

3. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Minister for Economic Development

The Bailiff:

Now we come to questions to Ministers without notice. The first question period is of the Minister for Economic Development and I invite questions.

Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

I am sorry, Sir, the Economic Development Minister did offer to make his statement prior to the questioning. I wondered if it would not be helpful for us to hear his statement prior to the open questions?

The Bailiff:

I did consider that with the Minister, Deputy, but it seems to me that Standing Orders provide for Questions Without Notice to precede statements. Members will have the opportunity to question the Minister after he has made his statement, in any event. Members, in fact, have a double whammy. [Laughter] I saw Deputy Lewis.

3.1 Deputy K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour:

As recommended by the Minister for Home Affairs, and with your permission, Sir, I would like to ask the Minister for Economic Affairs the same question. Following the announcement that the incidents of admission of underage drinkers to the Accident and Emergency Unit at the General Hospital has increased substantially in recent times, is the Minister taking any steps to increase the penalties for selling or providing alcohol to juveniles and if not, why not?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf (The Minister for Economic Development):

This is a complex issue and it is something which I share responsibility, as I understand it, with the Trading Standards Department, and indeed, the police authority with the Minister for Home Affairs. What I can tell the Deputy is that I have been giving close attention to the funding arrangements for Trading Standards and have agreed in principle to agree to increase the funding arrangements for Trading Standards, which, in my view, has not been sufficiently resourced to deal with some of the important work that they have been doing. What I have done is exchange notes with the Minister over the last few minutes on this issue. I am happy to engage with colleagues from Trading Standards and the other relevant authorities and report back to the Deputy on what we can do. What I can say is we are increasing the resources available to Trading Standards.

3.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I shall ask the question that was not answered last time; not addressed last time at all. In what timescale can the J.C.R.A. act over potential price rises in postage on the Island, and in the event that permission for postage rises is not given or mitigated in some way, what contingency plans is he aware of in Jersey Post to cope with the subsequent loss in revenue?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The Deputy will know that the J.C.R.A. are now the Regulator of postal price and stamps. It is the Regulator immediately that any increases will be subject to, as I understand it, which was a law passed by this Assembly for the J.C.R.A. The matter of the consequences of the J.C.R.A. accepting or otherwise the financial consequences of a decision not to allow an increase in post

will be an issue that will need to be discussed with the Treasury and Resources Minister. The J.C.R.A. also has to continue to make decisions which allow Jersey Post to fund its operation. That is in the Telecoms Law and it is in the Postal Law.

3.3 Deputy J.J. Huet of St. Helier:

Would the Minister confirm if the J.C.R.A. looks into all complaints it receives and what precautionary measures there are in place against vexatious complaints that have the potential of costing the taxpayer thousands of pounds?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I am not particularly necessarily aware - save with one particular example - of a vexatious potential complaint about the J.C.R.A. The J.C.R.A. is an independent organisation. It has been set up as an independent quasi-judicial authority, so I am not the one making the decisions and I do not necessarily know, and it is inappropriate for the Minister to know exactly what is available. I imagine that it is the standard rules of the Royal Court that deal with the issues of vexatious complainants, et cetera. If the Deputy would like - in the precincts of this Assembly - to draw my attention to any particular issues, I am happy to take them up to the extent that I am able to with the J.C.R.A. There is a third party right of appeal in the J.C.R.A. Law that anybody that is aggrieved by an abuse of dominant position can make a representation to them and they must act on it.

3.4 Senator B.E. Shenton:

The Minister will be aware that his accounting officer is responsible for, I quote: "Avoidance of waste and extravagance and must ensure the running of the department is efficient, effective and offers value for money." Did the accounting officer raise any concerns over the Battle of Flowers additional £45,000 payment, and if so, did he put these concerns in writing?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The issue of the exact arrangements of the decision-making, et cetera of the Battle of Flowers payment have been the subject of a Control and Auditor General review. Also the Chief Minister has asked, as I understand it, the Internal Audit Department to carry out a review of exactly who did what when. I have to say that I enjoy excellent communications with my Chief Officer and department. I have absolute confidence in their ability to advise me. At the end of the day, recommendations will be made to me and I will make a balanced decision based upon all the advice that I have. In relation to the Battle of Flowers, I have accepted all of the findings of the Control and Auditor General audit report. Moreover, I am delighted to hear that the Association has done so too.

3.5 Deputy C.H. Egré of St. Peter:

Now that we have been made aware that the incorporation of the airport is no longer on the current agenda, would the Minister advise this Assembly on the incorporation of the harbour and the timescale in which this might occur?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I have delegated the responsibility of both the airport and harbour matters to Deputy Maclean. We have engaged and are engaging together in a great deal of work in relation to both of those 2 trading areas. I can confirm that the issue of the airport - which is going to be a subject in the statement made by the Assistant Minister - is off the agenda. I am not prepared today to make

any further comments in relation to harbours. Harbours is the subject of ongoing reviews - ongoing incorporation within the overall economic development plan - to ensure that everybody within E.D. (Economic Development) is singing off the same hymn sheet. I have really nothing further to add. There is no change in policy from that which the Deputy is already aware.

3.6 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I refer back to the point brought up by Deputy Lewis regarding the sale of alcohol to the under-18s. My concern, Sir, is stimulated by our normal police meeting held last night, where members of the honorary police questioned the ability of under 18s to purchase alcohol in the supermarkets. The situation at present is that sometimes staff on the supermarket checkout are really pretty well unqualified when it comes to this. If the manager is not present, alcohol can whiz through these checkouts terribly easily. I question, Sir, whether we ought to consider whether this is an appropriate way to continue to sell alcohol and whether we should perhaps direct alcohol sales through the off-licence system, possibly by suggesting to supermarkets they have a properly supervised off-licence section within their shops. Clearly this present situation cannot continue, Sir, and I would like the Minister to address it for me.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The issue has been raised in this Assembly. I will undertake to work with the Minister for Home Affairs to review this issue and come forward with any recommendations changing from that review. I understand the concerns.

3.7 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Is the Minister aware that 2 consecutive editions of *Classic and Sportscar* for August and September 2006 have highlighted the Festival of Motoring held in Jersey, giving us tremendously good press? *This Island Race* is the title of the September edition, where it describes the Festival as one of the best-kept secrets in the Classic world. I am disappointed to see from written answers today that the grant to the Festival of Motoring appears to have dropped for the current year from £6,000 in 2005 to £4,000 this year. Would the Minister agree with me that this is really a premier attraction for the Island, which needs his support and plenty of support for next year's Festival?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Indeed, I am aware of it. I had a load of correspondence dropped off by the organisers of the event yesterday. I am extremely pleased and I congratulate them on bringing excellent coverage to the Island. Indeed, we are getting some quite good press at the moment in relation to forts, follies and towers in relation to a whole number of issues; all, might I say, designed with this attempt to re-look at tourism and to revitalise the sector. The Constable is quite right to say that last year the previous Committee cut the grant. I am looking at the whole event-led tourism grant. I am looking at this event. I am happy to report back to the Assembly when conclusions have been made about this event. Clearly, it does attract tourists to the Island, which is a good thing.

3.7.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Obviously the organisers need to place advertisements to get the festival in June on the road, if you excuse the pun. I would just like to press the Minister when he hopes to make a decision about funding.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I received a package of information on the issue yesterday. I will make a decision with the appropriate modalities of proper advice by my accounting officer and department as soon as I possibly can in the next few days.

3.8 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

We seem to receive confusing messages about the post office and its revenue over a series of question sessions. Could the Minister, Sir, outline what cross-subsidisation is occurring in the post office, because although he passes the buck - so to speak - to the J.C.R.A., the point is his fulfilment policy has a major impact on their revenues. Is there cross-subsidisation going on in the post office and are we in the slightly ironical position where the domestic mail user is having to subsidise the fulfilment industry?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

This Assembly has set up a proper, organised, regulatory authority, which separates out the issue of regulator, shareholder and operator. For the first time, we are going to be able to get a proper and impartial assessment of Jersey Post. I was hopelessly conflicted as operator and regulator. I am absolutely happy and confident that the J.C.R.A.'s efficiency review is going to deal with all of these issues. I do not probably need to take this Assembly's time up on repeating my own views about cross-subsidisation, et cetera.

3.8.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

With respect, Sir, the question has not been answered. Would the Minister identify whether his fulfilment policy is having an impact directly or otherwise on domestic postal rates?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The Deputy has asked this question in relation to the Jersey Post incorporation debate in relation to numerous issues. I think he has been told. I see the former President of the Postal Committee getting probably as confused as I am about why he keeps on asking the question. The question is: "Is the fulfilment industry on-line retailing good for Jersey?" and it has been good for Jersey Post.

3.9 Senator L. Norman:

I wonder if the Minister could advise what progress he has made in the last 10 months in implementing the fisheries agreement made between the States of Jersey and the States of Guernsey in August 2004?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Fisheries is the domain currently officially of the Minister for Planning and Environment. There is an agreement with the Chief Minister that the formal responsibility of this passes to me. I have had numerous meetings with Guernsey. My last letter I think dated 23rd September - to the Guernsey authorities is awaiting a reply from them. I am awaiting effectively replies in an attempt to resolve the issue, which I hope to resolve in a manner which is acceptable to both Island jurisdictions. We have the prospect of the Fisherman's Association locally being at the Privy Council, and something which I would want to avoid if at all possible.

3.10 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

The Minister has had a particularly difficult period recently and I do sympathise with him over flowers, flights and fulfilment. **[Laughter]** However, on the latter, I would like to ask the Minister quite seriously, in regards to the language that has been used in the United Kingdom recently by the Treasury Officer, Dawn Primarolo; does the Minister anticipate informing or educating the government in a more understanding light than they currently seem to have a grasp of the situation for Jersey? The language which has been used recently in the United Kingdom, with all due respect to the presence of His Excellency, does Jersey's reputation no good whatsoever. Although these issues may provide light entertainment for people who are interested in politics and issues of the day, the serious impact upon Jersey should this have an effect of affecting the W.C.C.s (Whole Chain Companies) will be significant. The unemployment of...

The Bailiff:

The point is?

Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

The point is, Sir, what steps is the Minister taking with the Chief Minister to put Jersey's position across, so that they seem to have a better understanding than they currently do?

The Bailiff:

Before the Minister answers that question, may I just say from the Chair that His Excellency is not a representative of the U.K. Government, and he would not be in the slightest bit embarrassed by this question.

Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

I am not feeling 100 per cent today, Sir. I do apologise if I said something untoward.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

There will be an opportunity for 10 minutes questioning on the statement so I am going to be very brief, but I would say to Deputy Le Claire I am grateful for his worry about my own position. Can I say the E.D. is a lot easier than Environment and Public Services ever was over 2 years. It is an important issue and one which I am going to be discussing with the Chief Minister in the next few days, about how we can bring to the attention of the U.K. Government the actions that I have taken in order to protect and enhance the reputation of the Island. I am happy to answer further questions on the statement.

The Bailiff:

According to my watch we have 30 seconds left. Senator Perchard?

3.11 Senator J.L. Perchard:

I will be very quick. In an answer to a written question regarding the delayed Flybe flight on Saturday, 28th October, the Minister - who I know is keen to cut costs where he can - informs Members that the total cost of keeping the airport open and fully operational was a mere £620. Will he inform Members as to how this figure was arrived at?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

This is the full cost of the cost of keeping staff, which is a full hour basis in relation to the staff that are necessary to keep the airport open. It is an absolute at the additional cost and it has been passed on to the promoters of the event at Fort Regent. I take this opportunity of recognising Flybe for the decision that they took - a finely balanced one and a difficult one - but also to apologise to the passengers, who I had no idea at the time were going to be inconvenienced to the extent that they were.