputy J. Renouf				

Deputy C.D. Curtis				
Deputy L.V. Feltham				
Deputy R.E. Binet				
Deputy H.L. Jeune				
Deputy M.E. Millar				
Deputy A. Howell				
Deputy T.J.A. Binet				
Deputy M.R. Ferey				
Deputy R.S. Kovacs				
Deputy A.F. Curtis				
Deputy B. Ward				
Deputy K.M. Wilson				
Deputy M.B. Andrews				

I am assuming, Deputy Doublet, from what you said that your panel does not wish to call this in?

**Deputy L.M.C. Doublet (Chair, Health and Social Security Scrutiny Panel):**

No, thank you.

**The Bailiff:**

How do you wish to deal with the matter at Second Reading then, Assistant Minister?

**Deputy A. Howell:**

Can I call for the appel again?

**The Bailiff:**

Well, I think you need to stand up. I think you need to propose and probably you would wish to do it *en bloc* because it is only one or 2 things in there.

**9.2 Deputy A. Howell:**

Yes, please may I propose the Articles *en bloc*, thank you.

**The Bailiff:**

Are they seconded in Second Reading? **[Seconded]** Does any Member wish to speak in second reading? If no Member wishes to speak in Second Reading then I close the debate. Those in favour of adopting ... the appel is called for. I invite Members to return to their seats and the Greffier to open the voting. If Members have had the opportunity of casting their votes then I ask the Greffier to close the voting. The Articles have been adopted in Second Reading:

<b>POUR: 42</b>		<b>CONTRE: 0</b>		<b>ABSTAIN: 0</b>
Connétable of St. Brelade				
Connétable of Trinity				
Connétable of St. Peter				

Connétable of St. Martin				
Connétable of St. John				
Connétable of Grouville				
Connétable of St. Ouen				
Connétable of St. Mary				
Connétable of St. Saviour				
Deputy G.P. Southern				
Deputy C.F. Labey				
Deputy M. Tadier				
Deputy S.G. Luce				
Deputy L.M.C. Doublet				
Deputy K.F. Morel				
Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat				
Deputy S.M. Ahier				
Deputy R.J. Ward				
Deputy C.S. Alves				
Deputy I. Gardiner				
Deputy I.J. Gorst				
Deputy L.J. Farnham				
Deputy K.L. Moore				
Deputy S.Y. Mézec				
Deputy Sir P.M. Bailhache				
Deputy T.A. Coles				
Deputy D.J. Warr				
Deputy H.M. Miles				
Deputy M.R. Scott				
Deputy J. Renouf				
Deputy C.D. Curtis				
Deputy L.V. Feltham				
Deputy R.E. Binet				
Deputy H.L. Jeune				
Deputy M.E. Millar				
Deputy A. Howell				
Deputy T.J.A. Binet				

Deputy M.R. Ferey				
Deputy A.F. Curtis				
Deputy B. Ward				
Deputy K.M. Wilson				
Deputy M.B. Andrews				

Do you propose the Articles in Third Reading?

### 9.3 Deputy A. Howell:

Yes, Sir.

#### The Bailiff:

Are they seconded for Third Reading? **[Seconded]** Does any Member wish to speak in Third Reading? Those in favour of adopting in Third Reading, kindly show. The appel is called for. I invite Members to return to their seats if they have got up and run away in the last couple of minutes, and I ask the Greffier to open the voting and Members to vote. If Members have had the opportunity of casting their vote I ask the Greffier to close the voting. The law has been adopted in Third Reading:

<b>POUR: 41</b>		<b>CONTRE: 0</b>		<b>ABSTAIN: 1</b>
Connétable of St. Brelade				Deputy R.S. Kovacs
Connétable of Trinity				
Connétable of St. Martin				
Connétable of St. John				
Connétable of Grouville				
Connétable of St. Ouen				
Connétable of St. Mary				
Connétable of St. Saviour				
Deputy G.P. Southern				
Deputy C.F. Labey				
Deputy M. Tadier				
Deputy S.G. Luce				
Deputy L.M.C. Doublet				
Deputy K.F. Morel				
Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat				
Deputy S.M. Ahier				
Deputy R.J. Ward				
Deputy C.S. Alves				
Deputy I. Gardiner				
Deputy I.J. Gorst				

Deputy L.J. Farnham				
Deputy K.L. Moore				
Deputy S.Y. Mézec				
Deputy Sir P.M. Bailhache				
Deputy T.A. Coles				
Deputy D.J. Warr				
Deputy H.M. Miles				
Deputy M.R. Scott				
Deputy J. Renouf				
Deputy C.D. Curtis				
Deputy L.V. Feltham				
Deputy R.E. Binet				
Deputy H.L. Jeune				
Deputy M.E. Millar				
Deputy A. Howell				
Deputy T.J.A. Binet				
Deputy M.R. Ferey				
Deputy A.F. Curtis				
Deputy B. Ward				
Deputy K.M. Wilson				
Deputy M.B. Andrews				

### **The Greffier of the States:**

Deputy Kovacs abstained. **[Laughter]**

### **The Bailiff:**

Deputy Kovacs, I assume from your look of calm and equanimity that that was an unintentional abstention. Very well, it will not be a repeat of the Millennium Park but there we are, that is how the vote is recorded. Deputy Gorst, you circulated to Members I think to say you were deferring the next item of Public Business to a future occasion. Thank you very much. That concludes, therefore, Public Business, and I call upon the chair of P.P.C. (Privileges and Procedures Committee) to propose the arrangements for future business.

## **ARRANGEMENT OF PUBLIC BUSINESS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS**

### **10. Connétable K. Shenton-Stone of St. Martin (Chair, Privileges and Procedures Committee):**

The arrangement of public business, 6 items are on the agenda for the meeting on 4th February. Reporting on Ministerial Affairs, P.71; Modern Languages in Schools, P.74, with Modern Languages

in Schools (Amendment); Draft Employment and Discrimination (Jersey) (Amendment) Law, P.78; Draft Employment and Discrimination (Amendment) Law P.78 (Amendment); Draft Children and Young People (Independent Advocates) (Jersey) Regulations, P.87; and Draft Children and Civil Status (Consequential Amendments) (Jersey) Amendment Regulations, P.89; and number 6, Promotion of Political Education, P.1/2025. P.86, which the Bailiff has just mentioned, was due to be debated today but has been moved to the 18th March sitting. Please be aware, as usual, to keep all the subsequent days of the meeting week free in case we are needed in the Assembly. I propose the arrangements of business.

**The Bailiff:**

Do Members approve the arrangement of business, as proposed by the chair of P.P.C.? Very well, then that concludes the business of the Assembly and we stand adjourned until 9.30 a.m. on Tuesday, 4th February.

**ADJOURNMENT**

[16:08]