

2.11 Senator B.E. Shenton of the Minister for Home Affairs regarding staff suspensions following the investigation into ‘Operation Blast’:

Can the Minister confirm whether any persons were suspended in connection with Operation Blast and, if so, their rank and the date of their suspension?

Deputy J.A. Hilton of St. Helier (Assistant Minister for Home Affairs - rapporteur):

Can I start by saying that I received a phone call this morning at 8.00 a.m. from my Minister informing me that he was unwell and would not be able to attend the States Assembly this morning. We discussed the 3 questions, the 3 oral questions that were laid before the States this morning, and we both agreed that we felt it would better, in light of the fact that the Minister has been the one who has been solely involved in the suspension issues around the Chief Officer of Police, if the States were in agreement, that 2 of the questions - question 12 submitted by Deputy Pitman, and the urgent oral question submitted by the Deputy of St. Martin - be answered tomorrow, if the Minister was well enough to attend. I am quite content to answer Senator Shenton’s question but Members will have to bear with me if I am not able to go into the detail because of my lack of involvement in the suspension process. So, I do apologise to Members but I really do not feel, on a matter of so much importance to Members and Islanders that I attempt to answer any questions in great detail and make a situation any worse than it may already be.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Assistant Minister, can you come on to what your answer is to the question?

Deputy J.A. Hilton:

In answer to the question, yes, indeed, somebody has been suspended in reference with Operation Blast and that is the Chief Officer of Police. That suspension took place on 31st July 2009 when the Minister extended the grounds of his suspension to include Operation Blast.

2.11.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

As the Chief Minister has said, the suspension is a very serious matter. Can the Assistant Minister just confirm that the Chief Officer of Police is, in fact, suspended over 2 different issues currently?

Deputy J.A. Hilton:

Yes, he is.

2.11.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Can the Assistant Minister confirm whether or not some of the material in Operation Blast consists of transcript of secret audio recordings?

Deputy J.A. Hilton:

I am not able to answer that question.

2.11.3 The Deputy of St. Martin:

I do not know whether the Assistant Minister can answer this one, but is the Assistant Minister aware of the involvement, maybe, of the Chief Executive Officer in the Operation Blast and has any consideration been given about him being suspended as well?

Deputy J.A. Hilton:

As I stated before, I have not been involved in any of the issues surrounding the disciplinary process. I have not read any of the reports that have been submitted to the Minister for Home Affairs so I do not feel able to answer that question.

2.11.4 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

One of the reasons we have been told today that the Chief of Police has been suspended is to do with Operation Blast. Could the Assistant Minister give us any of the 3 categories that have been outlined by the Chief Minister in relation to that and also the other reason why the Chief of Police has been suspended?

Deputy J.A. Hilton:

As I stated before, I have not been involved in the disciplinary process. I was not present at the meeting that took place and do not feel able to answer that question on behalf of my Minister.

2.11.5 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Supplementary, can we seriously expect that given such gravity of the situation the Minister for Home Affairs has not shared the information with the Assistant Minister as to the reason why the Chief of Police has been suspended? Surely, this is a woeful management of our government. What would happen if the Minister died? Will the Assistant Minister please inform us whether or not she is now saying, categorically, she has no knowledge as to the reason of the suspension, other than one she has mentioned of the Chief of Police?

Deputy J.A. Hilton:

Obviously, we do discuss things and I am aware of the general outline of the reasons why the Chief Officer was suspended.

2.11.6 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Would the Assistant Minister not agree really that the whole purpose of extending the suspension... because basically what it was, was really just another ruse to ensure that the Chief Officer would never return to work and just adds to those people, like myself, who believe this was a dismissal by stealth?

Deputy J.A. Hilton:

No, I do not agree with that. Obviously, evidence came to light that files had been created on States Members; it was a very serious issue. The Minister for Home Affairs brought that issue to the States and informed Members, which I believe was entirely the correct thing to do.

2.11.7 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Can I just ask the Assistant Minister, who I appreciate is in a difficult position, could she clarify; she seems to have indicated that she is aware that there are allegations that the Chief Executive Officer was accused of being involved in Operation Blast by her last statement?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Deputy, the Assistant Minister is not responsible for the Chief Officer of Home Affairs - if that is part of your question - so she is not able to answer.

Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Sorry, I was confused there by the exchange. I cannot think of the think of the question now.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

Given the absence of the Minister I will not ask any further questions.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

Just to clarify a point, I was talking about the Chief Executive Officer, I was not making reference to the Chief Officer of Police or the Executive Officer of the Home Affairs Department, so just in case there is any misunderstanding.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Had I understood that, I would have disallowed the question, Deputy, because the Assistant Minister is not responsible.

Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

I have recalled what I was trying to ask, may I ask it please?

The Deputy Bailiff:

And we have just moved on to question 12, Deputy Le Claire.