

23.12.11.

3. Deputy R. J. Ward of the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs regarding reduction in funds to police to put towards farming (OQ.240/2023)

Will the Minister advise what involvement, if any, she had in the decision regarding the £47,000 extra savings from the States of Jersey Police, put forward in the 33rd amendment to the Proposed Government Plan 2024-2027 and linked to funding for farming?"

Deputy H. Miles (The Minister for Justice and Home Affairs):

I thank the Deputy for his question. In order to fund what the Assembly agreed in adopting P.74 earlier this year, the Council of Ministers have lodged an amendment to the Government Plan to increase the value for money commitments required of departments. This should not surprise the Assembly. During that debate just last month, my colleague, the Minister for Treasury and Resources, stood up and told this Assembly that it would be hard to find the money required. He informed the Assembly that, and I quote: "The hard reality is that there will need to be savings delivered across departments to provide this additional money." My colleague from St. Brelade, Deputy Renouf, too, rose to his feet and urged Members to remember this situation when we are discussing the Government Plan. Quite presciently, he suggested that Deputy Luce may not find quite as much support if he were to be bringing the proposition here to cut £3 million or £4 million off the front line services. It was an acknowledgment that there would be difficult decisions to be made and, indeed, difficult decisions have been made. That has included the additional value for money commitment for the police and an extra value for money commitment for all of the other emergency front line services. This was agreed by the Council of Ministers, albeit subject to some robust discussions on my part. That was how we have arrived at the current position.

2.15.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Therefore, can I confirm with the Minister that she has no concerns about this £47,000 being lost from the police and she agrees with that cut being made?

Deputy H. Miles:

As I said, this was subject to some robust discussions around the Council of Ministers' table. I made my views clearly known on behalf of the States of Jersey Police and the other Jersey Home Affairs services to defend our front line service budget, as my colleagues know that I always will. As Ministers with a wide breadth of portfolios, we will approach difficult positions like these with different authorities and we face difficult challenges. I certainly do not envy the Minister for Treasury and Resources challenge in ensuring that he balances the books, but of course he must. I know that he understands the significant challenge I face in keeping this Island safe and I will be monitoring the impact of this closely. The Minister for Treasury and Resources knows that I will be knocking on his door if I have any concerns at all about public safety. Ultimately, the Council agreed this approach as being the best option given the finite pot of money we have available. As a Member of Council, I support this.

2.15.2 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

I note that the Minister voted in favour of P.74/2023, so could the Minister clarify whether she anticipated this cut to her department's budget at that time of that vote?

Deputy H. Miles:

Thank you for the question. I did indeed vote in favour of P.73 and my feelings there were clear that we need to support the agricultural industry and our fishing industry. I was concerned, actually not at the time ... I was concerned about the process, I was concerned that we were able to have an

amendment, a proposition of that nature, given that the Government Plan had already been lodged. My feeling was quite clear that any amendment that would have resulted in a reduction in budget available to the Government Plan should have been brought during this process.

2.15.3 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

In the Minister's initial answer to the first question, she seemed to suggest that other Members should have been aware that this was a potential eventuality, when they made that vote on the initial proposition. Why did Ministers not provide such information in the comments paper to enable Members to make a more informed decision at that time? Is she saying that Ministers did not decide at that point or had not decided at that point where the cuts were going to come from?

Deputy H. Miles:

I said in the initial part of my question, I find it difficult to believe that Members were not aware. The Minister for Treasury and Resources made it abundantly clear that the money would have to come from somewhere. As my colleague, Deputy Renouf, said, when we are discussing the Government Plan we may not find quite as much support if he were to bring a proposition here to cut £3 million or £4 million of front line services. At the point that I think Members agreed that proposition, the Government Plan had already been lodged and it was evident that it was going to be difficult to find that level of funding as a result of a sideline proposition.

2.15.4 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Could the Minister explain to States Members what, if any, indication the police service has given to the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs of exactly what this £47,000 cut would entail for them and what they would do to implement that?

Deputy H. Miles:

I thank the Deputy for the question. To date, we have not had those conversations.

2.15.5 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Does that not then mean this cut meets the definition of a speculative saving, which is precisely what the Fiscal Policy Panel is telling us not to do?

Deputy H. Miles:

No, I do not agree that it is a speculative saving. There are operational issues. The next time I meet with the chief police officer, I will discuss with him what we are going to do to attempt to make this extra saving.

2.15.6 Deputy M. Tadier:

Is the Minister confident that, as we have seen in the past, this is a potential false economy where we are going to be just saving up problems for the future and that a future Minister for Justice and Home Affairs may be dealing with the consequences of these very real cuts in 5 or 10 years' time when it comes to issues on the street in Jersey?

Deputy H. Miles:

I thank the Deputy for his question. As the current Minister for Justice and Home Affairs, I can assure him that I am already dealing with the effects of decisions made by previous Assemblies. All I would say to that is depending on the efficiencies and effectiveness that we are able to make, there will always be an opportunity for me to try to restore some balance, if required, in future Government Plans.

2.15.7 Deputy R.J. Ward:

The Minister mentioned that we perhaps would have been aware of cuts to front line services when this was passed. Therefore, can we assume that the £47,000 will be from front line services? Is that what we are being told, because you cannot have threats of front line service cuts and then suddenly there will not be front line service cuts? So which is it?

Deputy H. Miles:

The States of Jersey Police are a front line service. No matter where the elements of that £47,000 come from, be that back office, be that forensic services, be that human resources, all of those services contribute to the front line policing of this Island.