

21.11.02

4 Deputy I. Gardiner of the Assistant Chief Minister regarding Financial reports on Our Hospital (OQ.219/2021)

Will the Assistant Chief Minister commit to providing regular reports to the Assembly on all spending associated with the Our Hospital project, and if not, why not?

Senator L.J. Farnham (Assistant Chief Minister):

I thank the Deputy for the question. In my response to Written Question 441 from the Deputy, not 440 as that is a separate question, I have committed in agreement with the Treasury to half-yearly reporting aligning to the States annual report and accounts and the half-yearly financial reporting cycle. We did provide regular updates for States Members on the hospital and some of that information does include financial updates most recently in relation to the outline business case. In addition to that I propose, subject to further discussion with the political oversight group now that P.80 has been approved and we have the overall budget in place, to provide regular finance updates with the general updates to States Members which will continue now throughout the project process. The answer to the question is, yes, we will and that will be on a regular basis to be agreed with the political oversight group.

4.4.1 Deputy I. Gardiner:

I am grateful to the Deputy Chief Minister for his answer and I welcome in 6 months the reporting. However, I am concerned regarding the expenditure details, as the current expenditure category level does not provide a clear picture of spending. Would the Deputy Chief Minister consider providing a breakdown of the expenditure category sufficient cost information to enable effective scrutiny?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

Yes, absolutely. In relation to the Written Question 440, which asks for a breakdown to the level of recipient almost at invoice level, and it is not usual to provide that sort of detailed information publicly, bearing in mind the commercial sensitivities of a lot of the negotiations that are currently underway. But I do undertake to categorise the expenditure and provide it in as much detail as we possibly can. It is a balance of transparency and commercial sensitivities. But, like I said, I want to impress that the oversight group and I are very keen to provide as much detail to Scrutiny and States Members as we possibly can.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Yes. Why was the answer to 440 given late?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

Sir, I have to take full responsibility for that. I did not complete the answer until late yesterday evening and it was submitted first thing this morning, which I apologise to the Assembly.

The Deputy Bailiff:

When did you receive the question?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

The question was received last week at some stage.

4.4.2 Senator K.L. Moore:

My question has a little information that might assist the Deputy Chief Minister in understanding some of the reluctance from his team to provide questions, although we are grateful for his warm words this morning. A member of the public overheard 2 members of the project team discussing their work on the hospital project as they were travelling to Jersey on Sunday evening. One person spoke to the other and said: "Did you give them any numbers? I never give them any numbers when they ask for them", seeming quite pleased with themselves; that is the view of the member of the public. The dark-haired man said that there had been requests for numbers but the indication seemed to be that the numbers, including of beds, were still moving about as they had not been finalised yet. The above had apparently been discussed with another person, i.e. the changing numbers. They then continued to talk about other matters. Will the Deputy Chief Minister, in light of this helpful information from a member of the public, take his project team in hand and tell them that the time for obfuscation and playing games in relation to the facts that are genuinely required and expected by both members of the public and Members of this Assembly who are trying to hold the Government to account, it is time to stop playing games? Will he take them to task and ensure that these games stop?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

While I do not recognise any of the suggested behaviour in the Senator's previous comments, we have all of the detailed information and, in fact, I did have all of the detailed information that Deputy Gardiner asked for in Written Question 440. I was presented with a complete breakdown, line by line, of every single invoice and expense that was incurred between 1st September and 26th October. Subject to a further 2 discussions with the project team, it was decided that a lot of that information was commercially sensitive and it would not be wise to release it publicly in the way requested by the Deputy. I do recognise the problem, we are certainly not playing games. I would ask Scrutiny to join us in not playing games and get on and focus with constructive scrutiny of the project so we can deliver this together.

4.4.3 Deputy I. Gardiner:

I welcome the Deputy Chief Minister the discussion that should be open. I would like to ask if he would consider looking at the 6-months' reporting on the consultants. We have already established a process to report on the consultants with a possible breakdown and to find a way to have more detailed clarity on expenditure in risks and updated cost of the project every 6 months going forward.

Senator L.J. Farnham:

Yes, I would be pleased to do that. We are looking at ways we can provide some categories of the expenditure. Like I say, my hesitance to answer the Written Question 440 in the detail that the Deputy would have liked, as I said, is about commercial sensitivity and that being in the public eye. I would be happy to share more detailed information of course with Scrutiny and with other States Members on a confidential basis and I undertake to work in that way moving forward.