

3.4 The Deputy of St. Mary of the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee regarding debates on the Public Accounts Committee's report on the 'Accounts of the States of Jersey for the year ended December 31st 2009' and their update report:

Given the importance of the Public Accounts Committee's report on the Accounts of the States of Jersey for the year ended 31st December 2009 and their update report, will the Chairman agree to take steps to enable a debate on the 2 reports and if not why not?

Senator B.E. Shenton (Chairman, Public Accounts Committee):

I think this is a very good question and we discussed it at the P.A.C. meeting briefly yesterday. The P.A.C. historically has, unlike the U.K. (United Kingdom) P.A.C... we have brought propositions in our own right and we have been in quite detailed conversations with the Treasury about the Public Finances Law and the Chief Minister's Department about the States of Jersey Law. These negotiations and discussions will be ongoing. Perhaps the best promise I can make to the Deputy is that the States of Jersey Accounts are going to be published by the end of the month and we will be carrying out a full review of these accounts, which will include the underspends and other aspects. There is also a report coming out on States senior management salaries. Perhaps I could give the Deputy the assurance that we will liaise with P.A.C. and the Deputy himself about when this report comes out, which will be in a couple of months' time, that we will bring this to the Chamber in some format for full debate on the issues. In that way, it will be a report that will be hot off the press and will cover some of the questions that were asked with the previous questioner as well.

3.4.1 The Deputy of St. Mary:

Yes, the reason I asked this question was that the report I referred to in the question made some astonishing allegations about our public service and also about this Assembly about, for instance, uncontrolled spending and I quote: "Considerable sums of public money which cannot be accounted for." They also referred to an overspend of £100 million, which made a very good headline but it has turned out not to be true as in any normal version of English it was not an overspend. So that is why I am asking for this debate because I think these are very important issues and the Chairman of P.A.C. has not answered my question. He has offered a debate on a totally different report but that is not the point. The report about the 2009 Accounts had comments in it that should be debated on the floor of this House.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

I think unfortunately the Deputy has perhaps misread the report. The £100 million overspend was basically taking the 2004 estimate for what we would spend in 2009 and comparing it to what we did spend in 2009, which was about £100 million more than we estimated in 2004. So that is where that particular overspend came from. With regard to the control of finances, once we allocate funds to an individual Minister, how that Minister spends that money is down to the particular Minister. It is not down to this Assembly. We have no influence on how that Minister will spend the budget that he is allocated, and that was the point we were making. Furthermore, because certain Clothier reforms were not implemented, the Council of Ministers do not even have the power to pull a Minister into line if he deviates. So these were the points that we were making.

3.4.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisssier:

Building on that very point that the Senator made, could the Senator say whether his committee has come up with ideas - which seem to have eluded almost every group that has studied the States and made recommendations - to enforce stronger accountability? We also had the Welsh Audit Report...

The Bailiff:

I am sorry, Deputy, I think that is getting too far off the question which was whether there should be a debate on 2 pre-existing reports.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisssier:

Could the Senator indicate whether in this debate he will be focusing on the lack of accountability and the lack of the ability to enforce accountability?

The Bailiff:

Still too far off, sorry, Deputy. **[Laughter]** Good try but ... Deputy Higgins and then the final question Deputy of St. Mary.

3.4.3 Deputy M.R. Higgins of St. Helier:

Recently there has been much discussion about Scrutiny Reports being debated on the floor of the House and otherwise being brought out into the open. The Deputy of St. Mary is basically asking for a debate on the reports you have brought out so that Members can not only go over the evidence you have found but also see the validity of it. Does the Chairman of the P.A.C. believe that his reports equally should be debated on the floor of this House in the same way that Scrutiny Reports should be?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

There is an updated report coming out fairly imminently and what I have offered is to work with P.A.C. about having a meaningful debate on that account containing the latest information. So the answer is going forward; yes. I cannot see the point of debating reports that have already come out because there is updated information and we have got the 2010 report and accounts out fairly imminently.

3.4.4 The Deputy of St. Mary:

Will the new report be a proper Public Accounts Committee report or will it be full of the spin and personal views of the people on the committee dressed up as a critique of the accounts because otherwise if it is not, then it does not help the Assembly very much. So will the new report be better ...

The Bailiff:

Do you have a question there, Deputy?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

I think that is a subjective statement. I know that the Deputy did have some difficulty in understanding the report **[Aside]** **[Laughter]** and maybe the P.A.C. could take him to one side and educate him on the workings of the States finances.