

2019.09.24

4 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding the provision made in the Government Plan in respect of fairness in the delivery of public services: (OQ.221/2019)

Given the commitment in the Common Strategic Policy to achieve fairness in the delivery of public services, that does not disadvantage St. Helier ratepayers; and further to the Minister's response to a question on 2nd July 2019 that: "Fairness is the whole dynamics of the C.S.P. (Common Strategy Policy)" and that details on achieving that fairness will be in the Government Plan, will the Minister explain how this is reflected in the plan?

Deputy S.J. Pinel of St. Clement (The Minister for Treasury and Resources):

The Connétable of St. Helier will be aware that an independent rates working group was established in 2018. It was tasked with examining whether there should be a revaluation of rateable values for properties in Jersey. The group has made considerable progress in this matter. It carried out extensive work on this issue and it has met 5 times throughout 2019. The issues involved are complex and a lot of research has been carried out about how regimes operate in other jurisdictions. That work was not completed by the date the Government Plan was published and, for that reason, details were not included in the plan. The group is now close to concluding its work on this matter and it will then provide written recommendations to myself and the Comité des Connétables. Until I receive these recommendations, I am afraid I cannot comment further.

3.4.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:

With respect, that answer was completely irrelevant. I hesitate, at this stage, to know where to go, because the amendment that I brought and that was accepted to the C.S.P. was addressing the fact that St. Helier ratepayers uniquely pay for the delivery of public facilities such as parks, gardens, toilets, litter cleaning and so on to the tune of about £1.7 million. That bill around the rest of the Island is picked up by the taxpayer. The agreement was made by the Council of Ministers to address that unfairness. I am basically trying to find out where that is in the Government Plan, because the Minister did tell me, in a previous sitting, that it was in there. I have looked through it and I cannot find it.

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

As I said in my opening remarks, the review was not completed by the date of the publication of the Government Plan and until I am in receipt, along with the Comité des Connétables, which will obviously include the Connétable of St. Helier, there is nothing to comment on, because we have not received the results of the review.

3.4.2 The Connétable of St. Helier:

We really are talking at cross-purposes here. The Minister is talking about the rates revaluation, which is an important piece of work and it has been agreed by the States that it will be done. What I am talking about is the unfairness in the delivery of public services, which are uniquely paid for in St. Helier by ratepayers and which mean that St. Helier ratepayers pay more in rates than they would if these maintenance costs were picked up by the taxpayer. Now, I was assured that work was ongoing and I have to conclude that work has not happened. Perhaps I need to bring an amendment to the Government Plan and make the arguments all over again.

The Bailiff:

Was there a question there, Connétable?

The Connétable of St. Helier:

Does the Minister agree that I should bring an amendment to the Government Plan?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

I have long been aware of the question of unfairness expressed by the Connétable of St. Helier and that is exactly what the rates working group has been set up to do, but as I consistently say, without the information and completion of this review, which is due in the next couple of weeks, then I cannot give the Connétable the information that he requests.

3.4.3 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

We have been told that the bulk of customers in the trading organisations, including shops in St. Helier, comes from commuters. Have the Treasury made any estimates of this, which could quite possibly balance the Connétable's view that his ratepayers are paying more than their fair share? Are we having a bigger contribution from the commuters to the ratepayers of St. Helier than *vice versa*?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

That is a very interesting question. I am not aware of any research being done on commuters into St. Helier, but I am aware that the Connétable, as I said in my previous answer, regards that the ratepayers of St. Helier, having - as he said - to deal with the gardens, the public toilets, this has been an ongoing issue and that is what the rates review working group are going to come up with the answers for, hopefully in the next couple of weeks.

3.4.4 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Do I understand, then, that there is work being undertaken which will look at the contribution made by commuters, as opposed to the costs to the St. Helier ratepayers?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

I am not aware that there is work, but on the other hand, I am not aware that there is not work in this rates review, because we have not had the results, so I do not know whether they have taken that into account. If not, they should do.

3.4.4 The Connétable of St. Helier:

One can always rely on the good Senator to come up with an off-the-wall contribution. It seems to me that, as I say, the question I have put here, which was the substance of my amendment to the C.S.P., which was accepted by the Council of Ministers, has been not dealt with. I will just repeat my question: does the Minister for Treasury and Resources believe, notwithstanding that there is a review going on into rates, which of course is important, that I should bring an amendment to the Government Plan if I want to achieve fairness for St. Helier ratepayers?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

There is nothing stopping the Connétable from bringing an amendment to the Government Plan, but would it not be better to wait until we have the results in the next couple of weeks of the rates working review group to see what they have come up with, which will be shared with the Comité as soon as I get them?

The Bailiff:

The other answer, Connétable, is that the Minister has no responsibility as to whether you should, or should not, bring an amendment to the Government Plan.