

2.18 The Deputy of St. Martin of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding stimulus funding for a refurbishment of the Jersey Opera House:

Following an announcement that the Jersey Opera House has been given stimulus funding, will the Minister inform Members how many local staff will be employed in the refurbishment, why was the application for funding made by Property Holdings and not by the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture and, given that Property Holdings comes within the remit of his Ministerial responsibilities, who made the decision to allocate the funding?

The Connétable of St. Peter (Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources - rapporteur):

Unfortunately I cannot give the Deputy of St. Martin the actual numbers of people employed on the contracts. However, as a construction project, the contractor will bring people on and off site, depending on the works required. So the number of staff will vary at any moment in time. Nevertheless, the contractor has declared that in excess of 90 per cent of the total labour content will be local staff. The original fiscal stimulus application was made by the Education, Sport and Culture Department, not Jersey Property Holdings as suggested, and it is they who are sponsoring the project and chair the project group. The Jersey Opera House is owned by the States. Therefore, the allocation of funds is to Jersey Property Holdings who manage the States' property portfolio. The Fiscal Stimulus Steering Committee has verified that the project meets the fiscal stimulus criteria - the 3 Ts - and has recommended that funding is allocated for this project. Furthermore, it is anticipated that progression of this project may afford other opportunities, including possible rationalisation in relation to performance and other office space currently used by other cultural organisations in Jersey, hoping to achieve better value for money in the wider sense for the States and, in particular, E.S.C. (Education, Sport and Culture) supported cultural activities with sufficient office space to accommodate other additional cultural offices.

[11:30]

2.18.1 The Deputy of St. Martin:

I am concerned about how the allocation of money is funded, bearing in mind this is Property Holdings or under the remit of the Treasury. What independent assessment is carried out before the funding is allocated, independent of the Treasury itself?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

The assessment was undertaken by E.S.C. on this project on how they needed the money spent and what works were needing to be done. They then made an application through the Treasurer in his role overlooking Jersey Property Holdings to see whether funds could be made available out of the fiscal stimulus and a bid was therefore made. The Fiscal Stimulus Panel then agreed that this was an appropriate project to fund and that is how the funding was allocated.

2.18.2 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

While I support the arts, how can the Minister justify the expenditure of almost £1 million on new facilities at the opera house, judging by the reports on Channel Television and on the radio, when we have such a backlog in housing and people are living in unacceptable accommodation? What priorities does your department or the States have?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Quite simply, it is down to the Fiscal Stimulus Panel. The 3 Ts were employed in this, which is timely, targeted and temporary. The housing issues, which the Deputy referred to, are ongoing issues and do not fall within the actual remit of the 3 Ts. There are 2 different streams of funding required; so to use that as an analogy is an inappropriate analogy. You would need to use one which was also accommodated under the 3 Ts Fiscal Stimulus Policy.

2.18.3 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I do not know how the Assistant Minister can say that when, at the last sitting, the Minister for Treasury and Resources gave a statement to this House how he had found money for the Pomme d'Or Farm development out of the fiscal stimulus strategy. It can be done and it should have been done. Do you not agree?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

A slightly separate funding arrangement has been looked at with regard to Pomme d'Or. The Minister for Treasury and Resources did give a commitment to this Chamber that those works will go ahead and at that time the fiscal stimulus was looked at as a way of funding that. That may well be the case but that is also under review and that will be delivered back to the Chamber in due course.

2.18.4 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Although the Assistant Minister is not part of fiscal stimulus, would he not say, apropos the kind of comment made by the previous questioner, that the justification for further conference space merited further examination? Does he believe that Jersey needs further conference space and that this is a good way of getting it?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Unfortunately, it is not just about conference space. It is about works which were not carried out at the time the major refurbishment was done within the Opera House and it has been outstanding for some considerable period of time. In referring to conference space, it is just one of the opportunities that has been identified if we get these works completed and the Opera House and all areas within it up to occupational standard. Conferencing is one option. Putting in other Arts Trust offices into there is another option. If we do achieve that - E.S.C. have made a commitment to look at that - it may well release other offices back into the pot, so we can use that to look at the overall office strategy to gain even more benefit for the public.

2.18.5 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Just as a follow-up: does this mean, in terms of the arts estate, that his department is intending to close down the St. James Centre? Would he make ...

The Connétable of St. Peter:

I wish I could but unfortunately that is not within my remit at the moment. Clearly every piece of Jersey Property Holdings asset portfolio is under scrutiny and St. James is under scrutiny as part of that ongoing review of all Property Holdings property assets.

2.18.6 The Deputy of St. Martin:

I would just like to ask if the Assistant Minister could arrange for the figures of local staff that will be employed? He mentioned he was not able to give the answers. It

would be nice for Members to have a breakdown maybe of how many local staff and how many outside staff will be employed. Also, if I could just follow on from the question about additional facilities being introduced to the Opera House and maybe this would lead to the closure of other establishments like St. James. Being it is a Property Holdings function, or responsibility, will the Assistant Minister be looking in whether the money being spent to refurbish or reinstall new facilities at the Opera House may well lead or could lead to the closure of other premises like St. James, for instance?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

The Deputy of St. Martin is very visionary because he is already looking at our onward-looking work. That is exactly what we are looking to do; rationalising the under-utilised office space in many other areas, other than the Opera House. The net result of that is so we can release properties, which are no longer required to be held by the public back into the public domain for redevelopment or whatever is required. If I can just come back initially to the first point raised by the Deputy of St. Martin, the contractor has committed - and the local contractor is Camerons, which is a local contractor, and they do employ direct staff in the majority of their contract work - to us that in excess of 90 per cent of the total labour force onsite at any one time will be local staff.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Would I be permitted to ask question 3 first, Sir, or shall I ask question 20 or, more to the point, will I have time to ask both?

The Bailiff:

We are getting very short of time, Deputy. I think it is your choice.

Deputy M. Tadier:

I would like to ask question 3, Sir, if that is okay.

The Bailiff:

Very well, question 3 asked of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture.