

23.07.04

16 Deputy L.V. Feltham of the Chair of the States Employment Board regarding actions taken to address concerns of teachers (OQ.134/2023)

Given the anticipated strike action by teachers on Wednesday, 5th July 2023, will the chair advise what actions, if any, have been taken in recent months to address the concerns of teachers over pay?

The Connétable of St. John (Vice-Chair, States Employment Board - rapporteur):

We started negotiations back in October. Before we enter into negotiation we consider the market conditions, the cost of living, affordability and a number of other things. We have been benchmarking salaries and I can tell Members that the pay offered for a qualified entry-level teacher in Jersey is some 26 per cent higher than in Guernsey. The pay for the top of the scale without any allowances is some £8,400 more than offered in Guernsey. These rates are also very competitive against inner London. We do benchmark. We have gone into conciliation, as I have explained. We have offered arbitration and our doors are still open for discussions.

3.16.1 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Could the Assistant Chief Minister please inform the Assembly what specific concerns were raised by teachers during negotiations?

The Connétable of St. John:

The negotiations are carried out by the civil servants, the professionals. During our negotiations, our discussions with civil servants, there have been concerns about retention and attraction of S.T.E.M. (science, technology, engineering and maths)-subject teachers in secondary schools. There have been concerns about workloads and we are looking at all of those things as part of the terms and conditions in the wider discussions.

3.16.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can the Deputy Chair - I am getting the title wrong, I apologise - confirm that during these negotiations that are undertaken by officers, officers have the ability to offer more in those negotiations or are they sent into negotiations with a fixed position from which they are not enabled to shift from?

The Connétable of St. John:

Our negotiating team are very experienced people and they are able to come back with suggestions and go into those meetings with suggestions. Currently the policy of the States Employment Board is to offer the 7.9 per cent and that is why we offered to go to arbitration because we feel that it is a fair offer. Our employees' representatives do not believe it is fair and we offered for independent arbitration; that offer is still open.

3.16.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

The officers that are negotiating, can they come back and suggest to you more or are they set a fixed envelope from which they can negotiate and, therefore, is that negotiation?

The Connétable of St. John:

I believe I have demonstrated that there is negotiation because one of the offers would have seen some members receive up to 12 per cent increase. Of course officers can come back with feedback and suggestions and ideas; they are mandated to go in with a specific amount but if they come back

with suggestions it is something that the States Employment Board would clearly listen to. I am not saying that we would change our mind but we would certainly listen.

3.16.4 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Given the strength of feeling that we have seen from teachers around these pay negotiations, what suggestions did officers come back to S.E.B. with and why did S.E.B. reject those suggestions?

The Connétable of St. John:

The suggestions from the trade unions that their pay claim remains at cost of living plus 5 per cent, we do not believe those to be reasonable. We are looking at whether we can enter into a longer-term deal in future pay years but we are trying to negotiate for this year's pay deal, already several months behind. In terms of the level of feelings, one of the trade unions had a 59 per cent turnout and the other one had a 51 per cent turnout. The Connétable of St. Helier said that all teachers would be on one strike, only one of the trade unions is taking strike action tomorrow.

Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Sir, I do not believe my question was answered. The Assistant Chief Minister said what suggestions the unions had made, my question was specifically related to the suggestions that his officers have made in relation to the unions' concerns.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Yes, do you want to respond to that particular point, Connétable?

The Connétable of St. John:

Yes, Sir. I do not believe the floor of this Assembly is the place for negotiations. The Government Plan sets out the amount of money available to us in terms of staff pay and I believe that it should be left to the States Employment Board and the negotiators to do that negotiation around a table and not across an Assembly floor.