

2018.02.20

**10 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade of the Chief Minister regarding negotiations with the BBC regarding free television licences for all over-75s in Jersey: [OQ.37/2018]**

Will the Chief Minister seek a re-opening of negotiations with the BBC to provide free T.V. licences to all over-75s in Jersey and, if not, why not?

**Senator P.F. Routier (Assistant Chief Minister - rapporteur):**

From this year until 2020 the BBC will contribute the costs of providing means-tested T.V. licences for all eligible Islanders over 75. This will cost the BBC approximately £270,000 and that is on top of the cost of providing the extensive locally-produced radio and T.V. services, which I am sure we all value. This was a good outcome when the negotiations were done, so while this future date of 2020 is not far away we will not be at this time trying to renegotiate it. In 2020 the BBC will decide on its own funding policy and it is aiming to treat all licence fee payers equally. This means that the funding model applied in the U.K. will be the same in Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man.

[11:00]

**3.10.1 Deputy M. Tadier:**

Of course, whether it is a good outcome is relative and one has to ask the question for whom is it a good outcome. It is certainly not a good outcome for the vast majority of pensioners who will be having to pay a full T.V. licence compared to their counterparts in the U.K. who will be given free T.V. licences by the BBC up to 2020. Does the Assistant Minister in this case think that it is incumbent on the BBC to treat all licence payers in all parts of the British Isles equally and not to have 2 separate deals?

**Senator P.F. Routier:**

The BBC have taken the approach of replicating the systems, which were already in place prior to the recent negotiations, in fact Jersey has for a long time had the means-tested over-75s T.V. licence and the U.K. had a different system. But, as I say, there are currently 1,700 people who do benefit from a T.V. licence in Jersey and we know that the commitment that has been given by the BBC is what they will do, as the questioner was asking, is to treat everybody across the United Kingdom, Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man, in an equitable way in the future.

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

Can I have a supplementary?

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

Sorry, I thought that was your supplementary. I have you ticked as having a supplementary.

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

I cannot remember; I am just asking.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

That last question was a supplementary. You will have a final supplementary.

**3.10.2 Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:**

Would the Assistant Chief Minister agree that it is not the case, as the previous questioner put to him, that in fact over-75s are badly treated, because of course would he confirm that the budget that would have been available to free fee licences was, instead of given to all pensioners, it was put into the Westfield scheme, which had a huge benefit to pensioners and that, if any change were to

be made, what would be the consequences of withdrawing that free health care, optical and other foot care arrangements, and would he not think that would be a detrimental effect to pensioners rather than a benefit?

**Senator P.F. Routier:**

I thank the Senator for reminding me of that. Certainly we will recall at the time when this negotiation was going on and it was recognised that additional health provision was required for over-75s and the Westfield scheme has been a real benefit and has moved on from Westfield now, I think it is organised differently, but certainly it has been brought into local administration. But certainly it has made an immense difference to the health and well-being of those over 75.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

A final supplementary, Deputy Southern.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

It is not my ...

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

Sorry?

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

I have not asked a question yet, I do not think, in this one.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

Sorry, I am confusing the requests now. Deputy Southern.

**3.10.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Does the Assistant Minister not consider that a policy of sit back and wait for the BBC to come to us in 2020 is short-sighted and we could be in there laying the groundwork for a better deal if we chose?

**Senator P.F. Routier:**

Certainly not. I think the commitment that the BBC have made to ensure that everybody is treated equally with receiving their services, because the charter, which they are progressing and being a new place in 2020, it would not be really a useful thing to do when we are talking about the year after next that there will be something completely different, which we are waiting for the outcome of that. So it is not a matter of sitting back and not doing anything, we have negotiated effectively and we are in a good place.

**Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:**

Sorry, I just wondered if I was not coming up on your box, Sir?

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

No, you are coming up on the box, I have you down, but there is someone who has not yet asked a question to ask a question next, Senator. Sorry, was there a supplementary you wanted from that one, Deputy Southern? You normally have the chance to.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

No, thanks, Sir, I had a very clear answer that they are going to do nothing.

**3.10.4 Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

The Assistant Chief Minister has mentioned that it would probably cost something in the order of £275,000, I think he said, to provide free T.V. licences for all pensioners. Has it occurred to the Ministers to say that this is less than half the salary of one of the ancient male news presenters?

**Senator P.F. Routier:**

I think the Senator has misheard me or misunderstood what I said. It is not that it would cost £275,000 to give coverage for all over-75s, it is the cost that is currently being paid by the BBC to cover the existing licence, the people who do get it. But I will make no comments about the salaries of BBC employees.

**Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

I thank the Assistant Chief Minister for the correction.

**3.10.5 Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:**

I wonder if the Assistant Chief Minister would agree to publish an indication of the *per capita* additional spend that the BBC provides to Jersey compared to the *per capita* spend in the United Kingdom? In his answer... the reason why I am asking this is that he said everybody in the British Isles would be treated the same, and I am aware that, for example, the Isle of Man does not have a BBC outpost there as we do and would he not take the opportunity of reinforcing the importance that, if the additional cost would be imposed on the BBC, it is likely that we would see a further diminution in the output of the BBC, and would he not agree with me that would be a retrograde step, who are broadcasting these proceedings as we speak.

**Senator P.F. Routier:**

With regard to publishing the *per capita* spend for our Island, I would have to seek advice from the BBC about what they are currently spending, but certainly I can ask them that. But the Senator makes a really very, very good point. We are served exceptionally well by the BBC [**Approbation**], unless you are on the wrong end of an interview [**Laughter**], but certainly we do benefit from exceptional services from the BBC and I know at the time of the negotiations that was considered and that the Senator was the prime mover in doing those negotiations and I know that was considered at the time. So we have to be very careful that we do not have a loss of service from the BBC because that is not what we need.

**3.10.6 Deputy M. Tadier:**

If nothing else fails, a good bit of shroud-waving might to the trick. Essentially, if I understand the Assistant Minister's point before asking my question, is that he is saying that because we had a parsimonious benefit system in the first place, then the BBC are matching that parsimonious benefit system. It is the case that 17,000 people before who get free T.V. licences are no better off because they had a free T.V. licence anyway, it is just that now it is the BBC paying for it, and that by my figures, which are already a few years old, the majority of our pensioners are being short-changed by over half a million pounds by the BBC by not extending this benefit to the rest of the residents in Jersey. That is the reality of it. Is it not the case that this Council of Ministers and previous ones have short-changed pensioners because they did not have a proper universal benefit and they are still short-changing them now by failing to negotiate properly with the BBC for a non-discriminatory deal with Jersey?

**Senator P.F. Routier:**

I think the negotiations that were carried out in the recent times were very good for our community. As I said in my opening comments, it will be not really appropriate to go back to the BBC to open

renegotiations when we know that in the year after next there will be a totally different funding system for the BBC and the way they will review their licence fees, it will be decided at that time. But we have been given assurances by the BBC that we will be treated equitably at that time.