



Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel

Quarterly Hearing

Witness: The Chief Minister

Friday, 24th February 2023

Panel:

Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier South (Chair)

Deputy M.B. Andrews of St. Helier North (Vice-Chair)

Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier Central

Witnesses:

Deputy K.L. Moore of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter, The Chief Minister

Connétable A.N. Jehan of St. John, Assistant Chief Minister 1

Deputy A. Curtis of St. Clement, Assistant Chief Minister 2

Ms. H. Cunningham, Group Director, Finance, Business Partnering and Analytics

[11:30]

Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier South (Chair):

To members of the public who are here and for anyone who is tuning in online for this Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel quarterly public hearing with the Chief Minister, for the purposes of the transcript we will just go around the table to introduce ourselves. I am Deputy Sam Mézec, the Chair of the Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel.

Deputy M.B. Andrews of St. Helier North:

I am Vice-Chair, Deputy Max Andrews.

Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier Central:

Deputy Rob Ward, a member of the panel.

The Chief Minister:

Deputy Kristina Moore, Chief Minister.

Assistant Chief Minister 1:

Andy Jehan, Constable of St. John, Vice-Chair of the States Employment Board.

Assistant Chief Minister 2:

Deputy Alex Curtis, Assistant Chief Minister with responsibility for digital.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Thank you, and there are some officers present who may be called upon to provide detail in response to certain questions as and when that is appropriate, if they could introduce themselves at the start of speaking for the benefit of the transcript as well. We have got an hour and a half for this hearing. Before we kick off, Chief Minister, could I just ask you to confirm that you have read the Scrutiny Panel witness statement and understand its contents?

The Chief Minister:

We are familiar with it, thank you.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Indeed. You probably helped write it, to be fair, in a previous role. Thank you very much. The first set of questions we were going to ask relate to the ministerial plans and priorities. Since those were published there has been a change, which is the location now of the financial services portfolio, so could you please start by explaining the rationale for why that portfolio should now sit within the Chief Minister's remit?

The Chief Minister:

It is really returning to the Chief Minister's remit, where it was previously, and I think at this time it is a good place for it to be. It cuts across a very important time for the financial services sector, in particular with the MONEYVAL process this year, and also it sits well with my concurrent responsibilities along with External Relations and that takes us to our international relations and how our financial services industry reaches around the globe.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

When you took office as Chief Minister your initial plan was that that portfolio would sit with the Minister for Treasury, so we might call that plan A. This appears to be plan C. Why did you choose to create this iteration for that portfolio rather than revert back to what had been your original position when you took office?

The Chief Minister:

Now having had time to reflect on the various roles I see very much that there is a team approach required here. This important part of our economy obviously reads over to the Economic Development portfolio as well as my own and that of others and so I felt that we have a wide range of experience in the Council of Ministers. Deputy Elaine Millar really has that experience to be the lead person and so I wanted to create a strong team that can well represent the industry and look to the future.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Will this be permanent?

The Chief Minister:

I think we have had enough change and now what we need to establish is stability, because stability is one of the unique selling points of Jersey. It is something that we all should rightly be proud of and so now we need to just get on with the job in hand.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

It is unusual for responsibility for one portfolio area to be spread out over so many Members. Some might say it more closely resembles the old committee system rather than the ministerial system. Could you explain to us where you see the line of accountability for this portfolio going and if Members or even members of the public wish to conduct an interrogation on this portfolio where would be the go-to point?

The Chief Minister:

Deputy Millar is obviously the lead in this area now and then there is the group approach alongside myself and obviously ultimately that line does come into the Chief Minister's office.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

With the exception of the MONEYVAL review, which everybody is aware of the utmost importance of that, so with the exception of that, what do you see as the key challenges and key focus for your office now that this falls within your responsibilities?

The Chief Minister:

There is a lot to do in this area and obviously that is identified in the ministerial plan and the delivery plan. That work is all still underway and will be the full front of our attention. We do hope that we will deliver greater synergies in some of that work and, for example, the potential for bringing together the Fiscal Policy Panel with what was the shadow financial stability board and therefore

strengthening external input and oversight into developing financial services and receiving advice and input.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

A large part of that answer was focused on what happens in government to manage that portfolio, but in terms of the role that financial services plays in Island life and our economy and prosperity, what do you see as the main challenges and your priorities for what you would hope this iteration of responsibility for that portfolio will deliver?

The Chief Minister:

It is about maintaining high standards of regulation, which we are well known for, and that is identified in many global standards. It is also ensuring that our legislation remains up to date. We have seen recently pieces of legislation come before the Assembly and the L.L.C. (limited liability companies) has been a big step forward. It is offering the right environment with which businesses can locate themselves in Jersey and strengthen their business and broaden their business, which of course has a benefit to our Island economy. We are really pleased to see that happening and people choosing Jersey as their jurisdiction of choice. Then there are also the standards in the changing environment that the O.E.C.D. (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) G.I.o.B.E. (Global Anti-Base Erosion Rules) requirements are setting and how we meet that, which is about international tax, and of course very important for ourselves and other jurisdictions.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I am going to test you on 2 figures here and ask you where you would like to see that move forward. Do you know around how many people the financial services industry employs in Jersey and where would you like to see that go?

The Chief Minister:

Currently they are the major employer, the financial services industry. We have a working population of about 56,000 to 60,000 people and the financial services sector takes up about half of that working population would be where I am on that figure. Obviously as we move into an era of greater automation I would not anticipate a huge increase in the number of physical working people in that area, but of course we can all use technological advances to better deliver productivity and to move forward and respond to this changing digital era. Of course Jersey is really well placed for doing that because we have the fibre network and we are one of the best connected jurisdictions in terms of digital in the world.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Last one from me. You mentioned productivity there, and again a test question to start, do you know what portion of Jersey's G.V.A. (Gross Value Added) is made up by financial services? With automation and what you have just said about not seeing massive increases in the number of staff employed by that sector, where would you like to see that go in your term of office?

The Chief Minister:

It is a large part of our G.V.A. and that of course is something that we want to continue because we want to see a strong financial services sector and we want that to continue into the future. Of course, in saying that, we have talked about funds and different areas of business and I know that the Minister for Economic Development also wants to see some other areas of our Island economy thrive. If we look at tourism, for example, which everybody in the Island is very fond of our hospitality offer and we all feel that we can do more to strengthen that and to encourage many people from around the world to come and enjoy our hospitality here in Jersey, so it would be nice to see areas such as that. Of course I am sitting here next to the Assistant Minister with responsibilities in the digital area. Of course we all see that as a growing area and an area for opportunity.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Thank you. Do either of you have anything to follow?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I am just interested in this use of team approach and a group approach to this role. What is the approach to decision making? Is that led by one Minister and then the other 2 are consulted?

The Chief Minister:

We are very clear that Deputy Millar has a lead role, but the reason for a group approach is that sometimes several heads are better than one. We all can bring our respective approach from our different areas of responsibility and our different levels of experience to ensure that we make the right decisions and deliver the best way forward.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

That brings pressures from other areas and sort of interest in areas of no remit beyond that, so do you have a mechanism for this agreement as well? I have found it is very important when you have a group of people.

The Chief Minister:

I think we are all a collaborative group of people who are able to conduct themselves in a supportive way, but to listen, to debate and to drive the right decision collaboratively.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Very lastly, you have what you describe as a Minister for Sport and a Minister for Energy and Climate Change. Will Deputy Millar be referred to as the Minister for Financial Services then?

The Chief Minister:

This is something that we are talking to P.P.C. (Privileges and Procedures Committee) about and we need to continue that conversation because I made it very clear when I put myself forward for this role that I would like Assistant Ministers to have their delegated responsibilities reflected in their titles, because I think that is clearer and easier for people to understand and easier for people to go out and engage with others on the international stage, which of course many Assistant Ministers do for us. That is something that the Assembly did not seem to feel as comfortable with as I had hoped and so I think that is a conversation ...

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I think the Assembly would want to see on paper what the rules are rather than that kind of thing being decided in press releases, for there to be a set of rules to go down which hopefully would be flexible and easy to use to enable the clarity that you are proposing. Do you have any idea of if we might propose rule changes to enable that?

The Chief Minister:

That is something, as I have said, that is ongoing with P.P.C.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Okay, thank you. This is the third time I have said lastly, but it is lastly now. We did write to you asking when the ministerial plan documents would be updated to reflect that change in portfolio and we have not had a response yet. Do you know when that will happen?

The Chief Minister:

I was just told about that letter as I was walking out of the door and we will be getting back to you as soon as we can to tidy up, because obviously these documents are relatively recently published. It is a useful suggestion and of course we would be happy to do that.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Thank you.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I was going to say something but you have said “lastly” 3 times. It is just when somebody is called a Minister there is something very specific, which is that a Minister is a corporate soul, there is a

legal responsibility that comes with the title of Minister. That needs to be addressed because in the end that is a very significant point for the Assembly. I just want to raise that point. That is where I think the issues for the Assembly are that need to be made clear.

The Chief Minister:

Yes, I think that is a very important point and we should reflect that in our discussions with P.P.C.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Okay, Deputy Ward, you had some questions.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Yes. Can I ask you some questions on the Common Population Policy? Can you provide an update on the development of the Common Population Policy?

The Chief Minister:

We have committed to delivering it in June and so that process is underway. It sits with Deputy Stephenson - who unfortunately is not here today, so I apologise for that - but obviously we also have the Population and Skills Group, who are doing a lot of work in this area in considering where we are at and where we want to go. It will be an annual report that will be produced to the Assembly in June.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

So you are still aiming for June 2023 for it to be presented. I was going to ask you about what the ministerial group, this Population and Skills Group, are currently looking at. Are there any specific areas that are being looked at with regards to the Common Population Policy that we can ask you of?

[11:45]

The Chief Minister:

We have been looking at a wide range of areas. Control of Housing and Work Law is something that is always a matter of interest and I think you have been made aware that there have been some tweaks that we have made to help particular sectors, for example, the care sector, where we have enabled care workers to access unqualified accommodation. More recently I have taken a decision to allow partners of people who come to the Island under licence to have the same access as married partners would have, because we recognise that that sometimes causes blockages and frustrations for people who come to the Island as an unmarried partner and find that they do not have the same employment opportunities as they might have hoped in other jurisdictions.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

We are heading that way so it leads nicely into the next bit about what you hope to achieve through the Common Population Policy and how the priorities for those will be identified.

The Chief Minister:

I have referred already to automation and this digital revolution really that we are in the midst of at the moment. Where we are is finding that balance between ensuring that we have the accommodation, the facilities and the infrastructure for our population to support them and how we can define who and how and when we need additional people to come in and support our economy generally, and also of course our services.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

To address those issues it is going to be important to collect accurate and one might say timely statistics on population trends. What is happening to collect those statistics now?

The Chief Minister:

We have made some additional investment in statistics and I think we have seen the benefits of that this week with the gender pay gap information being published, which would not have happened without that additional investment. Also across the piece the government machine itself is moving to greater use of information services.

Assistant Chief Minister 2:

The Chief Statistician is working alongside Modernisation and Digital on how we better perform data linkage, which will allow Statistics Jersey to better function across data within government. Now, some systems that are key to population data such as the Social Security system are due for upgrade and replacement, as you may be aware of the transform project. What will be key - and I know, I have spoken to Deputy Stephenson on this - is making sure that the requirements for gathering and capturing, about appropriate data access and functionality for Statistics Jersey and the policy to be able to perform their function is included within that. But there is ongoing work on the better linkage of data that the Chief Statistician is working on.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

So there is work on collecting data, there is work on accuracy and linking that information; that is great. What about the principles behind what that Common Population Policy will do once you have got all the information? Where are the drivers behind it - if you like, the political drivers - which are equally as important, I think, in terms of where we are going as an Island?

The Chief Minister:

Very much so, and I think I outlined some of those earlier in terms of finding that balance. We have scarce resources, we have infrastructure pressures and therefore we have to balance that against our economic and our service needs when we are considering the number of people that we can sustain in the Island.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Is the current population policy in place?

The Chief Minister:

I think the previous government had one and so that will be ...

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Did it?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

That was the question.

The Chief Minister:

We are just looking forwards and looking forward to identifying our own population policy in June.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

You will be able to identify that difference from the current policy clearly? Because I think that is the really key point that people want to see, there is a population policy of some form. Do you know how this will differ and which of those parts of the current population policy - which whether you put it in place or not, you are in charge of - are going to be different from what we are developing now?

The Chief Minister:

So the current levers really are still the Control of Housing and Work Law, are they not? That is how it has always been driven. So there is the opportunity to move forward with the changes that the previous Assembly did agree, which was to allow a more nimble approach to adapting those levers. I think that is probably the path that we will go down so that we can be more responsive to the needs both of the community and, as I have already said, balancing what we can deliver in terms of housing supply and infrastructure.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Change of subject here on to the 2(1)(e) policy review. Could you give us an update on where that currently stands?

The Chief Minister:

That is in its final moments. We have had some interesting conversations with a good number of people and received a number of submissions from stakeholders as well. I think it is really important that we make it clear at every opportunity that what we are doing is not looking back and retrospectively changing the agreements that people have who are here. The only thing that has changed in that area is obviously the version 4, which was always subject to inflationary change in terms of the sum that people were required to pay as their tax, and that of course we did in the Government Plan. So version 5 will be a new modified version and we are well underway in terms of developing that.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

You referred to those conversations you have had in the meantime; who are the stakeholders you have engaged with?

The Chief Minister:

There is an interesting and wide variation of people who have interests in this area and want to have their views expressed. We are always willing to listen to anybody with a view and so perhaps ...

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Name any names? Organisations or bodies that you have proactively approached?

The Chief Minister:

So the Fiscal Strategy Group, which is part of Jersey Finance, have produced some thoughts for us which were most helpful and much appreciated. Also we have heard from accountants, we have heard from estate agents and we have heard from members of the public.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Have you?

The Chief Minister:

Yes.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

How have you advertised for members of the public to get involved?

The Chief Minister:

I think people are aware that it is a topic under some consideration and so they have taken that opportunity to engage with us.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

My concern with that answer is the ones that you have been more specific in referring to are bodies or organisations who you could quite clearly say have a vested interest in the policy as a whole. Lots of those will be businesses that provide services to these people. What are you doing to attract submissions from those who do not make any money out of the scheme, but who have perhaps an interest in the other elements of it, what impact it has on the macroeconomic picture and so on?

The Chief Minister:

I think we are most aware of the influences and the drivers that different groups may have. That is why I guess the term is broadly “stakeholders”, is it not? But of course we are, as I said, always prepared and interested to listen to various groups, but this is, as you say, a macro perspective. It is something that was discussed quite regularly during the election period and many of us have made our views quite clear in this area. Again, it comes back to balance because this is a very welcome group within our community who are very active and deliver some great benefits, particularly in the area of philanthropy. Just earlier this week I went to see the Jersey Funders Group with a fellow Minister and the Chief Executive, which was a very interesting conversation. There is of course so much that can be done through the great strength that we have.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Has this review attempted to collect the statistics to substantiate the claim that you have just made about their contribution? Because you do know that that is contested as to what degree that is true or not.

The Chief Minister:

Yes, that has been a topic of conversation.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

How has the conversation gone?

The Chief Minister:

This is something under development, but it is something that I think would really benefit the community to have a greater understanding. I know my colleagues agree with this and so we are rather of the mind that a kitemark or something that helped to identify ... not obviously who did what exactly, but how this group do contribute so widely. Much like the national lottery funding has a

kitemark, if people could see something of a kitemark that would help them to identify where charitable giving had come from this influential group, then it would be a positive thing for everybody.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

One more from me just before I open it, but we both referred to the macroeconomic impact of the policy. In this review, has the moral standing of the policy been part of the consideration?

The Chief Minister:

I think that has been part of the election process and of course everybody has a different view. We have a diverse community and we want everybody in our community to feel welcome. That is really the perspective that we take.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

That sounds like a no. It sounds like a no in terms of whether that featured in the terms of reference of the scheme or whether you have deliberately sought out those who have a perspective on the policy that is based on its moral implications - which I would hope you acknowledge that there certainly are some when people are treated differently - whether that is morally the right thing to do. People are entitled to have a view on that one way or another. Has that featured in the review as a question?

The Chief Minister:

I think using our moral judgment is an essential part of every politician's daily work and that is why people select us, really, is it not?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

But is it overtly featured in the review as a question to be considered?

The Chief Minister:

I think it is an implicit consideration more than overt.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Okay, so no is the answer to my question.

The Chief Minister:

Well, no, I think that is part of balancing up the way forward and expressing our views.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

So when this is eventually published, I presume what will happen when something is there, if I press Control F and type in the word “moral” or “morality”, is it going to come up anywhere?

The Chief Minister:

Probably not, in all honesty, Deputy, but I really do not think that that aspect of it is very helpful, to make moral judgments in that way. As I have said, we have a very diverse community, everybody is welcome and everyone contributes in different ways. We have a huge volunteering population in the Island, for example, and they all contribute fantastic ...

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

They will pay a higher effective tax rate than those who would come in through this policy and there is a moral question there as to whether some consider that appropriate or not. I think you have given a fair answer, so I am happy to move on at that point. Did you have anything to add?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

The thing that occurs to me is a simple question that perhaps should have been part of this survey, which is if people paid an appropriate amount of tax we would not be so reliant upon charity and we would not need that level of philanthropy. Is that something that has been addressed in this sort of investigation or report? Because those are the really key questions underlying this as a principle of taxation.

The Chief Minister:

It does come down to principle, does it not? I think from the very outset we have been really clear that we feel going forward that there is an opportunity for a greater contribution from a slightly smaller group of people and that is really important. We have shown that, I think, in our approach to the Government Plan, where we increased version 4's tax contribution to reflect the change in inflation in the period of that version. I think that is the right and proper thing to do because historically, without using an inflation base, people have ended up paying very low amounts of money because it was left at the point that it was when they arrived and over a period of time that defeats ...

Deputy R.J. Ward:

But that would remain for versions 1, 2 and 3 payers of that tax.

The Chief Minister:

We have made it clear that it is not right to and that is perhaps a moral argument as well, to make an agreement with people that you go back on, and I think that is very important that we make it absolutely clear that is not our intention to do.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I will leave it there.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

One of your priorities in your ministerial plan is about strengthening the relationship between the Government, States and the parishes. There was a convention in the past that the Chair of the Comité des Connétables was invited to Council of Ministers' meetings. Is that still the convention and is the invitation being taken up?

[12:00]

The Chief Minister:

It is now, yes, which we are very pleased about.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Good. It was not when I was on the Council of Ministers, which is why I ask that question, so that is good to know. It appeared at one point you were holding Council of Ministers' meetings in parish halls. Is that still happening and is there an agenda for that? I will be cheeky and ask this question: what are you doing to make that more than a gimmick in terms of not just having a meeting in a random meeting room, but meeting with parish staff and volunteers and what have you?

The Chief Minister:

Indeed. Well, just this week we went to St. Clement on Tuesday; I think it was this week. So we met with the Constable; we met with the officials working in the parish office. The Constable took the opportunity to show us around the parish hall and then at lunchtime - we did advertise in advance - members of the parish were able to come along and meet with Ministers and raise issues that they wanted to talk about. We found it a really useful session. The Constable also took some time to introduce himself formally at the table and raise a number of issues and talk about his parish in particular.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

What do you think you got out of that for perhaps food for thought for what Government can do to enhance the relationship with that parish in particular or more broadly the institutions of the parishes to assist them in doing good work?

The Chief Minister:

I think we are all believers in our strong parish system and the benefits it derives for Islanders and so the closer we can be to those parishes and the municipality the better. We can be all making

decisions and working together, so we particularly were all interested to talk about community sport teams, for example, and some of the good work that St. Clement is doing ...

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

A very good one, yes.

The Chief Minister:

... because they have always been trailblazers in that area. So it is about learning from that and helping to encourage others to follow their template.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Last one from me on this. One parish in particular, the Parish of St. Helier, has an official position of wanting a different relationship with the States and the Government and having a different legislative basis for forming its administrative structure, and that is something the Constable of St. Helier has spoken of previously. In the Government Plan debate, the Constable of St. Helier brought an amendment to, in his view, pave a way to having a municipal council structure for St. Helier and that was withdrawn on the basis of him saying he had had discussions with you that gave him confidence that a different route might be more appropriate. Can you update us on that and can you confirm if you are supportive of the principle of allowing the Parish of St. Helier to have a different structure to define its administration so that it can, on its own terms, seek to do better work as a parish?

The Chief Minister:

We probably need to restart those conversations with the Constable and of course we are keen to do so. We have held a Council of Ministers meeting in the Parish of St. Helier already - that must have been last month now - but that again was a useful session and we were really impressed with the number of parishioners who came to see us. Going back to the point of the structure, we can see that particularly for St. Helier there is lots of opportunity and we understand the driving force behind the Constable's desire and want to help him achieve that.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

That parish, as a body, wants to help achieve your priority of having a strengthened relationship with Government and the States, so they are eager to bite your hand off on that particular one. When do you anticipate you may be in a position to update us more broadly about that particular parish relationship with the Government and give us confidence that it will be strengthened in this term of office?

The Chief Minister:

I will make my best endeavours to find a slot for the Constable to come and meet with us again so that we can start moving forward.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Thank you. Anything on these?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Just the timing of those meetings. They are in the afternoon, about 2.00 p.m., and open to the public. That means that you will not get any young people that are at school or college, you will not get people who are working 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. It is about school pickup time so you are probably unlikely to get parents and their children. What demographic are you targeting there?

The Chief Minister:

That is a point that we have become immediately quite aware of and we are hoping to change the times. Obviously generally the Council of Ministers meetings start in the morning and so it had been a natural assumption that we do that, but we have quickly realised that point and so we are looking to hold those meetings in the afternoon and then open up the doors to the public and parishioners in the afternoons and evenings.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Given the Carbon Neutral Roadmap, have you looked at whether it is increasing your carbon footprint to have you all travelling around the Island?

The Chief Minister:

Many of us use electric bicycles, some of us use the bus and we can car share, so ...

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Nice to see that is being encouraged, that is all.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Okay, over to Deputy Andrews for the next line of questioning.

Deputy M.B. Andrews:

Thank you, Chair. Now, with the recent consultants use report for the period of July 2021 to June 2022 demonstrating that there was a 26 per cent increase in expenditure, from £47 million up to £59 million, what will you do to ensure that we are going to reduce the need for consultants?

Assistant Chief Minister 1:

We are working very hard in terms of reducing the amount of consultants that we employ. I think there will always be a requirement for us to employ some consultants, but we are working hard to train our own staff, develop them, and also we are looking at each application for consultants to join the organisation very closely. So I would suggest we are taking a much more commercial review on those things. We have turned down quite a number of applications for consultants and come up with suggestions on how the work can be carried out, but I think they will always be a requirement. Only this week the Chief Minister and I were in a meeting with 2 consultants who were outstanding, I would say, and I think they are going to add a lot of value to our organisation, but we are trying to reduce the amount. I have personally met with the Executive Leadership Team and explained to them how the bar has been raised. The applications that we get are far more substantial than when we first arrived in office.

Deputy M.B. Andrews:

So in terms of looking at say the previous use of consultants, what do you think you have learned from the use of those agreements that have been finalised? Moving forward, what could you maybe do to avoid those situations happening once again?

Assistant Chief Minister 1:

I think, as the Chief Minister mentioned, we are trying to look forward and where there is a contract in place we are seeing the end of those things because we do want to deliver a lot of things and therefore we do need some specialist support in areas. Each case is taken on its merits and we spend considerable time ... only this week we had to adjourn the States Employment Board meeting to look for a further date to consider the items in full rather than rushing through that process.

Deputy M.B. Andrews:

This is rather political, what we are speaking about here, but again with a public sector that is over 8,000 in headcount it is quite difficult to manage certain aspects at a micro level. How will you ensure that there is a robust procedure in place when there is a mechanism to use internal specialisation rather than having to look externally?

Assistant Chief Minister 1:

I think everybody is conscious of the cost of employing staff and the desire from us and indeed the civil service to develop our own people. If I can talk to you a little bit about, for example, the appraisals and objective settings, that has been an area of real focus for us as the States Employment Board. We will get reports every month at the States Employment Board on the progress that is being made in that area. I can tell you with great confidence that there has been a significant uplift if we compare to the same time last year as to how many people have had objectives set. That should also help people in terms of development plans because the one thing I have

discovered and my colleagues have discovered is the amount of talent that we have in our organisation. We have got some super people and we have got to find ways of tapping into that potential to help us go forward.

Deputy M.B. Andrews:

Yes, indeed. Obviously you mentioned about the States Employment Board, so what is the directive that has been set for the period of 2023?

Assistant Chief Minister 1:

We have not set targets in terms of numbers of consultants because we do have to make sure we finish some things and we have got a requirement for some processes to carry on. What we are trying to do is to convert, where, for example, in health we have been using locums into permanent employed staff. There is a big focus on that because not only does it give stability, but it should also reduce cost because we are paying premium rates for a lot of consultants when indeed we may be able to attract people. I say "may" because of the market. It is not just Jersey that is facing pressures in terms of recruitment; it is a national and a global challenge. But I think we have got a good product to sell to people coming to work on the Island and so we are working very hard with our colleagues, particularly in health, on that area.

Deputy M.B. Andrews:

Obviously you just mentioned there about locum staff. Are there any other policy areas that you are prioritising?

Assistant Chief Minister 1:

We have put a lot of effort, not necessarily just in consultants, but temporary workers. We have reviewed how we recruit people and the process and we have had some fantastic work carried out by a small team, first in education, then with social workers, and now that team is moving into health. So we are looking at improving the way we recruit anybody into our organisation, having ownership for that process from start to finish, both for the manager who needs the person, but also for our candidates. We are also managing what we call silver medallists, so where we have one vacancy but we have got more than one person who is suitable, we are looking to see if we can place that person in other similar vacancies within the organisation.

Deputy M.B. Andrews:

In terms of when we are looking at say the vacancy rates across each government department, is that remaining an issue, do you find, when you are looking at the data that is provided to you?

Assistant Chief Minister 1:

It is not going to change overnight, unfortunately, but we have had some success. We have got, for example, 33 people interested in the teacher graduate scheme. We have got 22 people who are already screened as primary school teachers to come and join the organisation as and when vacancies arise, so we are making some progress.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Deputy Ward is itching to come in on this.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

You talked about setting objectives and so on and you talked about the teacher graduate scheme. I must raise there though that that is not a short-term solution and it is incredibly labour intensive for staff that are already there because that is in-classroom training. What plans have you got to deal with that? Do you think that the support there is adequate at the moment for those in-class training and what measures have you had of the pressures that are already there? You could extend this to other areas of the organisation as well.

Assistant Chief Minister 1:

Sure. What did it say? We have got 22 qualified teachers who are ready to start work in the primary sector. The 33 that have applied - we have not taken them on, they have applied - they have come from a whole range of backgrounds, some with educational experience. But I take your point in terms of what processes are going to be in place for those people and that is why the objective-setting and the appraisals is really important. So if somebody is mentoring a colleague, they get the opportunity to talk to their line manager and any challenges are identified and we put in the relevant support for those people. I think we have been hugely lacking historically in terms of how we have done that mentoring and the appraisal process and it is something we are really keen on improving.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

If you do not mind, it is the detail of the time that is necessary for that - it takes an enormous amount of time - and do you really think that schools are equipped to give that time? I mean, we talk about primaries, but really the shortages are in secondary and in particular in specialist subjects and that is going to take time.

Assistant Chief Minister 1:

I do not have that operational knowledge, although I have worked in an education environment for 2 years. I do not have that detailed knowledge, but it is something I will check. But we are working really hard in terms of recruiting not only the graduates but also potential permanent employees.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I would just make a plea to be willing to accept when a system is not working because otherwise you will get the outcomes that you do not want longer term.

Assistant Chief Minister 1:

Yes, 100 per cent we are listening to staff. I think last time we were here we told you that we were meeting with the trade unions on a regular basis, quarterly basis. That process has continued and we are going through the second cycle of that, so we are interested to know what challenges different parts of the organisation have got, both from a leadership perspective and from a staffing perspective.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Is that all the trade unions?

Assistant Chief Minister 1:

Yes.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Are they given time to do that as well?

Assistant Chief Minister 1:

I believe so. I have not personally checked, but all of the meetings have been well attended.

[12:15]

Deputy M.B. Andrews:

We will move on to the size of the public sector workforce. Data shows us that there is an additional 1,000 people employed in the public sector since 2018. However, do you feel there has been an improvement in public administration during that time?

Assistant Chief Minister 1:

I think we have certainly needed more people in certain areas, so if we think of areas like education and health we have invested significantly, so not only teachers, but teaching assistants. We have a number of new teaching assistants who started in January and we have got more ready to start again. There are areas where we need more focus and more resource and I think as we go through the introduction of the Cabinet Office and the delivery unit we will look for efficiencies. I think we have been in a journey of discovery at the moment, and as we go through some of these areas we will undoubtedly find efficiencies, but equally I would pair that with a bit of caution, that if we need people on the front line to help people, then we will definitely need them.

Deputy M.B. Andrews:

I do like the use of the word “efficiencies” so that was very good to hear, because I do have it stated here that there are 1,456 employees on salaries above £60,000 - due to the recent data being published - and in 2018 there were 909 employees on salaries above £60,000, so surely there would have to be some addressing of the structure within the civil service to some extent.

Assistant Chief Minister 1:

I think some of that will be inflationary. We have got people who are on development programmes so we are giving them more responsibility. I think we see some areas where we do need additional support and if we take the previous point about education, where we not only have head teachers, we have deputy head teachers, we have assistant head teachers and all of those roles have different levels of responsibility and therefore different levels of reward. So I would imagine that in education there is one area where we have increased the amount of senior roles, but I think in other areas we do need to look for opportunities. When vacancies arise and they are over £100,000 they do come to the States Employment Board and they are challenged.

Deputy M.B. Andrews:

I did note with some of the lower salary bands there was a reduction in headcount and I think this is probably where ... when I am just speaking to members of the public, they are very concerned that services have been stripped back because there is not enough waged labour in employment. However, what we do see with the figures is the civil service is becoming rather top heavy with now 1,400 employees, so surely there would be a strategy in place to maybe try and have a more balanced public sector across the salary bands.

Assistant Chief Minister 1:

Looking from the inside, I think if you consider our health service, for example, to employ a doctor is very expensive and you are not long in building up your numbers across the organisation. That does not mean to say we should not look at it, and we are looking at it, but equally we need the expertise within the organisation. I would much prefer to be employing somebody if they are necessary than having a consultant working for us.

Deputy M.B. Andrews:

Of course this has been something that you have inherited, shall we say, from the previous Executive. Chief Minister, what is your view about the headcount increase and is there something that you believe needs to be done about it?

The Chief Minister:

I think the Assistant Chief Minister has really outlined our position at the moment very clearly and I think there is very little to add. He has a real relentless focus in this area and has expressed very clearly how he is holding officials to account and taking very sensible measures, I think, in relation to this area. What is really important to us is that we have a stable workforce, particularly in the critical service areas of health, education and social work because that has really been eroded. As the Assistant Chief Minister just outlined, the work of the delivery unit is really helping us already and we are making great strides in this area and now we also have begun to meet with the turnaround team who are here to support Health and Community Services. Their initial findings are also identifying ways that we can help to stabilise and strengthen our workforce in that particularly critical area, so we are very excited about what we are learning and about the measures that we are going to be able to take to ensure that we deliver better for the public of Jersey.

Deputy M.B. Andrews:

Thank you very much, Chief Minister.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Just one quick question on that. In terms of the numbers on whatever pay, do you think the pay protection that came from the last restructuring may have an effect on that in the next 6 months to a year?

Assistant Chief Minister 1:

Possibly, but I do not know the detail, but it is something I am prepared to go and have a look at. I honestly could not answer that question, but it is possible.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

It is just an issue that I am aware of. All right, thank you, I will leave that one.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Thank you. Moving on the next question area, which is on the housing crisis, which you do make several references to in your ministerial delivery plan. In line with one of those priorities that you raise, P.7.3, which is on key worker accommodation and your ambition to increase that by at least 100 by the end of this year, how far along into that are you and how is that being delivered?

The Chief Minister:

So if we focus initially on the key worker accommodation part of your question, that is coming along very well. The Westaway Court work that we commissioned some months ago now is now moving into its final week and so that will deliver 56 new units of key worker accommodation in the next month, so we are really pleased with the progress that is being made there. There is also a further

56 units that will become available in Le Mare; that comes online in early April and into May. Then there will be a further 20 units once those have been released because they were used back in December by those displaced people who unfortunately had to leave their homes at Haut du Mont when the terrible explosion occurred.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

How do you make these projects happen? The reason I ask that is you have just given 2 examples, one of Westaway Court and one of Le Mare. Le Mare is owned and operated by Andium Homes, who are a partner in delivering the key worker accommodation; Westaway Court was an empty building that I presume was under the remit of Property Holdings. Straight away you have gone to 2 different bodies to achieve the same thing there. How do you manage that? Does that get complicated when these different pockets of publicly owned sites have different management structures?

The Chief Minister:

We are a large and complex organisation with a large asset base as well and so we are fortunate, but we need to make sure that we are using that asset base to the very best of our abilities. Andium of course are a very effective arm's length organisation who are doing a fantastic job and they have a big project base that they are driving forwards with, and particularly now that the Ann Street Brewery site has been given approval, you will see them start to move forward with that project also. It makes sense to work with our partners and to use our assets wisely. Andium have also made some units available for key workers at Hue Court and we are getting really good feedback from those ...

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I still have the scars on my back from that one.

The Chief Minister:

Yes, so we see that as a really positive thing and it is absolutely vital that we deliver that accommodation, because it is a very clear issue for people coming to the Island and being able to afford to stay in the Island, the cost and access of accommodation. We have seen that recently in some work we have done reaching out to Islanders who are living elsewhere at the moment, perhaps students, and trying to ask them about what prevents them from coming home. Accommodation of course features heavily there. If I could then move into the policy aspect, this is - and in light of our last conversation - an area where we are strengthening our team because we see that housing is one of our 3 areas of relentless focus and so we need a strong team to be able to help us deliver the policy changes. Looking back on your time and perhaps one of the frustrations that you might have felt was that £10 million that was set aside ...

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

That is definitely a different issue to the key worker accommodation question, but I did have an important question on that to ask, which is who is the landlord for the key worker accommodation, given that I have just pointed to 2 examples that sit with different ownership? Is there one landlord structure or is it different depending on the site?

The Chief Minister:

At the moment that will be different, yes, but what we are doing is setting up a key worker accommodation unit that can provide better, clearer access and guidance to our colleagues who are accessing accommodation through it. Because at the moment it is very ad hoc, which is really sucking up the time of nurses, for example, who we would much prefer were spending their time doing what they are trained to do. We do not want them spending time trying to find accommodation for their colleagues, it simply does not make sense, and so we are tooling up that unit so that they can make sure that we deliver the best possible accommodation that we can.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

So for Westaway Court then who will be the landlord and are you going to look to rationalise that? Because we have mentioned that Andium provide that for lots of key workers, that they are a very experienced and capable landlord with staff who are capable of providing all kinds of services to their tenants, so it is natural for them. But if you are taking a property that is not in their ownership to set it up for key workers, would it make sense to involve Andium in the delivery of the landlord services?

The Chief Minister:

As I mentioned earlier, we have got a large asset base. Some of it is owned and managed by Andium and some of it is not. I think it makes an awful lot of sense to try and ensure that we are using the skills available within our organisation to best effect. Your question well reflects questions and discussions that we have been having in very recent times.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Thank you. Another one of your priorities in the ministerial plan is about reviewing the capacity and the resources of the strategic housing function so that it is capable of responding to the housing crisis. Where are you on that and when can we expect to see some confirmation of what the long-term basis for that body will be?

The Chief Minister:

Very soon. This is part of the Cabinet Office changes and, as I have just said, we have taken the decision to provide some greater resource in this area because it is an area of relentless focus, and we identify that unless we have the people there able to support the Minister in delivering on his priorities ... and we want to give ourselves the very best chance of delivering for the public on this critical factor.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I do not want to tread on anyone's toes, but you have said a number of times this "relentless focus." Your Minister for Housing said yesterday: "We know the cost of housing and buying a home is out of the realm for most people." There was a bit about the size of homes afterwards, which I am sure we will come to. Can it really be a relentless focus if Government have accepted that buying a home is out of the realms for most people on the Island?

The Chief Minister:

I have not heard the context in which he was saying that and so ...

Deputy R.J. Ward:

He went on to say: "So we have to appreciate therefore sizes will have to come down" which is another issue I think we have to address. So is the relentless focus going to be: "Do not expect to buy a home and when you do rent, it is going to be a lot smaller because that is all you can afford"?

The Chief Minister:

The "relentless focus" comes from the days following the 100-day action plan, so when we completed that we made it very clear that going forward we had 3 areas of relentless focus: they are housing, the cost of living and recruitment and retention. We have outlined to you this morning some of the work that is going on in terms of recruitment and retention. Obviously work is ongoing in relation to the cost of living crisis as well, and we started that with our mini-budget, but that work continues too. Then in the area of housing I think we have made it quite clear as a Government that we believe in owner occupation and so we want to drive a way forward for Islanders to realise the hope of owning their own homes and we think that is a good thing.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

So you do not agree with the fact that it is out of the realm for most people?

The Chief Minister:

I am assuming, because I have not heard this interview or wherever the Minister for Housing said those words ...

Deputy R.J. Ward:

On ITV last night.

The Chief Minister:

I have not had the opportunity to watch it yet. It will probably have been in relation to the House Price Index ...

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

No, it was Ann Street Brewery.

The Chief Minister:

Ann Street Brewery, okay.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Because those flats are tiny. They are barely above the minimum standard for many of them and that was a point of contention.

[12:30]

The Chief Minister:

As I say, I have not heard the context and there is obviously always going to be a need to have a blended approach, but we are very much focused on increasing owner occupation. In saying that, we also have a commitment and Andium is doing a fantastic job of increasing its delivery of social housing and a variety of different units. I think it was a really important day yesterday that they got the green light to move ahead and progress on that site. I know they are absolutely delighted with that result and we look forward to the regeneration that it will bring to St. Helier.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

You said you believe in owner occupation and that is certainly an aspiration that will resonate with many people out there in our community. How do you propose that somebody becomes an owner occupier when they live in a one-bedroom flat without parking that they are paying £1,400 a month to rent, which from my assessment of advertising I have seen recently seems to be the going rate? Does that not say to those people: "You are not going to stand a chance of saving up for your deposit when you are in rental stress for a one-bedroom tiny apartment without parking"?

The Chief Minister:

This goes back to why we are investing in the Strategic Housing Unit because we see that we need great strength in our policy officers. We have got some fantastic people there, but in terms of being able to drive forward the policies that will help people move forward and will ensure that we use ...

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

What are those policies?

The Chief Minister:

... that £10 million to the best effect, then we need people to help us deliver those policies and quickly.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

But if you are one of those people who lives in a newly built one-bedroom flat - even built by the Government on government-owned land, some of those flats - because you have no alternative for a housing option, you cannot save up for a deposit because you are in rental stress for your measly one-bedroom property, those people will not find much consolation directly in hearing that there is some shifting around of civil servants. They will want to know what the outcome is. What is the proposed outcome?

The Chief Minister:

I think I just said that the proposed outcome is that we will deliver policies that will provide an effective use of the £10 million that you had set aside some years ago and that has not been used so that people can ...

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Such as?

The Chief Minister:

... realise their hopes of property ownership. Well, when I was in your seat as the Chair of the Corporate Services Panel we brought forward an amendment to the Government Plan to suggest a loan deposit scheme as one of the uses for that £10 million pot. That was rejected by yourself and the government of the time. That is certainly an area of policy that we will be looking at again, whether the timing is now right for such a scheme to be introduced. But there are plenty of others to be explored as well, which is why we need the additional policy support to help us do that.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Are there schemes that began under the previous government which you are looking at to determine whether they can be re-evaluated to maximise the contribution of affordable housing? I ask that in

the context of questions we will ask later about the capital programme, where you have made very substantial changes to what were previous Government Plans. But we have not heard anything for one of the biggest plans that a government agency will be pursuing, which is the waterfront development, where a very small proportion of those homes are to be designated as affordable. What are you doing to look at those previous government-initiated proposals to maximise their impact?

The Chief Minister:

We have a diverse community in the Island and so therefore we need a diverse selection of homes for Islanders to live in and also for varied use of our public realm. That is something that is a matter of debate and discussion with Future Places, so both Andium and the Jersey Development Company attend our Future Places meetings and engage with us regularly on a variety of plans so that we can be as joined up and responsive as we can be.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I do not feel that is an answer to the question. You have cancelled the Kensington Place housing ...

The Chief Minister:

To deliver a hospital facility.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

... which of course is within your remit to do. You have proven that it is possible to do it, so will you do it for other potential housing sites that are delivered to say: "New Government, new ambitions, relentless focus on housing. How can we improve that proposal"?

The Chief Minister:

We are equally very conscious that Islanders need homes and so that decision was taken as a strategic decision to help us deliver the best possible healthcare facilities that offer a resilient, affordable way forward. But we are equally mindful that it did take out potential units of accommodation and so we want to see those units of accommodation replaced elsewhere. It is very easy to say we will not do something, but what sometimes we find harder to do is identify the sites where we can do things, but I am hoping that the hospital and the healthcare facilities project will enable us to identify other areas where we can deliver homes and potentially in a greener, more enjoyable environment as well.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Final question from me on this before moving to the next area. Do you anticipate therefore, based on what you have just said, that the Government will continue to facilitate the production of homes

to be built to then be sold on to investors to rent out at £1,400 a month for tiny floor space and parking? Is that something you will see continuing under your leadership?

The Chief Minister:

I have talked already about variety and meeting the diversity of Islanders. I think also S.o.J.D.C. (States of Jersey Development Company) have made it very clear that the majority of people buying their units are buying them for owner occupation. But as we have perhaps seen with some of the issues around the Horizon purchases through the life, if somebody buys a flat off-plan - which many people did, with the intention of moving into as a young couple - by the time that flat is delivered then their life has changed potentially and they now have a child perhaps and it is no longer suitable for the purposes that they initially put their deposit down for.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Sorry, can I just interrupt? That is the problem with building to the minimum standards. The 2-bedroom places that are being built at Ann Court are really for the occupation of 3 people and so those families that change, they will no longer be suitable long term. We are building developments that we know will not be suitable. Is that not the issue when we really do not think ahead and bite the bullet in terms of what we are going to build and futureproofing it for the changing demographic?

The Chief Minister:

I do not want to rehearse or go back over the Bridging Island Plan debate, but I do recall that many Members spoke against the rezoning of land that was identified for affordable homes. Our culture is predominantly towards families looking to occupy homes with gardens for that period of bringing up children and they are less inclined to living in flats during that time of their lives. So it is about having a blended solution and I remain frustrated by some of the decisions that the Members of the previous Assembly took in relation to the rezoning of land.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

But those places would not be built as affordable anyway. Can I just ...

The Chief Minister:

But they were down to be affordable homes, were they not?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

If they could have been built, given the drainage systems that would have been inadequate anyway, but that is another issue. Can I ask, you talk about meeting people in the Council of Ministers and meeting the public. What would you say to an audience of 23, 24, 25, up to 30 year-olds who are saying to you: "I have done everything right. I have been to university, I have come back. I am

working full-time, but the only place I can live away from home will cost me a minimum of £900 if I share with a friend or over £1,000 a month, which is probably 40 per cent - if not 50 per cent - of my salary and I do not have any hope on Jersey to have anywhere"? That is the sort of engagement I would like to see you undertake. If you did, what are you going to say to that, because those are the realities of what is happening?

The Chief Minister:

We very much hear that reality and we understand that and we are strengthening our Strategic Housing Unit, strengthening our policy and moving towards delivering a brighter future for young Islanders, because we do want Jersey to offer them the future that they desire. They are our future and if we wish our Island community to thrive into the future then it is absolutely within all of our interests to ensure that there are opportunities for them to do that.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

We are going to have to move on just because we are getting to that point. Hopefully to run through these ones relatively quickly: these are on government structure and Government, so Cabinet Office being an obvious starting point there. In August 2022 you said that the creation of this new department would take a phased approach over the next 12 months. Is that still due to be the case, that you will be finished by August in the full establishment of that Cabinet Office?

The Chief Minister:

Phase 1 is coming to an end and phase 2 is beginning and I think that we are making good progress.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Likely by this August to be complete? That was what you said last August.

The Chief Minister:

Yes.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Okay, thank you. Are you able to confirm the number of recruitments into the Cabinet Office and which posts in there have not been filled yet?

The Chief Minister:

There are 2 outstanding and we are looking internal applicants to fulfil them at the moment in that particular phase. We can invite from the Chief Executive, if you would like, a fuller response.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

That is adequate, I think, what you have given so far. Deputy Ward.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Yes. From the hearing with the Minister for Treasury, the Minister said: "I think there are standing voluntary redundancy agreements within the remit of S.E.B. (States Employment Board), not special ones, but standing ones", talking about some of the things that have happened recently. As Chair of S.E.B., can you outline these voluntary agreements?

Assistant Chief Minister 1:

I do not have details of the policy for redundancy in front of me, so again it is something I will have to come back to you on.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Do you know what the largest payoff would have been recently from these agreements, either voluntary or standing?

Assistant Chief Minister 1:

Again, I could not tell you off the top of my head, but it would have been whatever was contractually due to the person. There has been no additional payments made to anybody that I am aware of.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

The redundancy means that the post is not replaced?

Assistant Chief Minister 1:

That is correct.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

That is definitely what has happened in terms of one of the chief officers?

Assistant Chief Minister 1:

That is correct.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Forgive me for saying "chief officer", I forget what they are called now. It does change. It is a moveable feast, that one. That is what I was going to ask, thank you.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

In your 100-day plan - and I am going to get the exact wording up for that - you referred to: "Reorganise government departments to provide for direct accountability of Ministers." Who do the senior officers of the Cabinet Office report to?

The Chief Minister:

So the Chief Executive obviously is the key officer there and the line of accountability is to the Chief Minister.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Who does the chief officer of the Infrastructure, Housing and Environment Department report to?

The Chief Minister:

That is soon, I think, to become the Infrastructure and Environment Department ...

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

My next question was going to be what is happening to the H?

The Chief Minister:

Housing, as I think I alluded to earlier, is moving into the Cabinet Office and there will be a direct line between the key officer in that unit and the Minister for Housing. Then if we go back to Infrastructure and Environment, you have at the moment one chief officer and 2 Ministers.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Is that consistent with your position in the 100-day plan?

The Chief Minister:

There is some further refinement to be done in this area, but it is something that we are very keen to complete.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Okay, thank you. Deputy Andrews, on the delivery unit.

Deputy M.B. Andrews:

Yes, indeed. Chief Minister, I was wondering, how will the delivery unit prioritise its work streams?

The Chief Minister:

Prioritise its work streams? Through discussion with Ministers, who can help to identify the priorities because we have great expectations. The early work that the delivery unit has been doing has really identified the value that they bring to the organisation and to the public as well.

Deputy M.B. Andrews:

What priorities have been established among the discussions you have had with fellow Ministers?

The Chief Minister:

Firstly based around our 3 areas of relentless focus - housing, recruitment and retention, cost of living - we have outlined here at some length, so I do not want to go through it all over again. The recruitment work that they have been doing is really fantastic.

[12:45]

Assistant Chief Minister 1:

The same process that we have used for the recruitment with the delivery unit is now moving into the essential workers' housing, so simplifying the process, and that is a direct result of our conversations.

Deputy M.B. Andrews:

I also note as well as a panel we received a letter that was dated 27th October and it advises that the delivery unit had undertaken research into the experience of hiring managers and candidates throughout the recruitment process and noted that recommendations from this were being implemented at the time of writing. Can you inform us on what the implemented recommendations were and what effect they have had on the recruitment process thus far?

Assistant Chief Minister 1:

It is really positive, so I think that is what I was trying to allude to before, where the ownership of the process is in one place as opposed to a candidate talking to a number of people and the people, for example ... so if we are recruiting for a specific place, it will be one person that is dealing with that vacancy. That is the same for both the candidates and also for the hiring manager, whereas historically it would have gone into a pool at a call centre, for want of a better description. I think it is a much better experience for the potential candidates and it is a much better experience for the hiring manager. It is also much quicker and therefore efficient.

Deputy M.B. Andrews:

Okay, thank you very much.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Value for Money programme: can you confirm whether the governance structure for that has been finalised?

The Chief Minister:

Can we invite the relevant officer to the table?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Please introduce yourself into the microphone.

Group Director, Finance, Business Partnering and Analytics:

Good afternoon, I am Hazel Cunningham. I am the Group Director within Treasury and Exchequer for Finance, Business Partnering and Analytics, leading on the Value for Money programme.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

It is a very simple question: has the Government structure for that programme been finalised?

Group Director, Finance, Business Partnering and Analytics:

No, it has not been finalised. The intention is to have a ministerial group which will provide oversight and steer to the programme and then we will have officer-led groups which will provide strategy and steering, board direction and then various delivery groups within that. The Government Plan for 2023 established the programme as a new programme, so to date we have been spending quite a significant amount of time in the research and design, but we do plan to very soon put that in place. We have recently had agreement to establish a small programme office with approximately 4.5 F.T.E.s (full-time equivalent) who will support the programme in terms of governance and administration, but also to provide the enabling function for the programme to be established and embedded, then cascaded across the organisation.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Is all of that running to schedule in terms of the establishment of those oversight groups?

Group Director, Finance, Business Partnering and Analytics:

I have to go back to Council of Ministers quite shortly to confirm the rollout of the programme. Frankly, we have been slightly delayed because resources have been drawn into the recent major incidents so we have had some capacity issues in the earlier part of the year that we had not anticipated when the programme was discussed and agreed as part of the Government Plan.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Thank you, that is all to ask on that. Next round of questions on the capital projects, which Deputy Ward will lead on.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I am just working on making this question a lot shorter. The Minister revealed that several major capital projects have been on hold with no set date for completion. Chief Minister, can you explain the process that was followed to identify which major projects would be continued, paused, modified or abandoned by your Government and what advice on affordability was taken?

The Chief Minister:

I think if we probably deal with the most obvious one here, there is a hospital oversight group, and that Political Oversight Group has met and met with the Project Director on a number of occasions to work on our way forward. Obviously we commissioned a report in the very early days and that gave us some very helpful findings and an indication of the best way forward for that particular project. Now we are looking forward with great anticipation to delivering new healthcare facilities and to identifying ...

Deputy R.J. Ward:

We talked a lot about the hospital and I am sure there will be a lot more, I absolutely guarantee there will be a lot more, but the other major projects are to combine fire and ambulance, Le Rocquier School facilities, Fort Regent, the legislative change to the office of the Superintendent Registrar, integrated financial and performance management reporting, a residents review and there are a few more. Those are the ones really to focus on in this, I think, hearing. What was the decision-making process and what officer advice was taken on affordability of those? If you can give some examples, that would be helpful.

The Chief Minister:

The majority of those projects are being considered by the Future Places Group and we are looking at a more strategic approach to delivering on all of those projects. That work is underway.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

They are being looked at by the Future Places Group, but what was the process of putting them on hold before that so that it could be looked at by that group, because that is a new group? Or was it the Future Places Group that decided to put them all on hold?

The Chief Minister:

I think the majority of the items that you have described are not necessarily on hold, they are still in delivery. There was not a project that was underway or stopped or paused even, for example. They are still going through a process of consideration and decision making.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Chief Minister, just to confirm on that, we are using the language that is in the delivery plan so when we say “no next stage” or “end date” or “on hold” we are using the same language that is provided in there.

The Chief Minister:

Could you refer me to the ...

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Giving you an example, combine fire and ambulance station is now classified as: “No next stage or end date.” I mean, rather than just having an argument over semantics, I think the ...

The Chief Minister:

That is probably because they need to have the funding in the Government Plan and so there would not be an end date yet. But if we take, for example, the west of St. Helier school, that is something that is under active consideration, and then also the fire and ambulance as well, that is obviously ...

Deputy R.J. Ward:

So that is still going ahead?

The Chief Minister:

Yes, most certainly.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

It says “on hold” in the Minister for Home Affairs’ delivery plan.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

There is no suggestion that that might not go ahead in the site that we have?

The Chief Minister:

It is a matter of active conversation and consideration.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

That it goes ahead or not or just the timing?

The Chief Minister:

Well, there is not an identified site for it as yet and so the conversation is going on.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

The Rouge Bouillon site has been named, has it not? The last Assembly named it after the late Constable Norman as the combined ambulance and fire facility, so there has been a site. The old panel I chaired did an enormous amount of work on it. I can probably tell you more than I want to.

The Chief Minister:

I do not think it had a worked-up plan.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Okay, so it is not necessarily going to be there. You can see where the difficulty is. I am trying in this public hearing to get a definitive answer. The public look at “on the hold”, “no end date” and if they think: “Well, that is gone then” but now you are saying it is not gone, it is just not there. We are sort of getting into, well, an existential crisis here.

The Chief Minister:

I do not think it is at all existential. It is a matter of active conversation and discussion with the relevant Ministers and it is really important that we identify the best solutions for delivering a school in the west of St. Helier and improve fire and ambulance facilities, among many others. Of course, as you all know, especially when dealing with town, where space is particularly constrained, there is always a process of moving parts and so we feel that it is important to consider the impact of all of those in ensuring that we have the optimum solutions for them that are cost effective for the public purse.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

So it would not be a cancel culture, it is a no next stage or end date culture while you are discussing the plans?

The Chief Minister:

Active discussions are exactly that, are they not? They will be working up solutions that will appear in the Government Plan.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I do not think I can get any more from that, thank you.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Taking the hospital out of the equation, because what a debate that is, but just taking that one out and looking at some of the other perhaps less contentious ones in terms of the combined fire and ambulance stage and Le Rocquier sports facility - I will throw Fort Regent in there, even though it is a bit contentious anyway - whether they are cancelled or at the very least on hold pending further consideration, has the decision to do that to those projects ... have any of those clearly been done on the basis of affordability being the lead question that determines you want to press the pause button?

The Chief Minister:

I think there is always a balance, is there not, in terms of what is affordable and what is also delivering the best for the particular circumstances? You would have all heard, just as we did, during the election campaigns that there was a great amount of frustration with the approach that the previous government had taken, particularly in capital projects. They had a great fondness for capital projects and it is my view - and I think that is shared with many members of the public - that often these became quite overblown projects that were not really delivering exactly what the public wanted or needed and were not really affordable. I think the hospital is the optimum example, but equally one could say that of the Fort Regent project. I do not think there is a great appetite in the Island or desire for a casino ...

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Do you want to bet on that?

The Chief Minister:

... I think there are many other things that Islanders would much prefer to see if we are talking about entertainment. So we are now focused on considering what it is the public want to see in terms of entertainment, particularly wet weather days, but also entertainment that will improve and enhance our tourism offer as well.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

But what about Le Rocquier sports facility - sorry to interrupt - because that is something that is a sports facility for the east of the Island? Particularly when we have seen the low exercise rates among children, particularly those who are in state schools, who have less access to paid classes because of their situation. Indeed, Statistics Jersey have just released a report associated with poor health, which is those living in rented accommodation, those who are poor, those from other different communities.

The Chief Minister:

Deputy Rose Binet and I went recently to Le Rocquier School to meet with a group of pupils who are doing really well. Haute Vallée and Le Rocquier have been selected to go and represent Portuguese schools in Lisbon to talk about mental health. But we in that conversation did touch on access to sports facilities and the cost even of just simply playing 5 a side football. That is something that we are actively conscious of, aware of, and I just had an update yesterday on conversations that are ongoing about delivering the best possible sports facilities for the east of the Island because we know that there is a need in the east of the Island and there are conversations actively continuing.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

So we could be getting an end date for that one? There could be an end date in the next stage for that one; is that what we are saying?

The Chief Minister:

We are looking at what is the best solution for the east of the Island.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

For those projects that we have just been talking about, with the exception of the hospital, have you received officer advice that it is no longer appropriate to describe those projects as affordable, as the previous government may have chosen to do, or is it a political judgment?

The Chief Minister:

Well, it is a political judgment when looked at, the information that is provided and listening.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

But it was not officer recommendations to Government: "Sorry, we are going to struggle to deliver this with the financial constraints we currently have"?

The Chief Minister:

I do not recall there being a recommendation one way or the other. It was simply these are the facts and having to take a decision, when that one was particularly through the Government Plan process, I think, so you are having to balance it against all of the other requirements. Capital planning and programming is something that has never been our great strength and often we set aside huge amounts of money for projects that are not delivered in any given year. So what we are now focused on is identifying the capital projects that we can deliver and how in each respective year.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Thank you. Very last couple of questions here. We had some questions to ask on the legislative programme, but I think we got a further written update on that, which renders some of those

questions redundant probably. But looking in your ministerial plan at your legislative priorities for this year, Statistics and Census Law, Public Services Ombudsperson, Control of Housing and Work Law, States of Jersey Law 2005, Appointment of States of Jersey Employees 2005, those all appear to me to be initiatives that began before your term of office started and ones that you, I think, have inherited. Is it purely your priority for this year to complete those legacies and when, if at all, will you be looking to insert new legislative priorities?

[13:00]

The Chief Minister:

I think some of those projects - let us take, for example, the ombudsperson - had somewhat been left on the shelf gathering a significant amount of dust.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Not for want of some of us trying, I must say.

The Chief Minister:

Some of the process has been blowing the dust off those projects and asking officials if they could complete them, so of course they are first out of the blocks because they had a bit of flying start. It is amazing what you can find on those shelves because a number of items have been left there over the last 4 years and so we are keen to get cracking on those, but obviously there will be others forthcoming as we progress.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Any spoilers?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Classifications of functions of Government. That one will come through, I am sure.

The Chief Minister:

The which?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Classifications of functions of Government. I am not asking about it anymore.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Okay. Well, you feel the need to give us a heads up on any of that, please feel free.

The Chief Minister:

It will be my first port of call.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I appreciate that. Thank you very much, Chief Minister, Assistant Ministers, members of the public who have joined us here, the reams and reams of people who are watching online, and to all of our panel's officers and your officers for their support in this hearing as well. Thank you very much and I therefore call the hearing to a close.

[13:01]