

2018.12.03

12 Deputy T. Pointon of St. John of the Minister for Home Affairs regarding the impact of comments he had made to Channel Television on police morale: [OQ.229/2018]

Will the Minister provide his assessment of the likely effect of comments he made to Channel Television on 27th November 2018 that a survey of the States of Jersey Police undertaken in early 2018 was not important anymore? What effect has this had on police morale and on the efforts of managers trying to implement a revised operational structure?

The Connétable of St. Clement (The Minister for Home Affairs):

I attended the Police Association annual general meeting last Thursday and this matter was raised and discussed. It is clear that my comments came across and had been interpreted by some in a manner that was not intended and I regret that. Let me be clear to the Assembly, as I was hopefully clear at the Police Association meeting, the results of the survey undertaken in March were very important and significant and I said that in my interview to Channel Television. But what matters now, what is important, is the result of the next survey. We need to look to the future, make improvements and see more positive results in the next survey. That is also very important. I was trying to say we need to ensure action is taken to respond positively, that improvements where necessary are made, and then hopefully we will see more encouraging results in the future. That is the message I was attempting to get across. That is the message I hope I got across to the Police Association at their annual general meeting.

3.12.1 The Deputy of St. John:

Two hundred and nine members of the Police Association were asked to survey: 85 per cent responded, 64 per cent said they would not recommend joining the States of Jersey Police to a friend, 21 per cent did not see themselves working with the States of Jersey Police in a year's time, 71 per cent said morale had declined and 46 per cent said morale had become much worse. In light of what is a troubling picture, will the Minister explain what action has been and is being taken to improve the situation?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I do not think anybody could be surprised that morale is relatively low in the States of Jersey Police Force, as it is throughout the public sector, because when you have a period of change that is unsettling and is not good for morale. But the senior management team at the States of Jersey Police have already reacted to the survey, which unfortunately came out some 7 months late, and the important thing that has been recognised by the senior management team and by the Police Association and by the police officers themselves and by myself is that what is important in helping morale is communication. The Acting Deputy Chief Officer has set up forums so that officers can communicate with the senior management team and indeed officers can communicate with each other. I am getting mixed messages. There are some areas where I am being told morale has already improved; there are other areas where I am told it has not. That is something that my department, myself and the Deputy Chief of Police, have to work on. For my part, I intend to continue my communication directly from time to time with police officers. In fact, I have even been invited to go out with them on patrol one evening this month and I am looking forward very much to that.

3.12.2 Senator S.W. Pallett:

Would the Minister confirm or otherwise that there have been - and I was careful which words to use here - a significant number of police and fire officers leaving the service this year? What is he actively doing to retain and support experienced officers at what we all agree is a very difficult time?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

In any organisation, any department, you will get people leaving the service for various reasons, retirement, ill health, or for other opportunities. Where those vacancies are occurring, Customs, Police and Fire, recruitment processes are being or have been undertaken. The Senator will have seen in the last few weeks I think there were 9 new police officers sworn in at the Royal Court, only 2 this Friday just gone. The recruitment process is underway for a number of fire officers because of retirements in the recent past. So numbers I cannot give him, but certainly recruitment processes have been undertaken or are being undertaken.

3.12.3 Senator S.W. Pallett:

Would he provide the numbers of officers that have left the service - Police and Fire Service - in the last year so that Members for themselves can make a view whether that is an acceptable number or not?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I obviously do not have those figures with me but am quite happy to provide them.

3.12.4 The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

Will the Minister advise us what communication has taken place by the senior management team with the rank and file on the proposals to revise the operational structure?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I cannot go into great detail there but I know that the Acting Deputy Chief holds great store by communicating with his officers. Efforts in that area have been redoubled, as I have said earlier, with a number of forums being set up and people able to go to briefings on various matters, which they are concerned about.

3.12.5 The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

Will the Minister advise whether the changes will be imposed upon the States of Jersey Police?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I am not quite sure what the Constable means by imposing change. I mean change will come along collaboratively and will enhance the service provided to Islanders. What I know about the States of Jersey Police, and indeed the Fire Service and the Ambulance Service and the Customs and Immigration Service, is that is something that they will all embrace enthusiastically.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

Can I clarify my question?

The Deputy Bailiff:

No, I am afraid you have had a supplementary, Connétable.

3.12.6 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can I ask the Minister if you would at some time, as soon as possible, provide the number of job losses that will come from the reorganisation of blue light services as a defined number? It seems to be very unclear, which is one of the impacts that is making morale so low in blue light services, the uncertainty as to whether many of them will have a job in the future. Indeed, more experienced and senior members of that service are the significant number that are leaving, leaving us with a very inexperienced service that will allegedly provide a better service. I am not entirely sure how that will happen.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

The department, including officers from all the services within Home Affairs, are working together now on a target operating model that will best serve the Island. All of them are involved, Customs, Police, Fire and Ambulance joined Home Affairs, them as well. There is no plan whatsoever to reduce the capability of any of those services. In fact the majority of people who have left the service over the last 6 months or so have been retirees. Some have gone back to the United Kingdom, some have gone for other jobs, but in the main they have been retirees, which indeed is creating opportunities for promotion for others within the service. So what the service will look like in 3, 4, 5 and 6 months' time, I cannot say at this present moment because that is being worked on by the organisations themselves within Home Affairs.

[16:15]

3.12.7 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can I ask the Minister, does the Minister suggest that the same capability of delivery of service can be made with lower numbers of staff in our blue light services?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

It is quite clear that numbers cannot continue to fall. That is a statement of the obvious, and we are not looking to reduce numbers any further. I am not looking for any further budget cuts. My job is to be champion for the services and even where they can justify to me an increase in budget for certain things then I will fight the Council of Ministers and I will fight in this Assembly if necessary. But I am not seeing a case at this stage, or probably at any stage but certainly not at this stage, for any reduction in the numbers now at emergency services.

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

Since the Minister places so much emphasis on communication, could I ask simply how many ways can he communicate: "Do more with less"?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Sorry, what I can say is the emergency services, with the resources they currently have at their disposal, are doing a brilliant job. We have seen over the last 5 years crime reduce and compared to the United Kingdom, for example ... I think I mentioned before there was something like 26 crimes per 1,000 people; in the U.K. it is well over 80. We have seen the number of fires reduce since 2003 by 43 per cent. Those are good positive figures and we should be commending our services for the way they have reacted to the change. Okay, things are difficult, we know they are difficult, they are difficult throughout the States, but the emergency services are responding positively and I have nothing but praise for them and I am extremely proud of them.

3.12.9 The Deputy of St. John:

Will the Minister commit to having an in-depth investigation into the managerial framework that existed in the year prior in order to determine what led to such a catastrophic fall in police morale?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I do not really think that is necessary. Morale is low. I am getting reports that it is improving. I am getting reports from other areas that it is not improving. We are looking now and we are hoping to finish the target operating model by the spring of next year, which will then give more certainty for everybody. Once there is more certainty there has to be an increase in morale.