

20.11.02

13 Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade of the Minister for the Environment regarding the resourcing of the planning function. (OQ.309/2020)

Is it the Minister's assessment that the planning function is adequately resourced and, if not, will he explain how adopting the Government Plan will address the situation, including any additional funding that may be provided?

Deputy J.H. Young of St. Brelade (The Minister for the Environment):

I believe there has been a situation of under-resourcing of the planning team in previous years and I think an assessment of the current challenges they face indicates that there is not the resourcing in place. Now, the planning function depends on its resource from income from planning charges. It is income dependent and at the moment there are no specific funding proposals in the plan. What it is my intention to do to enable us to deal with those challenges, which the Connétable knows about, is to look at increasing the present cap on planning enquiries, which will enable us at least to either contract out or to make some additional point where there is probably 2 F.T.E.s (full-time equivalents) to cover the workload anticipated, which is extremely high in the approach to the new Island Plan. There is a lot of major applications. That is my straightforward assessment at the moment: no, it is not good enough.

4.13.1 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I am grateful to the Minister for his answer, but could he advise Members of the timescale of what he is proposing and if this, in fact, is a short-term fix to address the unreasonable delays being experienced by members of the public with the planning process?

Deputy J.H. Young:

That is a very good question. I think there are 2 particular challenges we face at the moment. Obviously because over 50 per cent of the staff were lost to COVID work this year, there is a backlog of applications that has accumulated, resulting in the major applications timescale and we are nowhere near meeting the target.

[15:45]

That is 13 weeks. Secondly, we lost senior staff as a result of the target operating model on One Government, which the Connétable knows my great concerns about, and we are replacing experienced staff with staff under training. Of course, the major applications that are coming in - the waterfront, the hospital - will need a planner on their own. So, timescale? I am asking the team to be able to lift the cap by a planning order this year, which will give us a source of additional revenue, which can at least allow us to have a breathing space moneywise. That is what I am open to. Of course, Connétable, it is always open for a Member to put an amendment to the Island Plan.