

2024.10.01

3.11 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding sustainable healthcare spending (OQ.182/2024):

Further to the Jersey's Fiscal Policy Panel 2024 Annual Report which concluded that 'the rate of growth in healthcare spending is not sustainable', will the Minister explain how he intends to ensure that healthcare spending is sustainable going forward?

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

I think the conclusion of Jersey's Fiscal Policy Panel is generally accepted by all concerned. As a consequence, I and my Ministerial colleagues are looking at a range of measures to improve the situation. Firstly, and as I have alluded to earlier, we are in the process of redesigning the structure of the entire health service in Jersey in order to make it more efficient and, as a consequence, more cost-effective. Work is also underway to address ways of increasing the number of people who utilise private health insurance. In addition, we are looking to introduce a range of measures to focus on illness prevention. This will involve encouraging lifestyle changes from childhood, a better patient monitoring using technology, more vaccinations and other various initiatives. This should help to reduce health costs in the long term. This will require more money in the initial stages, and that is something that will have to be dealt with and addressed when the work is complete. However, these measures alone will probably not be sufficient to deal with the issue of above-inflation increases in the cost of healthcare, so early in the new year we intend to start work to consider various options to increase the amount of money available for healthcare funding.

3.11.1 Deputy J. Renouf:

I thank the Minister for the response. Given that whichever way you look at it this is going to involve some very difficult choices going forward for society, how does the Minister intend to engage the Island in the debate about future healthcare spending?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

I accept what the Deputy says, this is going to be extremely difficult. We have not really got the time or resource to start that work before the new year. When we do, we will be defining ways when we have got a clearer idea of what is going to be required, that is the point at which we will start the whole process of consultation. We have not worked out that consultation yet but we will be developing it as we go.

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

Along with the efficiency review that provided the Minister for Health and Social Services with clear recommendations for improving the efficiency of the health service, there is also the financial recovery programme which has set forward a clear plan to make savings, consistent savings, year on year going forward. Will the Minister confirm that he is committed to delivering on the financial recovery programme?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

Yes, we are committed to doing that to the fullest extent possible. I think it is possibly proving a little bit more difficult than we anticipated because while it is going on, the cost of healthcare continues to rise above the cost of inflation. It is a bit of a losing battle but I certainly accept that we will be doing everything we can to reduce those costs.

3.11.3 Deputy J. Renouf:

The F.P.P. pointed out that health spending will soon reach 27 per cent of government spending which they commented puts us at the very top of the O.E.C.D. league table and is a level more commonly seen in relatively high tax Nordic countries. Is the Minister content to see Jersey travel in this direction and, if not, what other ideas does he have to solve the funding gap?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

I think the public of the Island expect a decent health service, so the likelihood is that we are going to continue to go in this direction, and it is going to be very difficult. We are a jurisdiction where we are trying to attract people to come and work here, we try to attract people to invest here, and to bring staff to work here, as much as anything for the benefit of Pillar Two taxation. I think it is very important for us to have as close as we can to a world-class health service. It is something I think we are going to have to pursue regardless of however painful that turns out to be.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Question 14, Deputy Warr will put to the Minister for Infrastructure. The Minister is absent, is the Assistant Minister prepared to take the question? Thank you very much.