

23.12.11.

1. Deputy L.J. Farnham of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter of the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs regarding the Jersey Police (OQ.238/2023)

What assessment has the Minister undertaken to be certain that the proposed Government Plan budget for the States of Jersey Police, of £27.4 million per annum, is sufficient to provide an efficient and effective police service?

Deputy H. Miles of St. Brelade (The Minister for Justice and Home Affairs):

I thank the Deputy for his question. As a member of the Jersey Police Authority, the Deputy will be aware that the States of Jersey Police Force Law 2012 provides that the police authority is responsible for overseeing the performance of policing services by the States police force. This includes providing advice in relation to the budget. I therefore rely on the authority and, of course, my regular discussions with the chief officer, to provide me with reassurance in relation to the sufficiency of the budget. I am assured that the budget is sufficient to deliver an appropriate policing response for the Island and maintain our high levels of public safety.

2.5.1 Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Can I thank the Minister for her response? While I know that the Minister said the budget will provide an appropriate service, we want to ensure we have an efficient and effective service. Is the Minister aware that the proposed freezing of the budget essentially is tantamount, given the rates of inflation, to quite a significant cut in the budget, and it will have an impact on front line policing? I just wondered if she would be prepared to revisit that as a matter of urgency for next year's budgeting Government Plan?

Deputy H. Miles:

I thank the Deputy for his question. The chair of the police authority raised some concerns about public safety recently in the media, and he said that there could be an impact on public safety. Of course he is right to highlight that risk. As with all my front line services, I will monitor budgets very closely to ensure that financial constraints do not impact service delivery. I am currently satisfied that the budget is sufficient to deliver an appropriate policing response for the Island and maintain our high levels of public safety.

2.5.2 Deputy R. Ward of St. Helier Central:

May I ask the Minister, in the response just given it was a recognition that there could be an issue regards the funding level. Can I ask the Minister what analysis is undertaken and the specific risk areas that may arise for the police force in providing the service that I know we all need?

Deputy H. Miles:

I refer to my previous answer in that it is the role of the police authority to advise me, due to their oversight of the performance of policing services by the States of Jersey Police. Evidently I converse regularly with the chief police officer, and areas of particular risk will be highlighted. In the event that I consider the budget to be insufficient to maintain public safety, I will not hesitate to talk to my colleague, the Minister for Treasury and Resources, to make sure the force has what it needs. The Deputy, in his initial question, asked about certainty and, as we have seen over the last year, we can never be absolutely sure to what extent our emergency service will be tested, either operationally or financially. I would also note that we need to remember that the police and the funding for the police is not the sole driver of community safety. It does not carry all the risk. It is just that community effort involving all of us to keep Jersey a safe and special place.

2.5.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

May I ask the Minister then whether she is reassuring the Jersey Police Authority that when concerns are raised, then they will be listened to and be acted on promptly?

Deputy H. Miles:

I thank the Deputy for his question. As we would expect, I have had discussions with the chair of the authority and the chief officer about the challenges of delivering our essential policing services.

[10:00]

The authority have not yet, to date, raised a formal concern in relation to the budget, nor have they sought any additional resources for the force. At such a time they do, I will consider that request.

2.5.4 Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade:

The community policing section of the States of Jersey Police provide an essential amount of support for the Honorary Police services and the Parish. Will the Minister confirm that their presence out in the field, so to speak, will not be compromised by these budget cuts?

Deputy H. Miles:

I thank the Connétable for the question, and a very important question. I am not in a position to confirm that the Community Policing Unit will not be withdrawn to other areas. As we will have noticed over the last 12 months, some of those community police officers have been withdrawn to support the force in areas that have been required to meet the emergencies. Although I would like to be able to confirm that to the Connétable, I am not in a position to do so.

2.5.5 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Will the Minister agree that she perhaps needs to be a little bit more forceful in retaining the budget for the community police services in the Parishes?

Deputy H. Miles:

It is entirely for the chief police officer to decide how operationally he deploys his officers. I have fought very hard and had very robust discussions to maintain and increase the budget for States of Jersey Police, but those operational decisions will always be made by the chief police officer.

2.5.6 Deputy M. Tadier:

Given the fact that last year's and this year's inflation have been in double figures, and when one looks at that in a compounded way I think one can think it is eye-watering. Could the Minister give us advice as to what her budget is looking like in real terms, when the R.P.I. (retail price index) is taken into account? Is it a cut or is it an increase?

Deputy H. Miles:

I refer to my previous answer. It is down to the police authority to advise me on decisions around the budget. I think nobody would suggest that there has been an increase but it is down to the chief officer and myself to decide how that cake is going to be cut.

2.5.7 Deputy M. Tadier:

So that does not really answer my question. It is quite simple. We have effectively seen a 23 per cent increase in the last 2 years in R.P.I. Has the budget for the police, and her department more generally, gone up by 23 per cent or not?

Deputy H. Miles:

I think the Deputy will agree that actually no budget across the States of Jersey has been increased by 23 per cent.

2.5.8 Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I note the Minister has said she has fought hard to increase budgets for her Ministerial, which is commendable. Can she confirm what actual budget was presented to the Council of Ministers for policing, for the term of this Government Plan? I am trying to ask: was the £27.4 million, as presented by the Minister, what she asked for or did she ask for a greater budget but it was reduced after discussion at Council of Ministers?

Deputy H. Miles:

The budget that we achieved was the £27.1 million. There were various growth bids that went into that budget, which were slightly higher. If my recollection serves, it was about £300,000 higher and that was to cover issues like the Digital Forensics Unit and other areas. But that was also across Justice and Home Affairs.

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I did ask just a straightforward question: was the £27.4 million the budget that was requested by the Minister or the budget that was left after negotiation at Council of Ministers?

The Bailiff:

My understanding of the Minister's answer, Deputy, was that certain additional figures were requested, but they did not make it through the cut. Is that correct, Minister?

Deputy H. Miles:

Yes, Sir.

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Can I thank the Minister?