

23.07.04

13 Deputy M.R. Scott of the Chief Minister regarding increased productivity by the Government (OQ.130/2023)

Will the Chief Minister advise whether any one area in Government has increased productivity without introducing additional staff and, if so, will she explain how this has been achieved and measured?

Deputy K.L. Moore (The Chief Minister):

The Council of Ministers is looking to drive a culture in which all colleagues across Government understand and act on their responsibility to ensure value for money for taxpayers. That means seeking to eliminate wasteful processes and focusing on improving service delivery. Departments across Government have a range of initiatives in progress, many of these are small, but nonetheless important, as we strive to embed a culture of continuous improvement across our public service. In respect of the topic raised by the Deputy, one area of improvement has been in the student finance grant application process, which was reviewed in 2022, following its transfer from C.Y.P.E.S. to C.L.S. (Customer and Local Services). Ultimately, the measure of productivity is a ratio of input to output. From that piece of work we can see that the existing team were upskilled to achieve a call answering rate of 96.5 per cent within an average of 5 seconds. Also colleagues from other teams within the department were trained to support peak flows on emails and phone calls.

3.13.1 Deputy M.R. Scott:

I thank the Chief Minister for her answer. The Chief Minister mentioned value for money in the context of productivity. Will she be looking at the extent to which policies themselves are productive and the extent to which the policymaking process is productive?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

That is an interesting question. Decision and agreement in the Assembly to adopt a policy or not should always take into account its deliverability and also sometimes we have to consider the pressure that it may place on the delivery of other public services or indeed, as I mentioned earlier, the burden on our existing public sector workforce.

3.13.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Chief Minister recognise that productivity has been flatlining for the past 20 years and that Government after Government after Government, Minister after Minister, have failed to revive productivity measures within the Island without introducing extra staff? It has not happened. Is that the case and does the Chief Minister recognise this and is she not chasing a chimera?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

I certainly hope not, in terms of chasing a chimera. The Deputy will acknowledge with me that the majority of our workforce are focused on hands-on human-based delivery, which is essential. That is within our health and education sectors, but there are so many other members of our public sector workforce on whom we rely and could not replace with technology. However, the previous Government invested a considerable amount of money in technology, improving our back office systems. That, I do hope, will at some point deliver some efficiencies and greater support administratively to our public service. We will continue to endeavour to improve our productivity by working with the Delivery Unit, as I identified earlier. They have identified really simple processes

that can not only improve the speed with which we recruit people to our public service, but also help them to feel a part of our organisation right from the beginning of their interaction with us.

3.13.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

It is all very warm and woolly. Can I focus on something specific? It is no good having a group of people answering the telephones and they manage to tick the box to say they answered in less than 5 seconds. The real measure is what was the quality of their response? Not 5 seconds or 10 seconds or otherwise. Can the Minister suggest that quality of response is the measure that we need not efficiency savings?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

One of the values of the organisation is customer focus. Indeed, we had a debate about that in the Common Strategic Priorities debate, so the Assembly is very familiar with that. Customer satisfaction is very important and it is something that we do take time to gauge and monitor and measure. I can point the Deputy to Revenue Jersey where they have adopted a new form process for customer inquiries. That, indeed, has received 5 stars in terms of customer satisfaction feedback.

3.13.4 Deputy R.J. Ward:

On the question of productivity, we might be in the Trigger school of productivity. Trigger was a road sweeper for 30 years and he had one broom, but it had 5 different heads and 26 different handles. I wonder whether that is the problem with this question. I would ask the Chief Minister: what is the definition of productivity that we are using? An ecological term is an increase in biomass, perhaps there is more truth in that, in terms of our workforce, than we would like to admit. Can I ask for the definition of productivity that is being used here?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

That is a great example; I was very fond of "Only Fools and Horses" in my youth. Productivity in this instance, in relation to public service is, as I identified earlier, the ratio of input to output. With the technology advances that we are seeing there is great potential to improve our output with less input. Just a couple of weeks ago I was fortunate enough to visit a large financial institution where they have seen increased productivity to a very great extent, through the simple process of improving administrative processes using technology. That has all been delivered by a home-grown talented team, who are now rolling out their experience and their developments to the rest of their organisation, which is global.

3.13.5 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can I ask the Chief Minister whether she has a picture of where ideal productivity is? Are we not just simply creating a world of consultancy where we are told yet again we can be more productive by doing this and we are throwing money at it? At what point is the workforce doing enough and they can go home and have a rest?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

This Government has made it very clear that we do not believe in a culture of consultancy. In fact, we are focused on doing the very reverse. We are developing talent and skills and input internally. That is exemplified by the work of the Delivery Unit, where they are helping their colleagues to identify better ways of working so that there is an improved appreciation of work because people spend more time doing the interesting parts of their job than the burdensome administrative tasks that are important but not necessarily the most enjoyable parts of a daily role.

[11:30]

3.13.6 Deputy M.R. Scott:

Thank you for the contributions to this question. The Chief Minister mentioned her definition of productivity in terms of outputs versus inputs, although I believe many would say it is producing more in the way of results with fewer people. I have not heard much in the way of targets. Also, the mention of technology, I would be interested to know exactly how she thinks that is improving performance in terms of targets. With reference to Revenue Jersey, whether she really thinks it is helpful that refunds can only be issued by cheque?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

I thank the Deputy, particularly for that last example which I was not aware, and so I take the point and will endeavour to find out more about it for her. Technology does provide us with a great opportunity, not because we want humans to interact with computers but because we want to simplify the tasks that can be burdensome on human time, so that humans can better do things and interact with other humans to deliver the best effect. Let us focus on healthcare, let us focus on education and smoothing out the burdensome tasks that technology can assist us with. I used in my last answer the example of a financial institution that we visited a couple of weeks ago. That is a real example of how focusing on using technology well to our best advantage can enhance productivity and improve people satisfaction in their own jobs.

Deputy M.R. Scott:

Sir, that did not answer my question.

The Deputy Bailiff:

In what sense; I think it did answer the question?

Deputy M.R. Scott:

Sorry?

The Deputy Bailiff:

In what sense do you say it did not answer the question?

Deputy M.R. Scott:

I was asking in terms of targets, how technology has improved the productivity.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Your last question was a general question about technology and then you asked about the cheques and, in my view, the Chief Minister had answered the question that was posed.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Sir, can I just say maybe some Members in the Assembly do not know what a cheque is but I would just point that out?

The Deputy Bailiff:

I do, unfortunately.