

4. Questions without Notice - The Chief Minister

4.1 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Would the Chief Minister like to inform the House on his feelings to the comments on P.101 from Her Majesty's Attorney General, and would he inform the House, Sir, if the Council of Ministers are going to produce written comments, because this is quite damning on the Code of Practice for scrutiny panels and public accounts. I would like the Chief Minister to show some leadership and tell the House where they stand on this.

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

I thought I had done that by emailing all States' Members, I think a week ago, but certainly the Council of Ministers have still yet another meeting to consider the position, and the Council of Ministers will be lodging an amendment for the debate on the Scrutiny Panel's protocol.

4.2 Senator J.L. Perchard:

On 18th July this year, the Minister for Transport and Technical Services informed the States that he will be presenting his new sustainable travel and transport plan to the States in the next few weeks, and certainly by the next session. Those dates have of course passed, Sir. Will the Chief Minister confirm that implementing a sustainable travel and transport plan is an extremely important strategic priority and will he accurately inform Members as to when a plan will be brought to the States?

Senator F.H. Walker:

I do confirm it is an extremely important matter of Island policy. The transport strategy will be coming to the Council of Ministers later this month, and I would anticipate it would be put to the House, or at least go out for consultation, immediately thereafter.

4.3 Senator B.E. Shenton:

Can the Chief Minister confirm that the Council of Ministers is charged with delivering the strategic plan as passed by the States Assembly and not alter it in any way?

Senator F.H. Walker:

Yes, and that of course includes the amendments that were approved to the strategic plan during the debate.

4.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister give more details of the amendment that the Council of Ministers is proposing to bring to P.101, because it seems to me that there is a fundamental difference of opinion between the AG (Attorney General) and the Council of Ministers and scrutiny as the role of legal advice to scrutiny?

Senator F.H. Walker:

I cannot divulge details of the amendment until the amendment is finally agreed. When it is finally agreed, it will be put forward in the normal way.

4.5 The Connétable of St. Helier:

In the dim and distant days when he was a St. Helier Deputy, the Chief Minister was an advocate of residents' parking schemes. I am very grateful to him for having interceded on my behalf with the Minister of Transport and Technical Services, who recently refused to allow the Parish to roll out any more schemes within the Parish. However, I have yet to have that new willingness from the Minister put in writing. Would the Minister confirm to me that he recognises the importance of residents' parking and that he will be pressing and encouraging his Minister to put that in writing to the Parish as soon as possible?

Senator F.H. Walker:

I do recognise the importance of residents' parking, and I am grateful for the Constable's gratitude, but yes, there is no doubt that the scheme will be able to go ahead, and I will indeed press the Transport and Technical Services Manager to advise the Connétable of that in writing.

4.6 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

On that theme, I remember, Sir, when the final occupant of the Presidency of Public Services spoke. He forever - and rightly - went on about road cleaning trucks going down different streets from the States in the Parishes, and there were great plans put forward about stronger liaison between St. Helier and Public Services, as it then was. Can the Chief Minister tell us, Sir, what progress has been made and whether there has been a flowering of co-operation?

Senator F.H. Walker:

I cannot tell the Deputy or the House this morning of significant progress. I can tell the Deputy of a meeting that took place just, I think, about 3 weeks ago on this very topic, because I agree with him entirely. This is something that requires some detailed attention. There are some complex issues, not least with unions and workers involved in this, which need to be addressed before any changes can be implemented, but the will is there, and in my view, where there is a will, a way will be found.

4.7 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Sorry to press it, but I do not see the reason for any secrecy around the broad thrust of the amendment that the Chief Minister is attempting to bring to P.101. Will the Chief Minister please outline the broad thrust of what he sees as a solution to the fundamental differences over P.101?

Senator F.H. Walker:

No, Sir, I will not. In accord with normal procedure, the amendment will be distributed to States' Members when it is agreed. It is not yet agreed, and I am not going to circulate anything which is not finally agreed. It is work in progress at this point.

4.8 The Deputy of St. John:

I would like to perhaps take this opportunity to thank the Chief Minister for a comprehensive written response that he gave me to questions that I have raised on a number of occasions regarding extradition arrangements that we have in the Island. In his response, he stated that the Council of Ministers would review current arrangements in full consultation with the U.K. Government. Therefore, could I ask if he has any timescales in mind for this process, or will it simply be dictated by any moves made by the U.K. Government?

Senator F.H. Walker:

I am grateful to the Deputy for pointing out that he was given a full response. I cannot give him a specific date on the review, suffice to say that it is a locally induced review, induced by us, and will be conducted as such and will be concluded as such, but I will revert to him and the House at the earliest possible opportunity.

4.9 Deputy J.A. Martin:

I would like to press the Minister. I am not going to ask what is going to be in the amendment, but I have concerns, reading Standing Order 26(5)(a) and (b); the minimum lodging period for an amendment is, on a 2-week proposition, one week, and for an amendment, it is 2 weeks. Under a 6-week lodging period - which I think P.101 was a 6-week lodging period - which is the minimum lodging period that he envisages we need?

Senator F.H. Walker:

I do not think the question stands, does it? With the revised date for debate, I do not believe we have encountered a problem.

4.10 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Notwithstanding the excellent work the Chief Minister performed when he was for many years President of the Postal Committee, would he not accept that the application of a pricing policy, for example, in removing all concessions on parcels of a very rigid user-pays all pricing policy - particularly in regard to parcels - has entirely undermined the postal business, and the very thing, and the very cross-subsidisation, and the retention of a good infrastructure are now at risk? Pricing policies are put into place, which have the effect, for example, with small traders like eBay traders, Sir, of chasing away a lot of business from the Post Office. Would he not say that the rigid application of that policy is utterly counter-productive?

Senator F.H. Walker:

The simple answer is - I would suspect in common with the Deputy - I do not know, because if he has figures which show that the parcel business has been completely undermined in Jersey, certainly I have not had access to those figures. If he does have such evidence, then I would be grateful to receive it, although this is, of course, very directly, a matter for the Economic Development Minister, under whose remit post falls.

4.11 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

Will the Chief Minister endorse the recommendations covering suicide prevention and self harm reduction, as made in the recent H.M.C.I.P. (Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons) reports, and advise whether the Council of Ministers will give consideration to finding the funding to fully implement those recommendations?

Senator F.H. Walker:

As I believe the Home Affairs Minister said earlier in answer to questions posed to her, the Council of Ministers recognises that there is a very serious issue on the funding of the prison generally. We recognise an extremely serious issue, and at the appropriate time - and the appropriate time will be very, very soon - we will be sitting down as an entire Council of Ministers to consider how best we can meet the funding needs, and I would classify them as needs as opposed to wishes; the funding needs of the prison.

4.12 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

I believe the Chief Minister omitted to answer the first part of my question, which was whether he endorses the recommendations made in the report.

Senator F.H. Walker:

Until I see the full report, I cannot give an answer to that question. All I can do, I think, is reaffirm what I said to the Deputy, that we are taking this issue as seriously as it needs to be taken, and it is very near the top of the Council of Minister's agenda at this point.

4.13 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

The Chief Minister has always been associated with public service reform, but there is a feeling growing up in the Island that there is a bit of a smoke and mirrors approach to that whole subject. Would the Chief Minister inform the House how he and the Council are convinced of the fact that real public service reform, which sadly involves cutbacks, particularly at management level, is occurring? What information does he receive on these matters, and is he sure that the methodology upon which this information is based is the right methodology?

Senator F.H. Walker:

The Deputy is adept at picking up the slightest whiff of rumour or misconception around the Island. The fact is, as I have repeatedly said - and I think is clear from the business plan - we are on track to save the £20 million a year that the Council of Ministers committed itself to at the beginning of the year, and that I thought was very clearly covered in the debate on the strategic plan, so I accept that the perception, as always, is that the government is not cutting back seriously on expenditure. I would say that perception is quite wrong, because we are, and if necessary I can answer more detailed questions on that during the business plan debate.

4.14 Deputy J.A. Martin:

In May this year, I asked a question of the Chief Minister in respect of share transfer - and I have asked this question before of the Minister of Finance and Economics, and also the current Treasury - and in the answer the Minister gave, I asked why was the delay, he said: "I do accept this is an important matter, and I have asked the Treasury to ensure that the work in this area is given a high priority." Can the Minister say why, in the law drafted, there is no mention of the share transfer law or anything being mentioned in the current business plan as part of legislation programme for 2007?

Senator F.H. Walker:

I am afraid the answer is no, I cannot. I wish I could, but I cannot. I will get the information for the Deputy.

4.15 The Deputy of St. Peter:

During the last session, the Chief Minister discussed developments within the emergency planning of Jersey. Can he outline what has happened since we first discussed those movements?

Senator F.H. Walker:

I can. The chairmanship of the Council of Ministers, as I think the Deputy knows, has passed from the Bailiff to me, and one of the first steps that we took was, following the departure of the emergency planning officer, to advertise for a new emergency planning officer, and I am pleased to inform the Deputy and the House that an appointment was made some 3 weeks ago, and I am very optimistic that we will now see a robust and essential emergency plan and emergency planning procedures, adding to those that have been in place for quite some time.

4.16 Senator J.L. Perchard:

I will just ask one, if I may. Firstly, could I congratulate the Chief Minister on the announcement of his recent engagement and ask him when the 52 of us will be receiving our invitations to the wedding? **[Laughter]**

Senator F.H. Walker:

I am grateful for Senator Perchard's congratulations.

4.17 Deputy S.C. Ferguson:

Apropos the emergency planning officer, I was informed that it is, in effect, a secondment, not a permanent posting, and also, that the emergency planning officer is located within the police force. Would the Chief Minister please confirm where the emergency planning officer is located; if this is a permanent appointment and not a secondment, and give some indication - I know he cannot go into details - some indication of the experience of the appointee?

Senator F.H. Walker:

The position is now permanent. There was a secondment to fill a temporary gap. The position is now permanent and the emergency planning officer does indeed sit within the police force, and I can assure the Deputy that the new appointee is a highly experienced individual in emergency planning and emergency planning procedures.

4.18 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

Could I ask the Minister, is the appointment a local resident, or is it someone outside the Island?

Senator F.H. Walker:

It is someone outside the Island. The shortlist was drawn up and the most appropriate applicant was someone with, as I have said already, very considerable emergency planning experience within local authorities in the U.K..

4.19 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

I do not know if the Minister is able to answer the question, but would the Minister consider that possibly the location of the officer may in some way compromise his position as independent, the emergency officer, if indeed he works at the police headquarters?

Senator F.H. Walker:

I do not. Surely, the most important requirement is the emergency planning officer is as effective as possible, and after much consideration, it has been agreed that the location is the right one. It will provide more and better opportunity for co-ordination between the emergency services, and that of course is vital to any response to an emergency. I am happy with the current plan.