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3.2 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding reductions in staffing levels in cleaning and gardening services:

What progress, if any, has been made towards reducing staffing levels in cleaning and gardening services; how many workers have taken voluntary redundancy or have otherwise left the service; how many staff may be subject to compulsory redundancy; how many staff are planned to be retained; and to what extent will services be stopped or reduced under the redesigned service?

Deputy E.J. Noel of St. Lawrence (The Minister for Infrastructure):

This question unfortunately cannot be answered orally in full in 90 seconds, but I will do the best I can. The department has made significant progress on reducing staffing levels in these areas through vacancy management, voluntary redundancy and redeployment. At the beginning of this process there were 154 employee posts in these 2 areas. Today that figure has been reduced to 101 with 36 remaining in parks and gardens and 65 in cleaning services. To date the department has accepted 15 V.R.s (voluntary redundancy) from parks and gardens and 24 from cleaning services. I am pleased to be able to advise Members that is a result of a staff consultation process and with the union support we have taken out of scope some employees and an entire section. We are just starting the cleaning services consultation but we anticipate similar levels of reduction through V.R.s and redeployment. Staff in all of these areas have not been put at risk of compulsory redundancy at this time. This will take place only when the tenders have been evaluated and only if the prices from the private sector are less expensive. It is important to remember that we are committed to redeploying as many staff as possible of the affected staff. The staff will have 6 months' support from H.R. (Human Resources) and outplacement to find alternative work. I will be calling upon my ministerial colleagues to support the department with redeployment of some staff in order to minimise the need for compulsory redundancies. The same services will continue but they will be delivered in a more cost-effective manner. The department will be providing services that are sustainably affordable and delivered efficiently.

3.2.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Could the Minister inform Members how many staff will remain on his books at Infrastructure and what services will be reduced? For example, how will the care for Howard Davis Park take place in St. Saviour under his new scheme?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Two good questions there. I will deal with the latter first. No services are going to be effectively reduced. We will be providing the same service to the public that we are currently doing but in a more efficient manner. As to the number of employees that will remain within my department, that depends on how many transfer to other areas. We have already had some from parks and gardens transfer to and become parking control officers, and we are working with our staff to slot them into other areas where we have vacancies. Indeed, we will be working with our colleagues in other departments to do the same.

3.2.2 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier:

Could the Minister confirm whether or not he has arranged a face-to-face meeting with Unite Union's regional officer and shop steward to discuss these matters, and if so, when is that meeting planned for?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Yes, that has taken place. The union official contacted me last week. We agreed that it would be good for ourselves and officers to meet up. Our support staff are arranging for that date. I do not have it in my diary yet. I believe that the representative wanted to meet tomorrow. Unfortunately because we are in the States I could not do that, but we are co-ordinating our diaries so we can meet up.

3.2.3 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

Would the Minister confirm whether any of the Parishes were approached to take over the administration or staffing of any of the parks and, specifically, would he comment on Sir Winston Churchill Park and the Parish of St. Brelade?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

We have had brief discussions with a number of Parishes, predominantly the Parish of St. Helier which has indeed taken some of our staff and we are in discussions with them about providing those public services in a more efficient way, working in partnership with the Parish of St. Helier. With regards to the Parish of St. Brelade, I believe that some preliminary discussions have taken place with the Parish municipality just to see if they would be interested in participating in a similar scheme there. We were approached by Deputy Kevin Lewis to see if we would transfer Howard Davis Park to the Parish of St. Saviour. I suggested to the good Deputy that he needs to liaise with his Constable and with his municipality first prior to us considering that request of his.

3.2.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

Has any consideration been given to what the public want and the parishioners in those Parishes, whether they are happy to see currently very well used, cherished and loved parks being outsourced, which are currently in States administration?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Any involvement with the Parish would need the approval of the Parish, and I would assume therefore that the Parishes would have to take out the appropriate Parish Assemblies. I am not quite sure if that is the case with the Parish of St. Helier. We are working in close partnership with them and have done over many years concerning activities taken on inside the ring road and external to the ring road. But we are working closely with Constables where that is appropriate.

3.2.5 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

Our public loos are maintained and cleaned to a very high standard by the Infrastructure Department and we should all be very grateful to those who work there who help in upholding the good reputation of Jersey as a holiday Island. My question is: the Minister has said that he wants to deliver the service in a more cost-efficient manner. Is he proposing on closing any public conveniences in the Island?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

No, that would be a reduction of service and we are not planning to reduce that service. I welcome the comments from Deputy Hilton about our staff, they do a fantastic job in cleaning our public conveniences. Surprisingly, it is one of the frequent comments that we get from visitors to the Island who take their time to contact my department to say how good our facilities are. Those staff do a fantastic job and have done for many years.

3.2.6 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Just to clarify: we in the Parish of St. Saviour consider Howard Davis Park very much the jewel in our crown of the Parish. My approach to the Minister was to protect the gardening element to make sure it is at the same standard as it always has been. So it was not so much to take over the park but as the gardening element to start with.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Deputy, if you could ask a question please?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Does the Minister not agree?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I do not think there was really a question there. Howard Davis Park is one of the jewels in our crown. Three of our parks have got Green Flag status; Howard Davis Park received theirs last year and I believe it is going to be re-awarded this year again. We have no intention to reduce the standard of any of our parks. I do take slight exception with what Deputy Lewis has said because many years ago when we lived in a different financial world Howard Davis Park looked even better than it does today, but it does still look fantastic and it will continue to do so.

3.2.7 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Can the Minister inform Members when he expects to have the tenders analysed and accepted and when he is likely to have his business plan completed and, above all, his economic impact plan completed?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

That is a bit like trying to hit a moving target. In some of the areas we are waiting for tenders to come in. Some areas have not gone out to tender. The due process will take place, along with the unions, along with the weekly consultation that we have with the unions, and the monthly meetings with the unions and with staff. There is a process to be followed and we deserve to follow that process because at the end of the day what we are trying to do is minimise the impact on our staff because those members of staff that unfortunately we will inevitably end up having to part ways with, they have done nothing wrong. It is not like where an employee has done something wrong and there is a disciplinary and you sack that individual. These people have done nothing wrong. They have provided us with phenomenal service, and I am sorry if I am going on a bit, but they deserve to be treated in a dignified way and due process is followed, and I am not going to rush that.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Just for clarification, the Minister talked about his process; his process has dates attached to it. What is the date by which he expects to have completed and finalised ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

I am sorry, Deputy, that amounts to a supplementary on a supplementary.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

That is clarification, Sir. He has not been clear.

The Deputy Bailiff:

I am sorry, that is a supplementary on a supplementary. The Minister has answered in the way that he has.