

2019.12.10

2 Senator K.L. Moore of the Minister for Education regarding the delivery of efficiencies in her portfolio: (OQ.300/2019)

How does the Minister propose to deliver the efficiencies set for her portfolio?

Senator T.A. Vallois (The Minister for Education):

Within the published efficiencies plan, £2.274 million has been set for my portfolio and £1.302 million for the Minister for Children and Housing. Specific to my portfolio, are 3 schemes totalling £806,329; the remainder of the scheme shared with the Minister for Children and Housing. The exact level delivered may be different to what is set, as schemes are further progressed. I have reserved my position on £1.781 million of efficiencies; £671,000 relate exclusively to my portfolio; the remainder being cross-departmental and cross-portfolio. I have agreed to the delivery of 7 efficiency schemes, which total £1.795 million.

[9:45]

£135,000 is within my portfolio and the remainder is cross-portfolio with the Minister for Children and Housing. The exact split between the ministries is unknown at this time, but will become clearer as the plans progress. It is for officers to carry out sufficient work, so that I can be assured that any efficiencies, within my portfolio, do not have any negative impact on a provision of education and supporting services and that all schemes are accurately costed and deliverable.

3.2.1 Senator K.L. Moore:

It is understood that, as the Minister has reserved her position on the £1.78 million of the efficiencies, that is because she has concerns as to the negative impact, or potential negative impact, upon children and education. So, could the Minister please explain what her concerns are and how she proposes to overcome this *impasse*?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

Of the £1.781 million, the costs recovery scheme for Highlands College courses totalling £571,000; the analysis and the options being proposed, I do not believe are, at this point in time, appropriately sufficient and there is work being supported by an independent U.K. (United Kingdom) expert, which I am expecting an update later this week. In terms of the commercial operations costs recovery scheme of £100,000, this is also being worked up with further analysis and proposals for fee uplifts and income generating opportunities, to be presented to me before Christmas. The modern and efficient workforce efficiency, totalling £110,000, is reviewing all fixed term contracts within the Department, to see which ones can be ended this year, in 2020, in 2021 and onwards. Early indications are that it may be difficult to achieve that whole £110,000 in 2020, but the analysis is yet not complete. The largest proportion is, of course, the organisational structures with regards to the business support review, totalling £1 million, which is subject to intensive and detailed analysis to identify options and will be progressed throughout the first quarter of 2020. However, following a Council of Ministers meeting last week, I have had it absolutely confirmed to me that £1 million will not include school budgets.

3.2.2 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier:

Yesterday, during a public hearing at P.A.C. (Public Accounts Committee) with the Chief Executive, it has been indicated that the delay in implementation of target operating models is due to the

political involvement. I would like to ask the Minister if the efficiencies situation will cause further delay in implementation of the target operating model in her Department?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

It is highly likely that it may cause further delay and the reason why I say that is because the appropriate work has not been completed. My concern, with that £1 million, was that school budgets were included. Like I have stated, at the Council of Ministers last week, following that, it has been absolutely confirmed to me that school budgets will not be involved in that £1 million and, therefore, I am uncertain as to whether that is actually deliverable in 2020.

3.2.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Just to confirm, because there is a lot of language being used there on the baseline ... classroom, in schools that would just not be the normal language they use. Can you confirm that, in schools, there will be no loss of teachers, teaching assistants and that kind, office staff, all of the support workers that, within a school environment, work together to provide that service for students?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

As I stated, it was only following the Council of Ministers meeting last week and this is why I have been going backwards and forwards on the £1.781 million, because I wanted to be absolutely assured, while the school funding review is being carried out, it seems absolutely absurd to be suggesting any cuts from business support within schools, until we have had a proper analysis about our funding for schools and ensuring we have the appropriate funding and resources to support the delivery of education in Jersey. I can give an assurance to Deputy Ward and the Assembly that, at this moment in time, school budgets are not included in that business support review of £1 million.

3.2.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

If school budgets are not to be included in that £1.7 million, where does she anticipate any cuts can come from? Would it be from the further education budget, would it be from the higher education budget, would it be elsewhere within her Department? Where does she imagine £1.7 million of cuts can come from?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

That is the million dollar question and that is why I have challenged the £1.781 million, because I do not believe thorough analysis and appropriate costs have been carried out, to ensure there will not be a negative impact on education. I will continue to hold my officers' feet to the fire. I do not believe that £1 million is deliverable so far as the information I have received. The £571,000, for Highlands College, is of particular concern to me, after being a member on the anti-inflation strategy group with Senator Farnham about how we ensure increases of costs to the public are kept at 2.5, or below. The uncertainty around this £1.781 million is real and until I can have the appropriate analysis and costed and deliverables, I am unable to support them.

3.2.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is the Minister suggesting then that we are talking about additional costs, or prices being charged for courses at Highlands College? Is that a possibility?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

That was the suggestion that was laid out in the efficiencies plan. It specifically referred to Highlands College, a £571,000 increase to particular course fees. That analysis is being carried out further, to

identify, actually, whether that is capable of happening. My particular view is that a large amount of those courses support not just children who are within - or young people, who are in - the vocational sphere, but apprenticeships, as well and therefore will affect small business costs. The reality of that will be the possibility of them not taking up those courses and, therefore, those courses becoming unviable.

3.2.6 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour:

The Minister mentioned that she was being asked to look at fixed term contracts and whether she could cancel some of those staff going forward. Can the Minister inform the Assembly what types of posts tend to be covered with these fixed-term contracts? Is it within the Department, or is it posts like teaching assistants and teachers?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

I cannot give the Deputy any further information about the fixed term contracts, as I do not have that. But I can assure her it will not be teaching assistants and teachers, at this point. I have been assured that it will not involve school budgets. That is what I have been advised. I can certainly get that information in terms of the ... there are 33, as I understand it, within this fixed term. It might be across myself and the Minister for Children and Housing, with regards to those particular positions, but the analysis that has been carried out so far, the reality is that it is unrealistic that it is going to happen in 2020.

3.2.7 Deputy M. Tadier:

Could the Minister state whether one of the efficiencies she could use - I will try and put my teeth back in - would be the teaching of tongue twisters to school children? Seriously, would she consider the removal of the requirement, in Article 19 of the Education Law, for a pupil to attend an act of worship at least one day a week in schools, thereby freeing up time and resources for other more important issues?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

The Deputy knows that we are carrying out a huge consultation with the Island, at the moment, about education. That will lead into a review and a change of the Education Law, that will come before this Assembly in 2021. Article 19, there is already an ability for parents to withdraw their children from acts of worships within schools. It is for this Assembly to decide as to whether they wish to withdraw that, when I bring forward the new legislation in terms of education.

3.2.8 Deputy M. Tadier:

Although parents can, obviously, withdraw their children from that, it is still a resource requirement for schools to be able to provide that act of worship for schools which, in terms of state schools, are notionally secular. So, would she look to removing this as an efficiency, as a matter of urgency?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

The Deputy will recall the Deputy of St. John's Proposition about ensuring this Assembly changes legislation before savings, or efficiencies, are made. That legislation would have to come before the Assembly before I could go forward with that efficiency, if it was deemed appropriate to do so.

3.2.9 Senator K.L. Moore:

I would be grateful if the Minister could tell us when the analysis will be delivered to her. If she is not content with the analysis, when it is provided, what will the Minister then ask the Council of Ministers to do?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

There are different timings for different parts of the £1.781 million. The first part I am getting an update, later this week, with regards to the Highlands College courses. With regards to the business support review, the detailed analysis is due to be progressed throughout the first quarter of 2020. I do not expect to see anything substantial until, probably, the end of the first quarter next year. In terms of what I am doing in how we then progress this, I am having regular meetings with officers and I will be due to have a meeting with the Chief Minister, later this week, to discuss what has gone forward to the Council of Ministers, whether it is viable, whether it is deliverable and ensuring that any savings, that are put forward, are properly analysed, so that we ensure there is no negative impact on education going forward.