

3.1 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Chief Minister regarding the effective scrutiny of the Annual Business Plan:

Will the Chief Minister explain to members why the figures given in his presentation of the Annual Business Plan 2008 in March 2007 in order that Scrutiny Panels had sufficient time to properly scrutinise departmental plans, were not the final figures therefore rendering effective scrutiny, such as in the case of the Economic Development, impossible?

Senator F.H. Walker (The Chief Minister):

The presentation to States' members on 23rd March 2007 represented the provisional cash limits for departments for the draft Annual Business Plan 2008. At the presentation it was made abundantly clear that these proposals were complete except for pay and price variations which might arise from the release of the March 2007 R.P.I. (Retail Price Index) on 18th April 2007. Members should also be aware that the substantive changes to the Council's proposals in March to those lodged on 17th July are in respect of pay and prices, the only exception being in Social Security which was primarily to reflect the changing profile of the Income Support Transitional Relief.

3.1.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I find it hard to believe that answer. What I have in front of me are figures for 2008 which showed in March a £750,000 transfer out of rural economy funding and a £750,000 transfer out of tourism and marketing into other sectors which now no longer exist. I am informed that these figures are not to be relied on in any way whatsoever and that the actual figures have changed completely from March. Can the Minister account for why that big difference should be there?

Senator F.H. Walker:

I would ask the Deputy to furnish that information. I assume that he has already taken it up with the Economic Development Department or the Economic Development Minister and if he has not, I do not know why he has not. It is also possible that the Deputy is unaware of the very constructive meeting that I and other Ministers held with the Chairmen's Committee Working Group, this is a joint Working Group to consider scrutiny of the Business Plan in which we made a great deal of constructive progress, agreed that the process needs to be improved and agreed a number of ways in which it will be improved. That, of course, is the way forward.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

If I may? Of course and indeed I have taken this up with the Minister for Economic Development and I am now confident that these figures which were presented in March were absolutely not to be relied on and bore no connection with what thinking in the Economic Development Department was. The question is why were these absolutely misleading figures presented as if they were close to the final figures when in fact nothing could be further from the truth?

Senator F.H. Walker:

Well, Sir, that is the Deputy's opinion and of course the important issue here is that the figures presented in the Business Plan are fully accurate and up to date. I have yet, as I have said, to see any information from the Deputy so I cannot comment on his comments, but as I say, I hope that he has taken them up with the relevant Minister and his department. But I would ask the Deputy now to focus on improving the scrutiny process as his own Chairmen's Committee representatives wish to do and working with Ministers to ensure that we do improve it and we get it right, and better than we have done in future years.

3.1.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Can I press the Minister to ensure that in the coming year figures presented six months before the Business Plan are more accurate and more accurately reflect what is planned than the figures which were presented in March of this year?

Senator F.H. Walker:

That will depend on the timing of course, and I would repeat that the emphasis at the presentation made it very clear that these were provisional figures. Now if members want, if the Deputy wants information as early as possible which I wholeheartedly support - then unfortunately if we are working months before the final figures are concluded, there will be a provisional aspect to them and some of them may well change. So I cannot give that guarantee. What I can guarantee is that any figures that are provisional will be clearly stated as provisional.

3.1.3 Deputy A. Breckon:

I wonder if the Chief Minister would like to comment on the Business Plan in general. The policy and headings, would he agree that in fact most of that is movable, not just within a department, but across departments and Ministers? The policy and headings within departments and across departments, the resource, the money and the manpower is in fact movable. Would he agree with that?

Senator F.H. Walker:

Is it movable within departments? Yes, Sir.