

4. Questions to Ministers without Notice ... The Chief Minister

4.1 Senator L. Norman:

Two years ago, the States requested the Council of Ministers to consider all options to preserve the headland at Plémont and to recommend a preferred option to the States with the least possible delay. Now that the Minister for Planning and Environment has determined the application for that site, can the Chief Minister say when the preferred option will be presented to the States?

Senator F.H. Walker (The Chief Minister):

I cannot give a precise date in responses to that question. We do await further input from the Minister for Planning and Environment who, in turn, is consulting on and assessing the options.

4.1.1 Senator L. Norman:

Two weeks ago, I asked the same question to the Minister for Planning and Environment who completely washed his hands of the matter and passed it back to the Council of Ministers. Would the Chief Minister recall that question and the Minister's answer?

Senator F.H. Walker:

I do not, and it is news to me and, obviously, I need to have some discussion with the Minister for Planning and Environment, but I will give an undertaking in response to the question to bring the information - the options - to the House at the earliest opportunity.

4.2 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

I have 2 questions, if the Chief Minister would grant me the liberty. I would like to ask if the Chief Minister is trying deliberately - and I mean deliberately - undermine relationships between this Island and our sister Island, Guernsey, by deliberately bowling out for a golden duck their Chief Minister in the inter-Island cricket competition? On a more serious note, and I do wish to be more serious on this matter, given the gravity as I have mentioned in 2 previous questions this morning of the emissions from the fire yesterday. Could the Chief Minister comment at this stage if he was notified, if he was involved, if the emergency procedures that would normally be expected to kick-in at this kind of an incident kicked-in and what his involvement was, if any, in yesterday's occurrence?

Senator F.H. Walker:

Can I first of all say I hope that relations with Guernsey have not been set back by activities on the cricket field. I thought it merely emphasised known superiority of Jersey to our sister Island. [Approbation] So far as the fire is concerned, I was not directly involved last night although I was informed and I remained in touch this morning. I did speak to the Constable of St. Peter earlier this morning to ensure that all have been handled correctly overnight and people who have been displaced, very sadly, have been found alternative accommodation which he assured me they had. My initial assessment, without having any real detail, is that the emergency services, particularly the fire service, reacted as they always do in Jersey, superbly well, to a very serious incident. [Approbation]

4.3 Deputy C.J. Scott Warren:

Does the Minister agree that similarly to allocating sufficient funding for the prison, there are sufficient funds for such items of expenditure on the Annual Business Plan 2009 as the Jersey Employment Trust for Vocational Employment needs, and those with learning difficulties, and to have an equitable system for early years nursery education provision that these are not nice-to-haves but they are only right in an affluent society such as Jersey?

Senator F.H. Walker:

Ideally, yes I would absolutely agree with the thrust of the Deputy's question. The problem is that there are a significant number - many, many - other essentials for the good government of Jersey and the welfare of the people of Jersey which are included in the Business Plan and if any items, no matter how much a government would wish to support them, if any additional items are to be included then the decision will have to be taken, which I think was made clear at the presentation to Members yesterday either to drop other priorities allowed for in the Business Plan or to increase the overall level of States expenditure both of which, of course, have consequences. It will be for this House when the Business Plan is debated to take some tough decisions and, of course, it is open to any Member to bring amendments to the Plan should they wish.

4.4 Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier:

I would not want to waste the Minister's officers research. Can I ask him the question: the Minister advised Members whether the definite inward migration figures that the States will be asked to decide from the current scenarios put forward... will they replace the one per cent growth or 500 jobs per year agreed during the migration policy debate P.25/2005, or will both figures run alongside each other?

Senator F.H. Walker:

This Council of Ministers will not be bringing any new proposition to this House and, therefore, the current target and the current States set target of growth of one per cent in the workforce will remain in place.

4.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Despite the fact that this Council of Ministers will not be bringing measures, what measures have been under consideration to enforce the 250 heads of household as a potential target given that last year 1,400 immigrants came to the Island?

Senator F.H. Walker:

If one takes the period over the last 5 years, the growth in employment numbers in Jersey is well below the one per cent target figure. There have been some years where it has fallen, other years, as the last 2 years, which has risen reasonably sharply. But over the last 5 years, the figure is below the one per cent. In fact, it sits at 0.7 per cent per annum.

4.5.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

If I may, a supplementary? What extra measures, if any, then are under consideration to ensure that figures set at 250 plus are achieved in the future rather than hitting and hoping over the rise and fall of the economic cycle.

Senator F.H. Walker:

The Deputy is well aware of the migration policy approved by the States and well aware of the time table for its implementation. Nothing has changed.

4.6 Deputy C.F. Labey of Grouville:

When the Chief Minister says that a migration policy is not going to be agreed by this Council of Ministers, does this mean it has been factored into the next one making decisions? Because I notice in the Economic Development Department's brief on the Business Plan for next year, one of their key objectives states an increased number of high value-added businesses and individuals migrating to the Island. Is this a desire of this Council of Ministers or will he wait for the next?

Senator F.H. Walker:

No, this Council of Ministers continues to work to the migration policies set by the States, as I said in my earlier answer. The other options are options for discussion and consultation and there are a number of options which will be for the next Council of Ministers to review and to decide its policies upon and to bring those policies to the States. But any change in the current migration strategy will have to be approved by this House.

4.7 Deputy S.C. Ferguson:

In view of the discussions this morning and in the light of the migration policy, will this Council of Ministers be encouraging out-of-Islanders to buy property here in the Buy/To Let markets?

Senator F.H. Walker:

No, we will not.

The Bailiff:

There are no other questions for the Chief Minister. That will draw the questions to a close and we move on to Statements on a Matter of Official Responsibility.