

4. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Chief Minister

4.1 Deputy P.N. Troy of St. Brelade:

In my research regarding our current waste strategy I have visited 2 recycling plants, one in France and one in Wales. Has the Chief Minister personally visited any waste recycling plants in the last 2 years? Does he accept that our waste recycling targets have been set at too low a level and that increased recycling targets could result in the purchase of a lower capacity incinerator with a consequential saving of millions of pounds from the capital budget? Would he be prepared to review the current strategy being proposed by the Transport and Technical Services Minister which is currently out of line with other jurisdictions aiming for much higher recycling targets?

Senator F.H. Walker (The Chief Minister):

I have not visited recycling plants, nor do I consider it necessary for me to do so. I would remind the Deputy that the proposal currently being pursued by Transport and Technical Services was approved by this House, after much debate and much scrutiny, and I am aware from discussions with the Minister that he and his department are constantly keeping under review development of new technologies. I am also aware that the order book for incinerators from around the world is now fuller than it has ever been. Do we have to do better on recycling? Do we have to set ambitious targets? Yes, we do. Will that mean that we can save, as the Deputy suggested in his question, millions or tens of millions of pounds on an energy from waste plant? No, it will not.

4.2 The Dean of Jersey The Very Reverend R.F. Key:

As Members of the House will know, tomorrow is the 25th anniversary service for Jersey Hospice Care. I wonder if it would be appropriate for the Minister to join me in sending the greetings of this House to those involved in the setting-up and continuing ministry of Jersey Hospice Care and paying tribute to this particular manifestation of the honorary principle in Jersey public life? **[Approbation]**

Senator F.H. Walker:

I do so most warmly. The support that Hospice Care has given to countless families in desperate health circumstances over the last 25 years is beyond admiration, in my view. They have done a quite superb job and I am sure other Members of this House have personal experience, as do I, of friends and members of family who have benefited enormously from the exceptional care and kindnesses shown by the staff and the volunteers involved in Hospice Care. I also remind the House, if they are not already aware, that there is a church service at 6.00 p.m. tomorrow in the Town Church which is a commemoration service - I am not sure if that is the right description for the service - on behalf of hospice and I hope as many Members as possible will attend. I thank the Dean for asking the question and for giving me the opportunity to pay warm tributes to Hospice Care and the excellent people who staff it and who work with it and in it as volunteers.

4.3 Deputy S. Power:

I know the Chief Minister will have been a little preoccupied last week with a letter written by Jersey's Health Minister and that is not the subject of my question. My question is related to a letter written by a former member of the States of Guernsey who is a leading member of the Guernsey legal profession. In his letter he suggests the need for a written constitution to protect the Islands against excessive influence from Westminster and the E.U. (European Union). He refers to the European Tax Savings Directive and what other governments force on us here, including in Jersey that means G.S.T. and 'Zero/10.' The advocate's solution was to seek dominion status with a written constitution, unsusceptible to manipulation by outsiders. The advocate finally suggests that Guernsey and Jersey should work together, potentially as an island

federation. Does the Chief Minister consider it now appropriate to consider more independence for Jersey and does he agree or disagree with the option of dominion status?

Senator F.H. Walker:

I do not consider that greater independence for Jersey at this stage is the right option, although I can confirm - and this is not news to Members - that the whole option of Jersey's constitutional position is constantly under review. There is a Sub-Committee - formerly of the Policy Resources Committee, now of course of my department - which includes the Bailiff and others, which keeps the position very closely under review. I do not believe that the advocate in Guernsey speaks on behalf of the States of Guernsey. He expressed a view which, of course, he is perfectly entitled to do. I do believe that Jersey and Guernsey should work together totally on these issues but I am also firmly of the view that the work we are currently undertaking, which we share with the States of Guernsey on a slow but purposeful development of our international identity - international personality - is the right way forward. With the greatest of respect to Advocate Perrot, I know he was looking at it from a legal perspective; I am not at all sure that he has looked at the position in the round and particularly taking into account the economic circumstances. Jersey's position has improved internationally very considerably in recent years and I am confident that it will continue to do so.

4.4 Deputy J.A. Martin:

As Chief Minister and our leader and so-called very strong supporter of Scrutiny, is the Minister aware that the Minister for Treasury is going to lodge his proposition on the sell-off of telecoms on 19th or 20th February without even having sight of the scrutiny report on the sell-off? Also, that at that meeting when all States Members, Sir, have been invited but the Minister for Treasury has also refused Scrutiny to take part in an open debate on both sides. Is the Chief Minister aware of this and if so, Sir, is he going to take leadership on his strong support of Scrutiny of this House? Thank you, Sir.

Senator F.H. Walker:

I believe that the Treasury Minister has followed an appropriate procedure in this respect. I wonder also, perhaps, Sir, if Scrutiny can tell us why they intend to publish their report on telecoms without having first shared it, as agreed in the Protocol, with the Treasury Minister? That does not strike me as adherence to the Protocol either.

4.4.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

It is not for me to answer questions, but that is not our intention at all. In the light of the Chief Minister's repeated and fulsome praise to Scrutiny, and his commitment to full executive co-operation with Panels, will he condemn the refusal by his Assistant Minister and his Chief Executive Officer on Friday, 9th February, to grant the Corporate Services Sub-Panel access to the discussion documents on the population register, produced by the Population Office and circulated to the Data Protection Commissioner for comment at the end of last year?

Senator F.H. Walker:

I certainly will not condemn it, no.

4.4.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Supplementary, Sir. Will he further undertake to ensure that proper access to all background papers which may cross departmental boundaries - including Health, Social Security, Housing and Statistics - are granted in a timely manner in the course of this wide-ranging investigation into the population register and population expanding?

Senator F.H. Walker:

Yes, Sir, I will. I am astonished that the Deputy is asking this question today, and I must wonder why. The Deputy was at a meeting with the Health Minister and I yesterday, as a member of the Chairmen's Committee, at which there was a considerable amount of agreement on how we were currently conducting business. There was an agreement that we could - and should - on both sides, improve an agreement on how we were going to do that. I am astonished that the Deputy seems to be suggesting some other position to that he was a party to at a meeting 24 hours ago.

4.5 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Going from, in a sense, the sublime to the ridiculous, would the Chief Minister, Sir, confirm that he is satisfied with the new so-called call centre telephone answering system which has been in place? Would he confirm that one of the principles of that system is that one always reaches a live person? Secondly, Sir, would he confirm that one of the downsides of that system is that individual telephone numbers are no longer given out and that, therefore, this impedes contact between the public and individual officers?

Senator F.H. Walker:

I cannot comment specifically on that last point. I can agree with the Deputy that, although the call centre has improved the contact between the public and States' departments, it has some distance to go before I am satisfied with it. I have had a number of discussions with the Chief Executive and, indeed, with other members of the team responsible for the call centre, with a view to getting the standards up to the very high level that I believe we should be working to. There is some distance to go but it is an improvement over previous practice.

4.7 Deputy R.C. Duhamel of St. Saviour No. 1:

In the light of the replies just made to questions put to the Chief Minister by Deputy Troy, will the Chief Minister release to the Environment Scrutiny Panel the evidence on which he bases his opinion that higher recycling rates will not lead to savings on the cost of an end treatment facility for the residual part of the waste plant?

Senator F.H. Walker:

That information has been given to the Scrutiny Panel in enormous quantity. I am sure the House does not need reminding that the Scrutiny Panel spent many, many months - I do not know how many months - scrutinising the proposals for an Energy from Waste plant and opposed those proposals, or members of the Panel certainly opposed those proposals on the floor of this House and were not successful. Sir, the States have thoroughly reviewed the Energy from Waste policy and taken a decision, a much delayed decision; it should have been taken at least 2, 3, 4 or may be even 5 years earlier. What we do not need... the last thing we need and, indeed, cannot afford - because the plant at Belozanne continues obviously to deteriorate and its life expectancy grows ever shorter - we cannot afford another delay. The States has taken a decision. I believe that decision was right and now we need to move on and implement and commission the new plant just as quickly as possible.

4.7.1 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

If I might, Sir, put over that question I was going to ask on the grounds that this has moved on to the incineration issue, so I would like maybe perhaps Deputy Duhamel to ask the next question if that is okay, Sir? **[Laughter]** Or should I say I would like to waive my right to ask the question, Sir, in deference to the Chairman of my Environment Scrutiny Panel.

The Bailiff:

You have a supplementary question Deputy?

4.7.2 Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

I was going to ask a follow-up. It appears that the Chief Minister is suffering from a certain element of amnesia, and I would like him to repeat, verbatim, to this House exactly the decision that was taken some 2 years ago.

Senator F.H. Walker:

I cannot repeat that decision verbatim. **[Laughter]** Probably the only person in this House who could is the Deputy because he has probably got the papers in front of him, **[Laughter]** but I do not believe anybody else could repeat it verbatim. All I do know is that a decision was taken and we need to get on with the job.

4.7.3 Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

In that case, could I make it easier for the Chief Minister: could he outline, in his opinion, the difference between an End Treatment Facility, which is what the States decided upon, and an incinerator or Energy from Waste plant of some particular description, which is the recollection of the Chief Minister?

Senator F.H. Walker:

We are talking here about detail, in my view. The States have taken a decision, whatever that decision was, let us now get on and implement it.

4.7.4 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Can I ask that question then, Sir, because many of us **[Laughter]** are wondering whether or not it was splitting hairs? The decision at the time, which was delayed while the States convened for a meeting in the Bailiff's Chambers to discuss the issue, was that the investigation would continue to determine what the actual best result would be and what the best technology would be. Has that actual decision been made? Because I do not believe that that decision has been taken. If the Chief Minister is telling us today that that decision has been taken and it was for an incinerator, then we obviously know where we are. We can go and investigate what the Chief Minister is saying and see whether or not a rescission of that decision is the only way forward, because in our minds - and in many other people's minds - the decision was to look at the best technology available, not necessarily an incinerator.

Senator F.H. Walker:

I did say "Energy from Waste plants" but the Deputy is technically correct; the decision was to look at the best technology available. That is exactly what the Transport and Technical Services Minister and his team are doing. I repeat though, Sir, let us not try to reawaken a debate that we had and - I do not know how long ago - took a firm decision on. This is a rear-guard action by those who oppose that decision to try and open it up again. Now is too late. We need to get on with the job.

The Bailiff:

Well, that concludes the second question period.