

5. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Chief Minister

5.1 The Connétable of St. Mary:

Bearing in mind the answer to the oral question posed by the Deputy of St. John earlier which I seem to recall noted that improvements were needed to the tasking of the Honorary Police, does the Deputy Chief Minister not consider that as the Honorary Police have been providing a valuable and, I would say, vital service for generations, the apparent lack of clarity on the part of the Emergencies Office and how best to maximise their involvement is a matter of major concern?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf (Deputy Chief Minister - rapporteur)

I was, with the Chief Minister, disappointed to learn of the issues in relation to the Honorary Police and the lack of clarity in relation to their roles and responsibility. I have discussed, as I said, with the Chief Minister... I know he takes that very seriously, and is going to take that up and discuss it at the Emergencies Board. Certainly I would take this opportunity of thanking all those Honorary Police that did take part in the exercise for their valuable contribution, and their contribution in terms of improvement will be taken on board.

5.2 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Three months ago the States approved my amendment to set up a different States Employment Board whereby there would be 2 members of Non-executive and 3 of the Executive. It was a simple amendment to the Law. Will the Minister explain why that particular proposition has not come back to the States so we can then move forward and have a States Employment Board as intended and what this House voted for?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I can tell the Deputy that the proposition is in final drafting and if it is possible to sign it off this week, it will be signed-off. It will be lodged certainly within the next week or so.

5.3 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Given that the Minister for Housing's decision should properly have come as part of the migration policy debate will the Assistant Chief Minister, on behalf of the Chief Minister, give an undertaking that the Council of Ministers will bring a retraction of this decision and include this particular provision as part of the migration policy, the Migration Law, which it should properly be?

[12:30]

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I am discharging the functions for the Chief Minister this week, I do sense the mood of the Assembly that there is a matter of concern here, and I will discuss with the Minister for Housing in the lunchtime adjournment whether or not we can arrange for a briefing or, alternatively, a proposition to be brought to the Assembly. I sense the mood of the Assembly on it and I sense Members want more information, and the opportunity to make a decision and I will discuss it with the Minister for Housing.

5.4 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I am sorry the Chief Minister himself is not present, but could the Deputy Chief Minister clarify what process is in place for the Chief Minister in his role as chair of the States Employment Board to respond to people who contact him? I have been waiting since 9th February 2009, not just for an answer but for a response. Is that the normal practice?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I cannot really comment in relation to a specific matter which I am not aware of. Certainly I sit on the States Employment Board. We are representatives of the employer and if it is a disciplinary matter... I do not know what the Deputy is alluding to. I know that the Chief Minister is timely and responsive to Members' inquiries, sometimes it is not appropriate for the member of a States Employment Board to respond to an employee. But I am happy to take up the issue if it is urgent in the Chief Minister's absence.

5.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Minister refused to be drawn earlier on to figures for the structural deficit for 2013, nonetheless does he not accept that large scale cuts in public spending and services, and their associated redundancies, will only ensure increased recession and worsen the deficit if he performs them before 2013?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I very much hope that the economy will have returned to growth by 2013 and 2014, and therefore any necessary changes in terms of public expenditure will be able to be absorbed within the economy. I would remind the Deputy that we are investing heavily in the economy during the period of the downturn and, as I said earlier, I believe that more people are in work and more people are in education as a result of the efforts that we are making.

5.6 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Deputy Chief Minister acknowledge that if the Council is to embark on a cost-cutting exercise that the public mood is very much against the massive expansion of the senior echelons of the civil service? Does he not, for example, think it very ironical that the procurement function almost went down to zero and it is now growing again as an alleged cost-cutting function at a rapid rate of knots with a vast proportion of people at the high management end?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I am determined to have - and I know the Chief Minister is - an informed and a proper debate about public spending and not to simply run a comprehensive spending review on headlines. I think the Verita report is a good example where a States department needs to have a higher grade and a greater number of senior posts. I agree with the appointment of a Hospital Director in order to not only ensure that there is a safe hospital to implement the Verita recommendations but also to ensure value for money. I think there is an issue of people facing both upwards in terms of strategy and policy and downwards in terms of implementation and it is one of the things that a small community wrestles with.

5.7 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would he not agree with the words of the U.K. Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, that the culture of paying top people in the civil service in alliance with the rates paid in the private sector has failed miserably and the public sector has not got the results that that money should have led to?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Two points, first of all in reference to the earlier point which I did not answer, procurement. Procurement into and improving buying across the States organisation is going to be vital in order to cut States costs joining-up different departments and their contractors in their contractual obligation to buying different things. It is absolutely vital. I do not want the comprehensive spending review to be a witch hunt about different sectors of the public service. I certainly do not think that the image or the impression should go out that we are going to start axing and wielding the axe on civil servants. There are hundreds of well-meaning, hard-working, diligent civil servants providing public services and it is our job to provide the appropriate framework for allocation of scarce States resources in the longer term. This is not

just about civil service. This is about improving financial management across the organisation, and helping people to provide and to do their work appropriately.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

It is the classic Chief Minister's act. He has totally moved the question away from the focus. The very senior echelons of the civil service and its proliferation.

5.8 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

I would like to ask the Deputy Chief Minister if he knows the thoughts of the Minister for Treasury and Resources in relation to the purchase by a Belgian insurance company of Kleinwort Benson and whether or not a concern has been expressed by any other banks in the Island?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

It is a matter for the Minister for Economic Development but I am aware of the issue of the purchase of that bank and I know that it is something that the Financial Services Commission is looking into in relation to the top 500 rule, *et cetera*. It would not really be appropriate for me to comment on that but Ministers are aware of the issue.

5.9 Senator B.E. Shenton:

How does the Minister's cost-cutting mantra fit in with his decision to advertise for a personal assistant to deal with the public politicians and media at a cost to the taxpayer in the region of £38,000 per annum?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I am not immediately familiar with the post that the Senator is referring to. Perhaps he could give me further information and I can answer the question. If that is in relation to the Minister for Treasury and Resources P.A. (personal assistant) then that is a post that is well-known and Ministers need appropriate administrative assistance. I do not know what he is talking about in terms of which post it is.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

It is the P.A. to the Minister for Treasury and Resources.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I think the Senator will well understand that Ministers need the appropriate administrative support to discharge their functions appropriately.

5.10 Senator J.L. Perchard:

The Deputy Chief Minister sits on the States Employment Board and, as such, is able to answer this question, I believe, as well as the chairman of the Board, the absent Chief Minister. My question is about the length of suspensions that some States employees experience, suspensions running into many years, many running into their fourth year. Does he agree that this is unacceptable on behalf of the States as an employer and certainly unacceptable that any of our employees should have to experience or endure such length of suspensions? We have been told on previous occasions that the length of suspensions are usually due to a judicial process taking place in parallel. Does the Assistant Minister not think it is time that the obvious conflict that our Attorney General has to endure when running a judicial process and advising the Minister needs to be addressed by the States Employment Board taking independent legal advice when considering disciplinary matters against an employee of the States?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I can agree with the Senator in 2 respects. Firstly, it is important that the States Employment Board gets proper advice, which it does so in relation to suspensions and exclusions in relation to

people that have been carrying out criminal activities and that their conduct is something which would normally fall within their contractual obligations and that another employer would need to do it. It is something that the States Employment Board has considered and remains vigilant about the issue of suspensions and exclusions. I would say that there are a small number, fortunately, of exclusions and suspensions that are of concern and in relation to the particular exclusion of the consultant in relation to the hospital, which I know is of concern and one of the issues that has been raised by the Senator, that is going to be subject and is subject to a review by the States Employment Board, and lessons will be learnt if there have been difficulties in that.

5.11 Deputy D.J. De Sousa:

Following on from the same line as Deputy Le Hérisier and Senator Shenton; can the Deputy Chief Minister notify the House in due course of all the new posts for civil servants that have been created within States departments in the past 12-13 months?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I am happy to attempt to do that, but again I do not want to engage in a vast amount of research when stuff is already available or information is already available to Members. I do not agree with the point that Deputy Le Hérisier made about the growing amount of civil servants in Jersey compared to the U.K. The public sector in the U.K. has grown exponentially, billions of pounds of taxpayers' money has been spent with the intention of improving services which has not always worked. I am determined to learn from the comprehensive spending review and do ours in a more thoughtful way.

5.11.1 Deputy D.J. De Sousa:

Following on from this morning's debate on the radio, when the Minister is looking for so many millions of pounds in cuts how can he justify increasing civil servant pay?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Civil servant posts are not simply pen-pushing bureaucrats that obviously... not the stereotype of people one would believe. Civil servants carry out all sorts of functions and it is this Assembly that agrees manpower levels in terms of what the financial arrangements for different departments are. Most of the money in last year's Business Plan went in health services. That is not an improvement in terms of the amount of civil servants but frontline nurses and something that this Assembly wrestles with in the Business Plan debate.

5.12 Deputy T.A. Vallois:

The *Keeping Jersey Special 2008* report mentions an analogy of the 3-legged stool in respect of policy that is taking into account environmental, economic and social issues. Would the Minister not agree that our 3-legged stool is rather lopsided at present?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I find it quite interesting that we are extremely critical of what we do in Jersey and the success that we have had. We seem to almost talk ourselves into decline. Jersey has been phenomenally successful in recent years both economically and has the wherewithal in order to invest in environment and social policy too. I think we are very hard on ourselves. We set very high standards but I certainly do not think that anything is broken in terms of Jersey. Certainly there are improvements to be made and an ongoing balance of environmental and social objectives, but it is all underpinned by the availability of resources.

5.12.1 Deputy T.A. Vallois:

I was not mentioning that Jersey was broken at all. I was just making a point that in the *Keeping Jersey Special* report it says: "Keeping Jersey special we have a 3-legged stool analogy" and I

was just purely pointing out the level playing field across all 3 areas, and would the Minister not agree that we could do better in 2 of those 3 areas?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I think we can always do better and we need to constantly improve in terms of social policy and environment.

5.13 Deputy S. Pitman:

With reference to the comprehensive spending review, will the Minister assure that those who undertake the review will consult people working on frontline services as to the impact that these cuts will have on services?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The comprehensive spending review is not only a matter for Ministers and their chief officers, it is a matter for all the staff of the departments and every Member of this Assembly, and that is why we will be engaging in as much widespread consultation, discussion, ideas in a positive way in order to get the best ideas of how to put limited resources to services in the future. I believe that savings can be made. The targets that we are setting are not unrealistic compared to other places but we need to engage with Members in order to find the best solutions.

The Bailiff:

I am afraid that brings questions to the Chief Minister to an end.