

3.12 The Deputy of St. John of the Minister for Home Affairs regarding the current number of police officers in the States of Jersey Police

Could Members be told of the current number of police officers in the States of Jersey Police, what shortfalls in numbers there are, if any, and what action is being taken to recruit new officers, please?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand (The Minister for Home Affairs):

The current police establishment is 246, but in 2009 there was only money for 240. I have not got the up-to-date figure, but the last time I was informed we were about 6 down which would be 234. During 2010 we expect to be between 11 and 16 down depending upon retirements. That would be, I think, from the figure of 240. There was a cut of 2 posts directly through the Council of Ministers approved approach to budget and in addition to that, we have suffered a loss of 5 additional posts due to increments. Increments are causing significant difficulties in the Home Affairs Department at the moment.

3.12.1 The Deputy of St. John:

Given the recruitment process has been cut short, will the people who have been through the selection process need to reapply for their positions?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

I would suspect that they would, but I do not know that for sure. The reason I suspect that they would is because we have been getting a lot of people applying and, therefore, it has been the best applicants who have been approved. I should have gone on to say during my first answer, but I try to keep it short, that it will be necessary to carry a minimum of 11, somewhere between 11 and 16, posts short for 12 months partly in order to ensure that sufficient funds are available to build up a good training group.

3.12.2 Senator A. Breckon:

I wonder if the Minister could confirm that with certain exceptions it is compulsory for officers to retire at 55 when some are willing, fit and able to continue?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

That is correct. The retirement age, so I understand it, is between 50 and 55. Of course if you have got experienced officers that is helpful in terms of their experience. On the other hand, when your budget is being worked on a total figure, on an annual basis, it is not helpful in terms of the numbers. We have been retaining experienced officers but at cost to total numbers.

3.12.3 The Deputy of St. Martin:

I was not quite sure of the answer the Minister gave, but could I have an assurance that there has been no restriction in the normal training period? I gather every year 16 or 20 officers are trained. There has been no cutback in the normal training period.

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

No, I am afraid the very opposite. I am sorry I do not speak loudly enough sometimes for the Deputy of St. Martin. No, the problem is we are not going to have a training group next year effectively. This is what it means. We are going to be carrying between 11 and 16 down and that pretty well for the whole of the year. My expectation is the training group can only be formed towards the end of 2010.

3.12.4 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Can I just clarify, is there no course being run because the States have got no money or is it because we have no recruits?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

We most certainly have lots of recruits and many of them very capable indeed. It is because of the effect on the budget of Home Affairs. As I said so before, we took a loss of 2 in the budget shakeout, but the effective increments has cost us another 5 posts, i.e. a total of 7 reduction effectively. I am very hopeful that progress can be made during this period in relation to areas to increase efficiency within the States of Jersey Police. There are issues as to the way in which paperwork is done and procedures operated, and I am confident that some significant improvements can be made which will counterbalance this drop in manpower.

3.12.5 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I have to say I am quite surprised that there is any shortfall of police because the last few weeks it seems like we are breeding them within the States Building but, nevertheless, with the violent crime we have talked about, could the Minister give us his view on how serious an impact this shortage of police officers is likely to have on violent crime within the next year or 2?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

I do not expect it to have any real impact on that at all because the police put out special additional resources at key times. I expect if there is a problem it will arise more so in the time periods for investigations with the process slowing up. It is regrettable but when I was first a Chief Officer in 1990 the system ran upon the basis that you pretty well got the money you needed for your existing staff even if that meant there were incremental increases. That system has changed at some stage to the current system where you are simply given a sum of money. Now if, as Home Affairs is experiencing, you have more and more people moving up towards the top grades and we do not just have a 3 increment system, we have a multi increment system, for instance, the Fire Service has 8 increments over 10 years, then even for the same amount of money you can find your staff resources being impinged upon. The position is extremely tight for Home Affairs for 2010 and will not be sustainable for future years if we have the same problems with increments.

3.12.6 The Deputy of St. Martin:

As the Minister knows there are a number of police officers suspended, particularly the Chief Officer. It is going to cost the taxpayer a lot of money on keeping police officers suspended and obviously there is going to be a shortfall of money. Can the Minister explain, is the shortfall in not being able to recruit officers purely down to the fact that the money which could have been spent on keeping people on duty is keeping them off duty? In other words, the shortfall is caused by the number of people on suspension.

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

There are a great number of different reasons why there is a shortage of money in financing of the police. That is one of them but there are other more major issues. There are also issues of police officers who are currently unable to perform duties due to levels of sickness or injury, things of that nature, but we are also experiencing pressures in other areas such as increased rentals for premises and increased costs of

maintaining the buildings, in particular the old school building is now increasingly looking like some form of crochet. It is held together by all sorts of bits of plaster as far as I can see.

3.12.7 The Deputy of St. John:

Given the shortfall in police officers, what impact has the current Royal Court trial had, given that I am aware that at least 2 U.K. forces are assisting in policing this building and would the Minister not consider that training our own men to do these jobs is far cheaper than bringing in men from off Island?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

I am not going to reveal operationally the number of officers who are required on the security arrangements which have been operating around here, but the requirements have been too great to be able to operate purely internally. We are using our own firearms people and other people, but there was a requirement beyond that.

The Deputy of St. John:

The Minister did not answer my question. The question was, would it not be cheaper to train our own men and have them within the Island than bring men in from off Island?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

I thought I had answered the question because I was simply saying there were too many people required for us to be able to do that.