

3.3 Deputy J.H. Young of St. Brelade of the Minister for Social Security regarding proposals for labour intensive public sector infrastructure projects:

Will the Minister advise the Assembly whether he has already initiated or is actively considering any proposals jointly with other Ministers for undertaking suitable labour-intensive public-sector infrastructure projects such as the maintenance of our coastal paths and conversation sites in order to open interim employment opportunities and, if not, why not?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley (The Minister for Social Security):

I am pleased to advise the Deputy that proposals and initiatives are being considered. We are very keen to use any opportunities available to help improve the prospects of people who are currently registered as unemployed. The Back to Work team, the Department of the Environment and the Transport and Technical Services Department have been working together to bring forward pilot schemes, which include working on the North Coast Habitat. My department has already made its commitment to such projects clear in the Back to Work bids in the Medium-Term Financial Plan. £1.3 million will be set aside over the 3 years for the implementation of employment projects which improve the employability of those with significant barriers to employment whose access to private sector work placements is limited. It is important that, as well as benefiting the environment and the wider community, the projects which are developed meet our core aim, which is to improve the prospects of all our clients securing permanent paid employment.

3.3.1 Deputy J.H. Young:

I thank the Minister and that is good news, but could I ask the Minister, please, to clarify when he considers those proposals will come to fruition? Will we, for example, see those projects underway this autumn, particularly in the countryside, bearing in mind that there is already a history of such a scheme working under the Committee of Constables in previous years?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

The answer to the Deputy's question is that I cannot give an assurance because the leaves are already falling and I suspect autumn is only a few days away. However, we are working not only with the departments I mentioned but also with other charitable organisations. I cannot give too much detail at the moment but work schemes of the type that the Deputy is recommending could involve the third sector and also could be put out by contract if appropriate.

3.3.2 Deputy J.H. Young:

Will the Minister be prepared to keep the House informed with progress as those schemes come to fruition, because we do not want to lose the opportunity?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

Yes. The Deputy and the other Members will be aware that, as soon as the Back to Work team develops new schemes, we do make public announcements. Certainly when and if we launch a conservation-type scheme we would keep everybody informed.

3.3.3 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier:

Can the Minister inform Members how many real jobs his initiatives have created in 2012 and, in particular, how many apprenticeships have we seen, in the economy, being created in 2011, 2012 and into 2013?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

Yes, I am delighted to answer that question. Up to today's date, that is January to August and the first few days of September, the department advise me that we have placed 700 people into paid employment across Work Zone, WorkWise, Advance to Work and Advance Plus. The matter to do with apprenticeships does not come under the Back to Work team. It was

previously administered by the Economic Development Department and is now the responsibility of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture.

3.3.4 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier of St. Saviour:

The Minister seemed to imply that there would be occasions when conservation work was not suitable for people and he spoke in a very guarded way. Could he please identify when it is not suitable and give the reasons why not?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

The people who are currently unemployed come from various professions with various skills and we are very much concentrating on what we call job substitution. What I mean by that is that there are vacancies in the commercial or private sector which are currently, every year, filled by non-locals; people brought perhaps into the Island to fill jobs. We believe that job substitution is the way to secure permanent paid employment for a lot of the people who are currently unemployed rather than schemes which just give people an experience of work but do not lead to paid jobs. There is a whole mix of skills among the current unemployed and the work scheme on the north coast would not be suitable for some people.

3.3.5 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Is the Minister saying that conservation work is a one-off kind of work and that there is no necessary continuity to it?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

Yes, I think I am saying that. There may be continuity in that it may lead to somebody being interested, for example, in working on the land or with a gardening company, but these are not the vacancies that will be created by a work scheme on the north coast. The opportunity is there to create a paid scheme but that is only really sticking a plaster on the issue of unemployment in Jersey.

[10:00]

3.3.6 Connétable P.J. Rondel of St. John:

Dealing with something at the moment; with the apprentices that take on these work schemes that you are referring to, Minister, does the employer get a grant towards paying the wages of these young people and, if so, how long does that grant last? Is it one year, 2 years or longer, for the duration of the apprenticeship?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

The Constable must be careful not to confuse the scheme that we are running, called the Employment Grant Scheme, with apprenticeships, which is a totally different situation. We launched, earlier this summer, the Employment Grant Scheme to encourage employers to take on people who have been unemployed more than 12 months. The employment grant is a total of £7,500. The majority is paid at the end of that first year of employment or, if it is an 18-month contract, at the end of the 18 months. The matter of apprenticeships, as I say, does not come under my responsibility and I could not go into any detail about how the apprenticeships are set up.

3.3.7 Connétable J. Gallichan of St. Mary:

Does the Minister acknowledge that many reports say that being in work is beneficial to people from a psychological point of view and that setting up interim employment opportunities is valuable in its own right, even if training is not directed at the future employment, simply because those people are employed, are in the routine of work and are kept in touch with society that way?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

I agree with the premise and the principles of what the Constable is stating there. The issue of whether we should be launching more work-type schemes of the type that we are discussing today, for me, is... The departments, as I said before, have been concentrating on placing people through Advance to Work and Advance Plus in the private sector because that is where the job vacancies will be, where the permanent work will be. States departments creating work schemes will not produce long-term employment for people.

3.3.8 Deputy J.H. Young:

I was encouraged by the Minister's response until the last set of exchanges, which I find very downbeat in respect of the importance of interim opportunities. I would like the Minister to tell me, particularly in relation to how much recognition he gives to the importance of the environment, how many meetings he has held with the Minister for Planning and Environment to discuss this aspect of the scheme, please.

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

The honest answer to the Deputy is that I have had no meetings with the Minister for Planning and Environment. However, my officers have had numerous meetings with officers of his department and that is where the work is taking place.