

23.05.23

2 Deputy C.S. Alves of St. Helier Central of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding the planning and assessments undertaken ahead of the closure of the gym at Fort Regent and the relocation of facilities to Springfield Stadium (OQ.105/2023)

Will the Minister advise what planning and assessments were undertaken and what data were collected prior to the closing and relocation of the sports clubs who used Fort Regent, and the gym there, to ensure there was sufficient space and the same quantity, quality, and variety of equipment at Springfield Stadium (or other facilities) and that the same number of users could be accommodated?

Deputy T. Binet (The Minister for Infrastructure):

I am sorry, I thought the questions had ended and I am having a conversation.

The Bailiff:

This is the next question, this is question 2. It is also addressed to you, Minister.

The Minister for Infrastructure:

If I could ask the Assistant Minister for Infrastructure, Deputy Stephenson, to take it up because she is specialising in ... apologies for not paying attention.

Deputy L. Stephenson of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter (Assistant Minister for Infrastructure - rapporteur):

The decant of sports clubs from Fort Regent has been an ongoing project for more than 18 months. The previous Government made a commitment to find alternative venues for all those at Fort Regent and conversations and dialogue have been continuous throughout the process with all those involved. The most significant piece of work underpinning that decision was the 2018 sports facilities delivery strategy undertaken by K.K.P. (Knight Kavanagh & Page). This then led to further work, which developed into the inspiring active places strategy. Both of those documents are publicly available and I would be only too happy to circulate them to Members. Studies undertaken prior to the design and build of the new Springfield gym determine that the Fort Regent gym operated with a high level of overcapacity. This new facility at Springfield was designed to cater for existing members and to provide further capacity. The variety of equipment at the new Springfield gym facility has been chosen to cater for a variety of needs. It is some of the best equipment available on the market. An amount of cardiovascular equipment has been moved from Fort Regent to Springfield, as it was relatively new and in good condition.

3.2.1 Deputy C.S. Alves:

I am sure the Assistant Minister was aware that there has been quite a lot of feedback regarding the restriction of space within the gym, and a lot of this has been quite negative. Can the Minister advise whether she will be taking on board the comments that are currently being published in various places, including Facebook? If so, how can people reach out directly to the department to ensure that this feedback is taken on board?

Deputy L. Stephenson:

Yes, absolutely. The sports facilities team and I are continuing to monitor, absorb and reflect on all the feedback being received, and I am very actively monitoring that personally as part of that

process. I would encourage anybody who does have questions or concerns to reach out to the staff onsite. They are also very welcome to contact me directly. My details are online.

3.2.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Some of the specific concerns that have been raised with myself is particularly the space for those who use free weights. They are saying there is simply not enough space to exercise appropriately. The concern is that these people may well leave the Active card system and go elsewhere. Is the Minister concerned about people leaving and not using the Active card facilities themselves?

Deputy L. Stephenson:

I think the reality here is that the gym has moved from a very, very large space at Fort Regent, and the K.K.P. report that I referenced earlier concluded that it was significantly over capacity. I appreciate that that change is always going to be difficult moving into a smaller right-sized environment for the market we are looking at here. Once again, we do monitor and take on board that feedback. Naturally, with any kind of move like this, there is always going to be a need to make small adjustments along the way. There will be some snagging as well that is needed. Very much aware of concerns and would encourage people to raise those and keep communicating well on how they are being affected.

3.2.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

The Minister mentioned the word "market". Is there not a concern that effectively other gyms, private gyms, will provide a better facility and therefore because of this market that seems to have been set up with an inadequate facility for some, they will simply move to private gyms and we could be seeing the end of a very successful system of Active card, et cetera.

Deputy L. Stephenson:

It is absolutely not the intention here to see the end of the Active offering whatsoever. This is about providing the right kind of sports and active facilities that can be sustainable and fit for the future in the correct kind of environment. The evidence has been very clear that Fort Regent was not providing that environment. I appreciate that there are questions about if some people may choose to leave their membership. Obviously they are private decisions. There has been a huge increase in the number of private gyms in Jersey in recent years and also the price points on some of those gyms have started to reduce. But currently Active offers a very good price point for Islanders and I do not see that going anywhere at all.

The Bailiff:

Deputy Binet, you would not normally be in a position to intervene at this stage having allowed the ...

Deputy T. Binet:

Sorry, I had something to say that may have helped.

The Bailiff:

I am afraid there is only one person that can answer the question at a time.

3.2.4 Deputy C.D. Curtis of St. Helier Central:

Would the Deputy consider moving some of the activities such as for the heavy weight trainers to another facility? This would leave more space at Springfield for exercise referral users and general fitness trainers.

Deputy L. Stephenson:

I would be interested if the Deputy has any suggestions about where those weights should go to. I would also recognise that some people choose to use cardiovascular equipment and weights as well in the same workout. So I am not sure and I have seen no evidence to suggest that that would be the right way forward. What I will say is that there are ongoing discussions about how we may be able to open up other Active facilities in future, perhaps out on smaller scales that maybe already exist out in the community, and now that the move from Fort Regent has happened it may enable us to start looking at how we bring online those facilities for the public as well.

3.2.5 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

Would the Assistant Minister confirm that there are no plans and whether there have been any discussions about privatising the Active card offering? Would she also state what her stance is on the privatisation of the currently publicly-owned Active scheme?

Deputy L. Stephenson:

I have had no discussions about the privatisation of the Active scheme. I have no real views on it currently. As I say, Active offers a very good offering to Islanders at a very good price point and I believe they are doing a very good job with that.

3.2.6 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Given the Assistant Minister's answers to previous questions, is she admitting that there are groups of people that are less well-served by the new facilities and, if so, who are those groups of people?

Deputy L. Stephenson:

I am not quite sure what the Deputy means there in reference to my previous questions. The only thing I can think is that the suggestion that some people may choose not to go to Springfield now that it has moved. But I think, as the Minister said earlier, we are very much in the early days of this gym. I think it has been open for 8 days now. Let us give it some time, see where we get to. The Minister and I will be paying close attention to how things settle down and bed in and we can move on from there.

3.2.7 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Is the Assistant Minister aware of any cancellations to Active card members due to the change in facilities?

Deputy L. Stephenson:

I have asked for an update on usage figures and exactly that question, and in the next couple of weeks I will be supplied with them, once again, once we have had a chance for the situation to bed in and settle down.

3.2.8 Deputy C.S. Alves:

The Minister mentioned in one of her answers that there had been consultations over 18 months regarding the clubs that were being moved and alternative venues had been looked at. We recently

had a couple of those club owners come into our constituency drop-in session and they had concerns regarding the space that they were being given, which I believe was meant to be at Oakfield, and the terms of the contract that they currently have in place being cancelled. Can the Minister give some reassurance that these clubs will be given like-for-like contracts or, at the very least, the exact same facilities and space that they were given up at Fort Regent to enable them to carry on operating in the way that they have done for so many years?

Deputy L. Stephenson:

I thank the Deputy for her question. The project at Springfield has been going on for 18 months. The engagement with those clubs and organisations has been going on significantly longer. The previous Government made decisions on that basis. I have also personally met with the clubs that remain at Fort Regent, which I believe the Deputy is referring to, more than once and continue to engage with them. Officers have as well. Their needs and requirement for space and timetabling have very much been taken into account.