

2018.10.09

15 Deputy K.G. Pamplin of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the application of the Goods and Services Tax (G.S.T.) to goods imported into the Island: [OQ.141/2018]

Given the recent report from the Comptroller and Auditor General on the governance arrangements for health and social care, in which she concluded that such arrangements were inadequate, will the Minister advise what measurable actions are being taken in response?

The Deputy of St. Ouen (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

Yes, the report did identify shortcomings in the way the former Health and Social Security Department was run. The interim Director General of the Health and Community Services has already written to the Comptroller and Auditor General indicating that the department fully accepts the findings. A response is now being produced as required and the response looks to apply the lesson learned swiftly and comprehensively. This will be considered by the Corporate Management Board and the Council of Ministers and is subject to consultation with other States departments involved.

3.15.1 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

The quote again from the Comptroller says: "I have discussed my major findings from this review with the Chief Executive and other chief officers during the past few months." Will the Minister for Health and Social Services be seeking a similar meeting?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I think it is unusual for Ministers to meet directly with the Comptroller and Auditor General. The line would usually proceed through the departmental heads, the director generals, so I would welcome an engagement with the Scrutiny Panel about this, which I believe is the more established way of proceeding, and the director general of the department will proceed and respond as required to the report. I hope that answers the question.

3.15.2 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Yes, the Public Accounts Committee will be following up the particular report of the Auditor General. Would the Minister like to comment on the Auditor General's comment in her report that the department has been better or is better at planning spending rather than applying savings?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

That is a finding which is accepted. Looking back at the past we are working to achieve effective savings where required but to ensure better planning, clearer governance, clearer accountability within the department. I welcome the new leadership team that has been brought into the department. They are developing a robust action plan to ensure that the right level of oversight and the right procedures for moving ahead are established within the department. I believe we will improve upon the shortcomings that have been identified.

3.15.3 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Will the Minister be following up the question of efficiencies, bearing in mind that when a department operates efficiently the costs will automatically fall away?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Running an efficient health service is a high priority for the department.

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Yes, but what steps is the Minister going to take to ensure that happens?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

There is much in the planning. The department is putting together its formal response, which will detail steps. There are improvement plans that are being prepared and will be coming forward shortly.

3.15.4 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

I welcome the Minister for Health's comments. I have said it publicly and privately to the Minister, we need him to succeed. The Island needs the health services it demands and requires now and for the future.

[11:00]

Dare I say, this takes us on to the hospital subject, because at the end of the day, our health and our health system has to match the deliverance of the hospital. That is obviously another question. Lastly, my final question, because obviously the general public would have seen this report in the media, the hardworking staff in all areas, from primary care to doctors to charity providers. What assurances can he give them that the work has been going on? What message would he like them to hear?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

First of all, I thank the Deputy for his vision and enthusiasm, which is shared, and I hope shared by all in this Assembly. The message that I might give to the public at large and those within the health service and our partners in it is that the need for change is fully recognised by myself and by the department. We are working to achieve that and do better. I believe there is a change of culture that is emerging within the department. There is a new openness, a new transparency which is shared across the board. I am looking forward and I am working with a really good team who are keen to advance and make changes. I am not in a position to announce details at the moment, but I can assure the Deputy that we will be announcing changes in due course, and I trust he will be pleased with the progress we are making.