

ORAL QUESTIONS - resumption

7. Questions to Ministers Without Notice - The Chief Minister

The Deputy Bailiff:

Right. We now have 2 matters outstanding from this morning: there was the second question at large for the Chief Minister, which we will start now. Deputy Higgins?

7.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Would the Chief Minister tell me when he proposes to bring forward some proposals to adopt the Carswell recommendations?

Senator I.J. Gorst (The Chief Minister):

The Deputy is imparting to me new information with regard to my proposals to bring forward the Carswell recommendations. I understand from reading media outlets that P.P.C. (Privileges and Procedures Committee) are proposing to review the Carswell recommendations, and I have no doubt that they will be asking probably my opinion and probably the opinion of the Council of Ministers in due course, and I look forward to giving my opinion to that piece of work.

7.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Chief Minister state whether there is a publicly-accessible register of the beneficial ownership of companies, trusts and foundations registered in Jersey and, if not, can he explain how the tax authorities in other jurisdictions with whom we have signed T.I.E.A.s (Tax Information Exchange Agreement) can do any effective research to discover if one of their citizens who they suspect of having undeclared assets in any such Jersey vehicles does, in fact, have such assets?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I think that the Deputy already knows the answer to the question with regard to publication of information with regard to those types of structures that he has asked about. As he also knows, the T.I.E.A.s that we have signed do require and place obligations not only on ourselves but on those jurisdictions to have reasonable grounds, and that is as it should be.

7.2.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Could the Chief Minister address the second part of the question: how are they to do any research upon whether any of their citizens has got assets in the Island?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I did address that question: I said that there ought to be reasonable grounds.

7.3 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

The Terms and Conditions Review is scheduled to save us £14 million. Can the Chief Minister confirm that the States is on line to achieve this and to deliver these savings?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I think as the Senator probably knows, as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review, there was a proposal to save £14 million, which could be made up with regard to changes in terms and conditions or with regards to pay. I inherited, and the current States Employment Board inherited, a position where we needed to make a pay-off as we did - again, that is known in the public domain - and we are working on changes to terms and conditions.

7.3.1 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Is the S.E.B. (States Employment Board) on line to achieve these savings?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Of course, we are working towards - and our mandate is to endeavour to achieve - those savings, in the context of which I have just outlined.

7.3.2 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

What is the probability?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Be in no doubt, it is extremely difficult. I have not carried out any probability or sensitivity analyses so I am not able to put a number on it but, indeed, it is challenging.

7.4 The Deputy of St. Ouen:

In the Strategic Plan, we are told that we are going the next step, that the plan signposts the high-level strategic directions which will be translated into detailed short, medium and long-term delivery plans to ensure that clear strategies, action plans and success criteria develop for each of the priorities. Can I ask the Chief Minister when we are likely to see such plans?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

That is a very good question. I am about to undertake a series of meetings with Ministers so that we can work together upon those plans and we will come forward with delivery vehicles. I have already spoken previously about setting up similar teams to the Back-to-Work Team, the Health Ministerial Oversight Group and introducing Back-Benchers on to those teams so that we ensure that we do deliver.

7.4.1 The Deputy of St. Ouen:

How does the Chief Minister plan to measure progress and report progress?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Deputy, I am sorry, can we go back to the old arrangement where you try to catch the speaker's eye before you just stand up and ask another question? It is much easier because I can then control questions around that.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

The problem is, Sir, that you do not give us a chance to ask a supplementary question unless we leap to our feet and literally butt in.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Well, having had that little exchange, perhaps you would like to ask your supplementary question.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Sir, my supplementary question is: how does the Chief Minister plan to measure the progress in the delivery of these plans and equally, how does he propose to report that progress?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

As the Deputy will be aware, the previous Council of Ministers have reported progress against targets of strategic plans and business plans and that, I believe, is the best way to do so again with the Strategic Plan, and that is what I will be proposing.

7.5 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

What a naughty boy the Deputy of St. Ouen is. Could the Chief Minister clarify how much nearer we are to getting this Committee of Inquiry into historic abuse saga on the way?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Yes, the Deputy again raises a good question. It is, unfortunately, taking longer than I would have liked. I am hopeful that I will be in a position to lodge terms of reference later this month so that we can approve them in this Assembly prior to the summer recess.

7.6 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Can the Chief Minister indicate whether independence, or a variant thereof, is a formal item on the agenda of the Council of Ministers at the moment?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

No. It is not. The Council of Ministers is committed to working more closely with Guernsey and understanding and improving that relationship and what formal structures might be needed to drive that relationship forward. Be in no doubt, as I am sure the Deputy is aware, our most important political and economic relationship is with the United Kingdom, and the Council of Ministers is absolutely committed to building and improving upon that relationship, and that is why we have spoken, and will continue to visit the United Kingdom to explain to parliamentarians and the U.K. Government what Jersey does, what it has to offer, how it meets international standards. To that end, I am supportive of us setting up a London office, and I hope that we will be able to bring proposals in due course to do that. We must strengthen that relationship because it is so critically important while at the same time, of course, ensuring that we are masters of our own destiny.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Sir, can we have extra time if the Minister takes so long to answer?

7.7 The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

When the Chief Minister does finally bring forward measures by which he will measure the achievements of his Ministers to deliver on the Strategic Plan, in the highly unlikely event that any of them fail to deliver [**Laughter**] how will the Chief Minister deal with that particular Minister?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

A very good question, but it is difficult to answer. We are all human so, inevitably, some initiatives of this Government will not work out in the way that we had initially intended. I think I touched upon some of these areas when I appeared before P.A.C. with regard to the power that the role of Chief Minister has, and I know that again this will be an area which is touched upon by the P.P.C. sub-panel looking at the machinery of government. Ministers are corporation sole; if I as Chief Minister feel that a Minister is not performing, without the goodwill of that Minister saying that they are going to either change their way or decide to step down because they think it was of such a great magnitude, then it is for this Assembly. We need to consider whether that is an appropriate and fit process for the Government that we want for our community. So there are no easy answers to that question, but I will be asking Ministers to perform and I will be expecting them to perform and them to act accordingly.

7.8 The Deputy of St. Martin:

I am sure the Chief Minister will have sent his best wishes to his new counterpart in Guernsey, but could he inform us whether he has had any serious discussions with the Guernsey new Chief Minister and, if so, what they were about?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Sending good wishes are serious, in my opinion. We have not spoken about an agenda for action yet, we have spoken, but I, with my Assistant Minister, Senator Routier, will be in Guernsey, starting those talks for action on Thursday. I know also that the Minister for Treasury and

Resources is intending to visit his counterpart later this week as well; we are absolutely committed to not just talking but seeing good, solid action.

[17:30]

7.9 Deputy J.H. Young:

The Strategic Plan includes 2 commitments in the actions to bring forward schemes to both generate affordable housing and for supporting first-time buyers. Could the Minister explain the arrangements he has put in place? In particular, which Minister has taken lead responsibility from the Council of Ministers and which Ministers are in support and when does he think we may likely see a report with some proposals?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I spoke earlier about a scheme that the Minister for Housing and the Minister for Treasury and Resources will be bringing forward shortly, which will indeed help first-time buyers with regard to purchasing and with regard to the problems around loan to value. Of course, there are 2 departments, or 3 depending on how we are going to use States-owned land, which have an interest in ensuring that we have affordable housing and that sites are used appropriately. That is one of the reasons why I support one of the proposals in the Housing White Paper with regard to a new strategic housing unit. We should have this centralised, we should know who is responsible and, no doubt, Ministers will discuss, argue, where that appropriately sits and within which department that appropriately sits. But as the Deputy knows, I am committed, the Minister for Housing is committed, the Minister for Treasury is committed, the Minister for Planning and Environment is committed to delivering more affordable houses to our community.

7.10 Deputy M. Tadier:

Will the Chief Minister comment now - or if not, tomorrow - when he or the rapporteur brings the latest T.I.E.A.s being signed to the House on the research of, I think, Danish academics and economists, which suggest that the more T.I.E.A.s one signs, the more inverse the correlation to the revenue that is gained by that jurisdiction's finance industry?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I have not personally read that particular article or that research, but I have read around it and I am aware that doubt has been cast upon the amounts and the particular piece of research with regard to the correlation between signing of T.I.E.A.s and deposit base and banking deposits. Therefore, I do not think it is right for me to comment, but I think enough doubt has been cast for me not to take it seriously.

7.10.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

Could I ask, in that case, that the Minister do a bit more research and find out to answer these questions, because they do have serious consequences if States Members are to vote for things which may harm our own finance industry. They should be taken with the correct information.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Will you do more research, Chief Minister?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I am not sure that I will do more research, Sir, but I would simply say this: I do not believe that the signing of T.I.E.A.s damages our community or our industry; I think it continues to show that we are committed to the best international standards and that is a commitment which we will continue to live up to.

The Deputy Bailiff:

I know there are other Members wanting to ask questions, but I regret the 15 minutes has now come to an end. There is left over the statement that the Minister for Social Security was going to make. I am not sure whether Members would like to take that tomorrow morning or to adjourn at this stage? Does somebody wish to propose the adjournment?

Deputy G.P. Southern:

I propose the adjournment, Sir.

The Deputy Bailiff:

The adjournment is proposed. The States will now adjourn until 9.30 a.m. tomorrow morning.