

2019.03.12

7 Senator K.L. Moore of the Minister for Education regarding the provision of funding for a Policy Development Board: [OQ.56/2019]

Will the Minister explain to the Assembly the rationale behind requesting £200,000 for a Policy Development Board when the department has access to the policy officers at Strategic Policy, Performance and Population, whose role it is to help develop policy for Ministers?

Senator T.A. Vallois (The Minister for Education):

We need to make greater strides in progressing this work and the resources are quite simply not there in my department, or the new Policy Department. We need to better assess our provision and needs, examining and consulting on policy options, considering other jurisdictions and exploring funding methods, including the interaction of our tax and benefit system. This is complex work, much of it is specialist work and it needs to be done properly, in consultation with stakeholders. A board will help in bringing more people into this process. This is why I am grateful to the Minister for Treasury and Resources that this money has been allocated, so that we can start delivering.

6.7.1 Senator K.L. Moore:

Given the Minister's answer, does this mean that the S.P.P.P. (Strategic Policy, Performance and Population) Department, as they are known, who have one policy officer and 5 senior officers, dedicated to working in the children arena, are not fully up to complement?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

I would have to speak to who is in charge of it, the Strategic Policy Department. But my understanding is those people, who have been moved over into this particular sphere, are concentrating on the work around the Children's Plan, the Care Inquiry. A lot of the health work that is going on, there is a great deal of policy work being carried out within other areas trying to bring them together. The capacity, with regards to those officers, is nil when it comes to work with regards to education and early years.

6.7.2 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Can the Minister explain how it can possibly be right to spend £200,000 on a Policy Development Board when school libraries are being closed across our Island schools and some schools are even forced to put out buckets when it rains?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

The reason why the £200,000 is needed, is to move forward with the Early Years work and to support proper policy and co-ordination between that work for supporting early education and, of course, the nursery education funding issue that we had last time to try and resolve. I understand that there is no closure of school libraries; I will check on that and come back to the Constable. But, I am just as frustrated as the Constable when I see schools not properly supported and funded with regards to not just their properties, but actual resources to support the education of our children.

6.7.3 The Connétable of St. Helier:

If I could follow that up? If the Minister shares my frustration over schools that are inadequately resourced, why are we spending all this money on policy development when there are other posts? One thinks of the well-staffed Communications Department, there are other posts that could be

drawn upon to provide the head count, so why are we not spending money on making sure that our students in Island schools are being properly looked after at school?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

Because that is another stream of work that we are looking into with regards to school funding, which, of course, this Assembly will know is also a priority in the Common Strategic Policy, thanks to the amendment from Deputy Ward. That is another stream of work that is being carried out. We need to recognise that, without policy development, the co-ordination in bringing these important and required services all together, especially with regards to early intervention, without the policy development and the specialist work that is required, especially around the tax and the Early Years practitioners, we need to ensure that we have the right development and the right policy in place, so this Assembly can hold me to account, to ensure that we are delivering the right things for our children.

6.7.4 Deputy S.M. Wickenden of St. Helier:

Seeing as we have put in very strongly in our Strategic Plan that children should come first, and we are going to work harder for children, does the Minister believe that she is being properly resourced and prioritised within the Education Department?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

Quite simply, no.

6.7.5 Deputy J.H. Perchard:

Given what the Minister has said about the department being under-resourced, does she not think that it would be more appropriate to fund an increase in the number of policy officers within that department, rather than use that money to put together a Policy Development Board, which will have a finite lifespan, given the fact that it is made up of politicians?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

No, because this will be a specific piece of work, that will only be time period in terms of developing the policy; there will be no requirement for permanency. Like I referred to, we require specialist support in terms of policy; that is in tax, finance, Education and Early Years, to ensure that we are looking at from conception all the way up to 5 years. This is a specific piece of work, so there would not be a requirement for the permanency in that particular policy support officer.

6.7.6 Deputy J.H. Perchard:

Point of clarification, was the Minister suggesting that specialism cannot be found in the policy officers within department but, rather, can only be found in her political colleagues and that is why there is a need to set up the Policy Development Board?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

As I understand, Education previously had no policy officer support, before the development of the central department was created. A lot of the policy work was done off the side of a Chief Officer, Deputy Chief Officer's desk and the relevant areas, which are also not just developing policy, but delivering on the policy as well. Of course, there is a great deal of work being carried out within the States, the public service, or should I say the Government of Jersey, whichever one we want to call it these days? There is a great deal of work that is being carried out within those areas and there is lot of lost capacity of which we would have seen previously. From my point of view, if I am trying to

push forward, particularly the Common Strategic Policy and ensure that I deliver on behalf of this Assembly that holds me to account to do that, the requirement for this funding is absolutely crucial.

6.7.7 Senator K.L. Moore:

Given the paucity of resource that is being dedicated to this absolutely essential strategic priority of this current Government, does the Minister, therefore, hold any confidence that any policy that is put forward by her department, following this Policy Development Board's work, will be supported by her ministerial colleagues?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

Sorry, can I just ask the Senator just to repeat the question?

Senator K.L. Moore:

It may not be verbatim but, essentially, I was asking the Minister whether she had any confidence, given her experience to date in relation to resourcing of her department, that any suggestions put forward by her Policy Development Board will meet with approval and support from her ministerial colleagues, in order to be resourced going forward.

Senator T.A. Vallois:

With regards to confidence and with regards to my fellow Council of Minister colleagues, they all agreed to the Strategic Policy, which specifically refers to an Early Years Policy Development Board and a concentration on Early Years. With regards to any options put forward by the Policy Development Board, that will be a decision taken by myself, as Minister for Education, particularly in the realm of nursery education funding, which, of course, will highly likely mean a proposition having to come to the Assembly, in any case, which will require the support and, of course, scrutinising and holding to account of this Assembly, to ensure that we deliver the correct option.

The Bailiff:

We come to question 8, which Deputy Wickenden will ask of the Attorney General.

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

Before I ask the question, could I just quickly ask a challenge on the written question I asked to the Treasury Department? I asked for a breakdown of ...

The Bailiff:

Which question is this?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

It is question 151.

The Bailiff:

Would you like to raise that at the end of the question time?