

STATES OF JERSEY



PROPOSED GOVERNMENT PLAN 2024 - 2027 (P.72/2023) – TWENTY-THIRD AMENDMENT (P.72/2023 AMD.(23)) – COMMENTS

**Presented to the States on 7th December 2023
by the Council of Ministers**

STATES GREFFE

COMMENTS

In response to P72/2023 (Amd 23) as Amended, the Council of Ministers (COM) reject this amendment to the 2024 Government Plan. Although the amendment by Deputy Luce is viewed by COM as well intentioned, it is however not deliverable or indeed affordable within the allocated spending envelope and, therefore, not feasible to progress. This amendment as proposed would lead to a significant overdrawn balance in the Consolidated Fund in 2025 onwards and contradict the requirement in the Public Finances (Jersey) Law for the Government Plan to consider the sustainability of Public Finances.

The COM agrees with the Deputy's assertion that the east of island requires improvements to sporting facilities. Previous schemes, as the one detailed in the report to the Amendment, sought a major redevelopment of Le Rocquier school's sporting facilities, with the additionality of adjoining community facilities. Work led by Infrastructure and Environment (I&E) identified a scheme costing in the region of £30m to be constructed over three years, which the Deputy has based his Amendment on.

The improvement to facilities at Le Rocquier School has appeared in earlier Government Plans with the purpose of upgrading the school's facilities. High level plans for a substantial community-based sports centre, alongside upgrades to the school, were explored over the last two years and led by I&E. However, COM concluded that it was imperative that the Capital Programme for the Government Plan 2024 must be both affordable and deliverable, and projects, therefore, needed to be prioritised by Ministers.

The Minister for Children and Education has recognised the importance of upgrading the school facilities at Le Rocquier School to ensure they meet all health & safety and Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) requirements, as well as adhering to building bulletin standards for Physical Education facilities at secondary schools.

In this connection, the Minister has directed officers to commence a feasibility study to develop internal and external sporting upgrades to existing facilities, including the development of a full size 3G pitch. Jersey Property Holdings (JPH) is leading the feasibility study in partnership with the school and officers from the Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department (CYPES). Initial plans will be developed early in 2024 for consideration. The upgraded facility would also provide improvements for community use outside of school hours.

The Minister has committed to exploring the funding for this project across the CYPES capital programme, and more widely with the Minister for Treasury and Resources across the wider Government capital programme. By taking this approach it will enable both the CYPES capital programme and the wider Government capital programme to be flexed where underspends from delays in other projects can effectively be utilised to deliver other much needed projects, such as this one.

The feasibility work for upgrading the existing facilities commenced this autumn. Once the plans for the scheme have been agreed these will then need to be taken forward for Planning and Bi-laws approval and a tender process to appoint a contractor.

From an optimistic timeline perspective, only a small amount a construction will be possible at the end of the 2024, with this more likely commencing at the start of 2025. Therefore, it is simply not possible to spend £7.7 million in 2024 as proposed by this Amendment.

If the plans above are stopped by this amendment this would require the whole process to start again with a timeline beyond that described above, therefore even less likelihood of spending £7.7 million in 2024.

The Deputy is proposing that the ‘Upgrades to CYPES Estates’ funding allocation be decreased by £4.4m in 2024 to support the construction of a new sports facility, highlighting that £5.764m is already allocated to school improvements and can, therefore, be used for this purpose. As per above, this funding will not be required in 2024 for construction according to the timeline. There is no need to reallocate the £4.4 m budget in 2024 as it cannot be utilised It must be stressed that if the Deputy Luce’s Amendment is accepted this will have serious consequences on both the Government finances and the CYPES capital programme.

All of this funding has been committed to support a number of prioritised projects across CYPES with the purpose of ensuring that schools meet health & safety, safeguarding, environmental, fire and compliance requirements; have suitable indoor and outdoor space to deliver the curriculum; and are sufficiently maintained. Projects across the CYPES estate have been prioritised and funding allocated to those in the “must do” category.

An example of the types of projects that would not be able proceed if the full allocation of funding was unavailable within the ‘school improvements’ capital allocation includes new fencing (safeguarding), replacement toilets, window replacement and roofing upgrades (to prevent water ingress), carpet replacements, and improvements to eating areas (to ensure children are able to eat indoors), and to outside learning areas. The impact of the proposed reallocation of £4.4m from this fund would affect priority projects at a number of schools, including:

Grainville; Le Rocquier; Samarès; Haute Vallée; Grands Vaux; Hautlieu; Victoria College; St John’s; La Sente Secondary; Highlands College; First Tower; Rouge Bouillon.

If the Amendment was supported and it was decided that some or all of the projects at these schools must proceed, then other projects within the ‘CYPES Upgrades to Estates’ allocation would be impacted, including the full allocation of the DDA fund, the upgrade work to the planned purchased Therapeutic Home, planned pitch developments and the rebuilding project at Le Squez Youth & Community Centre. All of these projects have been identified as a priority for the CYPES Capital Programme by the Minister for Children and Education.

In addition, the Deputy is proposing that £3.3m is moved from the ‘Central Reserve’ to support this project. In 2024, the Central Reserve provides £58m to meet anticipated inflationary pay awards for all public sector employees and a further £7m in the General Reserve to meet urgent and unforeseen expenditure requirements that arise during the financial year. In recent years, the General Reserve has been used to respond to major incidents, meet global price shocks, and address critical operational needs in health and the children’s service.

This amendment would require the amount available to meet unforeseen requirements in the General Reserve to be reduced by 47%, which would severely limit the Government's ability to respond to emerging financial challenges such as those outlined above.

Furthermore, the Deputy is requesting a further £29.8m is allocated for the total project approval. If this Amendment is passed, this funding will need to be reallocated from other projects already in the CYPES capital programme and from the wider Government capital programme. For CYPES, this would mean the delay or stopping of major projects, including the construction of the new Mont à l'Abbé Secondary School and the Central St Helier Primary School.

If the Deputy's Amendment is supported, then all feasibility work will need to stop and recommence for the scheme outlined in this Amendment. The timelines for the feasibility work and the required Planning and Bi-Laws approval, tender process to appoint contractor, would mean no construction would be possible in 2024- mid 2025 as there would not be sufficient time to progress to this phase of the project until at least 2026. This would mean the £7m allocated to the project in 2024 would remain unused and unable to be allocated to other priority projects.

The Minister for Children and Education has a plan to upgrade and modernise the facilities at Le Rocquier. This plan is in progress and will deliver a 3G pitch and modernised and fit for purpose indoor facilities for school and community use.

This amendment would stop those plans and create a longer timeline for the improvement works for the school and community, as well as impacting a large range of other priority projects across the CYPES estate.