

2026.01.20

4.4 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter of the Chief Minister regarding a Jersey Public Services Ombudsperson (OQ.13/2026):

Will the Chief Minister provide an update on the Government's plans regarding a Jersey Public Services Ombudsperson, or alternative independent complaints process, including a timetable for implementation?

Deputy L.J. Farnham of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter (The Chief Minister):

Deputy Scott was commissioned to lead this work and will publish her findings shortly recommending a roadmap for establishing a Jersey Public Service Ombudsperson with a broad remit. Before this can be implemented, some further work is required to refine the ombudsperson's remit and potential costs to ensure it provides the appropriate service for Jersey and the maximum impact and value for money. I understand Deputy Scott will be recommending setting up an ombudsman with a broad scope covering a wide range of public services, including coverage of relevant arm's length bodies.

4.4.1 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

I think the conclusion of that was that an ombudsperson will be set up and a roadmap for establishing it will be set out. Is the Chief Minister able to answer the second part of the first question, which was a timetable for implementation? Will those proposals be brought to this States Assembly before the election, and when does he expect the ombudsperson to be in place?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

The Deputy will remember the Budget debate, where we set aside some money for funding the work that is going on now. The short answer is the legislation will not be delivered in time to be considered by this Assembly, but I anticipate that a lot of the work will be done to pass on to the new Assembly.

4.4.2 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:

It is interesting that this work will not be completed before the election. Is it not the case that this is because his Government is rather split; in fact, hopelessly split on this? The Minister for Treasury and Resources: made a statement in the Budget debate regarding the establishment of an ombudsperson along the lines of "over my dead body". The Government is split on this. Has the Chief Minister held any meetings to get around the apparently irreconcilable positions within his Government?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I do not recall anybody using the phrase "over my dead body", but the Government is not hopelessly split. I know the Deputy has improved his rhetorical delivery considerably over this term. No, we do not all support it for various reasons, but we are doing the work as outlined in the answer to my question. We have made progress on this and ultimately, when the legislation is brought to the Assembly, it will be for the Assembly to decide.

4.4.3 Deputy J. Renouf:

When I made the point about "over my dead body", I think I saw the Minister for Treasury and Resource nodding assent, so it was not too far wide of the mark. Will the Chief Minister accept my congratulations for having played this one in such a way as to make sure that he has kept kicking it into the long grass until such time as it can be timed out and not be something in which has to be dealt with during this term of Government and which would have indeed exposed the splits within his Government?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Sorry, I will not accept the Minister's congratulations on this occasion.

The Bailiff:

I am not sure that question complies with Standing Orders because the question should not be framed primarily so as to convey information rather than seek it or convey a particular point of view. It was a rhetorical question, was it not, effectively? You were not asking for information. You were saying: “Well, this is what I think is happening.”

Deputy J. Renouf:

I was asking whether the Chief Minister would accept my congratulations.

The Bailiff:

Agree with your opinion.

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I would be happy to accept his congratulations on many other issues, but not on this one.

4.4.4 Connétable R.D. Johnson of St. Mary:

This matter has been raised in public in quarterly hearings of the Corporate Services Panel. We had hoped to have received the report by the end of ... well, certainly during November. In one of his replies, the Chief Minister did say that the report would cover cost analysis.

[10:15]

Could he therefore please confirm that the report will indeed go into that, and while accepting that cost is an important factor, that the overriding factor in deciding whether the ombudsman should proceed or not is the administration of justice, which appears not to be in play at the moment by the Complaints Panel?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

A cost-benefit analysis has assessed the projected costs of the policy options. The preferred ombudsperson model needs to be refined to ensure resources are used wisely and costs are contained, so I do not think there is a lot of challenge about the principle of an ombudsperson, although there is some disagreement in the Assembly. It was by no means a unanimous position this Assembly took. I want to reiterate, in this time where we are having to look at the costs of all arm's-length organisation, this Government has been running with the policy of not establishing a new one unless there is a solid case for doing so, and that is the work we are doing now. But, as I said, we are heading in a direction that does establish an ombudsperson, and legislation will be produced once the intermediate work is complete.

Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

I no longer need to ask the question.

4.4.5 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

I would be interested to know if the Chief Minister is one of those who supports it or not, but that is not my actual question here. What assessment of the risks of not taking timely action, and the key word there is “timely”, despite every single piece of work on this topic certainly that I have seen so far all concluding the same thing: that a Public Services Ombudsperson is the way to go and could actually save money in the long run? What assessment of those risks has been undertaken and how does the Chief Minister justify ignoring those risks and effectively kicking this into the long grass once again?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I am not sure if the Deputy actually has listened to anything I have said over the last few minutes but is intent in using this expression of “kicking into the long grass”. This has not been kicked into the long grass. We have taken it forward into a position that will seek to produce legislation. I do support the principle of an ombudsperson but not at any cost. We have not done any risk assessments because we did not need to. We have a complaints programme at the moment, a Complaints Panel, that manages things adequately at the moment. Now that can be improved upon and that is the work we are doing now.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Can I ask a point of clarification, Sir?

The Bailiff:

No, but if your question has not been answered you could make an observation and I could rule it out.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

I was just going to ask if the risks were assessed as part of Deputy Scott's piece of work that looked into this.

The Bailiff:

Was that part of your original question or not? **[Aside]** Not quite good enough.