

2015.01.20

4.4 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding the delivery of Gigabit Jersey:

Will the Minister inform Members of the latest developments in J.T.'s (Jersey Telecom) commitment to deliver the Gigabit project on budget and on time?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean (The Minister for Treasury and Resources):

The Chief Executive of J.T. gave a presentation to States Members on the Gigabit project last night. The presentation was also attended by the chairman of the J.T. board. I circulated the slides of that presentation to all Members last night. It is clear that a great deal of progress has been made in terms of delivering an extremely challenging and complex programme, one which of course has had its problems. Nevertheless 100 per cent of the core network has been installed, 99 per cent of premises past network has been installed and 35 per cent of broadband premises on the Island had been connected by 31st December 2014. That is 12,035 homes connected versus a target of 13,697. For context, in the terms of global ranking for fibre to the home, Jersey is overall in the top 10 and in Europe in first place. Make no mistake, this is a fantastic achievement and critically important as we develop Jersey's digital economy.

4.4.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Wonderful attempt at not answering the question. Could the Minister address the issue of the timing of the completion of the Gigabit project and does he accept that the Chief Executive Officer of J.T. last night said that that may be up to the end of 2019 rather than the initial aim of end of 2016?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

First of all I was delighted that Deputy Southern attended the presentation last night. I am sure he found it very useful. Yes, there are variables in a project of this complexity and size. There have been some difficulties which have been notified in the media among other things. Members who attended last night were made aware of those challenges. The chief executive did point out that in certain scenarios there could be an extended delivery period for this project. But he said he was not in a position to commit to that until the details and issues surrounding CH2M and the workers have been resolved, and he has undertaken that by June this year he will have completed a complete review and will be in a position to give Members a proper update on the budget and indeed the delivery date for this important project.

4.4.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Following on from that, there must clearly be a link between the current dispute that is going on, its resolution and the safe delivery of the Gigabit project in everyone's interest. Could I ask what influence does the Minister have with CH2M in order to make sure that the dispute resolution is catalysed as quickly as possible?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

Clearly, as Members will appreciate, the influence is with the executive with CH2M. CH2M was successful in securing the contract for this infrastructure. They are, as Members will be well aware, one of the largest infrastructure companies in the world with turnover of £6 billion and 28,000 staff globally. They do infrastructure. It is their business. So the relationship is between J.T. and that particular company. However, last night following the presentation, I discussed with the board chairman and the chief executive the particular challenges around this, and I have said that as a result of the position that we now find ourselves in that I am going to write personally to CH2M to express concerns around certain aspects of the delivery of the project and in relation to the way in which it appears that some workers may have been challenged. I think that will hopefully help to

exert some additional pressure on a company which has shown globally that it takes its reputation very seriously.

4.4.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I am glad to hear from the Minister that he is finally acting on this particular issue. Is it his intention that those workers who claim to have been not paid for work done or hours done, to the extent of thousands of pounds in some cases, that he will take up the cases of those workers and seek a resolution so that we can look forward to some sort of completion date well in advance of 2019?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I certainly hope in terms of the latter part of that question that the project is delivered as early as possible. It is in the interests of the Island. It is critically important from an economic point of view that we remain one of the leading jurisdictions with regard to delivery of high speed fibre. It is something that our sister Island I noted recently in the media were bemoaning, suggesting that they are 20 per cent slower and 35 per cent more expensive. But in terms of ensuring that the issues around the employees are properly rectified, yes, I have been holding to account both the executive, and I have spoken to the chairman about this issue, I have to say, and I am sure Members who attended last night would agree, the executive and the board are determined to do everything that they possibly can to ensure that the workers are properly paid for a fair day's work. That is what they should expect and that is indeed what they should get. I can say that although these are not J.T. employees, what J.T. have done, as recently as December, is that they have looked at the payments that were approved by CH2M. They did not agree with all of them and they paid £23,000 in excess of authorised payments from CH2M to the workers to ensure that fairness was achieved. A lot more work clearly needs to be done and I am satisfied that both the board and the executive are undertaking their duties very seriously to resolve this issue.

4.4.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Final supplementary, if I may, Sir. Does the Minister have a date by which he intends to be in touch with the workers concerned in order to ensure that this issue is satisfactorily resolved?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

No, I do not or would not give a date to the Deputy. The Deputy knows that I attended the meeting organised by Deputy Mézec with some workers from G.F.F. (Gigabit Field Force) last week. I found that very constructive to hear first-hand their views and their challenges. Indeed where I was allowed by those workers to pass on the comments they had made, I have done so to J.T. As I have said, the H.R. (Human Resources) Department in J.T., the executive and the board are taking this matter seriously and I will continue to challenge them to ensure that they put the appropriate pressure on CH2M to operate in an appropriate way with their employees, their workers.