

2018.10.09

6 Deputy T. Pointon of St. John of the Chief Minister regarding the availability of parking and the ease of accessibility at the La Motte Street location for a single access point to front-of-house services: [OQ.142/2018]

Was an analysis of available parking and ease of accessibility conducted before the La Motte Street location was chosen as a single access point for Islanders who need to make personal contact with front-of-house services such as Social Security and the Taxes Office; and if such a study was conducted, what were the results?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré (The Chief Minister):

To be fair, I had similar views when I was first briefed on the La Motte plan, but there are several aspects to the issue being raised. Firstly, it was considered in the overall context as part of the plans but there was no specific analysis done, as I understand it. The main reason there was no specific analysis is because Social Security at the moment has the highest footfall of any of the States departments that are front-facing. They receive around 100,000 visits a year already. Therefore it was a logical extension that that should be the location for this initiative. To date, there has been no negative feedback this year about the location. I am informed there has been a survey of about 1,200 people who have used the service, and 93 per cent of them rated it as good or excellent. The other comment I would make is that although ... as I say, I also expressed similar reservations, the point was made that obviously we do have parking in the vicinity. We have Green Street, we have Snow Hill, we do have some disabled parking and obviously we will have Ann Court. For example, relative to Cyril Le Marquand, that is better. Not ideal but it is important about bringing the services together under one roof, which is about making things easier for people who use our services. I think the main thing is we will monitor it. We will respond as necessary and obviously it will be through the good officers of D.f.I. (Department for Infrastructure) as to whether we can make any improvements, if they are deemed necessary.

3.6.1 Deputy T. Pointon:

Would the Chief Minister accept that the majority of people utilising that centre at present will be younger people, that most of the car parking in the area is in fact commuter car parking and is not available to people visiting from the Parishes during the day? The most accessible car park in town currently is Sand Street, and it is a fair distance from Sand Street to La Motte Street, especially for people who are elderly and may well have some level of disability. Would he consider putting some form of transport from car parks on the distant side of town to La Motte Street?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I think a specific link between Sand Street and La Motte Street for the moment would not be realistic, however obviously Snow Hill is shopper parking, it is not commuter parking. There are some disabled spaces in the vicinity as well. I would certainly be open but it is a matter for the Minister for Infrastructure seeing if there could be some short drop-off parking spaces in the vicinity. I think let us see how the matter progresses and whether there is a need or not.

3.6.2 The Connétable of St. Helier:

I presume that if the one-stop shop happened in St. John then the department concerned would have visited the Constable and the Parish Roads Committee to discuss it. Could the Chief Minister explain why the Parish of St. Helier has had so little involvement with this scheme? If we had known about it we might have suggested something imaginative like Deputy Southern's hoppa bus coming down from a largely empty Pier Road car park.

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I am probably going to regret saying this but I am probably sympathetic to Deputy Southern's hoppla bus principle, but we have just always got to find the money for it. I go back to the point that the Social Security building receives the biggest footfall of people coming into States services already and that was the logic for doing it. I think it is an incentive or initiative that should be welcomed because it is about organisational change. If there are improvements to be made let us assess it in 3 to 6 months' time and see what improvements we can make.

3.6.3 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Could the Minister answer my question which was about the ... perhaps I was being a little bit indirect but does he not think that this kind of proposal in any Parish should involve consultation with the Constable and the Roads Committee?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I am all for consultation. Absolutely. I will take this point for future things and make sure the Connétables are consulted. I shall pass that message on. When I say it is an internal organisational matter, it in theory is not going to have that much change on roads traffic because, as I said, the Social Security Department in the La Motte Street building is already used by a lot of people. So it will be swings and roundabouts. But the point is taken and I shall make sure that for significant changes that the appropriate consultation does take place.

3.6.4 Deputy R. Labey:

I must record that the front line staff at the Tax Office, when I have been there for help with my tax return, have been always universally excellent, and so too the staff at Social Security when I have gone with constituents. It is extremely busy there and always very, very helpful and try their best. Is this going to be one queue? Are you going to take your ticket, as you do at the charcuterie counter, and wait alongside Social Security and Taxes or will they be separate? You will go into the same building but it will be a separate department?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I agree with the sentiments of the Deputy on the combining of centres of excellence and also, more importantly, the comments he makes about the staff, in particular at Social Security and Income Tax, but also that applies elsewhere as well. I am not sighted directly on the queuing system. I have been informed by people who have experience that the queuing system is good. But I shall endeavour to find out the details.

3.6.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Chief Minister release the survey from which he has plucked this 93 per cent satisfaction rating and, in particular, highlight any issues on the survey to do with acceptability or parking to get to the particular centre?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Just to clarify, I did not say the survey related to parking. I said it related to the overall service is excellent or good. I have probably walked into the trap that the Deputy often accuses us, which is not looking at the data behind the survey, which is unusual for me, but the volume of stuff that comes through I might be excused on this occasion, but, yes, I shall endeavour to get the survey to the Deputy. I would point out that I suspect the Deputy already has access to the survey, as he is Assistant Minister for Social Security.

3.6.6 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Prior to the election, talking to people from St. Mary, they said that if they want to go to Social Security they have to allow 3 to 4 hours and take up a whole morning. During the election there was talk of a Flying Squad of specialised officers using the Parish Halls on a regular basis for people to call in on Social Security matters - it could easily be extended to tax and other matters - so why are we suddenly centralising this? What has happened to the Flying Squad?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

The Senator's memory is far better than mine on the existence of a Flying Squad. I do not recall that one in the Senatorial hustings, however this is obviously about making better services for ... it is taking the existing structure and making it more efficient, is the principle. In other words, it is meant to be easier for the existing ... when I say "the existing users", the ones who will automatically come into departments. If we are going to introduce an additional service, which is there is an intention to work more closely with the Parishes and to go out, if that is part of that work, then let us include that under the Government plans that are being developed and will be lodged in June of next year.

3.6.7 Deputy T. Pointon:

Does the Chief Minister accept that the sum total of the effect upon distant parishioners will be that they will be inconvenienced? The set-up here is really for the convenience of the organisation rather than the users.

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Unfortunately I do not. There is this issue around ... it ties-in to the comments previously around how we deal with people who do not have online access, for example. Part of the whole transformation is about it is meant to be one location to go to, so you do not want people wanting to drop items in or speak to people, do not have to work out which building they go to for which service. They can go to one place. In theory, that should be easier. Obviously, for those who have access to I.T. (information technology) the intention is that there will be more things made available online. I heard something on the radio this morning which is saying how that is changing, but that does not yet address the people, as we have discussed, who do not have access to online services. However, the intention is to make it easier for people using our services, they only have to go to one place rather than scattered around town. I am afraid I disagree with the Deputy on that one.

The Bailiff:

For those disappointed, can I point out the Chief Minister is up for questions without notice so remember your questions for later on.