

3.2 Deputy R. Labey of St. Helier of the Chief Minister regarding the cost of engaging Ramsay Jones in respect of public relations advice and training relating to the Independent Jersey Care Inquiry's findings: [1(265)]

Further to his answer to my written question of 18th April 2017, will the Chief Minister advise whether the £33,500 spent on consultancy in preparation for the release of the Independent Jersey Care Inquiry's findings included any expenditure on engaging Ramsay Jones? If not, what was the cost of engaging him and what is the total anticipated spend for all such P.R. (public relations) advice and training relating to this issue?

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

The cost of engaging Mr. Jones was not included in the contract with Portland. Mr. Jones covered his own travel, accommodation and living expenses from his fee of £18,000. No further training or advice will be required before the publication of the inquiry report. If, however, specialist advice is needed post-publication, I undertake to keep this Assembly informed.

3.2.1 Deputy R. Labey:

The Chief Minister, ironically, has said that part of this advice and media training is to assist Ministers in being fully open and informative, so one is bound to ask: why on earth was this information concealed in the original answer to my original written question?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

It was not concealed. The Deputy asked about Portland. There was already a response to a media outlet that was being issued at the same time that we were drafting the answer to questions; I am not sure if it was written, or oral. I am quite clear and always have been clear that these pieces of information would be placed into the public domain and I am content to do so today and answer any further questions.

3.2.2 Deputy T.A. Vallois of St. John:

Does the Chief Minister believe it is appropriate to use departmental budgets on what is, effectively, States Members' training?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

It is far more than training for Ministers, who will be required at very short notice to answer questions on the publication of the public inquiry. I think, in this instance, it was appropriate. Members will know that I was asked questions about media training at the end of last year and at that point I confirmed that I, myself, who was under accusation, had not received such training. For such an important publication as this, I think it is appropriate that Ministers are as well prepared as they can be for the publication of this report.

3.2.3 The Deputy of St. John:

Does the Chief Minister not concede that it would be putting a chief officer in an extremely difficult position to be accountable for spending money on a Minister's training?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

No, I do not think so. This is a theme that may be returned to later in this States sitting about training for all Members of this Assembly, particularly, perhaps, those who are new to an executive function, to ensure that they understand the legal requirements placed upon them, to ensure that they understand what their delegated responsibilities are, to better perform on behalf of this Assembly, which asks them and elects them to those posts and, ultimately, to better perform on behalf of the public.

3.2.4 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

Would the Minister clarify when he received this training, if you like, or consultancy for want of a better word?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I have visited Portland's offices on 2 occasions: one prior to the Easter holidays and one maybe 6 weeks in advance of that, so February and March time.

3.2.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

Just for clarification, would this training have been received before 14th February this year?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I do not have the dates in front of me but, no, that would seem to be earlier than the date that I attended Portland's offices.

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

Does the Chief Minister believe that he, and his officers, have met the highest standards of transparency in responding to this particular issue?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

This is the most transparent Government that this Island has ever seen. We have the Freedom of Information legislation. Members opposite may laugh about that fact. In our community, emails between Ministers are put into the public domain. I am not aware of anywhere else, or any other government, or jurisdiction, that places that openness, that transparency, upon the Executive.

3.2.7 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I am impressed, if I may say so, by the Chief Minister's volume. I am not impressed by the content and we will see when we debate my proposition on receiving proper answers to questions, some time later in this session, whether we are as transparent as he would like to believe that we are.

The Bailiff:

Maybe proper questions, Deputy.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Chief Minister not loudly agree?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I do not agree. I know that Members like to think that there is something secretive about Government. There is not. Ministers should, rightly, be able to discuss all policy options before bringing them forward. In Jersey, because of the broadness of our Freedom of Information legislation, we are aware that even as we are doing so, if we do so via email exchange, those emails can be placed into the public domain. I think that most Members, looking at the broadness of that legislation, would question whether it is appropriate.

3.2.8 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier:

Could the Chief Minister just confirm for the record that the work undertaken in this exercise has only related to issues surrounding the care inquiry and not anything else as well?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

When it comes to Portland in this instance ... although Members will be aware, because, again, I put this information into the public domain, Portland in the past have been used for support and advice on other areas, particularly attending party conferences and relationships with the U.K., but in this particular case it was entirely to do with the public inquiry. With regards to Mr. Jones, part of it was to do with the public inquiry, part of it was with regard to advice about Brexit and, thirdly, part of it was considering how we structure our Communications Unit in Jersey and offering advice in that regard.

3.2.9 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Seeing as this issue has now become something in the public interest, would he be prepared to publish the full details of what this expenditure has gone on and what areas have been covered in it?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I have just done so.

3.2.10 Deputy R. Labey:

Would the Chief Minister accept some free P.R. advice, in that his officers may have thought they had found a neat way to avoid answering the question in full; but, in fact, what followed was the drip, drip, drip of revelations, which, in P.R. terms, is a disaster? Once a matter is raised, the best thing to do is to get everything out in the open all at once. One has to ask whether one is getting value for money for this £50,000?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I am always willing to take free advice and to listen to it carefully. It sometimes feels like I have 49 Members, or 48 Members, in this Assembly, who are only too willing to give me free advice. Sometimes, it feels like I have 100,000 people, who would like to give me free advice and I am only too willing to listen and act upon advice that, I think, is in the best interests of Jersey and her citizens.