

2016.02.02

5.19 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding efforts to avoid strike action by unions:

Following indications from Unite the Union that a ballot is imminently to be taken by employees at his department on strike action, what actions, if any, is the Minister taking to find a resolution to this dispute?

Deputy E.J. Noel of St. Lawrence (The Minister for Infrastructure):

Unite has not declared an official dispute at this time. We have not concluded the service reviews and we do not know at this stage the full impact but redundancies are possible and are likely. Formal conversations with all unions commenced in early January and we will be continuing regularly over the next year to ensure that the employers are actively communicating and consulting with the unions. Informal meetings are taking place on a weekly basis with Unite and have done so for many years. In the event of a dispute being declared then the agreed new joint council collective dispute procedure will be applied.

5.19.1 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Will the Minister agree that it may put the minds at ease of these workers, some of whom were in King Street in the pouring rain on Saturday asking Islanders to sign a petition to help save their jobs because these people are terrified about what is about to happen to them? Would the Minister agree that it would be conducive to that process if he took on the same attitude that the Chief Minister before displayed to a £120,000 a year job on the basis of it being good value for money, for these workers as well who are described by the States' former adviser, Kevin Keen, who said it was the infrastructure workers who provided some of the best value for money in the entire public sector. Would you not believe that that would be a good attitude to take forward to avoid any potential dispute?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

My department is working towards making £4.6 million worth of savings over the life of the M.T.F.P. That is a decision of this Assembly. This Assembly agreed to make some £70 million worth of savings over the life of the M.T.F.P. from staff-related expenditure. That is some 20 per cent of the total staff budget for the States of Jersey. You cannot make those sorts of reductions in expenditure without unfortunately some of those that are currently within the employment of the States of Jersey leaving that employment.

5.19.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Minister mentioned his review is not complete yet. When is it his intention to complete that review and when can he get to some serious negotiations rather than consultation with the workers involved?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

That review is scheduled to complete in the latter half of this month. I expect it to be completed by the third week of February.

5.19.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

If I may, when will it be published following the third week of February?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

We are dealing with the lives of staff that do a good job; in some cases do an excellent, outstanding job, providing public services.

[11:45]

Unfortunately that is not the issue. It is whether or not we are getting the correct level of services for the correct amount of money. An example, which I have used in this Assembly before, we benchmarked, for example, the cleaning costs of Cyril Le Marquand House. We currently do that at a cost of around £160,000 per annum. We benchmarked that on a like for like basis with the private sector. That came in at some £90,000 per annum. Now, as taxpayers and as Islanders, we could live with that margin if that margin was closer but a £70,000 difference on a £160,000 spend is something that we need to look at. We need to be able to provide the same level of services but we need to be able to do it in a more cost effective way.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

That was not the answer to: "When will you publish your review?"

Deputy E.J. Noel:

We will share our review with those directly concerned because there are some 7 different reviews, for example, in Parks and Gardens and we will be sharing the outcome of those reviews with those individuals concerned when those reviews have been completed.