

2025.10.21

**4.7 Deputy D.J. Warr of St. Helier South of the Chief Minister regarding a paid-for article in the Jersey Evening Post on 27th September 2025 (OQ.226/2025):**

In relation to the school meals sponsored content article published in the *Jersey Evening Post* on 27th September 2025, will the Chief Minister advise if this article was sponsored by Government and, if it was, explain why, state the cost to publish the article and advise which department paid for the publication?

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

The sponsored content was placed as part of a campaign in order to raise awareness among parents of the school meals programme and, therefore, ensure that as many primary school children as possible can benefit from having a hot and nutritious school meal at lunchtime. The article was part of a wider campaign to keep the public informed about progress, the progress of the C.S.P. (Common Strategic Policy) priorities and upcoming developments. That included video interviews and other content that was also shared through the social media channels of all Island media and the Government's social media channel. The total cost of that was £897. That was paid for from the communications budget, which is part of the Cabinet Office.

**4.7.1 Deputy D.J. Warr:**

What is the budget allocation for providing sponsored content to the *J.E.P. (Jersey Evening Post)* in 2025-2026? If you do not have that number to hand maybe you could let me have that. Is there a danger that sponsored content is seen by the public as propaganda ahead of the next election?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

No, I would hope not. The idea is, and clearly it is important when we do advertorials or whatever you want to call them, it is clearly labelled sponsored content, which it was in this case. It is absolutely clear, top of the page that this was sponsored content. It is important we do that from time to time. We cannot always get the stories and the information out as part of the news stories because some of it we deem to be important that parents and children know about might not be considered newsworthy. That is why I think sponsored content is sometimes important. I do not know what the exact budget is. It is not a lot, it is part of the communications budget, but I am happy to let the Deputy look at that and let the Deputy have that figure.

**4.7.2 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:**

I hope the Chief Minister does accept that there would be legitimate worries about the potential for sponsored content becoming political propaganda. Could he, therefore, advise, what guidelines are in place to ensure that we do not get sponsored content that advises the public on the great work that the Chief Minister has been doing over the last 2 years and the Government's work to be the best Government that the Island has ever had?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I thank the Deputy for his compliment. I am not sure we deserve them just yet; we have got more work to do of course. I think sponsored content is something that is used very rarely, very occasionally when it is felt we need to get important messages across. The Government advertises and spends a lot of money on advertising. It is for roadworks to notices and to other important aspects. I think the school meals programme, something started by Deputy Renouf's

Government or the Government that he was part of, so I have to share the credit with them for that. It is so important to the development of our children that we felt on this occasion some sponsored content would help get the message across. I do not think anybody can mistake some sponsored content promoting the benefits of school meals with propaganda. I think that is quite ridiculous to assume that. But I do take on board the broader principle, which is why it is not used very often but only used where we think it is necessary and for the right reasons.

[10:45]

**Deputy J. Renouf:**

Sir, I did ask what the guidelines were. The substance of my question was what the guidelines are to prevent political propaganda.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

Yes, you did. Any guidelines governing the use of this?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I am not sure I have seen any guidelines that specifically state the word “propaganda”. But I can certainly ask Communications to look at that. The guidelines I have seen have all been very sensible, proper and appropriate and work generally well. I think our communications, especially across the Government, social media channels and the advertising and advertorial work we do has been beneficial to the public in sharing information.

**4.7.3 Deputy J. Renouf:**

Can I, therefore, ask what advice the Chief Minister took in relation to this piece of sponsored content and its appropriateness to check whether it met the criteria?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I did not have any advice on it. This was something that the Communications Department carried out, I presume with working closely with the Education Department. I think it was a good advertorial, I think it was important and I fully supported it. I do not have sight of every single advert, every single decision that is made along those lines. But I would like to reassure Members that our communications work, I think, is very carefully considered by the team and something I fully support.

**4.7.4 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:**

What does it come to when the Government has to pay the local newspaper to put out Government propaganda, especially when they used to do it for free? Is the real issue here not about Government but about oversight of the media? Would the Chief Minister listen to the legitimate concerns? Would he also answer the question about who is it that writes the sponsored content? Could he confirm whether the sponsored content is written in-house by his own officers, by government officers and then put to print or is it journalists for hire that we are seeing here working, effectively, on behalf of Government being paid for by the taxpayer?

**Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I am not sure who wrote the article. It all depends, I think sometimes articles like that could be provided by the purchaser of advertising. Sometimes it can be written by the supplier of the advertising. We all know that media - and I think we have very good media here - and the community aspect of what is covered in our media is second to none. I do not always agree with some of the news content; some of the headlines are a bit misleading. But the media over here are legitimate businesses and can run on the fact that they work on the back of their revenues from membership providing access to the news and advertising. I do not think there

is anything wrong with the Government. As it has done for many, many years, you can go back a long time, where we gave exclusivity to the media on notices. I think those days have passed now. But I think the media play an important part of working with the Government in sharing certain types of information. I have not seen any part of that related to any form of propaganda whatsoever. I suppose you could make that accusation to any business advertising with the media, and any big advertisers might not be criticised by the news because they are spending money on advertising. I can assure the Members that does not apply to the Government.

#### **4.7.5 Deputy M. Tadier:**

Would the Chief Minister undertake to give wider consideration to the appropriateness of the Government using advertorials, as they might be called? Where on the one hand of course Government are free to write letters to the *J.E.P.* or any media, which they do without paying. They can take out adverts which they do, paying for but when there is a Comms Unit which is employed by Government, there is an expectation, I think, from the taxpayer and from the public that the blurring of lines should not take place. Would the Minister give consideration to what the policy should be of any government, not just his, when it comes to the use of sponsored content which may be written by otherwise independent journalists?

#### **Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

I want to reiterate I do not believe there has been any blurring of lines. I would not support any blurring of lines. I will ask the Communications Department to remind Ministers there is a policy on that. I am happy to reassure Members of the position. It is a valid point raised by the questioner and varied Deputies, and we will continue to make sure that if we do use advertising or advertorial we will do it in a proper way, so it does not impinge upon the freedom of the media.

#### **4.7.6 Deputy D.J. Warr:**

I just want to make one point to the Chief Minister, there is a very big difference between business providing advertorial and governments providing advertorial. Businesses do it and everybody knows what businesses are about and that is their emphasis. Government, this is a wider communication thing. I do not see this parallel between what businesses do and what governments do. To come on to my final question is, how many other pages have been sponsored, does the Chief Minister understand? Are there any more plans to provide any more sponsored content in the *Jersey Evening Post*?

#### **Deputy L.J. Farnham:**

Just dealing with it, I hear what the Deputy says about business and I was not trying to make a comparison between government and businesses. But businesses are sometimes part of the news for various reasons. There could be a time when a business has done something wrong but because they are a big advertiser you can say, hold on a minute, why are the media not being ... but I have never seen any evidence of that. I think our media are free and fair and rightly firm where they have to be. I do not know how many advertorials we have done in the past. I have not seen very many and I do not know how many we have got planned for the future, if we have got any planned for the future, but I will certainly ask the question.