

2024.10.22

### **3.6 Deputy K.M. Wilson of St. Clement of the Chief Minister regarding departmental plans (OQ.198/2024):**

Further to his response to Oral Question 176/2024, in which the Chief Minister advised that his Government was producing departmental plans, will he advise whether these departmental plans will be available prior to the debate on the Proposed Budget (Government Plan) 2025-2028 and, if so, when they will be published; and if not, why not?

#### **Deputy L.J. Farnham (The Chief Minister):**

The business plans cannot technically be finalised until after the debate of the proposed Budget. I said I would try and make some plans available before the Budget, but of course, having consulted with officials, of course we cannot finalise them until the Budget has been finalised by the Assembly. This was the case in 2023, 2022, 2021 and 2020 when the business plans were presented in January. The departmental plans will be available in January 2025, after the approval of the Budget. However, we will of course continue to provide as much information as possible in advance of the Budget, not least through the Scrutiny process. Members will remember that we agreed to lodge the Budget earlier to allow more time for detailed Scrutiny, and that is a process that we are right in the middle of, and I would like to think Ministers are co-operating fully with that.

#### **3.6.1 Deputy K.M. Wilson:**

Thank you to the Chief Minister for his response. Could he consider that draft plans could be produced and that they do not just signal a statement of intent, but are populated with data that will allow us to assess the detail of the proposed delivery of the departmental plans in detail?

#### **Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

Yes, I can ... actually, draft business plans - if I remember rightly - were issued in 2019. Some departments managed to get draft plans out before the Budget, so I can certainly liaise with the relevant Ministers and officials, and if we have any business plans that could be presented in draft, I am sure that we will be able to do that, but I cannot confirm that until I have had those conversations.

#### **3.6.2 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

I am really surprised that the Chief Minister changed his mind within the 3 weeks between the Assembly when it was promised the plans would be published and now not. I would like to check with the Chief Minister, when the Budget has been created and presented, did the Council of Ministers and each Minister present their plans? Because to create the Budget we do need plans, and if these plans were presented, can these plans be shared with the Assembly and with the public?

#### **Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

Well, Sir, it is the Deputy and other Members who have decided to focus on the business plans; we are not treating them in any different way than the previous Government did. The previous Government published their business plans in January; they did not publish draft plans. The last time draft plans were published was in the Deputy Le Fondré's Government - 2019 - and not since then. So, I am not going to promise that. As I said in my previous answer, I will discuss it with Ministers. If Ministers and officials in those departments have got some draft plans ready, then we will be prepared to share them. But I want to go back to the fact that we

worked extremely long and hard, put some long hours and hard work into getting the Budget out - especially the officials - early, so Scrutiny had more time to scrutinise it. I think we are working fully with that process, so I would urge Scrutiny to use that process. If there are any doubts or any questions or any specific areas where they want more information, then they can ask as part of that process. To reiterate, our business plan, which will include each Minister's priorities and the legislative programme ... and actually on that subject, I can confirm that the legislative programme for the remainder of this term of office will be published in November.

### **3.6.3 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Interesting that the Chief Minister mentioned Ministerial priorities, which are very important. Usually, Ministerial priorities are published together with the Budget, because the Ministerial priorities should be budgeted. Can we see Ministerial priorities to be published before the Budget? And if Back-Benchers would like to address and bring amendments forward, they will have a choice and options to do it through the Budget.

### **Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

As I have stated on many previous engagements, the previous Government introduced Ministerial plans. I have a copy here, and I will read from the introduction: "The Ministerial plans form part of the Government programme for 2023-2026 and set out each Minister's priorities and the Council of Ministers' legislative programme." To be clear, the Ministers' priorities will be part of the business plan, to be published in January, as has been done in the past 4 or 5 years, and the Council of Ministers' legislative programme for 2025 and 2026 will be published in November.

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

The Chief Minister has said the Budget was lodged early so it could be effectively scrutinised. The difficulty that Members have is that - and I sense the palpable frustration among some Scrutiny Panels, which I am not on any, but I have watched all of the hearings - there is an absence of information. He did say that he was going to try and do departmental plans; that is now not going to happen because he has found out that it cannot happen before the Budget, and he refers back to Ministerial plans. I want not to be too long in my question, Sir - I know we have only got 10 questions - but I want to get to the point of asking the Chief Minister, is he going to produce something on a certain date that is going to help Members scrutinise his Government's Budget? For example, an earlier question was on the living wage productivity assistance to businesses; that has been delayed, not coming, not clear when it is going to come out. There are other big items of expenditure - and savings, for example - that are not set out ...

### **The Bailiff:**

Deputy, you are not succeeding in making your question shorter and I am not sure that ...

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

Well, I am basically trying to knit fog, Sir. I apologise; it is difficult to try and knit fog. I am trying to pin the Chief Minister in saying what his Government is going to produce, by when, for Members to scrutinise for the Budget, because at the moment we do not know. The story keeps on changing. Is he able yet to produce a list of documents that will be produced in advance, and by when?

### **Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

At the risk of repeating myself, we have produced about 160 pages of Budget and Budget annex, of detail. We have a prolonged Scrutiny period, and if Members wish for any further information, all they have to do is ask.

[10:45]

But we are not, as a Government, going to produce any specific additional reports, with the exception of, for example, the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development said as soon as Council of Ministers signed off the productivity support, we would share that, of course, in the business as usual. Any reports we are working on, we will share that as soon as they become available. But I reiterate, there is a detailed Budget and Budget annex, a good Scrutiny process that is underway, and a Government that is prepared to share any information that is asked for. We will produce our business plans in 2025, as has been the case for the last 5 years.

### **3.6.5 Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

As someone who is in their first term of the Assembly but also new to Scrutiny, I would like to ask the Minister, what happens if Scrutiny does not know what it does not know? In the sense that I hear the Minister saying that it is up to Scrutiny to ask for the information, but if Scrutiny does not know what to ask, how do we know?

### **Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

If Scrutiny does not know what to ask, how do they know what to ask? I do not know.

### **3.6.6 Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

With that answer and the promise in this new Government that there would be open, transparent and much more engagement between Scrutiny and the Government, does the Chief Minister agree that, to be open and transparent, the release of departmental plans - that apparently were used to be able to help draft a Budget that is quite top-heavy and does not with much detail underneath - would help to ease this tension and questioning that the Minister keeps getting asked about, actually what can we ask in Scrutiny if we do not know what we are asking?

### **Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I did not mean to be flippant in my previous answer. What I have said is we have produced, as has been the process for many years now, a detailed Budget, a detailed Budget annex with all of our expenditure - we have put all of the information in that we can - and we are having a long and detailed Scrutiny process. We must have had hundreds of questions from Scrutiny in letters on a regular basis. Hundreds of questions from Scrutiny - I will repeat that - which we are answering in an open and transparent way. I am not sure what more we can do. We are going to produce - I will say it one more time for the record - our business plans, Ministerial priorities in January 2025 and our legislative programme in November. I have said in an earlier question, if there are draft business plans available prior to that date, with the permission of the relevant Minister, we will share those as well. I can do no more than that.

### **3.6.7 Deputy A.F. Curtis:**

In the 2024 business plan for the Cabinet Office, under “Digital”, one bullet point is: “By the end of the current year, establish a prioritised list of modernisation and digital initiatives and projects.” In the absence of a 2025 business plan this year, will the Minister commit to publishing to the public and Scrutiny this prioritised list so we all know what our money is being spent on and what benefits we may see from digital?

### **Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

Sorry, could he just clarify what he is referring to?

**Deputy A.F. Curtis:**

On page 3 of the 2024 business plan Cabinet Office published in, I believe, August 2024, this is a commitment of this year's work, and the question is in relation to the fact that there will not be a 2025 one this year, however this is a commitment for further information that should be delivered upon.

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I would like to check the text in the business plan, and if we have committed to something, we shall certainly do our very best to make sure we deliver it.

**3.6.8 Deputy A.F. Curtis:**

The business plan does suggest that the prioritised list must be established. Will the Minister go further and commit that this will be established and published?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I cannot immediately see a problem with that, but I would like just to check what we said; but I cannot see a problem.

**3.6.9 Deputy K.M. Wilson:**

It is really to just ask the Chief Minister if he accepts that Scrutiny is doing its job and that, at the heart of the question, is the fact that we have a problem with the lack of detail and that it is simply not there. Will he perhaps reflect on this discussion and consider if there is anything else he can do to help and assist us with more detail about what is coming forward in the Budget?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

Of course, we want Scrutiny to be fully informed with as much detail as possible. Scrutiny need to outline to us - the various Scrutiny Panels - where their concerns are and we will endeavour to provide that detail.

**The Bailiff:**

Before moving on to the next question, it was mentioned during the course of this question that there are only 11 questions. I think the implication being that there should be an element of greater leeway. The Presiding Officer's approach is to take the total minutes available, divide it by the questions and have that resulting number as the nominal starting point for what is allocated to each question. At the moment, some questions are coming under that and some questions are going over that - even that generous amount - and therefore Standing Orders are there for a purpose and they should be applied accordingly in terms of the succinctness of the question and the time limit on the answer. We are marginal as to whether we make it through the next few questions in terms of the time allocated to us. I will allow another couple of minutes for injury time because of what I have said, but I just want to make it clear that there is not a bottomless pit of time simply because there are fewer questions.