

2018.11.06

15 Deputy M.R. Higgins of the Chairman of the States Employment Board regarding her secret meeting with union leaders: [OQ.184/2018]

Will the chairman update Members on her recent meeting with union leaders and advise whether she has found any means of avoiding strike action by public sector workers?

Senator T.A. Vallois (Chairman, States Employment Board):

The States Employment Board met with all trade unions, except for the nursing unions who were unavailable, on Thursday, 25th October. It is anticipated the board will meet with nursing unions the week commencing 12th November. The meeting was constructive with the trade unions presenting a detailed explanation of their concerns and the board listening and questioning as necessary. The board met yesterday, 5th November, to discuss in detail with officers the current status of the pay negotiations. All parties have an obligation to avoid disruption to public services, but equally all parties must recognise that any award must be affordable and sustainable in the public finances. However, the board has authorised officials to hold further meetings with trade unions with a view to resolving matters quickly.

4.15.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Can I ask the Minister on what basis these meetings will take place? If there has been no agreement to date, the Minister I believe was looking at options to try and deal with it, can she explain some of those options to this Assembly?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

There were 5 options that were put in front of us, which were extremely complex options, because this is not just about the pay situation, there were many issues that the unions had with regards to what was being put forward. We have looked at restructuring. The States Employment Board have agreed to a new restructure of the pay offer and we have asked our officers to go out and speak to the trade unions to negotiate with them as to whether that would be an acceptable offer.

4.15.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

In the light of the impasse we still seem to be in on this issue, will the Minister draw the attention of the Council of Ministers to Article 9(2) of the Public Finances (Jersey) Law 2005, which states that the Council of Ministers may lodge a proposition for the purposes described in paragraph 1, which would be to alter the expenditure budget of the M.T.F.P., if the Council of Ministers is satisfied that there is a serious threat to the economic, environmental, or social well-being of Jersey, which requires an immediate response. Further, does she think that the impasse we have over public sector pay is such a threat to the economic and social wellbeing of the Island?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

I am happy to raise Article 9 of the Public Finances Law. I am sure the Council of Ministers are already aware but I will raise that because the pay offer that the States Employment Board have restructured will be going to the Council of Ministers next week for them to see sight of. I would also draw the Deputy's attention to the fact that we have to recognise that we cannot put forward additional funding if there is to be a deficit. That is stated in Article 9(4) of the said Law. But I would be happy also to ask the Council of Ministers to ensure we have appropriate legal advice on the basis of that legislation as well.

The Bailiff:

Final supplementary.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

No, I will leave it as it is. Thank you.