

2024.10.01

**3.10 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North of the Chief Minister regarding a reduction in public sector spending (OQ.176/2024):**

Will the Chief Minister detail any tangible actions he is considering to deliver value for money and a reduction in public sector spending, and advise what reductions he has implemented to date?

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

The following tangible actions have been instigated to curb public expenditure: reprioritisation of growth budgets and reducing reliance on consultants and other third-party labour and thus curbing spend on this expensive resource, a staff vacancy freeze, alluded to in a previous question from August until March 2025. We are not bringing in additional resources and only using existing resources wherever possible. Encouraging departments to think hard about what activities they undertake and to align with agreed corporate priorities and key services. In respect of future plans for savings and value for money, these will be delivered under the following theme: review of the arm's-length organisations and regulatory organisations, reducing the office footprint, reduction in roles through removing management layers and extraneous activity, and reduction in consultancy, as I have already alluded to. As I said before, the reprioritisation in growth funding and the overall curbing of growth during the life of the Budget we have presented.

**3.10.1 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

It is interesting that the answer was using the resources and curbing growth and reprioritisation; we hear this a lot. Cutting costs is just about the numbers. I would like to bring the attention of the Chief Minister to the line in the Budget: 'Departmental net revenue expenditure.' In December 2023 we approved here for 2025 £1,050,000,000 - just above £50 million. For this year, for 2025 for the same departmental revenue expenditure, the Council of Ministers is requesting £1,147,970,000. Would the Chief Minister explain the increase by £100 million in departmental revenue expenditure?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I wonder if the Deputy could direct me to the relevant page in the Budget so I can look at the table she is referring to.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

It is page 42 in the current Budget and 40 in the previous Budget. Sorry, apology, 49 in this Budget.

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I am not sure I have the right one. I am looking at page 41 of the Budget.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Sorry, it is my eyesight because it was a screenshot. Apologies, Chief Minister. If you are looking for page 41, it is departmental net revenue expenditure. We can see that in 2024 it was £1,057,000,000 and the same line asking for £1,147,000,000 for this year.

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I am not sure I am going to have time to go through it line by line and explain. I wonder if the Deputy would allow me to come back to her.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

No, I do not think we can ...

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

No, I think that I am happy for the Chief Minister to look into this, and we do have questions without notice.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

Yes, this might come back to haunt you later on this morning. [Laughter]

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I expect it will. Thank you.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

Are there any other questions arising from this question?

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

This is all part of a picture of Members wanting to know some detail. The Chief Minister previously in another question relating to savings, of which this is another one - which just indicates the fact - he pointed out that he was referring to page 106. The problem is, and again I think this is where the current question is going, where is the detail, what does it mean, and is he going to come forward with Ministers to explain what these numbers on pages, either 104, 105, or the previous page, what do they mean? Because we do not understand them and there has to be also a level of trust. I hope the Chief Minister would agree that there has to be a high level of trust in the Government delivering them?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I refer the Deputy to my previous answer, the large amount of detail there is in the Budget, the savings proposals as outlined in the table on page 106. I do not think any Budget in the past, even when the Deputy was the Minister for Treasury and Resources for that period of time, published separately what would be hundreds and hundreds of pages of granular detail if you wanted a line-by-line breakdown of all of these figures. Which is why I extend the invitation to Members, if there is a specific area they would like to see more detail on, provide us with the specifics and we will provide the answer. We are not going to spend time and resource producing hundreds or potentially thousands of pages of information that might not be necessary.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

I do remind Members under Standing Order 10(8): 'A question shall not raise an issue which, in the current session, has been decided by the States, fully answered, or to which an answer has been refused.' It is contrary to Standing Orders to ask a question that has already been answered in the session.

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

Your ruling just now indicates that we are not allowed to ask questions when it has been answered but if the answer does not satisfy Members in this democratic Assembly because it is not clear, surely we can press the Ministers. I am just trying to make sure that I am not incurring your wrath by asking the question.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

Well, if the question has been fully answered, you might not like the answer or agree with the answer, but if the question has been fully answered, in this case by the Chief Minister saying: "Well it is all on page 110" whatever it was, then we have got that answer twice. There is no point in asking the same question again. Firstly, it is contrary to Standing Orders but, secondly, we do have 21 questions to get through and ultimately other Members will suffer because their question simply will not be reached. We need to bear the framework in which these questions are asked in mind. A supplementary?

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

The Chief Minister was kind enough to refer to my tenure as the Minister for Treasury and Resources when we have delivered savings; he was part of that. Does he accept that the current explanations that are being given of the numbers that are put on in page 104 are insufficient for current Members to have the confidence to vote in favour of them in the Budget? I maybe summarise my question: is the problem really the lack of this Government not producing departmental plans which means effectively we just do not know what departments are doing?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

No, because we are producing departmental plans and they will be available. Some of them are available now. This Budget is running with the format the Budgets have been running in for many years. We have tried to put in as much information as possible. Of course, we are going through the Scrutiny function at the moment, which is scrutinising these figures in greater detail, and we are engaging in that fully. If there are any specific lines or specific areas that Members would like more detail on, then please speak to the relevant Minister, the Minister for Treasury and Resources or myself to articulate the information they want and we will provide it.

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

Can I raise a point of order very politely? I am quite serious. The Chief Minister just said he is going to produce departmental plans. In this Assembly, on the record, they have previously said they are not. I am so sorry, scrutiny is difficult, asking questions is difficult, but it is like trying to scrutinise a blancmange or an eel with Vaseline, it just keeps on moving.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

A point of order is the purpose of seeking an order from the Chair so ...

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

The point of order, he previously said ...

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

Please do not speak over me.

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

Sorry.

[11:15]

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

What order are you seeking? What ruling are you seeking under Standing Orders?

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

The ruling I am seeking is the Assembly has previously been told there are going to be no departmental plans issued by departments. The Chief Minister has just said now that there are. Are we to expect that the words of the Chief Minister are the previous ones or the ones that he has just said?

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

That is not a point of order, Deputy, you know it is not.

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

Well, I am trying to find out the facts.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

No, no, we are not having a ...

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

He clarified the question.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

Sorry?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I think I understand the question. The Deputy, I think, is mixing up, we said we are not going to produce departmental business plans and Ministerial plans.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

You have answered the question, we cannot have a free-for-all, Chief Minister. Chief Minister, we cannot have a free-for-all. Are there any other questions arising from this question? A final supplementary, Deputy Gardiner?

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

I will follow up later.