

# STATES OF JERSEY

## OFFICIAL REPORT

**TUESDAY, 9th DECEMBER 2025**

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[9:30]

**The Roll was called and the Dean led the Assembly in Prayer.**

**COMMUNICATIONS BY THE PRESIDING OFFICER**

**The Bailiff:**

**1.1 Welcome to His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor**

On behalf of all Members, I would like to welcome His Excellency to the Chamber this morning.  
**[Approbation]**

**PUBLIC BUSINESS - resumption**

**Connétable A.N. Jehan of St. John:**

If I could just advise Members that Amendment 21 is going to be accepted rather than rejected by the Council of Ministers.

**The Bailiff:**

Chief Minister.

**Deputy L.J. Farnham of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter:**

Sorry, Sir, I was hoping to speak on the debate, if we are continuing where we left off.

**The Bailiff:**

All right, we will get to that in a moment.

**Deputy T.J.A. Binet of St. Saviour:**

I did tell Members that I intend to make a short statement about waiting lists, as advised yesterday, at the beginning of the afternoon session, Sir, if that is okay.

**The Bailiff:**

Normally we conclude the Budget first but perhaps we will come to that later on, considering whether Members agree to accept that.

**Deputy T.J.A. Binet:**

Whatever is required, that is fine.

**2. Proposed Budget (Government Plan) 2026-2029 (P.70/2025): thirty-second amendment (P.70/2025 Amd.(32)) - resumption - Environment Departmental Funding**

**The Bailiff:**

We resume the debate on the thirty-second amendment and the next Member on the list to speak was Deputy Alex Curtis.

**2.1 Deputy A.F. Curtis of St. Clement:**

I do not want to spend long on this amendment. Our panel's chair has given a thorough and detailed explanation of the impact and risks if it is not supported. I am also grateful that she has proposed part 2 only. She rightly highlights that, as proposed, it is now on the Minister for Treasury and Resources and Chief Minister to find the funding to make the tough choices. They have the power and perhaps duty to bring forward amendments to reinstate a balanced Budget. This is important because it is not for a Scrutiny Panel to propose where to take money outside their remit. We simply do not have the evidence. That said, we can propose that this cut, these savings, are a significant risk to the department to the function of its operation, and we ask Members to put their weight behind that evidence and agree that there are sufficient areas to resize across Government to ensure that this

department's budget is protected. The Minister for the Environment yesterday said that cuts have been applied proportionately across the Council of Ministers, although he caveated that by saying front lines had some protections. So he may think he is playing his part in equal hardship but we should consider the numbers. Of net revenue expenditure, which for the Department of the Environment is £11 million, they are being asked for savings of £750,000, roughly 6 per cent. The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, granted has more front line roles, is asked for savings of £1.24 million on a budget of £188 million. The Treasury and Exchequer, largely more back office function, has a savings target of £1.5 million on £46.5 million of net revenue expenditure. No Minister is hit harder in the delivery of service than the Minister for the Environment in this Budget, and the Minister gets no grants through growth for any area of their work. It is further harder the Minister recovers some money, a further circa £6 million for the delivery of service that is seen split out through statutory fees. But a turn to the Public Finances Manual shows that fees charged to be there to recoup the cost of delivery of service, fees should never be used to extract a profit from the user in a user pays charge and so he should not rely on this money to cross-subsidise any work within his department. As already stated by others today, there are areas that Ministers can look to reduce money in the Budget because it is indeed still a growth Budget, a Budget that allocates £52 million in growth bids. As highlighted, these are new, not existing, and it is not, in my view, beyond the ability of the Minister and the Council of Ministers to find £656,000 by cutting the cloth of just these growth bids accordingly. To put that into perspective, the Council of Ministers need only reduce their own appetite for growth in their chosen areas by 1.26 per cent. That is not the Government budget. That is a cut to the growth bids of the Government's appetite. 1.26 per cent across those will happily deliver a balanced Budget and ensure the vital plethora of functions performed by the Environment Department can be delivered. That is an extensive list of functions. I want to stress how much of a choice this is. Members can see where those growth allocations are in page 44. The Government is investing a further £7 million in the investment competitiveness in 2026 alone. A 10 per cent reduction to this would equal the savings. Children's Services improvements could equally be reduced by 10 per cent to deliver the entire financial ask in 2026. The Minister should read the Children, Education and Home Affairs comments paper to see how costs have increased here, and while I note they support that additional funding, we have to make choices. Equally there are some laudable aims in the Supporting Islanders and Strengthening Communities budget that could be reduced. These do provide more Government support for supporting parents with cash grants for school supplies, developing workplace pension policy and extending Pension Plus and Health Access Scheme, as well as a wider programme of schemes for improving inclusion. I do see Ministers shaking their head as if to say: "How could we make a choice on these?" But that is what we are here to do. We are here to make choices and balance priorities. Those are clearly a wider remit to 2025. That is growth. Much as we want to provide these, we must balance what we deliver. The truth is I do not suggest taking 10 per cent from a competitiveness programme, nor taking a £2 off every hour of delivery of new nursery education. Nor do I suggest we slash the Supporting Islanders and Strengthening Communities in isolation. But the point is to show the scale of funding across Government just to growth bids; 1.26 per cent. If Ministers feel actually those are more important than work that is going on at the moment, that the growth should be replacing business as usual, then they can target that without even leaving a dent in any of the growth bids. I think that we have some tough decisions to make. We do have to ask where our money goes. £656,000 for the Environment team to deliver what many could consider front line services, delivering services for the public, ensuring that we keep working, ensuring that our footpaths are well-maintained, that our treaties are upheld are important elements.

[9:45]

I do believe we have to make some choices. We have to curb our expectation in every area. But I do think that this money is evidence-based to be funding the Environment Department and I do urge

Members to consider all taking a little bit of a thought as to where they can find that money and funding the Environment Department.

#### **2.1.1 Deputy L.J. Farnham of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter:**

I am pleased to follow the previous speaker actually, and I hope what I am going to say might shorten this debate, that we must remember if we want to curb a growth we have to be serious about delivering savings. We have to trust the professionals in charge of the departments to identify and deliver services within the budgets they are allocated by this Assembly as part of this process. It is also up to Ministers to look at their budgets. Sometimes they have substantial budgets and prioritise and reprioritise where they feel they need to spend the money, and that is a process that the Council of Ministers work collegiately on. I would like to report to Members, there has been some productive discourse between the Ministerial group in the last 12 to 18 hours, and the mood is that we feel obliged ... not obliged, but I think we feel, having considered the comments and looked at the budgets, and particularly because part 1 of the amendment was withdrawn, that was the real challenge and the opposition was drawing money from the Strategic Reserve for what ultimately is revenue expenditure, which we could not support under any circumstances. But given the changes, we are pleased to support this amendment and therefore technically [**Approbation**] that will be a free vote for Ministers. We have asked Treasury officials to come back with an amendment that looks at growth bids and spreading the difference across the departments. In the scheme of things, I do not think it is a great burden and we will be pleased to support it.

#### **2.1.2 Deputy H.M. Miles of St. Brelade:**

I think I shall put my speech in the shredder.

#### **2.1.3 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour:**

I was going to read out quotes from children and talk about intergenerational fairness but I will not need to do that now, so thank you.

#### **2.1.4 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:**

It is interesting that it is going to be a free vote now rather than the Ministerial whip to support this. I think it also shows the wonder of modern day lobbying, because it is quite clear, and nobody said it yet surprisingly, but clearly the cut in budgets for the Environment Department has stirred up something of a hornet's nest [**Members: Oh!**] with the public. We know about it because it has created quite a stir with the chattering classes. But quite rightly. I think it has to be said at this point, sometimes it is nice to take a short break and distance ourselves, take a step back and look at the politics that is going on here. Clearly, I think that some in the Council of the Ministers have realised that this is one cut too far and it is alienating them from their traditional electoral base who are very eloquent and very able to contact States Members here. But, of course, that does not mean it is not the right thing for the Council to have taken on board either. My big concern here is that if these cuts were too far, not just from our environmental perspective but also I look at this through the economic lens. The Minister was quite clear in his concerns yesterday when he ... I think he felt that he had been backed into a corner. He was doing his job as a loyal Minister, but that actually there were going to be real negative consequences if we were to follow these cuts through on a proportionate basis to other departments, because we cannot compare like for like. What really concerned me is when he started mentioning the fact that our lovely cliff path system, which is really one of the jewels in the crown of the offering that we have to tourists. When they come over here from whichever nationalities and also at whatever time of year, they talk to us about the beautiful scenery but also how well maintained the cliff paths are, how clean Jersey is and how groomed it all is, and that it is a pleasure for them to come over here. It does still differentiate our Island from other cheaper destinations, but which we can still compete on the overall offerings. I think there are wider consequences to this. This was not a genuine saving, I do not think. I think this was actually an area

where you get a short-term gain, but actually potentially some very long-term pain, which it might be difficult to come back from. I do acknowledge, notwithstanding my slightly tongue in cheek comments earlier, that it is good to see Government moving on issues where they think that there is movement, and of course more power to the chair of Scrutiny.

#### **2.1.5 Deputy K.F. Morel of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:**

I will be pleased to support this. I just wanted to pick up on one thing to amplify it a little bit, and that was something from Deputy Alex Curtis's speech with regard to the use of fees, particularly through the regulatory area. I agree entirely with Deputy Curtis on that. I think it is something for the next Government to look at, is that user fees should not form part of any department's budget because that in itself creates an inflexibility in the system. You then cannot adapt that department's budget in any ways or change those services in any ways because the department becomes reliant on those fees. So from that perspective, I just wanted to reiterate the fact that I do think in the next Government, user fees should all be going straight to Treasury and nowhere else, and departmental budgets should be assessed entirely through the budgetary process and not through the user fees element.

#### **2.1.6 Connétable R.D. Johnson of St. Mary:**

My speech is going to be somewhat different to what it was 5 minutes ago, in view of the Chief Minister's speech. At that stage, I was going to draw particular attention to the fact that the chair of the Environment Panel comprehensively laid out the circumstances and the concerns that the panel have. I would like to emphasise the one on the potential that the department would not be able to comply with its statutory regulations. I respectfully remind Members to turn their minds back to 2 or 3 weeks ago when we considered the Dogs Law and amendments, and it then became apparent at the eleventh hour that certainly the enforcement provisions contained in that law were in fact unenforceable. Not because we were seeking to impose new conditions, but the ones which they borrowed from earlier legislation had actually been taken away from them due to cuts. I think that is a lesson that all Ministers and departments need to bear in mind, that if there are to be cuts, and there are to be dangers of not complying with those regulations, then those regulations should be removed. We should not be in a situation where we simply leave them off the statute book and not comply with them. In that sense, I am pleased that the Chief Minister has made his statement because that is an area which affects all departments, not just the Environment, and we are in danger of damaging our international reputation if we allow that sort of thing to happen. Again, I am very pleased that the Chief Minister has spoken in the way he has, and I shall obviously be supporting the amendment.

#### **2.1.7 Deputy A. Howell of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:**

I rise just to say thank you very much to the Scrutiny Panel for all the work they have done and to the officers in the Environment Department who we could not manage without, and also to the public who spend many hours hunting for hornets. Lots of my friends are up there for days and days and days and I have been wanting to support them - I mentioned it before - and I thank the Council of Ministers and the Chief Minister.

#### **2.1.8 Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade:**

Following the last speaker focusing on the hornet situation, I think it is fair to say we have an explosion of hornets in the Island and it is not business as usual. The department are faced with having to deal with this massive expansion of nests and we are relying on the volunteers who are giving their services to the department for no return. I think it is incumbent on Government to support them in that role, which we shall do. I have to refer to the paths, the certain areas in the Parishes, and I mention mine particularly because we have areas such as Noirmont Wood, an extensive area of woodland which was given to the Island just after the war as a war memorial, and due to lack of



funding has been really neglected. These are areas which we must try and get back on track. In closing, like Deputy Howell, I thank Asian hornet tracking volunteers for their work and look forward to looking into how we might improve the present system to the benefit of the Island as a whole.

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

May I ask for the default to be raised on Deputy Kovacs?

**The Bailiff:**

Are Members content to raise the default on Deputy Kovacs? The default is raised.

**2.1.9 Deputy M.R. Scott of St. Brelade:**

I wanted to add my thanks to the volunteers who are involved in combating the hornet invasion and indeed all volunteers in the Island. I think that perhaps there can be some ideological differences on whether we should have volunteers working in this area or even more Government employees, and I certainly know which side of the ideology I fall. It also can be regrettable if efficiency savings affect the environment. I know that is very important to many people and that it does in many ways go hand in hand with the economy and the support that the Council of Ministers wish to give it. I also just want to add my thanks for the Scrutiny Panel, who clearly have done a good job here.

**2.1.10 Deputy S.G. Luce of Grouville and St. Martin:**

I feel obliged to say just a few words. Yesterday afternoon when we started this debate, I had a big sign on the desk on the left of me which read “hard” and big sign on the desk on the right of me which read “rock” and I found myself very much between the 2. It was going to be a hugely difficult debate for me to speak in, but I just want to say a couple of words of thanks. Before I do that, I want to agree with Deputy Tadier. I am certainly 100 per cent committed to the well-being of this Island is rooted in the environment that we find ourselves living in; brown cows, green fields, sandy beaches, clean footpaths around our wonderful coastline and people come to live in the Island. People want to stay in the Island for the environment that they appreciate, and we forget that at our peril. I also want to thank those people who have spoken, those Members who have spoken in favour of or thanking the many volunteers. I have about 500 volunteers that help with the work that is done by my department, not just the 50 or 60 hornet hunters that we have who go out and do fantastic work, and I thank them. But many others that help across the whole of the biodiversity of our Island reporting data to us. I want to thank the Scrutiny Panel for bringing this amendment, which highlights the massive diversity I have inside my department for everything from Met. Office to fishing and farming and footpaths, and the list goes on and on. Finally, I would just like to thank my fellow Ministers and the Chief Minister, in particular, for mulling over this situation overnight and agreeing that we will support this amendment today.

**The Bailiff:**

Does anyone else wish to speak on the amendment? I call upon Deputy Jeune to reply.

**2.1.11 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:**

I will be brief because we have a lot more to get through in the next few days, but I really want to thank Members who have taken the time to contribute to this debate. I also want to echo other Members to say thank you to the volunteers that support our Island environment, ranging from those Asian hornet hunters, but also those who do the monitoring of our biodiversity and really show that we are in a biodiversity crisis, not only globally, but in Jersey itself. We do need to ensure that we keep the pressure on to show that we do need to do every help that we can to the environment. But ultimately, of course, I want to thank the Council of Ministers for acknowledging that this amendment does not create new growth, nor does it expand the public sector. It is simply about ensuring the Environment Department can meet the statutory duties that this Assembly has already placed upon it. That shows that the Assembly wants to support Jersey’s natural environment because it is not a

discretionary add-on or a nice to have because it is a core public service that protects our health, our safety and our economy. So again, I would like to thank my Scrutiny Panel and my officers for supporting me in doing this work.

[10:00]

I would like to thank the Minister again for the time that he has given and all the information he gave to help build our evidence for this amendment. I would like to thank again the Council of Ministers.

**The Bailiff:**

Is the appel called for?

**Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

Yes, Sir.

**The Bailiff:**

The appel has been called for. Members are invited to return to their seats. I ask the Greffier to open the voting. If all Members have had the chance to cast their votes, I ask the Greffier to close the voting. I can announce that the amendment has been adopted:

| <b>POUR: 44</b>           |  | <b>CONTRE: 1</b>    |  | <b>ABSTAINED: 0</b> |
|---------------------------|--|---------------------|--|---------------------|
| Connétable of St. Helier  |  | Deputy M.B. Andrews |  |                     |
| Connétable of St. Brelade |  |                     |  |                     |
| Connétable of Trinity     |  |                     |  |                     |
| Connétable of St. John    |  |                     |  |                     |
| Connétable of St. Clement |  |                     |  |                     |
| Connétable of Grouville   |  |                     |  |                     |
| Connétable of St. Ouen    |  |                     |  |                     |
| Connétable of St. Mary    |  |                     |  |                     |
| Connétable of St. Saviour |  |                     |  |                     |
| Deputy G.P. Southern      |  |                     |  |                     |
| Deputy C.F. Labey         |  |                     |  |                     |
| Deputy M. Tadier          |  |                     |  |                     |
| Deputy S.G. Luce          |  |                     |  |                     |
| Deputy L.M.C. Doublet     |  |                     |  |                     |
| Deputy K.F. Morel         |  |                     |  |                     |
| Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat    |  |                     |  |                     |
| Deputy S.M. Ahier         |  |                     |  |                     |
| Deputy R.J. Ward          |  |                     |  |                     |
| Deputy C.S. Alves         |  |                     |  |                     |
| Deputy I. Gardiner        |  |                     |  |                     |
| Deputy I.J. Gorst         |  |                     |  |                     |
| Deputy L.J. Farnham       |  |                     |  |                     |
| Deputy K.L. Moore         |  |                     |  |                     |

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| Deputy S.Y. Mézec           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy Sir P.M. Bailhache   |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy T.A. Coles           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy B.B. de S.V.M. Porée |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy D.J. Warr            |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy H.M. Miles           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy M.R. Scott           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy J. Renouf            |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy C.D. Curtis          |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy L.V. Feltham         |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy R.E. Binet           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy H.L. Jeune           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy M.E. Millar          |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy A. Howell            |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy T.J.A. Binet         |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy M.R. Ferey           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy R.S. Kovacs          |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy A.F. Curtis          |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy B. Ward              |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy K.M. Wilson          |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson    |  |  |  |  |

## **2.2 Proposed Budget (Government Plan) 2026-2029 (P.70/2025): thirtieth amendment (P.70/2025 Amd.(30)) - No Agricultural Loans for Cannabis-based products**

### **The Bailiff:**

We now move on to the thirtieth amendment proposed by Deputy Wilson. Deputy Wilson, there is an amendment to your amendment lodged by the Council of Ministers which you do not accept, is that right?

### **Deputy K.M. Wilson of St. Clement:**

That is correct, Sir.

### **The Bailiff:**

Thank you very much. I ask the Greffier to read the amendment.

### **The Greffier of the States:**

Page 2, paragraph (b)(vi) – After the words “in excess of estimates provided in this plan”, insert the words – “, provided that no Agricultural Loans are to be given for the purpose of supporting the cultivation in Jersey of cannabis-based products for medicinal use”.

### **2.2.1 Deputy K.M. Wilson:**

Sorry, I have got a sore throat, so I am just trying to lubricate my vocal cords. In November 2024, the Government published its Rural Economic Framework, a vision for managing our countryside and revitalising what is described as a fragile economic ecosystem. Its intention was to keep Jersey farming and to encourage Islanders to support our local food producers. One key proposal within the framework was the re-establishment of the Agricultural Loans scheme, which had been dormant since 2003. This year we see £5 million allocated and its purpose was unambiguous, which was to enhance food security and uplift both individual farmers and wider agricultural community to ensure a prosperous, profitable and sustainable future. When this fund was launched, the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development stated that these loans would help the sector to continue to be protectors of Jersey's natural environment. Nothing in that vision spoke of subsidising pharmaceutical crops. Nothing in that intent suggested underwriting the risks of a high margin, expert-driven medicinal cannabis industry. Regulations were created to help farmers invest in tractors, irrigation, soil improvement, livestock and general agricultural land use. They were designed to protect food security, not to underwrite private, high-value commercial enterprises that operate more like pharmaceutical factories than farms. Yet today the Council of Ministers argues that medicinal cannabis technically fits within the definition of agriculture and that it should be eligible for these loans. With respect, I cannot support the position, and I want to be absolutely clear why. When we speak about agriculture in the context of agricultural loans, we are speaking about something very specific. As I have said before, the law was designed to support the backbone of our rural economy, the cultivation of land for food, the rearing of animals, the stewardship of our countryside and the protection of traditional farming business. The scheme was created to support the agriculture and use funds for dairy infrastructure, potato storage, glasshouse improvements, equipment and land for farming, and these investments strengthen food production, soil health and the environmental stewardship I referred to. This is public interest sustainability, it is not commercial speculation. But medicinal cannabis is none of those things. It is not part of our food producing agricultural base. It does not contribute to food resilience and it does not stabilise our traditional farming and agricultural sector. The fund was never intended to finance crops that cannot be eaten and cannot support Jersey's food security. Cannabis is not tomatoes. It contains active pharmacological compounds with medicinal effects and significant risks. Growing cannabis for medicinal use is in fact pharmaceutical manufacturing, not agriculture in the true sense of the word. However valuable some may consider medicinal cannabis as a commercial opportunity, it is not agriculture in any meaningful or statutory sense. It is a licensed narcotic industry. It requires pharmaceutical grade facilities, high security operations and controlled environments, and this bears no resemblance to the open field or horticultural activity our agricultural loans were designed to support. To rebadge this activity as agriculture simply to justify access to public subsidy undermines the clarity and the integrity of our agricultural policies. We have a separate licensing regime for medicinal cannabis for a reason, and it should not be financed by loans designed to support farmers who produce the food we eat. The medicinal cannabis sector is highly speculative. It carries export risks, regulatory risks, reputational risks and the history of rapid commercial failures. If the cannabis operator collapses, as we have seen elsewhere, the public purse is exposed. Agricultural loans were never designed to underwrite that kind of risk. They were designed for a 30-year low-risk investment in farming industries. Just because a project is technically viable does not mean it is aligned with public purpose. A cannabis grower could meet every financial test and still be completely inconsistent with the fund's purpose. I argue that we are in danger of throwing away £500,000 worth of public money to a highly volatile commercial venture and yet we are struggling to find money, as we have just heard, to support the Minister for the Environment with his programme of work. What this message means is that if we allow a high profit cannabis operation to access this loan support that many dairy, potato and horticultural farmers may never be offered the same for untested venture, this distorts the scheme. It undermines fairness, it risks displacing support from the very farmers that we are trying to help. There are also reputational issues associated with allocating this money. Our agricultural support schemes should align with our public values, our environmental priorities and

have broad social acceptance. We should not be using public money to speculate and back high risk industry, and even if they do succeed we still have not worked out how the States benefits. Ministers argue that because medicinal cannabis is an emerging sector it should remain eligible. I would suggest that political signalling should not override this fiscal responsibility that we have. If medicinal cannabis has commercial potential, it can and it should be financed through private investment and venture capital. The proper place for cannabis farmers to seek investment is from venture capital because what it does is it shares the risk as well as share the profit. It is wrong to use the agricultural loan facility because it is a low-cost term loan whose purpose is not to make a profit, but it is to provide support to those who would otherwise struggle to produce food on Jersey. It does not require taxpayer-backed lending, but food security does, soil health does, nutritional resilience does, and our established agricultural economy does. We are told that regulatory frameworks are being reviewed, and that is precisely why we should not pre-emptively allow agricultural loans to drift into supporting an industry that is still under regulatory development. This Assembly should be making decisions deliberately and transparently and once we have the full picture, not by default, not by accident, and not because of technical definitional loopholes. We are told that loans for medicinal cannabis have not been granted, but that is not reassurance. That is evidence that applications are coming and public money could soon be financing high margin private ventures with no link to Jersey's food needs or environmental stewardship. The fact that an amendment has been brought by the Government limiting the loan to 10 per cent is a damage limitation exercise. I believe we are sleepwalking our way into using public money for commercial venture rather than sustainable agriculture, which is why I wanted to bring this amendment. There is a recognition that there is indeed a significant risk of a lot of money being diverted into cannabis production rather than food production. The Council of Ministers argues that the eligibility for the loan should be broad and inclusive, but public funds must be guided by public purpose, not just by technical eligibility and commercial opportunity. This amendment preserves that purpose. It avoids blurring the lines between agricultural policy and pharmaceutical entrepreneurship. It maintains a strong dividing line between food production and medicinal cannabis production. Because as I have said, cannabis is not tomatoes. Medicinal cannabis can continue in Jersey, but with the correct legal and commercial frameworks. But it should be funded by private capital. The agricultural loan facility should remain focused on sustainable food production, environmental stewardship, soil and nutrient health, sustainability and supporting the traditional sectors that define Jersey's agricultural identity. This is not about opposing the cannabis industry, it is about protecting the integrity of agricultural policy. It is about responsible public finance. It is about political clarity and public trust. It is about maintaining a clear dividing line between food and cannabis when it comes to how public money is used. The question before us is not whether medicinal cannabis is a viable business. It may well be. The question is whether taxpayer-backed agricultural loans designed for farmers for food production and for the stewardship of our rural land should be diverted into a pharmaceutical-designed industry. I believe that the answer is no, because if we allow this redefinition, if anything grown in a pot under glass can become agriculture, then we dismantle the very purpose of those regulations and abandon the farmers they were created to support. For these reasons, I cannot support the Council of Ministers position and I propose my amendment to the Assembly.

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

Can I raise a point of order, Sir? Can you clarify if Members should declare conflicts of interest where those might be, for example, business relationships with existing or potential medicinal cannabis businesses, including land leasing and so on, or might also include close personal relationships, including friendships with people who run those cannabis businesses?

**The Bailiff:**

You would not need to declare a friendship, but any financial interests you may wish to declare.

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

Can I just seek one further point of clarification?

**The Bailiff:**

Yes, of course.

**Deputy J. Renouf:**

I was thinking in particular about point 3 of the Code of Conduct, which says: “Members should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.”

**The Bailiff:**

Yes, but the key provision is Standing Order 106, which deals with declarations of interest. The question is really, do you have a financial interest ... you or a member of your family have financial interests in the cannabis business to declare? If you have an interest of that nature, then you should declare it. Otherwise, you do not need to.

**Deputy J. Renouf:**

Thank you. It was more for ...

**The Bailiff:**

If you are in doubt, then you may want to declare the interest, but it is probably not an interest that prevents you from voting or taking part in this debate from what you seem to be saying.

**Deputy J. Renouf:**

It was for the purposes of the whole Assembly. I do not have any interest to declare.

**The Bailiff:**

Deputy Binet, do you wish to speak to the debate because we are going on to the amendment now? Or do you want to declare something?

**Deputy T.J.A. Binet of St. Saviour:**

Declaration, Sir. I just wanted to comment on the declaration because ,looking across the room, I suspected that that comment may have been directed at me. I will make it plain that I have done business with I think all of the cannabis producers over here at one time or another, having been in business here since I left school, but I do not have any financial interest. I just wanted to clarify that because I had a funny feeling that that comment may have been intended for me to respond to.

**Deputy R.E. Binet of Grouville and St. Martin:**

The same goes for me, what the previous speaker has said.

**The Bailiff:**

We now move on to the amendment lodged by the Council Ministers and I ask the Greffier to ... did I ask somebody to second that? Did someone second the proposition? **[Seconded]** Thank you very much

### **2.3 Proposed Budget (Government Plan) 2026-2029 (P.70/2025): thirtieth amendment (P.70/2025 Amd.(30)) - amendment (P.70/2025 Amd.(30)Amd.) - No Agricultural Loans for Cannabis-based products**

**The Bailiff:**

I go on to the amendment and ask the Greffier to read the amendment.

[10:15]

## **The Greffier of the States:**

Page 2, paragraph (b)(vi) – After the words “provided that no” insert the words - “more than 10 per cent of the total funding allocated to the”. After the words “Agricultural Loans” insert the word “Fund”.

### **2.3.1 Deputy K.F. Morel of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity (The Minister for Sustainable Economic Development):**

I thank Deputy Wilson for her speech and her proposition. Members will be able to see that it is correct, as Deputy Wilson has suggested, that I have proposed and the Council of Ministers does propose a compromise. There are very good reasons for this. In fact, as I was listening to Deputy Wilson speak, there were a few misconceptions in the speech which can reinforce for me the reasons why I think it is appropriate to maintain a minority ... to allow up to 10 per cent of the Agricultural Loans Fund to be used for medicinal cannabis industry. That is not to ring-fence 10 per cent, it is very important to say, it is just that if there were applications and they were seen as appropriate applications by the board, up to 10 per cent could be used. So that would be up to £1 million across the industry, and it is very important to confirm that is not ring-fencing for the industry. That £1 million could equally not be used on the industry itself. But I think it is really important to address some of the misconceptions. One was the reference throughout Deputy Wilson’s speech to agriculture being about food crops. While I think in many people’s minds this is what we think, Jersey’s agriculture industry has never been solely about food crops and the heyday of our flower export market is proof of that. Indeed the Agricultural Loans Law itself refers to flowers, bulbs and the purchase of equipment for flowers. Actually what is being grown in the cannabis industry is precisely that; a flower. So I think it is really important that we, as an Assembly, do understand that the agricultural industry is diverse and is different. While the work that I have been doing with my team for the past 4 years has focused on Jersey’s agricultural sector and Jersey’s food system, the sustainability of Jersey’s food system, and that is something that I am incredibly proud of, none of that work has been in order to exclude other elements of agriculture, and that includes the growing of flowers. It should also be remembered that Jersey’s agriculture sector is primarily an export sector. Most of the crops grown today are exported. They are not consumed locally and that, I think, is something that is very important. It is a reality that all of the food that we eat which is locally grown is grown precisely because it has been effectively subsidised by the exports of the industry. I think as well another element was, and I understood where Deputy Wilson was coming from in terms of the high-value pharmaceutical enterprises that she was talking about, but again I think that is another misconception. There is at least one, if not 2, very large agricultural medicinal cannabis businesses, but there are also much smaller ones. It is actually the smaller ones, that is the reason why I bring this amendment, because medicinal cannabis offers diversification to existing agricultural businesses in Jersey. I do note that there are farming families in Jersey who operate small farms that are seeking to diversify into medicinal cannabis in order to maintain the whole of the farm itself. Medicinal cannabis will help them in that respect. To cut off this loans funding would therefore make it much harder for them to diversify and maintain the ongoing financial health of their overall farm. It is for that reason primarily that I feel that it is important to at least maintain the door ajar for them to be able to apply to the Agricultural Loans scheme because if we cannot help existing small farms diversify, then we are making it much harder for them to maintain their world in farming. There is no doubt in my mind that we do need to be fair to people in this Island, and while I accept that medicinal cannabis is an industry that some people do struggle with, I think that is as much them due to a lack of understanding and it is also, I would suggest, the industry itself needs to significantly improve its communication with the Island. I urge Members to support this amendment, which ensures that the Agricultural Loans Fund is deployed strictly in accordance with the legislation that underpins it, while setting a clear limit of 10 per cent on the proportion of funding available to medicinal cannabis producers. The Agriculture Loans Regulations 1974 permit businesses for individuals engaged wholly or mainly in work of an agricultural nature to apply for a loan. Medicinal

cannabis production is a horticultural activity and it therefore satisfies the definition of an agricultural enterprise. Those engaged in this activity are legally entitled to seek finance from the fund. I would also observe that the Agricultural Loans Fund makes no such distinction for other types of horticultural activity and, as I have said, it does actually directly refer to the growing of flowers. Without this Council of Minister's amendment, Deputy Wilson's amendment risks shifting the goal posts retrospectively. So far in 2025, 9 applications have been formally recommended for approval by the Agricultural Loans Board. This totals over £4 million in loans that are either completed or in process. None of these loans have yet been from medicinal cannabis producers, but there is engagement with the scheme from businesses in this sector. It would, in my view, and this also speaks to the wider concept of Jersey actually having a stable business foundation to attract investment into the Island, it would be inappropriate, after the scheme has been rekindled, as it was a couple of years ago, to now block them from accessing loans when they are permitted to apply under the current legislation. In some cases they themselves have invested considerable time and finance in preparing for that application process. I do understand that agriculture is an emotive subject on the Island, it is one that we rightly feel passionate about, is one that I feel passionate about. But it is with this in mind that we must be robust in how we use the Agricultural Loans Fund. Applications should be dealt with on their own merits, not prioritised or deprioritised simply because of our views about the crop involved. Members will have seen in the report accompanying the Council of Ministers amendment and the details here of the application process required of all applicants. Jersey Business verifies proposals, qualified accountants review them and the Agricultural Loans and Guarantees Advisory Board then makes recommendations to the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development. For loans above £150,000, the Minister for Treasury and Resources must also approve. This multistage review ensures that strategic investment decisions are properly managed. I recognise that Members may be concerned about the potential scale of investment involved in the medicinal cannabis sector, and of course, the Loans Fund has limited resources. That is precisely why we have sought a compromise by setting a maximum level of funding accessible to the medicinal cannabis sector as a whole. Subject to a decision of the Minister for Treasury and Resources to approve a transfer from the Consolidated Fund to the Agricultural Loans Fund in 2026 of up to £5 million, the total fund would then sit at £10 million. This fund would then evolve as repayments begin to become available to recycle back into the pot. There is no doubt in my mind that Amendment 30 would signal a lack of political support for an emerging area of agriculture, which has significant export potential and could contribute to the sustainable economic growth of the industry. The Loans Fund should remain distinct from debates about local regulation of medicinal cannabis and instead focus on supporting viable agricultural enterprises, and we do this. I know a farm near me which has moved into accommodation as a part of that diversification. I therefore urge Members to support our amendment. I think not only is it the fairest way forward for the Island, it is a way which ensures that we limit access from that sector, because I do understand that Members could be concerned that large enterprises could seek significant amounts or significant proportions of the loans pot. I also am aware, I cannot remember exactly how it panned out, but I know we had this same debate, I believe, 12 months ago, and the Members did then support the 10 per cent allocation. There was another reason afterwards why, and I cannot remember what happened, but technically it fell through in the end. I cannot remember how. But I do ask Members to support business in Jersey, to support the agricultural sector by allowing that diversification where it is appropriate and by not signalling that we invite business to Jersey, as we have done over the last 6 or 7 years, and then to some extent say, actually, we want to treat you differently now. So I think it is appropriate that particularly those smaller Jersey farms that are looking to diversify into medicinal cannabis are able to access at least a minority of this fund to help them in that diversification.

**The Bailiff:**

Is the amendment seconded. **[Seconded]** Does anyone want to speak on the amendment?



### **2.3.2 Deputy T.A. Coles of St. Helier South:**

I think today has been a good example of why you do not always come into a debate listening or with a preconceived idea. Because originally my thought was that I did not actually agree with the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development because personally I do not think this one should be limited down to just 10 per cent for people who are trying to diversify their agricultural businesses. But actually he is right, it is better to support something at this stage that can see that the fund is still used to help farmers transition from one type of agriculture to another. As he says, we may not always agree with the product that is being grown. My fellow members of the Planning Committee saw an application on Thursday which saw a farmer over here wanting to start growing hops and grains and barley because he wants to make alcohol. That is still a form of agriculture. It is still growing, but not everybody will agree with the alcohol industry. I am not one of those people, but those people do exist. Jersey farmers are struggling. We do know that. The cost of export is becoming a challenge. The competitive market in which they are exporting into is a challenge. So they are looking to diversify in what they grow to make sure we do have an agricultural industry in Jersey. It is a challenge because obviously I get that cannabis is emotive, and we have had some growers over here who have not necessarily been the best to their neighbours. That does not mean that everybody is going to be terrible to their neighbours. I do think that we need to make sure that our farmland and our agricultural industries survive in the Island because otherwise we will see bad practice of people leaving their glass houses going absolutely to wrack and ruin just simply so they can maybe become houses. All of a sudden we have more developed land in our rural environment than actually rural activity. My initial instinct was to dismiss the Minister's amendment and also dismiss the initial amendment itself. But I think now that I support the Minister's amendment, however, I still will not be supporting the amendment as a whole.

### **2.3.3 Deputy H.M. Miles of St. Brelade:**

This Assembly has made a number of important and carefully considered decisions regarding medicinal cannabis in recent years. We have chosen to permit its cultivation under very strict regulatory conditions. We have chosen to treat it as a controlled substance requiring a licensing and compliance regime aligned with international expectations. Crucially, in the debate in 2021 and again in discussions surrounding the development of the medicinal cannabis regulatory framework, Members were clear that this had to be a privately funded, commercial and industry-driven activity, not an area subsidised or underwritten by the taxpayer. One of the expectations presented was that Jersey could benefit from meaningful tax revenues generated by the sector. It is important to acknowledge that those anticipated tax returns do not appear to have materialised to the degree suggested at the time. Despite the initial optimism, the industry has not yet delivered the scale of revenue or wider economic uplift that was forecast. That is not a criticism of the businesses involved. International markets have shifted dramatically. Oversupply has driven prices down and regulatory complexities have increased worldwide. But it does underline a critical point. This is a commercially volatile, high-risk sector and if the industry has struggled to even produce a predicted revenue for the public purse, it would be even less appropriate to now expose taxpayers to further risk by offering publicly-supported loans or financial guarantees. This Assembly was assured that the medicinal cannabis sector would be a net contributor to public finances, not a recipient of them. Similarly, when this Assembly reaffirmed its purpose of the Agricultural Loans scheme during the review of the rural support policy, we endorsed the principle that public funding should prioritise food production, soil health, environmental resilience, and the sustainability of traditional agricultural holdings.

[10:30]

Again, those decisions were not made lightly. We should ensure that we remain consistent with the principles already agreed. Medicinal cannabis is fundamentally different in nature, purpose and risk profile from the activities that the scheme was designed to support. Cannabis is a controlled drug

with active pharmacological compounds. When grown for medical use, the operation becomes part of a pharmaceutical supply chain, as Deputy Wilson said. Regulated, highly specialised and commercially volatile. It simply cannot be considered to be the equivalent of tomatoes, flowers or courgettes. To classify it as horticulture for the purpose of accessing public finance is a departure from our own previous decisions. I think it reinterprets the scheme in a way that Members have actually never endorsed, and it would be to blur the very clear line we have rightly maintained between supporting agriculture and subsidising pharmaceutical manufacturing. Medicinal cannabis is a high risk, commercially-driven industry. International markets fluctuate rapidly. Regulatory burdens are substantial and these are risks that private investors should choose to take on, but they are not appropriate for public exposure, even if it is only up to a percentage of our Agricultural Loans scheme. In my view, the medicinal cannabis sector may operate in Jersey, but it must operate on a private basis without recourse to public subsidy or financial guarantees, even 10 per cent of it. We know that we have pressing environmental responsibilities, we have soil degradation problems, we have food security issues, and climate change are among the most urgent challenges facing our rural sector. The Agricultural Loans scheme is one of the very few policy levers available to us to support resilience in these areas. Every pound allocated through the scheme has the potential to enhance food production capacity, improve soil and nutritional health, strengthen supply chains and support climate adaptation. Allowing any funding to be diverted into subsidising a specialised pharmaceutical industry, contrary to the direction of travel this Assembly has established would undermine these priorities and dilute the scheme's original purpose. We should also acknowledge that until this Assembly has full visibility of the regulatory enforcement and compliance costs associated with medicinal cannabis production, it would not be a responsible thing to open the door, even at a low level, to public financial exposure. I will not be supporting this amendment to the amendment.

**Deputy K.F. Morel:**

Point of clarification, yes, please.

**The Bailiff:**

Point of clarification, Deputy Miles?

**Deputy H.M. Miles:**

No, thank you.

#### **2.3.4 Deputy Sir P.M. Bailhache of St. Clement:**

This reduces to quite a simple question. Is this truly agriculture or is it an industrial enterprise? I must confess that it does not look to be like agriculture. It may very well be that the growing of cannabis should be supported as an industrial enterprise by the Minister, but that is a different matter. The question is whether this can truly be regarded as agriculture, for which the Island has set up a special subsidised scheme to ensure that loans are available to *bona fide* farmers, carrying out what we would all regard, generally speaking, as farming. Farming does include horticulture, includes the raising of cattle, the treating of cattle. All these things, it seems to me, as a matter of common sense, one would regard as agricultural. I, for my part, find it quite difficult to conclude that the growing of a plant for the purpose of creating an industrial product, a medicinal product, falls really within this category.

#### **2.3.5 Deputy S.G. Luce of Grouville and St. Martin:**

For a second debate in a row, I find myself in a difficult position. As Members will know, I was the Back-Bencher that brought forward the proposition to recapitalise the Agricultural Loans scheme some 2 and a bit years ago now. I have said it in this Chamber before, and I have said it publicly before, and I say it again. At that time, the last thing I envisaged was this money being used for the growing of medicinal cannabis. That money I wanted was for keeping our brown cows and our green fields, our Island green and beautiful, our farming community in good health, and our fields

cultivated. It did not really at any point include greenhouses. Having said that, during the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development's speech, I have found myself thinking along the lines of Deputy Coles and thinking of other agricultural crops which end up in sort of non-agricultural places, if you like, and of course the growing of crops to make alcohol would be one. Potentially the growing of crops to fuel energy supplies would be another. They are not all about food. Certainly, I did not exclude the growing of flowers when I had my vision of the future of agriculture in Jersey. I have grown anemones, I have grown lilies, I have grown daffodils in quite large quantities outside and indoors, and they are part of our Island heritage. I then found myself thinking during the Minister's speech about the difference between growing and when that agricultural process becomes the industrial process that Deputy Bailhache just spoke about, and of course he is quite right. Cannabis is a plant that is grown in a greenhouse just like any other plant. It gets to a point of harvest, and at that point is where the industrialisation, if you like, takes over. The processing, the enormous value starts to be realised because, as with many plants, it is only when you process them that you see the benefit of what you are finally trying to achieve. When I sought the money for the Agricultural Loans scheme, one of the reasons I did not think about cannabis was the fact that the monies involved, the investment required, the cost of production, the massive amount of money that is paid for the final product, the numbers are far, far in excess of anything that would ever happen in agriculture in Jersey. It is not millions, it is tens of millions, and the returns, the profits, the numbers are all multiplied by 10, 20, 50-plus that you would get and receive from a normal agricultural crop. I am in a difficult spot here. When I proposed the recapitalisation of Agricultural Loans, I did not intend this money to go for medicinal cannabis. But I take the points that the Minister has made on board. We need to treat people fairly, and I know there are some farmers on the Island that only intend to grow the crop, they do not intend to process it, which then puts us into another dilemma of whether we support it or not. I personally will be in a difficult position on this particular vote because, as I said right at the start, when I proposed this money, the last thing I had in mind was medicinal cannabis.

### **2.3.6 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:**

Thank you to the Minister listening to the speech because it has got a bit complex that we all expected. I believe this is the time to look at the Agricultural Loans regulations and to adjust them where we are now. My speech will be cut now because Deputy Miles and Deputy Bailhache took probably 50 per cent of my speech, which is great. The main point I would like to add, there is a big difference around the world, and we are, by the way, late takers. We are not pioneers in cannabis growth industry in the medical cannabis, by any means. If you will think about a country or 2 who were the first that started, Canada come as a first in your mind, Malta as the second. What has happened in these countries, it is really interesting. If you look around the world with countries who were the first, it was the same story unfold. Initial excitement about cannabis cultivation followed by quickly market collapse if they concentrated on cannabis as an agriculture. Where was it successful and managed to survive, it was when they concentrated on the farmer, high-grade, different type of growth. For example, in Canada, between legislation and mid-2023, Canadian licence holders destroyed over 1.7 billion grams, £3.7 million, of unsold dry cannabis because they could not sell it. In December 2023, there were 53.7 million package units sitting unsold in Canada because it was not requested. In Canada oversupply has been extreme and it did damage obviously the economy. In Portugal, commentators talk about a bottleneck ageing stock price drops as product piles, while regulators struggle with approvals, leading to oversupply of bulk products look at home. Basically, across Europe, also Denmark and Portugal, faced over-capacity of the basic cannabis growth. The only part of the industry that consistently survived was the large pharmaceutical companies with vertically integrated supply chains, not small growers relying on government support. I know that we are not a big country, we are small. At the same time, we do not have good history with managing risks around the loans. I am really worried that high-risk volatile industry, like an agricultural growth, not the pharmaceutical that hopefully will bring us income that we are all expected, might be problematic. By the way, it is important to say there is a difference between hemp and cannabis. I

believe hemp is agriculture we debated previously, and it can contribute to our agriculture in various things. But this is why I am coming back where I started. I believe that it is time to change Agricultural (Loans) (Jersey) Regulation 1974 and make clear what is agriculture, what is not an agriculture, what is high risk, what is not a high risk. The amendment for me does exactly what needs to be done, that Agricultural Loans will be used for what we count as an agriculture, and this is why I will be rejecting the Government amendment.

### **2.3.7 Deputy M.E. Millar of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:**

I obviously rise in support of the Minister's amendment, and I would just like to give some background about the Agricultural Loans, where we are at the moment. £5 million has been transferred to the Agricultural Loans Fund in 2025. A £5 million contingent transfer is proposed in 2026, and £3 million is currently being held in reserve for this purpose. So far in 2025, there have been 9 applications formally approved by the Agricultural Loans Board, with a total of over £4 million worth of loans complete or in process. None have yet been made for medicinal cannabis, but there has been some active engagement from a small number of businesses in the sector. Deputy Gardiner mentioned the regulations. The regulations currently define eligibility, and to exclude one sector would be inconsistent with that eligibility framework. Unfortunately, she is not here. The regulations are actively under review, and some degree of modernisation is already expected and in train. I would suggest to Members that it is far better to allow the Minister to continue that work of addressing eligibility in the context of the full review rather than a piecemeal way through amendments. There are strong oversight and checks already in place. Applications are made in the first instance to Jersey Business. They are then verified by accountants, and it should come as no surprise to anybody that those people conducting the reviews will be considering both the risk of the relevant business of the industry as a whole and whether or not they can afford to pay on a sustainable basis. It is reviewed by the Agricultural Loans and Guarantee Board after that, who then make a recommendation to the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development.

[10:45]

Any loans over £150,000 then require my approval as Minister for Treasury and Resources approval, and I can assure you that my team look at all of these very carefully before they then recommend to my giving of approval. A couple of speakers now have commented on the inherent risk in cannabis growing. I have been told that 300,000 tonnes of Jersey Royals go to waste every year because they are not the right shape or size. Those potatoes are now being used by an entrepreneur to make vodka. Do we cut the vodka production of potatoes out of the loan mechanism? We also have to remember that agriculture itself, in any context, is highly risky. Bad weather, whether it is drought or heavy rain, can affect any food producer, and we also have to remember the absolutely tragic loss of a very large dairy herd last year. The whole of agriculture is subject to risk from a huge number of environmental constraints that are out of farmers' control. That does not mean to say we should stop giving them loans. If we took risk-based decisions on whether or not somebody could grow a field of tomatoes because of the weather, we would not make any loans. I support the amendment.

### **2.3.8 Connétable M. Labey of Grouville:**

Just a slight correction to the Minister's supposition just now. The total tonnage of Jersey Royals grown in the Island could very rarely, if ever, exceed 150,000 tonnes in total, let alone the waste that came from that crop, because there is 30,000 vergées, maximum weight of 5 tonnes a vergée. I do not know where she has got that source. But I would like to talk about the production of cannabis. I believe it is a factory organism, if you will; it can be grown practically anywhere. As Deputy Coles quite rightly said, on our visit to one of these particular units we discovered that it is a glasshouse, but completely clad in metal cladding to eliminate sunlight, to eliminate the energy going into that unit, the energy provided by the sun, which creates too much heat. We just had a planning application about some chillers, quite famously, that required to keep the temperature regulated within that

structure. So, is that agriculture? Well, I would say mushrooms are produced in the dark, sir. They have been for many years, or were, I should say, in the tunnels created by our invading German forces during the war. Unfortunately, that no longer happens from what I have been told. But in one journey I have made in the wonderful city of Liverpool, across right from one side of Liverpool to the other in a taxi, I saw a very long row of houses, and right in the middle of that row of houses was a roof of a house covered in pigeons, and I asked the question of the taxi driver, I already knew the answer. I said: "What on earth is going on in that house?" Like I said, I already knew the answer, he said, "They are growing wacky baccy up there." Because, of course, they are produced in a loft with heat lamps that make the pigeon's feet nice and cosy in the month of November in the city of Liverpool, and they were quite grateful for that, their nice warm feet. That proves the point that cannabis can be grown underground, it can be grown in a shed, it can be grown in a loft. So, how relevant is that as an agricultural crop? I am sorry, but I disagree if it is just defined as an agricultural crop.

### **2.3.9 Connétable K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour:**

As an addendum to my colleagues, police in the Midlands often look around to see when it is had a heavy snow, where the snow has melted on certain houses, they are worthy of further investigation. Anyone that knows me, know that I am quite anti-drug. I always have been. But I will be the first to admit that with certain drugs there can be extracts taken out for medicinal purposes. For instance, morphine is an extract of the poppy, which was discovered in the 1800s and named after the Greek god of dreams, Morpheus. So, there is a clue there. But generally speaking, not in favour of growing of cannabis, even though in certain circumstances extracts can be taken. I will be supporting the main proposition, but I am not sure about the amendment. I will wait to hear from my colleagues.

### **2.3.10 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:**

I have only been moved to talk to respond to some of the comments that have been made. I think we have moved quite far away, or are risking moving far away from the original debate. I am just minded to say that you cannot always judge whether somebody is growing cannabis in their loft by a heat map, as the poor couple that were in the news in the U.K. (United Kingdom) recently found out. You have these 78 year-olds and 80 year-olds enjoying their breakfast at 9.00 in the morning, their door gets battered down by the police, simply because they had the heating on, and putting the heating on when you are a pensioner in the U.K. is such a rare event nowadays that they just presume that somebody must be growing cannabis in there if there is any excess heat coming out of the property. I must admit when the Constable started talking about underground/overground I expected him to burst into song with the Womble song there. So, I think we may need to get back to basics here. I do ask the question, what is the problem that we are trying to resolve? What is it that we are worrying about? We have been told that no cannabis farms over here have applied yet to the loan, yet some Members are trying to take pre-emptive action, but if they ever were to try and apply for a business grant, that they would be stopped from doing so. I would simply say that - maybe I am old fashioned - but if you grow plants and then you sell them for whatever purpose, that is agriculture. What I would say is not agriculture is putting solar panels on fields. That is not agriculture. That is not growing anything, and it is not looking after livestock. I do not want to digress too much, but certainly there are limitations. I think we are conflating 2 issues here. There is an issue that still needs to be discussed fully. It is perhaps something that Scrutiny needs to consider as a cross-panel review in future, maybe it is something it needs to consider in its legacy report because it does cross not just the Economic Department but also Environment and Health Departments in terms of if ingredients are being made which then go on to become pharmaceuticals, that ultimately is a regulatory issue, not one about whether or not what they are growing is agriculture. Because as we know, hemp can be used for different purposes, and quite rightly, the Constable of St. Saviour has already alluded to the fact that poppies do get grown, not just because they look pretty but because you can extract morphine and codeine from them, and then they are very lucrative, or very useful certainly for painkillers. We know that, for example, New Zealand's got a big licit poppy growing

industry, which is then sold. If we look at what the basis of the Agricultural Loans Fund's aims are it is to empower farmers and agricultural enterprises to drive and support growth, spark innovation, and build resilience. If that growth somehow happens to be in the cannabis-related industries, why would we not want them to be able to grow, spark innovation and build resilience? It seems at the moment we are saying: "But they do not pay tax at the moment, so it is not a lucrative industry." But at the same time, they are not applying for these grants anyway, so they seem to be self-sufficient. But if they said: "We want to apply for these grants because we think we can make our industry more innovative, create growth, and ultimately have more jobs in the Island", then I do not see why we would not ultimately leave that to the criteria of the scheme and to Jersey Business to triage the applications and put them alongside every other one. Already the Minister is saying that he wants to bring an amendment anyway so that there will be limits on how much funding that they can get. So, I think he is very much meeting the mover of the proposition halfway. I probably share Deputy Coles's concern that the amendment is not really necessary, and I think it has been put in there as a safeguard. It is not to say that I am fully behind a rampant pharmaceutical cannabis industry. I think there are serious questions that do need to be raised about regulation and quality control when it comes to Jersey doing this viably, and it is arguably something that has not been fully thought through as an industry. But I do not think the limitation on the Agricultural Loans scheme, which is ultimately there to drive efficiencies and to spark economic growth ultimately is something that should be used to combat this. Lastly, I would much prefer to see greenhouses used than the many dilapidated greenhouses that we see still around the Island. I prefer them to be in use, growing whatever - tomatoes, cannabis, all sorts of flowers, whatever - and then of course they are going to have different uses. If this in some way in the future just leaves the door open for all industries to be supported, I think that is ultimately what the purpose of the scheme is for.

### **2.3.11 Deputy J. Renouf:**

I have got perhaps a slightly different take on this because for me it is not about the definition of farming. I am not hung up about whether or not medicinal cannabis counts as farming or not. I think it is perfectly reasonable to argue, as Deputy Tadier says, that this could be a new use for redundant glass sites and so on. As I say, I am not opposed to the industry, but my issue is more with risk. I take note of what Deputy Miles reminded us, which is that this is a highly risky business and it is generally funded by private equity, venture capital and so on, because it is acknowledged to be high risk. So, the question in my mind is, should the taxpayer be involved in stepping in where private investors have decided not to tread? If businesses who want to get involved in this sector are unable to raise the money in the private market, why is the Government stepping in? Now, the Agricultural Loans scheme steps in where there is market failure in other sectors. But it does so on the basis of very well understood business models, and it does so with very clear, wider policy framework that wants to support those sectors. So, that is understandable and people can see the point of that. But I do struggle to understand why the taxpayer should be taking on this risk that apparently the market is not prepared to take on. So, to answer the question that Deputy Tadier asked, which is: "What is the problem we are trying to solve?" I think it is to remove the temptation to make loans that might be higher risk than others. It is reasonable to say that the panel deciding, and the Minister deciding, will be fully aware of potential risks, and will be taking them into account. But they will be doing so also within a stated desire to expand this industry, to support this industry, and they will also be doing it in a context where they have not much in the way of experience in which to build. When it comes to giving loans to a dairy farmer, we have a lot of information to hand. When it comes to giving loans to potential medicinal cannabis businesses, we have very little information to hand, and as we have heard, it is in any case an exceptionally volatile sector. So, my concern is, as I say, not so much with the question of whether it is farming - I am quite comfortable with the medicinal cannabis industry in Jersey - my concern is with the risk that sits around this and the fact that every time we give a loan to a medicinal cannabis business, we have less money to give elsewhere to areas

that when the loan scheme was set up, we were all pretty clear we understood what they were. So, on that basis I shall probably have to vote against this amendment.

### **2.3.12 Deputy A.F. Curtis of St. Clement:**

I think Members know I am quite interested in agriculture and horticulture, and I have followed a range of the types of industries it exists in. I want to first address the comments made by Deputy Renouf issuing kind of a repeat of some arguments about risk. Second, I want to look at what does agriculture look like and the argument provided on that. Third, those on what makes an area agriculturally successful. First, on risk, it would be fair to say that probably the growing of cannabis, especially for smaller growers, craft growers, as I think these would be more likely to be fitting a loan to be funding, is more risky than other crops. But I would disagree that Deputy Renouf said that the Agricultural Loans system is one to fund incredibly well-trusted business models, well-rehearsed.

[11:00]

The loan scheme has been going since at least 1974, previous iterations may have existed before that. What is well known to us, in fact, what is no longer sustainable for farming, at one point was emerging, at one point was a different model. Viewing the Island's history through aerial images will show the change in cultivation practices, the rapid growth of glasshouses, the change from wood glasshouses to those with steel aluminium frames. The industry is constantly changing, and I think it is easy to look in retrospect and say: "Well we know what would be going forward is low risk." Funding growing for local food systems is not low risk either. The capital investment to provide food in today's modern supply chains is not a low-risk thing to do. That is why funding is there to help support that. A 10 per cent allowance, I think, would be what we call risk mitigation. I think the Minister alluded to the balance. So, I think, we are acknowledging a risk and we are mitigating that risk with this amendment. Deputy Renouf also mentions why the money cannot be found in the private market. Well, we have had contact from those who wish to consider the facility provided by the Agricultural Loans. They have been very good to share their business models, their financing. One reason they might not is because they are more local producers, those who want to retain in farming. These are not necessarily imported companies who have the expertise in using the private market, nor necessarily need the scale that the private markets of investment would provide. Maybe they also want to retain equity on Island, and a loan would do that. Second, what does agriculture look like? We have heard that agriculture and the crops from agriculture come in many forms, and to be honest, the form that we see modern medicinal cannabis or any cannabis growing looks no different to that of the highly optimised protected crop growing that we see in areas like the Netherlands or the south of Spain. There is thorough quality control, Q.R. (quick response) codes used throughout the system, no different to a Japanese factory which originally invented the system of tagging items. It is heavily mechanised, lower in labour, but it is highly skilled. So, the image of it is really no different, and Deputy Morel, the Minister, highlighted that the history of Jersey's agriculture has been one of export. We have funded and supported the industry to provide it an identity and ultimately economic value. The export of flowers or tomatoes created sites on our landscape which were not necessarily, let us say, picture postcard bucolic, to use a planning inspector's word, but showed a working landscape that provided a use of the land for the Island to use. So, I think what we see is something that can be considered agriculture. Third, I want to touch on what makes agriculture successful in any jurisdiction. The answer is one that this Assembly tries to get to grips with a lot, its adjacencies, but most importantly, its skill. Why does Jersey grow the Jersey Royal? We have got some nice sun, we have probably got some nice maritime climates for early crops, but we have an established industry, a set of skills on-Island, and a supply chain that is highly geared to providing that crop out to the early market, and there are many in this Assembly far better to speak about it. Why does any industry consolidate around an area? Why does Te Puke in New Zealand have the growing of almost 50 per cent of the entire of New Zealand's kiwifruit, or Katikati be the avocado centre of growing? Why is Yakima Valley the perfect place to grow hops,

or Nelson in the South Island? Their climate plays one role, but a lot of it is about the fact that these areas build infrastructure around agriculture. They champion that agricultural skills can provide the adjacency. So, you go to these areas, they share the knowledge and infrastructure for spraying. If you go to a kiwifruit orchard, the sprayers are low enough and shared between the pack houses so that when they go into an orchard, they can go below the canopy that forms. You go to a hop estate in Yakima, the co-operatives can share and have resource together. Likewise, they can share, through people leaving and joining other companies, expertise. When we look at the skills required in the horticulture of cannabis, they are not so different to other skills that we do want to retain on-Island. The Island still thrives with the Eric Young Orchid Foundation, the cataloguing, the genetic tagging, and the continued growth of orchids exists on-Island and we have many horticulturists employed there who may want to know they have other opportunities in the Island. These skills, I can attest from those I know, are suitably transferable and is what will make us a place with more attractive skills. This goes as far as to understanding the horticultural requirements for ventilation, and having visited a site I know that not only has some of the ventilation installations and the horticultural supplies been installed by local fabricators, those skills are now more adept to apply to other areas of traditional horticulture. We could debate all end whether 10 per cent or zero per cent is important, or whether it is agriculture or not, but what I would say is what are we trying to achieve? I think a thriving, balanced and diverse agricultural sector is the ambition behind the Agricultural Loans Fund. I think risk mitigation is important, and I do think that the Minister's pragmatic approach mitigates risk in any one industry while showing that we ultimately to succeed need skill, supply chain adjacency and encouragement.

**The Bailiff:**

Does anyone else wish to speak on the amendment? If no one else wish to speak, I call upon the Minister to reply.

**2.3.13 Deputy K.F. Morel:**

I thank everyone who has spoken in this debate. There are a few things that I think are worth noting. It is worth talking about the approvals process for the Agricultural Loans Board. They do, as a kind of matter of course, not back, or not provide loans for high-risk projects. That has been borne out over the past year or so over operating. They have repeatedly pushed back against anything that is deemed high risk in their view. I mentioned that the amendment that the Council of Ministers proposes is not ring-fencing, it is only up to 10 per cent. I think really importantly, and this was alluded to by one of the speakers, is that we are going to be bringing forward new regulations to the loan scheme. At the moment we are covered under 1974 regulations, and it will be no surprise to the Assembly, they are not perhaps entirely fit for purpose. So, we will be bringing forward new regulations, and I think it would be an appropriate debate to have at that time as to whether those are any restrictions that people wish to have on there. I think that would be the appropriate place to do it, so that the law itself would have any exceptions rather than doing it through such a way here. We will be bringing forward that loan scheme in order to create the possibility for variable interest. At the moment it is very much just a single fixed rate. Also, we will be seeking for it to be widened beyond agriculture to fishing and aquaculture as well. These are things that the Assembly will likely be asked to opine upon; not this side of the elections, I believe it will be after the elections. I think this debate would be a perfectly reasonable debate to be had there. It would be probably, in my view, a more appropriate debate to be had there. I will stand by what I believe is correct, that in Jersey we have an agriculture sector which is constantly changing and adapting. It has not and never will focus solely on food. It is an export dominated agriculture sector, and that includes the non-food items. It is true since the demise of Flying Flowers, which happens to be on the same site as what is now the largest of the cannabis companies, Flying Flowers did export hugely from this Island flowers, not food at all. But I do understand why the scale of some cannabis plants in this Island leads people to think about the factory-like nature of it. What I would say is it is absolutely correct that when you



are growing cannabis, it is agriculture. When you are processing it, it is different. That might be something when we come to debate regulations, the Agricultural Loans Law that maybe you want to pick out as a point of difference as well, the processing as opposed to the actual growing is 2 different things as well. I am always concerned that in Jersey we send out so many mixed messages to people looking to invest in this Island. We do it in the construction industry by constantly changing sizes, constantly changing regulations, by having a difficult-to-understand planning system. We do it in many areas, and in this case, just 6 or 7 years ago, Jersey went out, rightly or wrongly - I believe rightly in the sense that I think it is good to attract business to Jersey - but Jersey went out and put the flag up and said we are interested in developing the medicinal cannabis sector. We have seen interest in that obviously develop and we now have 4 licensees in the Island. But it is not those existing licensees that I am most concerned with. For me, it is those who are Jersey farming families who are seeking to diversify. I am concerned that by going with Deputy Wilson's unamended amendment, we will be making it harder for those farming families to maintain their interest in farming. So, I think we do need to send out consistent messages externally about investment in Jersey, and I think that this amendment does speak against that. I ask the Assembly, please, to support this amendment. I think it is an appropriate compromise. It makes sure that the Agricultural Loans Fund cannot be dominated by the medicinal cannabis sector. It minimises the amounts that would be lent to the sector, and because of the nature of the panel, I believe most of those amounts, if any were to be lent, would be very much on the growing side and not on the processing side, and that would have a lot to do with the risk nature of it. I do ask Members to support the Council of Ministers' amendment in this, because it is important to maintain those messages to the industry and externally.

#### **The Bailiff:**

Is the appel called for? Thank you. Members are invited to return to their seats. I ask the Greffier to open the voting. If all Members have had the opportunity of casting their votes, I ask the Greffier to close the voting. I announce the amendment has been adopted:

| <b>POUR: 28</b>           |  | <b>CONTRE: 13</b>         |  | <b>ABSTAINED: 3</b> |
|---------------------------|--|---------------------------|--|---------------------|
| Connétable of St. Helier  |  | Connétable of St. Clement |  | Deputy S.G. Luce    |
| Connétable of St. Brelade |  | Connétable of Grouville   |  | Deputy M.R. Scott   |
| Connétable of Trinity     |  | Connétable of St. Ouen    |  | Deputy H.L. Jeune   |
| Connétable of St. John    |  | Connétable of St. Saviour |  |                     |
| Connétable of St. Mary    |  | Deputy S.M. Ahier         |  |                     |
| Deputy G.P. Southern      |  | Deputy I. Gardiner        |  |                     |
| Deputy C.F. Labey         |  | Deputy K.L. Moore         |  |                     |
| Deputy M. Tadier          |  | Deputy Sir P.M. Bailhache |  |                     |
| Deputy L.M.C. Doublet     |  | Deputy D.J. Warr          |  |                     |
| Deputy K.F. Morel         |  | Deputy H.M. Miles         |  |                     |
| Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat    |  | Deputy B. Ward            |  |                     |
| Deputy R.J. Ward          |  | Deputy K.M. Wilson        |  |                     |
| Deputy C.S. Alves         |  | Deputy M.B. Andrews       |  |                     |
| Deputy L.J. Farnham       |  |                           |  |                     |
| Deputy S.Y. Mézec         |  |                           |  |                     |
| Deputy T.A. Coles         |  |                           |  |                     |

|                             |  |  |  |  |
|-----------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Deputy B.B. de S.V.M. Porée |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy J. Renouf            |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy C.D. Curtis          |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy L.V. Feltham         |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy R.E. Binet           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy M.E. Millar          |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy A. Howell            |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy T.J.A. Binet         |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy M.R. Ferey           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy R.S. Kovacs          |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy A.F. Curtis          |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson    |  |  |  |  |

## **2.4 Proposed Budget (Government Plan) 2026-2029 (P.70/2025): thirtieth amendment (P.70/2025 Amd.(30)) - as amended - No Agricultural Loans for Cannabis-based products.**

### **The Bailiff:**

Now I move back to the amendment as amended. Does anyone wish to speak on the amendment as amended?

#### **2.4.1 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:**

Yes. I will just say, since nobody called for the vote names, I changed my mind. I voted for the Government's amendment. I was persuaded by Deputy Curtis and by the Minister's summing up, and so therefore I will be supporting the final vote.

#### **2.4.2 Deputy K.F. Morel of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:**

Very similar to Deputy Renouf. I will be supporting Deputy Wilson's amendment with this amendment. I think it is an appropriate amendment for us to support.

### **The Bailiff:**

Does anyone else wish to speak on the amendment as amended? No one else wishes to speak. I call upon Deputy Wilson's reply.

#### **2.4.3 Deputy K.M. Wilson of St. Clement:**

Firstly, I would just like to say thank you to everybody who had contributed to this debate. There were just a couple of things that I wanted to reference in response. That is that I would urge Assembly Members to just be mindful that when we do come to talk about the regulations for the Agricultural Loans going forward, that of primary concern is that we understand what we mean about diversification, and that this should not just only relate to diversifying into cannabis production. I think we have a lot more opportunity to explore what other types of crops indeed would bring value to the Island. The other thing that I just wanted to mention was about risk and whatever we do in relation to diversification of agriculture in the Island, we need to be really clear about what kind of risk appetite the Island has for high volatile agricultural industry, if I can put it that way.

[11:15]

What I would argue is that to sustain the Island's farming base and rural economy, that we need to have a greater understanding of what that means, not only for the farmers, but also for the wider

economy. That includes taking into consideration some aspects of the public's opinion on that in terms of how their land and their environment is going to change, and it will change, if we see a proliferation of the kind of industrial units that we have already seen emerge relating to cannabis growing. I accept that the Minister's views around trying to find a middle way, but I am also minded of the Minister for the Environment's comments about that he never envisaged that these loans would be used for that purpose. So, I ask Members to consider how did we get here, why do we find it necessary to consider diversification of our agricultural industry in this way? For me, that is a question, I think, that has never fully been answered in relation to why public money is backing this kind of diversification. I would just like to communicate a message to the farming community per se. I was privileged to attend the recent farming conference and just saw the amount of amazing produce that our farmers are engaged in delivering. That is why I was motivated to produce this amendment, because I could see that there is fabulous food produce on offer that we could really see a way forward for export as well as local production. It is for that reason that I think if we have got any money to spare, that we should really be consolidating on the quality of genuine Jersey produce and making sure that we can sustain that going forward. So, I thank Members and call for the appel.

### **The Bailiff:**

The appel has been called for. Members are invited to return to their seats. I ask the Greffier to open the voting. If all Members have had the opportunity of casting their votes, I ask the Greffier to close the voting. I announce the amendment has been adopted:

| <b>POUR: 39</b>           |  | <b>CONTRE: 4</b>          |  | <b>ABSTAINED: 2</b> |
|---------------------------|--|---------------------------|--|---------------------|
| Connétable of St. Helier  |  | Connétable of St. Clement |  | Deputy S.G. Luce    |
| Connétable of St. Brelade |  | Deputy T.A. Coles         |  | Deputy B. Ward      |
| Connétable of Trinity     |  | Deputy K.M. Wilson        |  |                     |
| Connétable of St. John    |  | Deputy M.B. Andrews       |  |                     |
| Connétable of Grouville   |  |                           |  |                     |
| Connétable of St. Ouen    |  |                           |  |                     |
| Connétable of St. Mary    |  |                           |  |                     |
| Connétable of St. Saviour |  |                           |  |                     |
| Deputy G.P. Southern      |  |                           |  |                     |
| Deputy C.F. Labey         |  |                           |  |                     |
| Deputy M. Tadier          |  |                           |  |                     |
| Deputy L.M.C. Doublet     |  |                           |  |                     |
| Deputy K.F. Morel         |  |                           |  |                     |
| Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat    |  |                           |  |                     |
| Deputy S.M. Ahier         |  |                           |  |                     |
| Deputy R.J. Ward          |  |                           |  |                     |
| Deputy C.S. Alves         |  |                           |  |                     |
| Deputy I. Gardiner        |  |                           |  |                     |
| Deputy I.J. Gorst         |  |                           |  |                     |
| Deputy L.J. Farnham       |  |                           |  |                     |
| Deputy K.L. Moore         |  |                           |  |                     |

|                             |  |  |  |  |
|-----------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Deputy S.Y. Mézec           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy Sir P.M. Bailhache   |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy B.B. de S.V.M. Porée |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy D.J. Warr            |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy H.M. Miles           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy M.R. Scott           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy J. Renouf            |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy C.D. Curtis          |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy L.V. Feltham         |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy R.E. Binet           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy H.L. Jeune           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy M.E. Millar          |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy A. Howell            |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy T.J.A. Binet         |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy M.R. Ferey           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy R.S. Kovacs          |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy A.F. Curtis          |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson    |  |  |  |  |

## **2.5 Proposed Budget (Government Plan) 2026-2029 (P.70/2025): eighth amendment (P.70/2025 Amd.(8)) - Sport addition to Jersey Premium**

### **The Bailiff:**

The next amendment to be considered is the eighth amendment, lodged by Deputy Stephenson, and I ask the Greffier to read the amendment.

### **The Greffier of the States:**

Paragraph (b)(viii) – After the words: “Appendix 2 - Summary Tables 5(i) and 5(ii) of the Report”, insert the words – “, except that, in Summary Table 5(i) the Head of Expenditure for the Cabinet Office should be reduced by £350,000 and Head of Expenditure for Education and Lifelong Learning should be increased by £350,000 to support a pilot project for the introduction of an additional sport and Physical Education component within Jersey Premium funding to run in 2026, with the same amount of funding to be made available in 2027”. Page 4, paragraph (b)(xii) – After the words “Appendix to the accompanying Report”, insert the words – “, except that, on page 42, Table 9 - Revenue Heads of Expenditure should be amended to reduce the Head of Expenditure for the Cabinet Office by £350,000 for each of 2026 and 2027, and increase the Head of Expenditure for Education and Lifelong Learning by £350,000 for each of 2026 and 2027, to support a pilot project for the introduction of an additional sport and Physical Education component within the Jersey Premium funding to run in 2026 and 2027”.

### **2.5.1 Deputy L.K.F Stephenson of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter:**

I did not know that I could start to clear the Chamber quite so quickly, but I might save that as a superpower for another day. It might speak to some of what is in my opening speech, because when I sat down to put this speech together, I thought about starting by going through all the very extensive

research and evidence that exists locally, nationally and internationally, which makes the case for this amendment and investment in sport and physical activity more generally. Figures that show how one in 4 children in Jersey starting school are overweight or obese, rising to almost one in 3 by the time they leave primary school. How just one in 5 children in Jersey are being active at or above the recommended level, and so on and so forth. How those on the lowest incomes often face many barriers to engaging in sport and physical activity. For those who have had the time to read it, the report accompanying my amendment does cite a lot of that local evidence. I do not plan on reciting it all here, there is no need because the truth is many of us have heard it many times before, and we probably all accept the headline messages that a large proportion of our community, children, young people, and us adults too, we are not moving enough, despite recognising just how important to our physical and mental health physical activity is. There are countless reports, strategies, and documents that all point in one direction; that we need to get people moving more. The most recent of those, I think, is Jersey's Population Health Prevention Strategy, launched by the Health Ministry in 2023, which included an aim to improve opportunities for Islanders to be physically active, with an emphasis on those who face barriers to improving their physical activity. Then there is the Children, Young People and Families Plan 2024, published jointly by a number of Ministers that included aims around making sure that children and young people in Jersey are healthy and happy, and it included things in it like enjoying the best health as they grow up, having space and opportunities to play, and being able to make healthy lifestyle choices. There is wide acceptance of the issue. It is backed up by really clear evidence, and the right words are in the right strategies. But what are we doing about it? Where is the action? I know I said I would not go through the statistics, but there is one report I would like to draw Members' attention to at this point specifically, and that is the Jersey Child Measurement Programme and its latest report from 2024. It states repeatedly that childhood obesity levels in Jersey are stable. We often hear stable used in a positive sense and talk about wanting stability for our Island. But stability in this case is not a good thing. It is stable at far too high a level. 31 per cent of year 6 students are classed as obese over the past decade. That is stable, yes. But is it anything for us to be proud of? It is certainly not. We should not confuse stable with acceptable. There is a pattern here, not just with children and physical activity, but more generally with preventative health at the most basic levels. We are barely moving the dial, if at all. We have to step up as an Island, as a community, as a Government, as a States Assembly, and start backing up those words with some action. As the very many debates and ongoing discussions about health funding show, we cannot afford not to, which brings me to this amendment. Here I am offering Members the opportunity to take some action in a practical, easy to implement and relatively low risk way. The amendment proposes a 2-year pilot scheme, which would trial a sport and P.E. (physical education) addition to the well-established Jersey Premium. In practical terms, primary schools would receive an extra £140 per eligible student, plus a base grant of £5,000, which will be ring-fenced for investment in sport and P.E. Schools would have the autonomy, as they do with the Jersey Premium funding, to decide how money is spent within guidance set by C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills), and they would report on how they have spent the money annually as part of the Jersey Premium reporting structure, which is already in place. I have chosen £140 as it is the average cost of a term of swimming lessons in the private sector here in Jersey. For many families on low incomes, swimming lessons of this kind are simply unaffordable. While programmes are in place to help children learn to swim within school time, and some of those are funded by the Government, and others by charities and sponsors, there are gaps that do remain, and there are children who are not hitting the curriculum points that they should on swimming at a primary school level and a secondary school level. Top-up swimming lessons out of school time would be just one idea for how that money could be spent in a very targeted way. Others may choose to invest it into broader projects, such as walking bus schemes, or by running after school clubs supported by local sports organisations, or by employing specialist sports coaches to expand and enhance what is already on offer. I know from talking to a number of them that our schools have many good ideas already about how such investment could benefit their young people. This amendment is not about criticising

schools for the good work they already do, nor is it about trying to squeeze more into an already busy school day and a packed curriculum. The beauty of this scheme is that opportunities could be created before, during and after school. But it is based on an acknowledgment that not all schools prioritise sport and physical activity in the same way. By ring-fencing funding in this way, those who need a little extra encouragement to embrace the potential of sport and P.E. have an incentive and a requirement to do so. It is not about getting the money out the door or ticking boxes, the guidance would set out the responsibilities that schools would be working to. I am conscious that this is the first amendment of this Budget debate, although it will not be the last, which asks for money to be spent on something new. I realise it may not necessarily be an easy sell to a tough crowd after a day yesterday spent debating the challenges of public finances and the need to live within our means. I would like to reassure Members that this amendment is not blind to that. It is targeted at low-income students and those who have ever been considered a looked after child and would therefore be eligible for the Jersey Premium. It also targets just primary schools. Recognising that there is not unlimited funding, it makes sense to start with the youngest in our community who have the most to gain from adopting healthy habits at the earliest opportunity. Evidence also shows that, as I say, those from low-income backgrounds often face barriers to accessing sport and physical activity. This amendment is restrained and realistic. The amendment proposes a 2-year pilot scheme, after which the impact of the addition would be assessed and any decisions for future implementation and funding would need to be made. To be clear, I am not asking Members today to agree to a long-term commitment or long-term funding. I am also not asking for any new money to be found. This is not about growth, and it does not expand the public sector. This proposed Budget that we are here this week debating includes £615,000 a year within the Cabinet Office Head of Expenditure, which is allocated to the Chief Minister's Pilot Project Fund. This is not yet allocated, so this amendment does not propose taking money away from anyone or anywhere. It also leaves £265,000 a year in the pot for other spending, and, as I say, the commitment only lasts for 2 years. The amendment is also carefully worded so that using the Pilot Project Fund is just one option. The money could come from elsewhere within the Cabinet Office budget. We should also consider the cost benefits of investment in sport and physical activity in terms of health, well-being, building communities, and also the economy. Much of this money would be spent locally and some would be spent with local sports clubs and associations. This amendment would be an investment with returns in many ways. Before I finish, I would like to reiterate 2 main things that I think it is a good opportunity to highlight in this Assembly today. Sport and physical activity are powerful tools which we massively underestimate the value of. We need to change that, and Government and this States Assembly can lead the way in doing so, and I would urge Ministers today and those coming in the future to really consider that as they start to look at long-term thinking around preventative health, and more generally take it into account when we are talking about health spending as well. It is time we stopped standing still and got moving, and the pun is absolutely intended there. We need to get moving on preventative health at the most fundamental levels. There is growth proposed in this Budget around preventative health, but it does seem to come in later in the process of preventative health.

[11:30]

What are we doing right at the beginning to encourage our community today and in the future to live healthier lives right from their youngest days as they grow up? I ask Members to support this amendment and send out a message today that this States Assembly is about more than just words and we are serious about investing in healthier and happier futures for our young people.

**The Bailiff:**

Is the amendment seconded? **[Seconded]**

**2.5.2 Deputy R.J. Ward of St Helier Central:**

I thank the Deputy. I am in a position of rejecting this amendment in the most polite way I possibly can, and I had a conversation with the Deputy the other day. I know that the Deputy comes from a position of genuine concern and interest, and I genuinely respect that, and I respect her position. I must remind Members that sports is already a key part of a broad and balanced curriculum in schools for all children and young people across our education establishments. I would suggest that it is probably one of the most inclusive areas in our schools and in the school curriculum with every child getting access to something that they can do in sport. Even myself, I played right back for my school, and the joke is obviously right back in the changing room. I want to recognise the amazing work in schools across this area. This is not an absolute to say that no investment is being made. It is. There is an enormous amount going on across our schools. But there are some issues with the amendment, and I will explain why I cannot accept it. The transfer of funds would reduce money available for charities that have needed to rely on the Chief Minister's Pilot Fund in emergency situations. That is the purpose of the fund, to act as a funder of last resort. In recent years, it has been used to maintain important services such as Salvation Army, Butterfly Cafe, Brighter Futures and Sanctuary Trust. I do not see it as being a fund for ongoing funding for a system which is Jersey Premium. By comparison, this amendment will be a proactive policy choice to extend services and not identify a long-term funding allocation, and I recognise that was addressed. However, there would be an expectation of that long-term funding allocation and change the nature of the way that Jersey Premium is structured, and I will come back to that just at the end. It would raise the expectation of funding pressures elsewhere after the end of the second year. Our children are not in schools for just 2 years. They are in primary schools for 5, 6 years and beyond into secondary schools. So, any funding would need to continue. I do recognise the Government's response to P.70/2025 Amendment 10 would include establishment of a roadmap, which considers a number of health improvement opportunities. I think we need to take a wider and joined-up approach to this, including exercise, nutrition, and I do believe that we are starting to address nutrition with school meals and making some real changes to what children are eating in schools, which is a really positive thing - and I thank the Assembly again for their support with that - and mental well-being from childhood onwards. The benefits of this amendment must be an integral part of that roadmap. Exercise alongside nutrition and mental well-being will be part of the health improvement opportunities roadmap to support children in schools. I will say that access to high quality physical education for every child is a priority we all share. But this amendment, while having the correct intention, does need more work. We must ensure it fits with the existing policy and delivers real impact, not just for Jersey Premium pupils, but for all. That means clear standards, strong quality checks and reliable data. Without these, we risk falling short of the good intentions. With Jersey Premium in particular, I will come back to it at the end because I want to put that very carefully together. The time-limited nature of the pilot funding is a challenge, as it does not identify long-term funding allocations. C.Y.P.E.S. cannot guarantee continuing the approach given current funding priorities and the pressure on S.E.N.D. (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and inclusion. I have been very open with the Assembly about our challenges around S.E.N.D. I presented a report to them, I have answered questions, there has been sometimes, I think, some poor reporting of the situation, but we are trying to act on that, and that is an integral part of our pressures going into the future. We talked about nice-to-haves before. These are all things that are nice to have, but there are some things that are so essential as to what happens in our schools in the coming years that we have to address them as a matter of priority. I think whoever is in this role in the coming years will not be able to guarantee funding in the way that we want. I will also say, that the impact of Sport Premium in England has not seen universal improvement of certainly of staff capability to deliver sport. Ofsted Support suggests many teachers do not feel confident and the impact across different groups has been inconsistent. I know U.K. is a larger jurisdiction, but it also has larger funding. A recent report in England by Ofsted notes that even after years of P.E. and Sport Premium funding, many primary school teachers still report low confidence in teaching P.E. Only 56 per cent said they felt confident, about 15 per cent said they did not feel confident. This suggests that universal funding does not uniformly improve staff capability

as intended. We have to be very careful about spending tranches of money on individuals in the way it was suggested, because it may not be the best use of that money to get the maximum impact, particularly across our school. I did have a brief discussion with the Deputy, and I apologise for not amending. I think we got caught up in some very late amendments that were really important. To be honest, I could not find a simple way to amend, but I would be pleased if the Deputy would want to be involved in looking at small pilots in schools that will inform future developments, because we do, going into the future, have to look at where we are with Jersey Premium in the way it is working. I think, and I will stand up and say in this Assembly, it has been a success. It has had an impact across our schools, particularly for the most needy. But we do have to look at a way which Jersey Premium can be changed to be most effective, both in the way it deals with children with S.E.N.D. and particular needs, but also in areas such as sport. But I would extend this further and say it has to be extended in areas such as music, such as art, because they are all beneficial to our children. But that takes a longer-term joined-up approach to this particular type of funding. To do that piecemeal, and I do not mean that in a bad way, I am trying to use language that is all positive in this. I know perhaps the language coming after I speak will not be perhaps as positive, but that is the way we are going. But we cannot do it in an ad hoc way. We need to do this in a joined-up way. I recognise the intended benefits of the amendment. We will continue to review the best approaches to support high quality, inclusive, sustainable sports education in schools. However, for the reasons given, particularly taking money from the Pilot Fund, which I think will be essential next year, it may not be spent at the moment, but the way that we are with a society and the way it is going, I think it will be needed to support particular groups, and if that money has gone on something which will be central funding, and we do not have that central funding this year for this particular project, then I think we will regret that later term. So, be careful, I would say, to Assembly Members of the decisions you make today. With all that in mind, and genuinely as positively as I can, I have to reject the amendment, ask Members to reject the amendment, and offer that sort of olive branch of working with the department to see whether we can have smaller pilots to help develop a much stronger Jersey Premium offering across the board, both arts, sports and education in general in the coming years, months and decades of Jersey's education system.

### **2.5.3 Deputy K.L. Moore of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter:**

I am impressed but disappointed to hear the tone from the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning; impressed by the considered tone, which of course is good, but ultimately disappointed by the conclusion, because Deputy Stephenson has set out very clearly a rationale to improve the well-being and the health outcomes of our children and to embed better choices in their lives going forward, which is clearly a pilot project, and I do not need to reiterate any of the arguments that Deputy Stephenson so eloquently put forward. All I think I simply need to do is to pick up the point about the funding source and the Pilot Project Fund. I think it became very clear in questions, I think that was just yesterday, that the Pilot Project Fund is now being used to give money to charities that need a bit extra, which is not the purpose of the Pilot Project Fund. It is there to get things started and to do something new, which is exactly what Deputy Stephenson is bringing here. I think it is a very sad state of affairs that this fund is being used to give money to charities when they are falling a bit short in a year. Yes, we did give money in a previous Government to the Butterfly Café, but that was because it was a start-up project and it fitted within the structure of the common strategic priorities at the time, and that was absolutely the right thing to do. It was a start-up and sadly it has failed, but it was there to provide some start-up funds. Deputy Stephenson is quite rightly proposing a start-up to help deliver some change. That change can be measured, and if it is considered and seen that it is succeeding, then it should be taken on in a head of expenditure, whether that is health under the preventative health scheme, or whether that is education because it is delivered through education. That is a matter for joined-up Government to find a solution and take it forward, because I have no doubt that this scheme would be successful if implemented, and I certainly support it and hope that other Members will too.



#### **2.5.4 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour:**

I will be supporting this amendment. I want to echo what the previous speaker said, which was the first part of my speech, and I was a little bit confused by the speech before, which spoke about ongoing funding that should not be sourced from the Pilot Fund. It is quite clear to me from Deputy Stephenson's report that she is asking for a 2-year pilot project from the Pilot Project Fund. I do understand Deputy Ward, he mentioned that many charities have had funds from this Pilot Project Fund. I know that as States Members we support the charitable work that happens in our Island. I am sure that the grants that were given from that fund were really important. But that is not the purpose of the fund, and I feel quite strongly that we need to think in a more sustainable way about funding of Jersey charities, especially given the increasing need in the Island. But nevertheless, if this amendment were to succeed and that money was to be used from the Pilot Fund, which Government want to use to help fund charities, I think it would also align with that because Jersey Sport is the charity which would most likely be asked to deliver much of the work that would come out of this, and Jersey Sport is a charity. I think it still aligns with that alternative use of that Pilot Fund. But to reiterate, it is asking for a 2-year pilot project, which I think is very reasonable. I also want to reflect on some of the speeches on previous amendments and the phrase "intergenerational fairness" has been used, which I fully support and have mentioned in previous speeches with regards to children's rights. This amendment goes a long way to improving intergenerational fairness and supports the direction that Government are going in, in terms of looking at preventative health. I know that the Minister for Health and Social Services is very keen to address this and has given significant funding to preventative health, and I think that he probably would have liked to have more funding for preventative health measures. I hope that the Minister for Health and Social Services and his Assistant Ministers will feel able to support this. Because what we do know about preventative health initiatives is that the earlier we invest that money, the better return we get on that money, and Deputy Stephenson mentioned this in her opening speech. It is like an upside-down triangle. If we put £1 of investment in the early years in primary school, then we keep getting a return on that investment in terms of efficient use of taxpayers' money. It makes fiscal sense to put the money in at this early stage for our children. The Deputy has set out in her report and her speech tons of evidence. It is indisputable, the evidence behind this amendment. I always like to follow an evidence-based approach, as I know most of us do. So, I hope that Members will consider this carefully and consider the evidence, and the children who will be benefited from this amendment if it succeeds.

[11:45]

It is not just the Minister for Health and Social Services' intentions that this echoes, but it seems to me that it aligns with the wider Government priorities, because we know from the Health Panel that the wider determinants of the Health Ministerial Group has already been established, or is planning to be established, and that group will be looking at things exactly like this, and I would expect pilot projects like this one to come out of that group. But I do not want to wait. I think that we should take the evidence and the proposal that has been brought to us by Deputy Stephenson and act on it today and initiate this pilot project. Some of the evidence that Deputy Stephenson has laid out, and I wanted to pick up on some of the characteristics associated with poor health, which was a Statistics Jersey publication I think 2 years ago, and we are so lucky to have this wealth of evidence to put in our reports for these amendments because we have Statistics Jersey and indeed Public Health that are presenting us with all of this evidence, and when are we going to listen to it and act on it? Today, hopefully. COVID has had a huge impact specifically on this area, and I recall when I was a primary school teacher and I taught 4 and 5 year-olds in a reception class, and for many years every single one of my children that came through my class were taught to swim. I believe that this was a joint project between Government and a charity. They had funded swimming lessons. This stopped during COVID and I do not think it has ever properly returned to our primary schools. There is a whole cohort of primary school children who are perhaps at the end of primary school or just leaving

primary school that probably do not know how to swim because they did not have access to these lessons and have been disadvantaged as a result. So, another argument for supporting this is that we are still playing catch up from COVID. This additional investment, I do not think it will completely catch up those children, but I think it is the very least that we can do, honestly. Swimming I know is just one of the sports that would be covered by this, but it is an essential skill on an Island. It is really alarming to hear the increasing numbers of children that are coming out of primary school, because it is a part of the primary school curriculum in the same way that reading and writing is in the curriculum, it is something that children are entitled to be taught and expected to attain by the end of primary school. We are failing children at the moment. There is a need in this Island, and I think we all know that need is growing. Again, if we look at some of the data from J.O.L.S. (Jersey Opinions and Lifestyle Survey), the types of households that are struggling the most with the cost of living and therefore least able to afford lessons and active sporting clubs for their children, are single income families where there is only one adult running the household with children, but also all households with children are one of those groups that are being most affected by the cost-of-living crisis and most struggling with the cost of living. The birth rate is going down. We need to find ways to attract and keep families in the Island, and having a holistic, well-rounded offering in our schools that includes not just artistic endeavours and academic endeavours, but sporting as well, is really important. I am emphatically supporting this amendment, and I hope that all Members will give it serious consideration in light of our duty to give due regards to children's rights. The funds are there in this Pilot Project Fund, this is a pilot project, it is evidence backed, it makes sound financial sense in terms of efficient use of taxpayer money, we will get a good return on this investment, it will help families that need it the most. I think it is a very sensible and very well-evidenced amendment, and I hope Members will support it.

#### **2.5.5 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier South:**

I was on the Education Scrutiny Panel around the time that Jersey Premium was introduced and I regard it as most definitely one of the best innovations we have seen in how education is delivered to children in my time in the Assembly. It is an excellent scheme and something to be supported and expanded where possible, and that is why I was pleased to hear from the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning his commitments in that regard and his commitment to work with the proposer of this amendment to see how such a thing could be done in a clearly co-ordinated way, and that, of course, will not just include sport, but will include other things as well. He mentions access to arts and culture as well, which has got to be a fundamental part of that. I do think that the appropriate thing to do is to go by that route that is proposed by the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning rather than this amendment. But for me, the crucial point here, and I am sorry to make this point in this way, but I do really think that the proposer and supporters of this amendment have got their funding source wrong. The descriptions that we have seen of the Pilot Fund so far from previous speakers do not really match the reality here. It may well have been the case in previous years of the Pilot Fund being used in that particular way, but my experience of seeing it for the last 2 years in Government is that it most definitely is not the right source for this funding. First of all, Jersey Premium is not a charity. it is a public service, and it ought to be funded like public services. But I do not think that should be a controversial thing to say. The Pilot Fund in previous years may well have been used for things under the previous Government, it backed things that are on the public records that Members can look at, that I think were a waste of taxpayers' money. But in the 2 years of this Government, that fund has been used effectively to support charities in Jersey when they have needed it, and given the landscape we know there is in Jersey of charities struggling and the pressures that are going to come to us in future years. I personally think it would be absolutely devastating to not be able to support those organisations when necessary because of not having enough funding in the Pilot Fund for that. I know of at least one example of that fund being used for something connected to my remit, where had we not been in a position to be able to offer that funding, and a charity had suffered as a result of that, we would have ended up having to have spent a lot more

money as a Government to make up for what would have been lost through that charity not being able to continue its work without that support. That fund exists now to do that. It might not have been that case in previous years, but now that is what that fund exists and is used for. It is not there to supplement public services, and Jersey Premium is a public service, not a charity. So, if you want to find a source of funding, this most definitely is not it.

#### **2.5.6 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:**

I put my light on because I believe that charity for years are crying for a proper commissioning framework. This framework should be developed by now. P.A.C. (Public Accounts Committee), C. and A.G. (Comptroller and Auditor General) and Scrutiny, everyone told that the charity needs to be supported with 3 years long-term funding and not gifts from various sources. This is why I decided to start, and this is where I think maybe the Chief Minister Fund needs to be called charity fund or need to be called grants fund or any way how we call it. Let us not mix between Jersey Premium and supporting sports activities and supporting ... by the way, Jersey Sport, I know there was a bit, it is not a charity, we know it is an arm's length body and they deliver sport, but let us not use the charities in this debate. Charities deserve better and they need proper sustainable funding and not to work around.

#### **2.5.7 Deputy C.D. Curtis St. Helier Central:**

I am sorry to say that I do not think I can support this amendment. While I am pleased that Deputy Stephenson has raised this subject, I am pleased to hear that the Minister will be looking at how to improve and extend Jersey Premium. I cannot support an amendment that will take funding from the Chief Minister's Pilot Fund. I am currently in conversation with a number of charities and projects that desperately need funding, some to do with children, and therefore cannot support any amendment that will depend on the Pilot Fund, which is, in practice, supporting charities.

#### **2.5.8 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:**

I am only going to speak very briefly, but I do think this is the most bizarre situation. We have a Pilot Fund, and the Government's response to not using the Pilot Fund is to say: "It is no longer a Pilot Fund. We have decided to change its purpose without telling anyone. It is now a charity support fund." The only argument that is being advanced against using it is that they have diverted the money into a different form, a different use. It is extraordinary. The proposer of this amendment has done nothing more than go back to the original purpose of the fund. Her only error is to respect that original choice. What an error, to go back to the basics, to go back to the original purpose. I was in 2 minds about this amendment, but on the basis that the arguments advanced so far by the Government are so hopelessly weak, I am going to support it.

#### **2.5.9 Connétable M.A. Labey of Grouville:**

I have a pilot project for you. My colleague to my left, the Connétable of St. Clement, and indeed the Scrutiny Panel that I am a member of, have been advocating the conversion of some of the facilities at Le Rocquier School for many years. In fact, I am sure the Connétable of St. Clement will back me up in this in so much as it has been a long time now that we have been campaigning for the improvements of public access sporting facilities in St. Clement, Grouville and St. Martin. because we are literally a desert with regards to that. There are some private benefactors like the Chefs Tenants of Grouville who provide those facilities for our parishioners, but we have nothing in the east of the Island with regards to this. How about spending some money on converting the facilities at Le Rocquier for public access sport, not only for the young generations and Jersey Premium, but for their mums and dads, the older generations as well. That would be a wonderful project to support, but I do not support money being taken out of this fund to do it, because I think there are other funds that we can use for that purpose. But I will not be supporting this.

#### **2.5.10 Deputy R.S. Kovacs of St. Saviour:**

I want to speak in support of the intention behind this proposal. The case for strengthening physical activity for our children, especially those from our most disadvantaged families, is clear. Too many young people are not meeting recommended activity levels. Cost is still a great barrier for many of them to have it done outside of school hours, and the targeted approach can improve long-term health. However, I cannot support using the Chief Minister's Pilot Fund. That fund has kept vital charities during crisis and in some cases, prevented them from going under entirely. It is not the source for this type of policy initiative. I do support the principle. Schools need better guidance and support to offer more physical activity to the children who need it most. One way we could achieve this is through joint work between preventative health and C.Y.P.E.S. Their combined expertise feeds well with the Government's comments having planned to develop a health improvement roadmap covering exercise, nutrition and mental well-being. The Government have said that the aims of this amendment will be considered within that work and I welcome that. I also welcome the Minister's statement that this can be done within existing resources without extra budget. Physical activity must remain a core part of wider healthy lifestyle options for children, especially those facing additional barriers. The reassurance from the Minister that this work is already underway, even though a different route, makes me comfortable to support this approach instead. I also welcome the Minister's plan to review the Jersey Premium with the view to extend it and to ensure it continues to be effective for the children who rely on it and the offer to work with the Deputy on a suitable pilot aligned with the direction of this amendment. With that reassurance, I am content to follow the Government's approach while still pushing for the same goal, giving every child, especially the least advantaged, the chance to be active, healthy and confident and doing so without the need for additional funding.

**The Bailiff:**

Does any other Member wish to speak on this amendment? No one else wishes to speak. I call upon the Deputy to reply.

**2.5.11 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:**

I am not sure what is worse, to stand up here and have your ideas and your work really criticised and told it is a load of rubbish - no, I know that is not what was said - or to be told very politely: "It has got merit. We agree with all the evidence, but we are not going to do it anyway." That is a personal comment about how it feels to stand up here when you have brought an amendment and it is something you have worked really hard on for over a year.

[12:00]

I am grateful to all Members who have spoken today, and we have shown, many of us, that we do get it. We get the words. We get the evidence. We have read it. We have heard it. We have seen it ourselves. I still question what we are doing about it, and I am yet, unfortunately, to hear an answer but, of course, I will work with those who likewise want to help find those answers, and I welcome any opportunity to do so now, and in the future as well. I am not going to go through everything in detail but, as I say, I thank all of those who did respond. I would like to just respond to a few points made by the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, and I am grateful for his consideration and the conversation we did have the other day as well on this and, as I say, I would welcome working with him and others in future. The Minister did refer to sport and physical activity as a "nice to have" and I get where he is coming from. He alluded to it within a pot of needs within a department that has huge pressures about some very fundamental, sometimes life-and-death-type scenarios. I get that. The pressures are huge, but I would argue that there comes a tipping point where we need to start considering sport and physical activity as part of that process, and as part of those solutions. I would give an example. The Minister referred to the challenges around S.E.N.D., particularly within schools and his budget and his department. Now, while I was Assistant Minister with responsibility for sport in the previous Government, one of the projects I went to see was at Haute Vallée School.

They were using some money that I think had been raised by one of the British Lions visits. They were using it on a project to encourage young people within that school with various challenges in different ways to engage in sport and physical activity when being in a classroom was overwhelming for them. It meant that they were staying in school and they might go out and have a break - one of the examples we saw was boxing - and they would go out, they do it within a controlled, led-environment but with the space to express themselves. Then they had - I cannot remember the figures - the evidence and the data which showed it was really working. Those kids were staying in school. They were not disappearing off, or it was not overwhelming them so much that they could not stay there for the day. They would go back into classes later or they would develop relationships with the staff who were in that room who then found ways to enhance their education in other ways around those experiences of being active. Just to emphasise the point that I think it can be part of the solutions in the very real challenges that I know that department and our Island generally are facing as well. I would like to see us start to change the language around the use of that. I am not saying the Minister described it as exactly this, but it is not a "nice to have". For me, it is a fundamental part of the education and the upbringing that we, as a society, should be giving to our young people. Just a quick note on the U.K. scheme that the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning referenced. That only provides £10 per student, and it is universal. It is not targeted at low-income families. Yes, they have much larger schools, so the pots tend to be large, but it is a slightly different scheme. There are reports, I think, as the Minister alluded to, that it has got some pros and it has got some cons. The statistics about teachers feeling confident teaching sport and P.E. question: without the extra funding, would the figure have been even lower? I do not know. I have not read the report in detail, but I do not think that is a strong enough argument to just say that that is a failure over there, but I appreciate it is a different place with a different amount and a different scheme there. Small pilots in a small number of schools, I think, is a way that we could have worked this, and perhaps on another day we could have seen an amendment which might have achieved that. I am grateful for Deputy Moore for her contribution and Deputy Doublet also. Deputy Doublet referred to the indisputable evidence, and I am really grateful to her for pointing that out because I did work hard on that report, but it was not hard to bring together, if that makes sense, because there is so much evidence out there. When you compare that to some of the other, perhaps, amendments but also some of the proposals we have within this Budget here this week that we are considering, there is probably more detail and evidence within that 3-page report than there is on a lot of the things that we are here to discuss for multimillion pounds this week. I am also grateful to the likes of Deputy Curtis and Deputy Kovacs for their interest as well. I am disappointed, obviously, that they cannot support but I know they are both great supporters of children and young people, and sport and physical activity as well, so I am sure it will not be the last discussion we have about it. Also, to Deputy Renouf, I appreciate the point that he made about the funding source and, as you can probably tell, I, and the Minister himself, have approached this in a very collegiate way so far but I think this debate did take a turn when we did start to talk about the funding source. I just cannot not raise it here today that what are we doing when we have an argument about a Pilot Project Fund like this, and I appreciate the arguments around using it for something different and for charities, but I would note that yesterday the Chief Minister, in answer to an oral question from me, did refer to the many millions of pounds that Government give to charities via Social Security. This amendment is not saying: "Do not give charities any money and take it all away from them." It is £350,000 from one source which is currently being used by this Government for charities. The Chief Minister yesterday did quote a fund; I think it was tens of millions that refers to charities. It is not saying that, but I am now left questioning at the end of this debate around accountability and transparency, to be perfectly honest. I am a member of the Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel and we did ask a question about the Pilot Project Fund of the Minister for Treasury and Resources as part of our review into this Budget and that response, which is published online, refers to the amount that is proposed in this Budget for including within that fund, which is £615,000. It is allocated annually, and it states that funding requests come from a sponsoring department. They are accompanied by a business case. They are

signed by the finance business partner and chief officer, or delegates, or comparable assurance with either a Ministerial Decision or the Chief Minister approving the business case to authorise the expenditure. All expenditure is governed by the Public Finances Manual. It goes on about underspends and how they are treated, like everything else. Nowhere there does it say that this is not a Pilot Project Fund anymore. What does that say about transparency and how is Scrutiny able to hold the Government to account on that? How are Members here today able to consider a Budget that has gaps in it like that? What are we approving today? I think that is a really important point. It may be an oversight by the Government, and I am not saying it is being done for any particular reason, but it is important and I think it does need calling out. I am now going to lose where I was speaking because I have gone on a rant about that. Yes, that was an important thing to point out and to raise. I wanted to make some comments when we come back to the overall Budget debate at the end of the week. I do intend to make some comments around how some of the information is being presented in the Budget this year because over my years of reading and seeing Jersey's Budgets, Government Plans, Medium Term Financial Plans, it seems to be that we are getting less and less information. We are getting fewer and fewer heads of expenditure. We are getting less clear titles of things. It is not a criticism of the Minister, but I also sit on the Health and Social Security Scrutiny Panel and there is £1.8 million allocated in growth for projects in the Social Security budget which has a couple of lines with very little explanation in the Budget. When the Scrutiny Panel was asked as part of its Budget review for more information; it is under development. I get that things take time to work out and it is useful to know you have got the money before you spend the time doing it but, again, there is a balance to be struck. It comes back to transparency and accountability and, as Members, when we are being asked in this Assembly to put our names to something, to say: "Yes, we agree to that", I do not think it is good enough, quite frankly. I ask for the appel, please.

#### **The Bailiff:**

The appel has been called for. Members are invited to return to their seats. I ask the Greffier to open the voting. If all Members have had the chance to cast their votes, I ask the Greffier to close the voting. I can announce that the amendment has been rejected:

| <b>POUR: 11</b>          |  | <b>CONTRE: 32</b>         |  | <b>ABSTAINED: 1</b>       |
|--------------------------|--|---------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| Connétable of St. Ouen   |  | Connétable of St. Helier  |  | Connétable of St. Clement |
| Connétable of St. Mary   |  | Connétable of St. Brelade |  |                           |
| Deputy L.M.C. Doublet    |  | Connétable of Trinity     |  |                           |
| Deputy I. Gardiner       |  | Connétable of Grouville   |  |                           |
| Deputy K.L. Moore        |  | Connétable of St. Saviour |  |                           |
| Deputy D.J. Warr         |  | Deputy G.P. Southern      |  |                           |
| Deputy H.M. Miles        |  | Deputy C.F. Labey         |  |                           |
| Deputy J. Renouf         |  | Deputy M. Tadier          |  |                           |
| Deputy H.L. Jeune        |  | Deputy S.G. Luce          |  |                           |
| Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson |  | Deputy K.F. Morel         |  |                           |
| Deputy M.B. Andrews      |  | Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat    |  |                           |
|                          |  | Deputy S.M. Ahier         |  |                           |
|                          |  | Deputy R.J. Ward          |  |                           |

|  |                             |  |  |
|--|-----------------------------|--|--|
|  | Deputy C.S. Alves           |  |  |
|  | Deputy I.J. Gorst           |  |  |
|  | Deputy L.J. Farnham         |  |  |
|  | Deputy S.Y. Mézec           |  |  |
|  | Deputy Sir P.M. Bailhache   |  |  |
|  | Deputy T.A. Coles           |  |  |
|  | Deputy B.B. de S.V.M. Porée |  |  |
|  | Deputy M.R. Scott           |  |  |
|  | Deputy C.D. Curtis          |  |  |
|  | Deputy L.V. Feltham         |  |  |
|  | Deputy R.E. Binet           |  |  |
|  | Deputy M.E. Millar          |  |  |
|  | Deputy A. Howell            |  |  |
|  | Deputy T.J.A. Binet         |  |  |
|  | Deputy M.R. Ferey           |  |  |
|  | Deputy R.S. Kovacs          |  |  |
|  | Deputy A.F. Curtis          |  |  |
|  | Deputy B. Ward              |  |  |
|  | Deputy K.M. Wilson          |  |  |

## **2.6 Proposed Budget (Government Plan) 2026-2029 (P.70/2025): thirty-first amendment (P.70/2025 Amd.(31)) - Empty Residential Properties**

### **The Bailiff:**

We now move on to the thirty-first amendment, lodged by the chair of the Environment, Housing and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel, and I ask the Greffier to read the amendment.

### **The Greffier of the States:**

Paragraph (b)(viii) - After the words “Appendix 2 - Summary Table 5(i) and (ii) of the Report”, insert the words - “, except that, in “Summary Table 5(i) - Revenue Heads of Expenditure”, £250,000 of the Cabinet Office Head of Expenditure for 2026 should be reserved as a ring-fenced budget line for the development of policy mechanisms to address empty residential properties, with this funding not to be drawn from the existing Housing budget within the Cabinet Office Head of Expenditure.”

### **2.6.1 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity (Chair, Environment, Housing and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel):**

This amendment proposes allocating £250,000 to restart and deliver policy development on empty properties but in the spirit of compromise and fiscal realism, we recognise the importance of a pragmatic approach, so the rest of the Scrutiny Panel accept Deputy Curtis’s amendment reducing the allocation to £25,000. This ensures that at the very least, Government can finally buy in the expertise needed to provide the support to the policy team to do some groundwork in designing a

mechanism and scope the legal architecture which is still relying on the heavy lifting of in-house expertise. This is an amendment that is modest in cost but significant in its impact, an amendment that starts the work this Assembly has already agreed is necessary to tackle one of the most frustrating and visible failures of our housing system; the assistance of long-term empty homes across our Island. It is a small allocation, deliberately small but a vital one. The Environment, Housing and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel brought forward this amendment because the evidence cannot be clearer. The Jersey Youth Assembly were asked to scrutinise the Budget and identified repurposing empty homes. This is the second most preferred way of improving access to housing and an empty homes tax as the single most supported policy option out of 14. Younger people told us directly that they are tired; tired of watching houses rot while they struggle to find somewhere to live, tired of a system that allows valuable homes to sit unused while families are priced out. If any of us want to speak seriously about the next generation, then we must listen to them when they tell us what matters. The Assembly has already agreed with them. In 2022, through P.48, Members voted to introduce an effective mechanism to discourage long-term residential vacancy; that decision has not been undone. While a stop progress is not political disagreement but a total absence of resources. The Minister has consistently told this Assembly and Scrutiny we would have moved P.48/2022 on if he had had the resources. He was clearly disappointed that the previous Minister lost the allocated unspent money needed for the work to progress. The Minister for Housing has been entirely candid on this point. In the Assembly on 25th February 2025 he stated plainly: “I do not have the resources within my budget at this point to pursue the kind of option that I would like to help tackle empty homes.” In Scrutiny hearings he elaborated further and I paraphrase; the previously allocated £500,000 for this work was surrendered almost entirely unspent. The internal capacity to progress the policy no longer exists and without new funding he cannot move forward on an empty home mechanism.

[12:15]

The Minister has been also clear to Scrutiny and to the Assembly that empty homes do matter and the Government must find a way to put these homes to use. On this there is no disagreement; again, there is only a lack of resource. Today we have an opportunity to fix that, even with this most modest amount because it gets the work off the shelf and back into motion. Without this funding allocation, whether it was the original £250,000 or the £25,000 now there with the acceptance of Deputy Curtis’s amendment, the Minister told us unequivocally that nothing will happen unless he drops other work he has set. At the Budget Scrutiny hearing, I asked the Minister about policy-setting and asked if there were regular discussions to set policy direction. He explained: “I regard that as always happening.” We were told in a letter to Scrutiny of what the Minister has prioritised for 2026: “Social rents, policy review and report to the States Assembly in accordance with the requirements of P.29/2025 as amended; begin scoping and delivery of the property transaction process consultation in accordance with the requirement of P.61/2025 as amended; *Homelessness in Jersey* report, quarterly data collection reporting and a review of social housing eligibility criteria; an annual review of the assisted purchasing scheme’s eligibility criteria.” There was no mention of empty homes or moving P.48/2022 forward, even ahead of propositions that have come forward in 2025. During the Budget Scrutiny hearing I asked whether he or a future Minister could undertake this work within existing resources. The answer was clear from the Minister; it was no, not unless he or they, future Ministers, cut something else. They would need even new funding or approval in a future budget cycle. What has changed for the Government to propose that this work can now be done with no extra funding? Bringing empty homes back into use is not only socially responsible, it is fiscally responsible because it increases housing supply without taking a single inch of greenfield land, avoids costing new infrastructure, supports vitality of our Parishes and strengthens community cohesion. This amendment does not commit us to a specific policy model, does not grow the public service, it simply gives Government the minimum resource to progress the work this Assembly has already voted should be done. We know long-term empty houses are a concern. The Minister knows empty houses matter. Young Islanders have told us empty homes matter. We cannot continue having the



answer there was no budget to do the work. With this amendment now reduced to £25,000 we can remove that excuse once and for all. Let us not overthink it, let us not over-politicise it. I urge Members to support the amendment as modified and to signify clearly that when the next generation asks us to act we do not look the other way.

**The Bailiff:**

Is the amendment seconded? **[Seconded]**

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier South:**

Sir, could I just ask a point of order or it might be a clarification from yourself?

**The Bailiff:**

Yes.

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Because there are 2 proposed amendments to this amendment.

**The Bailiff:**

Yes.

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

In her speech the chair of the panel spoke of accepting the amendment from Deputy Curtis and I was not sure if she was proposing the amendment as amended.

**The Bailiff:**

No, there is going to be a separate debate on both amendments.

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Thank you, Sir.

## **2.7 Proposed Budget (Government Plan) 2026-2029 (P.70/2025): thirty-first amendment (P.70/2025 Amd.(31)) - amendment (P.70/2025 Amd.(31)Amd.) - Empty Residential Properties**

**The Bailiff:**

There are 2 amendments to this amendment, one from the Council of Ministers and one from Deputy Alex Curtis and the first to be debated is the one lodged by Deputy Curtis. I ask the Greffier to read the amendment.

**The Greffier of the States:**

Page 2, paragraph 1– For the figure “£250,000” substitute the figure “£25,000”. After the words “empty residential properties” insert the words “, such policy to be developed in-house with funding available for minor external input only if required”.

### **2.7.1 Deputy A.F. Curtis of St. Clement:**

I will not take long on this amendment to the amendment. I brought it because I could not personally support forcing an allocation of £250,000 to new work. We have all been told to exercise restraint and pragmatism and this was my effort to ensure that where work was brought forward I could do so. I did consider what the Council of Ministers have proposed and I was told by officers that was not an allowable change, as it would fundamentally remove a line of funding negating it. I am surprised that the Council of Ministers’ one was ruled in order. Nevertheless, I now consider and still consider mine to be the most appropriate course of action and I will explain briefly why. The policy area that is being proposed is an important one and we often know that what gets counted and

what gets measured gets done. A small but realistic allocation of money in 2026 - £25,000 - helps, I think, focus and drive accountability that this is an area of work that needs delivery. It recognises that there should be no excuse for any small external resource to facilitate this. But I think we need to be honest, if the money is not spent because it is not needed, that is a very common occurrence in Government budgets. I do not believe this materially challenges the flexibility of Government to deliver. I believe that having a single £25,000 line item in will help ensure that policy is developed. We must remember this is an election year. The key mechanisms have all been determined by the next Assembly and this is a pragmatic approach. I make the proposition.

**The Bailiff:**

Is the amendment seconded? **[Seconded]** Does anyone wish to speak on the amendment?

**2.7.2 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier South:**

Thank you to Deputy Alex Curtis for bringing this amendment. But I should make clear from the outset that I personally do not support the amendment, quite obviously because I have my own amendment to it, which takes precedence for me. The reasoning for that is very simple, which is that for 2026, so forgetting years beyond that, but for 2026 I do not really know what this money will go on. I do not know if something is conjured to spend it on, whether £25,000 would be the right amount for it. I cannot offer an explanation with any degree of credibility as to what that would be and why that amount of money is the right amount for it, which is why I proposed an alternative amendment instead, which says let us use next year to do any initial policy work on bringing empty homes back into use. From there we see where we go, and maybe that will mean financial implications for 2027 and we can get best use of that once we have done the preliminary work to understand how most effective we could dedicate ourselves to a project to introduce mechanisms to bring empty homes back into use. But next year I cannot tell you what that money would be and whether that money would be enough for it. This amendment talks about spending that externally, so I am guessing that means a consultant or something to that nature. That is something that at this moment in time the Government is trying to reduce and not do that. But that is not to say we could not make a strong argument for an exception from time to time if that does become abundantly necessary. But right now we do not know if it is necessary. Maybe it is, but we will get that clarity next year, not right at this very moment. If we did somehow conclude that we needed to make an exception to that and bring some external expertise into this, I have got absolutely no idea if £25,000 would be enough for it. I absolutely appreciate that Deputy Alex Curtis is trying to be helpful here, and both of us have the same aim in that we want to see mechanisms put in place to get much better use of the stock of homes in the Island where too many are empty and they are empty for a multitude of different reasons that might require different kinds of mechanisms to address that. But simply for putting that on the agenda and developing a work programme for next year, I do not see how this would enable that. Perhaps we come back to it in 2027 if it becomes apparent at that point. But for next year this funding, I just simply cannot tell you how we would spend it, in which case I say could we instead please defer to my amendment, which gives us a bit of a freer hand in that sense to in-house? Do what we can to say, right, these are what we think the mechanisms will be and if we then need to have any other allocation for that in future then that is what we come to at that point. But rather than just taking a stab in the dark, let us come back to it when the picture is a bit clearer. I would ask Members to reject this amendment and instead support the amendment that I hope to have the opportunity to make a case for shortly.

**2.7.3 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:**

I do not want to necessarily repeat what I said earlier, as the Scrutiny Panel. But I want to be clear that of course we started with £250,000 because the £500,000 was set for 2 years of the work that was originally put for to be able to implement P.48/2022. We felt that that, without any other information, seemed to be the logical amount. But discussing with Deputy Curtis, realised I am being

pragmatic, that maybe we needed to reduce this. But we feel that we need to have some money because consistently the Minister has been saying over the last year, 2 years that he has not got money because the last Minister was unable to spend it, did not spend it and it was put back. Consistently we have heard from the Minister in the Assembly and in Scrutiny when asked about this that he cannot continue the work exactly because he has not got the money to do that. Therefore, I find it interesting and now suddenly the Minister is standing up and saying: “We do not need the money” because he can do it in-house. But we have consistently seen that the work for the last 2 years has stalled. It has stalled, it has not been pushed forward. P.48 has not been pushed forward, so it is sitting on a shelf only because, apparently, in the Minister’s words there is not the resources to do it. I do not understand now that suddenly the Council of Ministers is coming and saying: “We will be able to do this work in-house without resources”, when before we have been consistently told the last 2 years and, therefore, we have had a big delay on being able to get any mechanism moving forward, any work on this. The £25,000 is specifically there to help kick-start this work and so that, potentially, the next Minister in the next Government can come to the Budget for next year with a clearer plan to be able to show that we can move forward and have the amount that the Minister has just said to be able to do the more substantial work on this. Because we have heard from the youngsters, we have heard from the Minister, and we have heard continuously that this is an issue. As I said before and I listed, even when we pushed the Minister during the Budget Scrutiny Panel to see if he is thinking about empty homes, he said: “No, because there are no resources.” This we feel, as Scrutiny Panel, is why we felt we needed to put some resources towards this. This is why now we support Deputy Curtis in reducing that amount, being more realistic to just kick-start that work, take it off the shelf, try to catch up a little bit on the last 2 years of hearing, apparently, the excuses that there is no work done because there are no resources, we are now saying there are resources. There is a little bit, let us start this work, so help this Minister, future Minister, be able to put a strong case to the next Budget to get some more substantial money to get this mechanism up on the ground. I did not hear from the Minister why he has put propositions that were agreed this year ahead of something that was already agreed in 2022 and has had consistently strong support from this Assembly as well and from the young people. I would urge Members to support Deputy Curtis’s amendment.

#### **2.7.4 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:**

I rise slightly uncomfortably to gently have to disagree with my party leader and the Minister for Housing on this. But I think we are united on the overall principle of still wanting to get to the root of the problem. What we have got before us now is, do we give the Minister for Housing an extra £25,000 which he may or not need as a guarantee to maybe be able to do the work next year? Of course it is not necessarily this Minister for Housing, it could be a future Minister for Housing. I hope it will not be this Minister because I am sure he is destined to greater things, albeit that housing is very important. When we are talking about safeguarding the work of any future Minister for this, which may be started by this Minister and concluded by a different one of our colleagues, Reform Jersey, I think I would be much more comfortable if I knew that I or my Reform Jersey colleagues had that £25,000 buffer that we could do a meaningful piece of work on this. Because it is true that I brought the proposition back in 2022, sometimes my name gets left off that; that is fine, I do not mind too much. It was supported virtually unanimously, apart from by one Member who is no longer in the Assembly, so you vote against sometimes at your own peril. **[Laughter]** He is still alive, do not worry. I think he thought that maybe what I was proposing around empty properties was perhaps a fad that he did not want to support.

[12:30]

But the rest of the Members did not agree and they did want action on this. Let us look at, first of all, what was agreed then. It was that: “An effective mechanism should be introduced to discourage domestic properties from being left vacant for long periods and to request the Minister for Housing

and Communities to initiate the necessary arrangements for the preparation of an options paper identifying potential mechanisms with a view to publication before the end of September 2022.” Positively homeopathic you might say the extent to which part (b) has been watered down to make it as acceptable as possible. But even that was not done in the last 3 years. But we do have to go back further than that of course because there was a Scrutiny Report issued in 2025. and I look across the Chamber to now the Constable of St. Mary, who was, I think, the Deputy at the time. One of the findings from that review and recommendations in fact said that: “By January 2016 the Minister for Housing should investigate the possibility of bringing back empty homes into use using a variety of tools, including the introduction of a form of empty property tax or charging an annual sum, in addition to the current Parish rates.” The Ministerial response to that, it said neither accept nor reject. This is the Ministerial position: “The issues of vacant homes and how to bring more back into use within the property market will be addressed in a future policy paper.” Still waiting for that paper I think: “It will be addressed in a future policy paper to be published by the Strategic Housing Unit. This paper will consider all of the potential options to address these issues, including that of using fiscal measures. However, it is not considered feasible that it can be achieved by January 2016.” At which point I will whisper to myself: “No ... Sherlock.” Sir, I think that something happened to my microphone there: “The Draft Housing Strategic Unit expects that this work can be delivered by the second quarter of 2016.” They could not quite agree on which quarter of 2016 it would be delivered. But pretty academic I would say, now that we are going to be 10 years on from that and still we are waiting for action to take place. I do not rise to criticise this Minister. I do not rise even to criticise the previous Minister. But I do think that the Assembly is still owed a review of this and we are owed a mechanism by which to put empty properties back on to the market. I will leave my comments there because there are probably some comments I would like to make in the main debate about why this is still a valuable idea. But I, personally, would be much more comfortable putting that small sum on the table, so that if this Minister or a future Minister says: “You know what, we have agreed a policy platform. We now need to do a little bit more work after 10 years to investigate what the options are, perhaps bring somebody in to give us a bit of impartial and expert advice.” That £25,000 buffer is on the table and I think it will help to resolve, hopefully, the issue that we have identified in the past but also that our young people today who have stood up in this Assembly have also been identifying as an issue now and into the future if it is not tackled.

**The Bailiff:**

Deputy, your reference to Dr. Holmes was unparliamentary and should be ...

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

I would like to take that back, Sir, thank you.

**The Bailiff:**

Thank you. Does anyone else wish to speak on this proposition, this amendment?

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

Yes, I will just rise to express some surprise, perhaps bordering on astonishment. Because the Minister said a version of if he is got given the money for next year he could not think of anything to spend it on. I find that surprising because of course empty homes is in his party manifesto from the last election. It is a priority in the Housing Crisis Action Plan as well. But now he is Minister he does not seem to know what he would do if he got given some money to address the issue. The other thing, I think, that is surprising and has been pointed out by the chair of the Scrutiny Panel, who said that the story has changed over the course of 2 years. He said for 2 years he did not have resources but if we are to take at face value what he just said, what it turns out he should perhaps have been telling us, is: “I do not have any resources but even if I did have some resources I do not know what I would do with them.” I do find it surprising that the Minister does not want a small amount of

money to address what is acknowledged by all of us, I think, as a serious issue for the Island. I think I wrote in my own manifesto about a house in my own Parish that has been empty for my entire adult life. We seem just to accept that and we should not accept it. It is a crisis for this Island. Many of those houses are in country locations as well. There will be specific reasons for why some of them will be empty. Some of those will be entirely legitimate. But we are also entitled as a society, when the cost of building new houses is so high, to ask whether some of those houses should not be brought back into use. It should be a priority for this Assembly and for this Government, as for, I hope, previous Governments and future Governments, that we will do something about that. This is a very small ask that the amendment from Deputy Alex Curtis would put an obligation on the Minister. I would hope that he would accept it and rise to the challenge of finding something to spend it on.

#### **2.7.6 Deputy L.J. Farnham of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter:**

I am going to join Deputy Renouf, who spent a lot of time being astonished over the last couple of days, and I say I am in a permanent state of astonishment doing this role sometimes. But there is also a surprise and Members should not be surprised that this Government is trying to do work without requiring new money to do it. We are trying to do as much as we can within resources. Quite simply what we are saying here - and I know that Deputy Mézec and his team take this situation very seriously - empty housing is a challenge but it is a complex issue to solve, as the previous Government will know, because there are often very complex ownership arrangements around empty houses, some of which that have been empty for decades. I think basically what the Government is saying, and what Deputy Mézec is saying, we will do the work in 2026. I know they are giving a great deal of consideration to the matter now and have been. But all they are saying is we do not need £250,000, we do not need £25,000, we can do it in our own resources. For example, if next year concludes internally that the solution is to introduce empty dwelling management orders, for example, then I am not sure that will need £25,000, and if it does then the amendment to the amendment will say the money is sat there. It is really neither here nor there. If I am absolutely honest, whether we support Deputy Curtis's or the amendment to the amendment by the Council of Ministers, which I support because it is our amendment of course, is not going to make a lot of difference. We are still going to do the work but we do not need the money to do it. That is, I think, a new culture we have to try and adopt in this Assembly. We do not always need new money. Sometimes we can do stuff from our existing resources.

#### **The Bailiff:**

Does anyone else wish to speak on the amendment? If no one else wishes to speak, I call upon Deputy Alex Curtis to reply.

#### **2.7.7 Deputy A.F. Curtis of St. Clement:**

I thank Members who spoke on this amendment. I hope that with a couple of words and the almost support I have there from the Chief Minister that the Council of Ministers can bridge the gap and join me on this and show a little more support and commit to maybe the accountability that a line in the budget would give them. To address the Minister's key points - and I thank him for his response - were around he would not know what to do with the money. The point of this is to focus in mind that there still is an absolute requirement for Government to develop policy options for the States to consider for what is a pressing issue. There are all sorts of reasons one needs money in developing policy, particularly complex policy like this. While the Chief Minister is keen to say that they want to not spend new money; first, this is money from the Cabinet Office. It is not new money, it is reprioritising of money; £25,000, not a lot. But that gets one quite a few different things, that help in ensuring policy development is not slowed; independent survey or consultation, academic expertise, legal expertise and perhaps even any extra policy resource. I would hope this would not go on policy resource. There are specific areas, however, in which Government is wise to go and seek external advice. £25,000 came from considering often the quantum of days one might get,

looking to how much Scrutiny may pay for that kind of independent expert advice that helps it enormously in providing evidence-based reports. We have heard that it is important that the Minister does not, or whichever future Minister does not, turn around in the future and say: “I had no money to progress a key element of this policy work.” I do not think allocating £25,000 is the end of the world here or there. I do think that understanding that it is not about never spending money outside of Government, it is about appropriate and proportionate spending of money by Government on the expertise it requires at the right time. I think £25,000, while I did have to choose a number, can be justified as anything from 15 days to 60 days, depending on using a lawyer, consultant, academic or commissioning of a survey. I think there are certain deliverables one can fit in that sum. I definitely think that this Assembly should signal it is an area there should be no excuses that policy work continues. I think this is the right amendment to deliver that mandate and I call for the appel.

**Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier Central:**

Sir, can I just ask a quick question?

**The Bailiff:**

Of me or of the proposer?

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

It is probably yourself, Sir, it may well be the Greffier but I am sure you know.

**The Bailiff:**

Yes.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

If this amendment is voted for, does the subsequent amendment from the Minister fall away?

**The Bailiff:**

It falls away, yes, that is right.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Just confirming that people understand that. Thank you.

**The Bailiff:**

Thank you. The appel has been called for. Members are invited to return to their seats. The Greffier is invited to open the voting. If all Members have had the opportunity of casting their votes, I ask the Greffier to ... you can still vote, I have not closed the voting yet. All right, close the voting. **[Laughter]** I can announce that the amendment has been rejected:

| <b>POUR: 16</b>           |  | <b>CONTRE: 27</b>         |  | <b>ABSTAINED: 0</b> |
|---------------------------|--|---------------------------|--|---------------------|
| Connétable of Grouville   |  | Connétable of St. Brelade |  |                     |
| Connétable of St. Ouen    |  | Connétable of Trinity     |  |                     |
| Connétable of St. Mary    |  | Connétable of St. Clement |  |                     |
| Connétable of St. Saviour |  | Deputy G.P. Southern      |  |                     |
| Deputy M. Tadier          |  | Deputy C.F. Labey         |  |                     |
| Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat    |  | Deputy S.G. Luce          |  |                     |
| Deputy I. Gardiner        |  | Deputy L.M.C. Doublet     |  |                     |
| Deputy Sir P.M. Bailhache |  | Deputy K.F. Morel         |  |                     |
| Deputy T.A. Coles         |  | Deputy S.M. Ahier         |  |                     |
| Deputy D.J. Warr          |  | Deputy R.J. Ward          |  |                     |
| Deputy H.M. Miles         |  | Deputy C.S. Alves         |  |                     |
| Deputy J. Renouf          |  | Deputy I.J. Gorst         |  |                     |
| Deputy H.L. Jeune         |  | Deputy L.J. Farnham       |  |                     |

|                          |  |                             |  |  |
|--------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--|--|
| Deputy R.S. Kovacs       |  | Deputy K.L. Moore           |  |  |
| Deputy A.F. Curtis       |  | Deputy S.Y. Mézec           |  |  |
| Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson |  | Deputy B.B. de S.V.M. Porée |  |  |
|                          |  | Deputy M.R. Scott           |  |  |
|                          |  | Deputy C.D. Curtis          |  |  |
|                          |  | Deputy L.V. Feltham         |  |  |
|                          |  | Deputy R.E. Binet           |  |  |
|                          |  | Deputy M.E. Millar          |  |  |
|                          |  | Deputy A. Howell            |  |  |
|                          |  | Deputy T.J.A. Binet         |  |  |
|                          |  | Deputy M.R. Ferey           |  |  |
|                          |  | Deputy B. Ward              |  |  |
|                          |  | Deputy K.M. Wilson          |  |  |
|                          |  | Deputy M.B. Andrews         |  |  |

## **LUNCHEON ADJOURNMENT PROPOSED**

### **The Bailiff:**

Are Members content to adjourn? Chief Minister, do you want to say something?

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

I think it is too late, Sir. I was going to propose we just finish this off but I think the amendment has been made.

### **The Bailiff:**

Yes. The Assembly is adjourned until 2.15 p.m.

[12:43]

## **LUNCHEON ADJOURNMENT**

[14:18]

### **2.8 Proposed Budget (Government Plan) 2026-2029 (P.70/2025): thirty-first amendment (P.70/2025 Amd.(31)) - second amendment (P.70/2025 Amd.(31)Amd.(2)) - Empty Residential Properties.**

### **The Bailiff:**

Move on now to the second amendment to the thirty-first Amendment and I ask the Greffier to read the second amendment.

### **The Deputy Greffier of the States:**

Page 3, paragraph (b)(viii), substitute the words “£250,000 of” with “within”. Page 3, paragraph (b)(viii), substitute the words “should be reserved as a ring-fenced budget line” with “resources should be made available”. Page 3, paragraph (b)(viii), substitute the words “, with this funding not be drawn from the existing housing budget within the Cabinet Office Head of Expenditure” with “should it be required”.

#### **2.8.1 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier South (The Minister for Housing):**

Hopefully, I can be fairly brief with this one, as I think most of what I would have said was said in the debate on the previous amendment. I was grateful for Members rejecting that one and hope that they will support this one instead. It is proposed for a very simple reason that the allocation of funding, as proposed in the original amendment, is unnecessary. It is also problematic because it asks for ring-fencing within an already existing budget, as opposed to allocating new money for it,

which by definition would mean having to re-evaluate all the plans within the Cabinet Office to ring-fence funding for something that, therefore, could not be used for something else. But we do not even think we will spend it at all, which is not an effective way to budget for the Cabinet Office. I think that is a good enough reason on its own for accepting this amendment. While in the previous amendment, I explained why it was not necessary to allocate resources for next year. I will try to reiterate that, if it was unclear in my description of it last time. But finding an effective mechanism or mechanisms to deal with the problem of empty homes in Jersey is not a simple task because homes can end up being empty for all sorts of different reasons for which a single mechanism may be completely useless for some of those. Some are empty because they have been inherited by the distant relatives of the previous owner and nobody really knows who they are or where they are. They might even not know that they have inherited a property. It can be inherited by multiple distant relatives, who among themselves cannot agree what to do with it because they all have a stake in it. At the other end of the spectrum there could be people who own properties who are just not very active in using them appropriately and probably do not really have a good reason for it but it is their property and that is what they have chosen to do with it. Different mechanisms that would resolve one kind of reason for a home being empty might not be applicable for others. Early on in this I had thought that some kind of empty property tax would be the best way forward, and that could serve as an effective mechanism for discouraging homes being left empty; that is not necessarily something we could do very quickly. I do remember having helpful conversations with the chair of the Comité des Connétables about looking at whether the rate system could provide a platform for that. I think our initial conclusion is that it is not completely easy. If we did want to use that we would have to think a bit more long and hard over it. But that mechanism would be useless for bringing back homes into use that are already owned by people but they do not necessarily know that they own it. A higher tax on those properties would achieve nothing because they are not going to pay it anyway because they do not even know they own the property. There are things we can do. As time has gone on I have kind of thought that perhaps some system for empty dwellings management orders could be a useful tool there, whereby an authority of some sort in Jersey would have the right to take over the use of a home that has been identified as empty for a long time without an obvious owner, refurbish it, put it into use and then if the owner does turn up you could hand the property back to them, along with the bill for refurbishing it or say we will hold on to it until the money made out of renting it covers the cost of refurbishing it and then hand it over to them. There are all sorts of things you could do there. In moving forward on those, it would not be a quick thing to do and would certainly not be up and running next year, even with the best will in the world. I think that the best option is next year, in among the other policy work that we are set to do, bearing in mind that there is an event halfway through next year that could disrupt what the priorities are for the housing portfolio and what policies are adopted, that in among that work some basic work is done to identify in the first instance which of those options could be pursued. Then if resource is needed later to get those up and running, that will be a discussion for the 2027 Budget, if that is what the political will of the then States Assembly deems it to be. But for now, for next year, I believe what would happen if funding was allocated in the way that the panel is proposing, I believe what would happen to it is the exact same thing that happened to the funding that was allocated for this in previous years, which is that a project just did not proceed quick enough to make use of that funding while it was still on the table and ended up being handed back as an underspend at the end of it. We do not need that funding just yet. The door is open in case we need it for 2027. But let us use next year to work out what that way forward is. We can do that with my officers and my successor, whoever that may be, may well have that opportunity as well. If there is a need for further resources we come back in the future for that and that is why I would hope Members will accept this amendment.

**The Bailiff:**

Is the amendment seconded? **[Seconded]**

**2.8.2 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:**



The panel, while disappointed that no funding will be ring-fenced for this work, does welcome the fact that the Minister has finally acknowledged the need to move forward on long-term empty homes; that recognition is long overdue. Therefore, we accept C.O.M.'s (Council of Ministers) amendment to our amendment and I urge Members to support it. However, it is remarkable to hear the Minister now say that after 2 years of insisting he could not deliver P.48/2022 without additional resources, he is suddenly able to progress work in-house. I would, therefore, like to ask him in his summing up to explain why this was not set out in his correspondence to Scrutiny on his 2026 plans originally. What has changed and why right up until the Budget Scrutiny hearing did he repeatedly assert that this work was impossible without extra staff or funding, yet today it is apparently achievable within existing capacity?

### **2.8.3 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:**

I would like to go back to the underlying reason why one way or the other this work does need to be done, whether that is with extra funding or not. It is going to be done in-house and I welcome the renewed commitment for the Minister to look at this. Ultimately, it is because if there are the numbers of empty properties out there in the order of what the last census told us or even half of those, even a fraction of those that could be brought back on to the market, we are still talking about hundreds of properties that would be being used that are not currently being used. Those are houses which we do not need to build ultimately; they are houses that we do not need to build in town, and they are houses that we do not need to build in the countryside. It means that for all of those properties, those homes that there will be in the future, it means we do not have to have debates about whether they have parking or not. We do not have to have Parish meetings about whether or not the drains can sustain those new developments because those properties are already there. Of course they may need maintenance, they no doubt will need to be brought up to date, but those homes are already in existence. While I welcome the Minister's comments that there is an issue here which might require empty management orders on certain types of properties which are owned where the owners are out of the Island, I would ask that we need to know some numbers here. Because it would seem to me that there are lots of properties in the Island which are empty, which we know exactly who owns them. The starting point should be, I presume, the rates register. Constables will be well placed, I suspect, in each Parish to know exactly which homes are paying their rates or part of their rates but which are not occupied; they have an owner but not an occupier. Those properties which have been left empty for, let us say, a starting point of 2 years should give us a good benchmark. Okay, there is an issue with that property. It is either being left empty deliberately. While the majority of homes will be in St. Helier, there is a disproportionate amount of homes that are identified in St. Brelade and I noticed them on the election campaign and they are not all dilapidated rundown homes. Some are deliberately being left empty for whatever reason. They are apartments sometimes, they are individual houses and who knows why they are being left empty but they are not being lived in. You can see that from the letterboxes that are full and nobody is going into these properties. Because that is what they are; they are properties, they are not homes. Something needs to be done about those because we do have a small Island where we have very, some would say, draconian housing regulations that stop people from even being able to rent, let alone buy in the Island and that we do have a big demand. But it is something again that young people in this Assembly when they have had their debates, they focus on that particular issue. I do think there needs to be a consensus around the Council of Ministers' table to say that whether or not this requires an extra resource, it certainly requires across-party working from within the Council of Ministers. If they were to put some of their ... I do not want to say their greatest minds on it because I think there are great minds throughout the civil service, including within the Housing Ministerial support team. But if there were to be a bit more political will to say: "Look, these are the potential mechanisms that we could use", given the fact that there is broad and longstanding consensus within the Assembly that something needs to be done on this issue, then I think that should be the way to do it. I think we need to bring the Comité des Connétables in on this because it may not be the only option. But that has to be one of the starting

points, certainly for the gathering of information. One of the starting points may well be that if you leave a property empty for a certain period of time, you will pay a multiple of your Parish rates. There might be a split, of course that goes to the Parishes. There might be a split that goes to the States in that and even to the Housing Department, so to speak. But of course the ultimate goal of this is not to raise any new taxes.

[14:30]

The ultimate goal of this is to act preferably as a carrot, rather than a stick, to change behaviour and to say that in a small Island where housing is in desperate need it is both inefficient but morally reprehensible to leave properties empty long times when those properties can be transferred into homes. I do encourage this Minister kindly and politely, and whoever follows him, to get on with the job and to make sure that whatever the mechanisms, because I think it will be mechanisms that are needed to fulfil the underlying pledge that was made in passing this proposition, and then going back to the Scrutiny Report, that that is ultimately lived up to and delivered on.

#### **2.8.4 Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade:**

Just following up from the previous speaker, I would say from the point of view of the Comité des Connétables, we are enthusiastic to ensure that empty properties are occupied and they are not left empty. But, as the Minister for Housing did allude to earlier on, there are lots of different circumstances and I do not think any 2 are the same. I think from the point of view of the Connétables, that we can deal with individual cases the best way we can without getting too involved with the legalities, which inevitably may be the case. But as a first point of contact, sometimes we will have access to the owners and we will certainly make the effort to ensure that those properties are occupied. I can say that in the last couple of years I have dealt with one particular case, which was a bit of a challenge, and I did have through that process discussions with the Receiver General because we were at the point of not knowing who the owner was. He was very obliging and suggested that if the owner could not be found that he would have the ability to take control of the house, get it done up and let and get an income stream going on, until such time as the owner could be found. As it happens we did not get to that point and relatives were located. But I think that maybe the Receiver General may have a part to play in some difficult cases in the future. I would say that from our point of view, if anybody has got any knowledge of empty premises, please tell us and we will do what we can to assist.

#### **2.8.5 Connétable M.A. Labey of Grouville:**

In his summing up I am hoping that the Minister for Housing will also bear reference to anecdotally there are hundreds of empty single-bedroom flats in the Parish of St. Helier, many brand new developments that have not been sold and what are we to do with them? There are some at Westview, there are some in Bath Street, there are some at the old Play.com site. We are constantly asking the Planning Department for more single-bedroom flats and we ask the developers: "Why are you building them because nobody seems to want them?" I am hoping that the Minister will give us a lead on how he is aiming to do what he is going to do with those.

#### **The Bailiff:**

Does anyone else wish to speak on this amendment? If no one else wishes to speak, I call upon the Minister to reply.

#### **2.8.6 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Just on that very last point, the Constable of Grouville referred to several different sites there, including the old Play.com warehouse site. It is fair to say that while there are at this point a few unsold there, the bulk of them went extremely quickly and I can tell you why they went extremely quickly. It is because they are quite nice and they are very reasonably priced. That is why those have gone quickly and why others are struggling. When I have been looking at homes that are

available, looking for completely unconnected reasons, I am seeing a quality and price that I can well understand why a theoretical prospective buyer would not find too appealing. The ones that he is referring to, I think that that is going to be a free market solution there where prices have to more closely align with expectations, and that is a different issue to the homes that have been in existence for generations and have gone through different ownerships, et cetera. The chair of the Comité referred to the work of the Receiver General, which I was grateful to him for raising that. Because I have worked with the Receiver General, who has, I think, been really helpful on this subject. Using the powers that his office has, he has brought an empty home back into use on Belmont Road, which I got to witness the opening of, where they encountered a property that had been empty for a long time and have brought it back into use. I was telling some colleagues during the lunch break of the good fun that I know the Receiver General has had when trying to locate the owners of empty properties, where he has located one, found that the owners live outside of Jersey and has sent them a letter with his official seal at the top saying: “Did you know you have inherited a property in Jersey? Would you like to come and claim it?” Those people have taken one look at it and thought it was scam, until eventually he would stand up at their door and they have gone: “No, this is real”, which is quite amusing. But, yes, he has been helpful and he has certainly been a partner until this point. I try not to get too negative. I am disappointed at the language of the chair of the Scrutiny Panel who spoke about the recognition of the importance of this being long overdue. I obviously take exception to that because I have always recognised the importance of this. I just take a realistic and pragmatic approach, depending on where we are in the work cycle. While it was true for me to say that I could not start and complete projects on empty homes with the resourcing available to me previously, not least because my priority in this term of office has been to develop and get passed a Residential Tenancy Law; that has been the main aspiration of my tenure, which I am very pleased to have achieved. I am still not saying that resource will not be necessary to start and finish this project. What I am saying is that it is not necessary to start it now. It may well be the case that we come back with resource and that will be for the Budget of 2027. But earlier on in my tenure, to start and finish a project, yes, I would have needed resource to do that. But we are talking at this point about starting it and the question of finishing it and resource for that will come later. To start it at this point we do not need that resource because as things have progressed through my tenure, with some projects being successfully completed, others being added, others being re-profiled, depending on how things go, that is an exercise you always do in what your capacity is and how your projects are going at various points. It is our judgment at this moment in time that we will be able to begin some of that work next year without needing to disrupt much else. But that is not always the case, depending on where you are at your point in your term and your other projects going ahead. On those bases, I hope Members will support the amendment and I call for the appel.

### **The Bailiff:**

The appel has been called for. Members are invited to return to their seats. I ask the Greffier to open the voting. If all Members have had the opportunity of casting their votes, I ask the Greffier to close the voting. I can announce the amendment has been adopted:

| <b>POUR: 40</b>           |  | <b>CONTRE: 4</b>          |  | <b>ABSTAINED: 0</b> |
|---------------------------|--|---------------------------|--|---------------------|
| Connétable of St. Helier  |  | Connétable of St. Clement |  |                     |
| Connétable of St. Brelade |  | Deputy Sir P.M. Bailhache |  |                     |
| Connétable of Trinity     |  | Deputy K.M. Wilson        |  |                     |
| Connétable of St. John    |  | Deputy M.B. Andrews       |  |                     |
| Connétable of Grouville   |  |                           |  |                     |
| Connétable of St. Ouen    |  |                           |  |                     |
| Connétable of St. Mary    |  |                           |  |                     |
| Connétable of St. Saviour |  |                           |  |                     |
| Deputy G.P. Southern      |  |                           |  |                     |
| Deputy C.F. Labey         |  |                           |  |                     |

|                             |  |  |  |  |
|-----------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Deputy M. Tadier            |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy S.G. Luce            |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy L.M.C. Doublet       |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy K.F. Morel           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat      |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy S.M. Ahier           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy R.J. Ward            |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy C.S. Alves           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy I. Gardiner          |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy I.J. Gorst           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy L.J. Farnham         |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy K.L. Moore           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy S.Y. Mézec           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy T.A. Coles           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy B.B. de S.V.M. Porée |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy D.J. Warr            |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy H.M. Miles           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy M.R. Scott           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy J. Renouf            |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy C.D. Curtis          |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy L.V. Feltham         |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy R.E. Binet           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy H.L. Jeune           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy M.E. Millar          |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy A. Howell            |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy T.J.A. Binet         |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy M.R. Ferey           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy R.S. Kovacs          |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy A.F. Curtis          |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy B. Ward              |  |  |  |  |

### **The Deputy Greffier of the States:**

Those Members voting contre: the Connétable of St. Clement and Deputies Bailhache, Wilson and Andrews.

### **2.9 Proposed Budget (Government Plan) 2026-2029 (P.70/2025): thirty-first amendment (P.70/2025 Amd.(31)) - as amended - Empty Residential Properties**

#### **The Bailiff:**

We return now to the debate on the thirty-first amendment as amended by the second amendment. Does any other Member wish to speak on the amendment as amended? No one wishes to speak. I close the debate. Those in favour, kindly show ...

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

Sir, we should have the appel.

#### **The Bailiff:**

The appel has been called for. Members are invited to return to their seats and I ask the Greffier to open the voting. If all Members have had the opportunity of casting their votes, I ask the Greffier to close the voting. I can announce that the thirty-first amendment as amended has been adopted:

|                          |  |                           |  |                     |
|--------------------------|--|---------------------------|--|---------------------|
| <b>POUR: 41</b>          |  | <b>CONTRE: 3</b>          |  | <b>ABSTAINED: 0</b> |
| Connétable of St. Helier |  | Connétable of St. Clement |  |                     |

|                             |  |                           |  |  |
|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------|--|--|
| Connétable of St. Brelade   |  | Deputy Sir P.M. Bailhache |  |  |
| Connétable of Trinity       |  | Deputy M.B. Andrews       |  |  |
| Connétable of St. John      |  |                           |  |  |
| Connétable of Grouville     |  |                           |  |  |
| Connétable of St. Ouen      |  |                           |  |  |
| Connétable of St. Mary      |  |                           |  |  |
| Connétable of St. Saviour   |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy G.P. Southern        |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy C.F. Labey           |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy M. Tadier            |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy S.G. Luce            |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy L.M.C. Doublet       |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy K.F. Morel           |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat      |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy S.M. Ahier           |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy R.J. Ward            |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy C.S. Alves           |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy I. Gardiner          |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy I.J. Gorst           |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy L.J. Farnham         |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy K.L. Moore           |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy S.Y. Mézec           |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy T.A. Coles           |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy B.B. de S.V.M. Porée |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy D.J. Warr            |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy H.M. Miles           |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy M.R. Scott           |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy J. Renouf            |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy C.D. Curtis          |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy L.V. Feltham         |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy R.E. Binet           |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy H.L. Jeune           |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy M.E. Millar          |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy A. Howell            |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy T.J.A. Binet         |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy M.R. Ferey           |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy R.S. Kovacs          |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy A.F. Curtis          |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy B. Ward              |  |                           |  |  |
| Deputy K.M. Wilson          |  |                           |  |  |

### **The Deputy Greffier of the States:**

Those Members voting contre: the Connétable of St. Clement and Deputies Bailhache and Andrews.

### **2.10 Proposed Budget (Government Plan) 2026-2029 (P.70/2025): thirty-fifth amendment (P.70/2025 Amd.(35)) - Reduction in Public Expenditure.**

### **The Bailiff:**

Now move to the thirty-fifth amendment proposed by Deputy Moore, and I ask the Greffier to read the amendment.

### **The Deputy Greffier of the States:**

Page 3, paragraph (b)(viii) – After the words “Appendix 2 - Summary Tables 5(i) and (ii) of the Report”, insert the words “, except that in Summary Table 5(i), (a) the Head of Expenditure entitled Health and Care Jersey should be reduced by £57,207,000, (b) the Head of Expenditure entitled Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture should be reduced by £5,700,000 and (c) the Head of Expenditure entitled Treasury and Exchequer should be reduced by £26,607,000, to maintain net revenue expenditure at 2025 levels for 2026, with any consequential amendments to be reflected as necessary throughout the budget. Page 4, paragraph (b)(xii) – After the words “in the Appendix to the accompanying report” insert the words “, except that on page 42 in Table 9 - Revenue Heads of Expenditure - (a) the Head of Expenditure entitled Health and Care Jersey should be reduced by £57,207,000 for each of 2026, 2027, 2028 and 2029, (b) the Head of Expenditure entitled Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture should be reduced by £5,700,000 for each of 2026, 2027, 2028 and 2029 and (c) the Head of Expenditure entitled Treasury and Exchequer should be reduced by £26,607,000 for each of 2026, 2027, 2028 and 2029”.

### **2.10.1 Deputy K.L. Moore of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter:**

The comments of the Council of Ministers regarding this amendment is strong. I would simply say that disregarding the intention of this amendment and not taking action to get a grip on expenditure is, to quote them back at themselves, not either realistic, practical or sensible. I urge Members to consider the facts before them and support this amendment. One can argue that the Council of Ministers has attacked this amendment because the amendment acknowledges and responds to a difficult truth that they are not inclined to confront, that the public sector is still expanding, while the private sector has not kept pace. Given that the former is funded by the latter, the position is not sustainable. The Council of Ministers knows this. The F.P.P. (Fiscal Policy Panel) and others have made it quite clear. The question is whether it should be this Council and this States Assembly to confront the issue or whether the problem, which is likely to become larger should it be left for those who are elected in June 2026. This is a philosophical and a deeply political matter which calls into question the doctrine upon which the Island's success over many decades has been achieved. Over recent years there has been pressure to deliver more and more services and, in my experience, this has not always been achieved in a cost-effective way. Just look at the many recommendations from Comptroller and Auditor Generals over the period who have urged caution and identified means to provide greater accountability and value for money. We now find ourselves at a crossroads. In the foreword to the Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel's report on this Budget, the chair summarises her panel's view of the Budget: “Jersey cannot afford complacency. This Budget exposes the fragility of our public finances and the inadequacy of current planning.” During the debate of the last Government Plan, Deputy Southern observed: “I believe that this Assembly has seen the first steps on the road to a Budget that is led by socialist principles.” This Budget takes us further along that road and, in responding to the choices that are to be made, is a matter of left and right. Do we want to walk further down the road of socialist principles or do we return to the tried and tested Jersey principles of resourcefulness and fiscal responsibility, spending within our means? This amendment may be demanding but we need to wake up and take a new road if we are to secure the Island's future and there is no time to waste. The figure of £89 million is a lot of money but this is the projected increase in revenue expenditure before depreciation. This is less than 9 per cent of the total Budget, a target that should be achievable with careful application. It is fully appreciated that there are some savings identified in the Budget but they do not demonstrate that the Government are taking the financial position seriously enough or going far enough in gripping their expenditure.

[14:45]

They are, as the Chief Minister has told the media and I paraphrase here: “Leaving the next Government to deal with the difficult issues.” To use the words of the highly respected former chief executive of Jersey Finance who published an article last week titled *Jersey must protect its advantages before they erode*: “The solution is not austerity, it is discipline, the careful, modern,

intelligent kind. Jersey needs to hardwire fiscal responsibility into its governance system so that expansion is measured, justified and tied to outcomes.” He then sets out a framework, 5 points, which include: “Productivity before expansion, digital transformation, processes, redesign and zero-based budgeting.” Just like this advice from a well-respected former public servant, this amendment does not call for cuts to services. It calls for a grip on expenditure and a drive for greater productivity. In a small Island community it is vital that we can deliver excellent health and education. People would not want to live or work here if we cannot treat our sick or teach our kids. But sometimes throwing money at something is not the solution. What is required is careful management. I will now set out some areas where this can be achieved. In health the financial recovery programme should be extended beyond 2026. In the report I provide an example of savings that could be delivered in the area of women’s health. At present we have people at consultant level who are carrying out minor procedures. If nurses are trained to do those procedures, the time of the consultant is freed up to do other more complex things, thus reducing their waiting lists. The same principles can apply in many other contexts. There have also been many reports offering clear routes to make savings, such as the *Getting it Right First Time* report, which looked at orthopaedics and theatre efficiencies, which was published last summer. Our constituents regularly feedback their experiences of using services. One shared first-hand experience with their 89 year-old mother-in-law who can see that the patient transport service does not work as efficiently as it could or should. Why not work with the Parishes which offer transport assistance to their parishioners? The Parishes can also help to unlock some further efficiencies. One of the time-honoured traditions of our Island that has supported the delivery of services to Islanders has been through our Parish system. There are many opportunities to strengthen those services by harnessing all of the goodwill that remains within those traditional institutions, moulded by our resourceful forebears and harness the concept of voluntary service. Duplication, one piece of work that institutions moulded by our resourceful forebears and harness the concept of voluntary service. Duplication. One piece of work that was commissioned under my Government was a great repeal bill. This removed old legislation and regulations, the red tape that is unnecessary both in time to administer and the costs that are being incurred. Sadly, it was, of course, not brought to this Assembly. The chief executive has described the public service as having an additive culture. New stuff is constantly added, but not enough thought is given to the things that Government still does that it could either do differently or stop doing altogether. Why, for example, are we still retaining a tourism law under which civil servants are checking whether hotel rooms have lockable doors that are readily numbered or otherwise identifiable, and that their décor is of a satisfactory standard? Retaining the Policing of Beaches (Jersey) Regulations 1959, which restricts beach trading, but in a way that seems to make it easy for incumbent operators to carry on doing what they have always done, but which does not seem to allow scope for new market entrants to compete. Or there is maintaining the annual café registration scheme in the Places of Refreshment (Jersey) Law 1967, when we adopted a new food law just 3 years ago. Or running a ship’s registry that has well over 1,000 ships on it, but where the clear majority are overseas owned, rarely or even never visit Jersey and which generate risk for Government. For example, the States of Jersey Police, which might be called upon to investigate any serious crimes committed on board such a ship while in international waters, but with little or no qualified economic benefit to Jersey. All of these were the responsibility of the Chief Minister when he was formerly Minister for Economic Development, and all of these functions appear to have been left alone for the last decade or more. That is just examples from one of the smaller departments. Performance management. Despite the good work of the previous States Employment Board, which focused on this matter under the Constable of St. John, who encouraged greater effort to be put into performance management, time and time again this was an area that was considered too time consuming. I can give an example, if I may. When I raised a concern regarding a person who was clearly not performing in their role, I was told: “Yes, we know they are not good at their job, but we cannot move them.” This was not a junior person. How many other people are underperforming in their roles while their managers do not have the time to deal with it? If there were 9 or 10 of those people, that could save £1 million a

year right there. Let us not forget their 16 per cent pension contributions. Many of the proposals set out in this amendment are known to Government already. They may have been on the too difficult pile but, given the state of our finances, it is time to grasp the nettle and put the sustainability of the Island's finances ahead of those organisations which might be impacted. Take the arms' length organisations, for example. Some, but not all, have a remunerated board, each costing about £120,000. If there is a professional and capable executive in place, why can they not report to one effective and professional board that provides oversight to a number of organisations who all share synergies? That may appear to be small beer, but one of the reasons that we find ourselves in a position where the Budget is greater than the projected income is a result of not paying sufficient attention to the smaller sums and demanding a more efficient way of working. One of the reasons a private secretary to the chief executive was recruited was to bring that leadership to the organisation to drive forward a new approach. Technology. Businesses all over the world are focused on harnessing technology to deliver greater productivity. In recent years, over £100 million has already been spent on technology projects aimed at doing just that for the public sector. Yet this Budget identifies a further £80 million-plus to spend with only a small amount of rejected savings. New service lag. The Minister for Health and Social Services has claimed that this amendment will prevent him from delivering new services. This is not true. This amendment asks him to get a grip on his existing expenditure and deliver better value for money for Islanders. It also recognises that growth bids mean doing new things. This means that there is a period of time when new people have to be employed and there is often a time lag while that new service gets up and running. This means that the money is not required on 1st January. In fact, Governments often struggle to spend all of the growth money in the first year. So rather than the shroud waving that we hear from the Council of Ministers in their comments, why do they not take a proactive approach instead and consider offering training and development to some people who are already in the organisation who could be redeployed to work in new service areas rather than taking on new people. The previous Government was accused of trying to do too much and achieving too little. Of course, we are also accused of contributing to growth, and I should speak to that, of course. Some of this is set out in my report. There was, of course, a good response to the plan that was set out in the first 100 days. Now, I have a great deal of respect for many public servants, particularly those on the front line. The majority demonstrate on a daily basis their commitment to public service, and I thank them for that. But it was difficult to shift the dial and it was clear that there were key people, a small pocket, who missed the Le Fondré Government, who had taken something of a more backseat approach. What has become clearer since leaving Government is that there was an element of sabotage going on from within, by a small pocket of the very people who were supposed to serve with impartiality. It has been reported back to me ... and forgive me for using this opportunity to share this, but I think it is important that it is said. One such civil servant has told their friends that they are proud to have played a part in bringing the Government down. I assume that was the same person who was sending the now Chief Minister information about Government meetings that Deputy Farnham would then share with his colleagues on the Corporate Services Panel. It does make one wonder what else was going on. Of course, I do not know. If I had the energy, I should of course make a complaint but I would prefer to focus on moving forward in a constructive way and trying to represent my constituents for the time that I have left as a States Member. But it was not right. What is clear is that certain Members of this Government wanted power badly. What is not clear is why? What do they want to do with it? Who do they represent? This is, I am afraid, a do nothing Government. Its objective has been to do nothing other than sign a big contract for the hospital. I am aware that there will be accusations that my figures are not accurate enough or detailed enough. Let me remind Members of another observation made by the Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel. Despite well-recognised pressures within the health system, the panel found that the Budget does not set out concrete measures to urgently address them, relying instead on longer-term work to develop a sustainable funding model. Recurrent overspends continue to distort expenditure planning. If the Minister, with his team, has not brought to this Assembly concrete measures, how is it possible for a



Back-Bencher to do so? The key issue here is that we have a Council of Ministers who have failed to grip expenditure and deliver the promises that were made to the Assembly last year. We were told in January last year that there would be no more reviews, instead there would be action and delivery. Yet what have we actually got? We were told the Health Advisory Board was too costly, but now we are told that they are wonderful, the Minister relies on them. In addition he has created another board costing an additional £70,000 to support him in his work. The previous Minister for Health and Social Services was criticised for not having a health strategy, yet the current Minister has told Scrutiny that now is not time for a health strategy. Previously, Members of this Government argued for the protection of the Health Insurance Fund, now they are proposing plans that will see its value fall dramatically. So it goes on. As the Corporate Services Panel observes: “Our work has revealed a pattern. A Government that speaks of discipline, restraint and sustainability, yet relies on temporary fixes, depleted reserves and structural imbalances to balance the books. The reliance on the Social Security Fund to prop up day-to-day spending is not only unsustainable but also a breach of the principle of spending within means that the Budget itself claims to uphold.” End of quote. This is not the action that we were promised last year. What we are seeing is a return to the dither-and-delay approach that dogged the Alliance-led Government that our now C.M. (Chief Minister) oversaw along with his colleague, John Le Fondré. The public did not vote for the status quo. They voted for change. Let us get back to achieving what we set out to deliver in 2022. Let us restore hope to our public and to our business community. Given the tone of the comments and the quotes provided to the media, it is clearly going to be a debate in which the guns will come out to take potshots at the person rather than dealing with the issue at hand. So I would respectfully suggest that before engaging in that sport, Ministers would consider very carefully the words of the Corporate Services Panel again, whose chair, Deputy Miles, observes: “Jersey cannot afford complacency. This Budget exposes the fragility of our public finances and the inadequacy of current planning.” Thank you all for listening and I look forward to the debate.

**The Bailiff:**

Thank you, Deputy. Is amendment seconded? **[Seconded]** Does any Member wish to speak on the amendment.

**2.10.2 Deputy M.E. Millar of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:**

Well, there is a lot in there. I applaud Deputy Moore for taking me at my word and bringing forward a proposition that seeks to reduce Government spending. She was not, as I said in the last debate, the only one to do so, because actually Deputy Bailhache also did. But Deputy Bailhache actually presented a proposition which not only had a proposal, it had a funding mechanism. I take my hat off to him for putting his head above the parapet and actually bringing forward a solution to something to which he did not agree. I am sure that Deputy Moore, as a very experienced politician, will understand that she proposes such a significant reduction in Government budgets that I cannot possibly accept it, nor is it deliverable. This Council of Ministers, recognises that the level of growth that we have seen over the last 5 or 6 years is simply unsustainable.

[15:00]

We cannot continue to grow at that rate. Accordingly, in this Budget, as in the last, we have looked to restrain growth in day-to-day spending while increasing savings to help pay for the essential growth and investment that we cannot avoid. We have dispensed with the previous Government’s growth process, a process that allowed departments and Ministers to present hundreds of business cases, seeking both new funding and significant numbers of extra headcount. I have not been able to confirm the number, but my memory in 2023 was that the business cases and growth bids involved extra headcount of 600. Many of these proposals were good ideas but few of them were truly affordable without stopping or vastly reducing existing spending and services. That process did not drive efficiency or effective use of public funds. It is laudable again that the former Chief Minister

sought to stop such a process and it is commendable that the current Government has done so. Instead, we have only considered targeted growth, focused on delivery of the C.S.P. (Common Strategic Policy), which was agreed by this Assembly, front line services and to mitigate key risks. At the same time, this Government has increased levels of planned savings to be delivered by departments, with £40 million planned across 2025 and 2026, and a further target of £29 million in 2027. Some will argue that more action is needed. I absolutely agree with that sentiment. However, we will achieve more through thoughtful planned action than rash knee-jerk reactions. This amendment from Deputy Moore does not just stop new growth and investment, it freezes overall expenditure at 2025 levels, which represents a real terms cut to Government expenditure. All inflation increases, including pay awards, would need to be absorbed by departments. No funding would be available to meet pressures and risks that we are already seeing. No investment would be included for the future. This is austerity. In essence, this amendment asks us to make £89 million of unspecified savings in a single year, yet provides less than a month to identify and deliver those savings. I seem to have it at the back of my mind that the Fiscal Policy Panel is not very keen on unspecified savings and there we have got £89 million of them. While the Deputy has divided the savings between Health, Economy and Treasury, the amounts allocated have no real evidence, no rationale and no meaningful plan behind them. Such a drastic reduction, a literal decimation of the public service, without any time to plan or consider consequences, will have serious ramifications, including to the front line and services that Islanders rely on most. Reducing the budget for Health and Care Jersey by £57 million without any clear justification is not bold. It is financially irresponsible. It risks undermining essential services and reversing years of work to stabilise health provision started under Deputy Moore's Government. As the Council of Ministers comment papers suggests, this level of cut would have a catastrophic impact on the Health and Care Department. I will leave the Minister to articulate in more detail what the impact on the health service would be. Similarly, the amendment proposes reductions to the Economy Department, referring specifically to arm's length bodies. This is without any consultation or impact gathering and leaves the affected organisations and their staff with a high level of uncertainty just before the start of the year. I am sure the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development will wish to say more on this, but what I would comment is that at the question time event last week, which was very well attended - not by many politicians, I hasten to add - there was a great groundswell of support in that room for the A.L.O.s (arm's length organisations) and for why some of them had had grant funding cut, and we are wanting to even more with this amendment. Turning to my own department, in the proposed Budget, Treasury has £46.5 million in 2026. If Deputy Moore's amendment is approved, in 3 weeks this drops to just under £20 million. That cuts Treasury's budget by over half. Again, just as an aside, we often talk about the front line and what the front line is, and people, like the tax help desk, and indeed the front of office at E.S.S.H. (Employment, Social Security and Housing) are not considered by many to be the front line. But if you go and ask them how many customers, they are dealing with thousands and thousands of customers every year, tens of thousands of customers speak to them every year. You can bet your bottom dollar that the minute they get a poor service, they are on the phone complaining about it. Absolutely, they are on the front line and absolutely they get no recognition for that fact. Turning back to Treasury, I acknowledge that the Deputy's intention is for these savings to be redistributed across other departments through my ability to make transfers between heads of expenditure. While this is possible, Members will all be aware that transfers between heads of expenditure are required to sit before the Assembly for 4 weeks. I believe it is also the case that I cannot simply move money between heads of expenditure without consulting with the relevant Ministers and seeking their agreement. If I did not have that agreement, then I imagine we would be debating, because taking money from some departments that other amendments are seeking to protect or indeed grow, any change would undoubtedly be called in for debate, delaying any transfers further. This would cause artificial pressures from within Treasury, which is not helpful when trying to ensure the overall public purse stays within budget. Given the amount of time the proposer has taken to prepare this amendment has been short, it is not entirely surprising that there is

limited detail. Rather they have slashed Health, Treasury and Economy. Indeed, producing a more detailed, thought-through plan would take more time than that. However, the amendment gives no more time to the Government to deliver a plan before the beginning of the year. Those Members who have attended the States Members workshops, established by the Chief Minister, will know that we have done a lot of work to understand where the growth over the last few years has been generated. We are now looking closely at how that growth in the public service can be constrained and reduced, and we will be presenting further to States Members on this in the New Year. At this point I am going to diverge from my speech because I do have a couple of things I would like to say, both in terms of this and the debate recently. There was a huge amount of information in there, in the Deputy's speech, a huge amount of ideas as to where savings could be made and spending cut. She has referenced laws that have existed from the 1950s. Why did her Government not do anything to deal with those laws? She makes a very easy swipe at civil servants and the 16 per cent pension contribution. That is all they get, they do not get health insurance, there are no other perks. They get a salary and a pension. Really, I think the fact that we continue to just beat them over the head about pension contributions is really, really quite unfair. They do work hard. If Deputy Moore is unhappy about things that happened in the past, then the appropriate way to do that is to raise a proper complaint and deal with it through appropriate channels. I do not know what she is talking about, but just to put almost anonymous complaints out there about civil servants and not go through a proper process when nobody can address them through proper channels, I feel is inappropriate. Coming back to the Budget, Deputy Stephenson, who I imagine is online at the moment, said this morning she did not know what was worse, being criticised or being told that your work was good but we are not going to do it. Criticism, I can tell you, is not a comfortable place because I have had it for weeks; weeks of criticism about everything we do. I do not mind criticism, I really do not, but nobody ever recognises the good work. Nobody has said: "Yes, it is good that money is going into Health." Nobody is recognising that we are putting money into childcare to help the economy and get people back into work and grow the economy. Nobody has said: "Yes, it is a good idea that we build children's homes for our vulnerable children." If you look at the headline in the *J.E.P. (Jersey Evening Post)* today, do we really want children going to La Moye because there is no acceptable accommodation for them? We have done all of these things. We have not been given any credit but all we have had is criticism. How dare you cut the States grant? How dare you not put money in Strategic Reserve? How dare you not live within your means? Nobody - nobody - really has come up with any plans. We have produced savings and look what has happened. You have bounced 2 of them. No, we do not like you cutting environment. No, we do not like you cutting the police. They are not cuts, they are just rational decisions that the Council of Ministers signed up to to try to live within our means. If you are going to criticise, it would be quite nice if you could come up with some alternative solutions. It would be quite interesting if Deputy Curtis's programme, the new site, could work out how many times Deputy Renouf has mentioned the F.P.P.s comments on the States grant. The F.P.P. made quite a number of comments, but nobody is dealing with any of those. Deputy Renouf could have brought a proposition to reduce the formula-driven growth in arts, heritage and culture. We tried to do that last year and the Assembly did not like it. That was an F.P.P. recommendation. If you are going to hold the F.P.P. report up, you have to address all of it. We are trying our best and I will ask the question that I said at the question time event, it was a very big room, there were lots of people there and I said: "Who would like to pay more tax?" Not a single hand. I returned to the question later: "Who would like to pay more tax?" One person put their hand up and said: "I would pay more tax if I knew where it was being spent." Now, I do not think there is any question where money is being spent, and I do absolutely agree that there are lots of areas of unwise spending. Deputy Bailhache mentioned some of them the other day. A public standards ombudsman will be a money pit that will cost Government, I suspect, way more than the £1.5 million that Deputy Bailhache mentioned. It is not an effective means. We are a small population of 100,000 people and we have to stop creating bodies that are independent because, before you know it, they are jumping up wanting more money all the time. That has got to stop. We all have our part to play

and we all need to stop bringing propositions that spend more money, because nothing in these amendments are really cutting costs, apart from Deputy Moore's. None of them are stopping savings. It is just moving money around. So if you are going to criticise Government, come forward with some solutions, but nobody is doing that. It is all: "It is your job to make savings, it is your job to do this, it is your job to do that." You have responsibility as well as Members of this Assembly and I think it is time you started living up to those responsibilities. If you do not like what we are doing, bring forward some suggestions. Unlike some, I do not support party politics. I do not think it would be good for the Island, I think it would make it even more divisive than it already is. But we seem to be in a kind of worse situation where we have people acting as an informal opposition which exists to criticise, but formal oppositions bring forward plans. They bring forward plans. Kemi Badenoch stands up and says: "Labour are useless, we do not like what they are doing." But she offers an alternative. She offers an alternative that people could vote on. We are not being given alternatives. If you want to be in opposition, be in opposition. That is your right in a democratic Assembly. But do the job properly and bring us some solutions. I am going to return to my speech having had a bit of a rant. In the meantime, this amendment does not present a credible plan. It is not bold action, it is a blunt instrument which would derail the strategic priorities this Assembly is committed to and have significant adverse impacts across the public service. I urge Members to reject it.

**[Approbation]**

### **2.10.3 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:**

I put my light on because I do believe there are several things that the Minister for Treasury and Resources said, and I would agree on and I would like to support her. But there are probably areas where we disagree. This is why it is important that I speak because I do believe that ... and this is where we agree, we need to get a grip on our expenditure and increase productivity. This is what Deputy Moore suggested, this is what the Minister for Treasury and Resources suggested, and this is what I would echo. I do believe that we need to invest in health, and I welcome the investment in the childcare.

[15:15]

I am not opposing it and I am actually saying it is great to move forward. Where I think the difficulties lies, and maybe it is also for the Minister for Treasury and Resources ... maybe if the Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources could respond to this, if possible, as unfortunately the Minister for Treasury and Resources has already spoken. Where the difficulty lies is that where we talk about investing in health, which I fully support, we do not know how this investment will be spent. It is not about not investing, it is about how you are doing things with this money and what will be delivered, what will be the outcome and how you will do things differently. Unfortunately, during the Public Accounts Committee public hearings, when the Public Accounts Committee challenged officers as to what they are doing differently, how they can deliver a better service based on new technology, different contracts, working through different models, we did not hear any new ideas, except of let us have theatres full. Again, let us invest in health but it needs to be different thinking on different types of investment. The Council of Ministers is telling us that finances are tight and offer little detail on how savings will be made. Again, not to recruit people because we could not manage to recruit permanent positions, it is not saving. Yes, obviously on the balance by the end of the year it will show. Again the Minister for Treasury and Resources talked about the opposition. I am saying I came to this debate open, I am not entirely sure that I can support the numbers that were proposed because I believe it did not include inflation. I believe there are several other questions around the numbers that I challenged Deputy Moore openly about. This is why I cannot be called an opposition because it was not developed with me. I have problem with the numbers and I have questions around the numbers, but it does not mean that the point is not made in principle. I cannot dismiss the points that were highlighted. The Minister for Treasury and Resources, during that debate ... it was very interesting and a very good public debate, but it is 100 per cent that the Minister for

Treasury and Resources cannot have the final ... actually, the Chief Minister cannot have the final word in this Council of Ministers because they work according to a different model. I think, in my provision, it needs to be the final word when the funds need to be balanced, what it will be spent on and how we will overspend or not overspend. If we are mentioning 2023, yes, there are lots of growths, but 2023 compared to 2024, and compared to 2025, end up in black. Did not add up with overspending. At this stage, with the information before us, I struggle to see how I can support the amendment, but also I believe that Deputy Moore has raised questions that Ministers have failed to answer and those questions remain valid. I will continue to listen to this debate with an open mind. Thank you.

#### **2.10.4 Deputy K.F. Morel of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:**

I thank Deputy Millar for inviting me to speak, and I am responding to her invitation. I think that is appropriate as obviously Deputy Moore's amendment does bring direct requests for savings from my department. It is difficult not to levy really the same criticisms that Deputy Millar, the Minister for Treasury and Resources, levied. When you read through the proposition, it is scant in terms of evidence and the £5.7 million that is being asked for from the Department of the Economy and, more specifically, the local economy as opposed to the financial services side of it. It does not actually say where, it just talks about the merging of A.L.O.s. Now there are a number of things I can say about that. First of all, one thing I can say is that while we have been working on looking at how we can best and most efficiently organise arm's length organisations, were you to merge them all, the savings would not reach £5.7 million. £5.7 million would be the absolute withdrawal of ... well, put it this way, 2 Digital Jerseys and one Jersey Business is what you would need to take out of the Budget in order to do that. The work that Digital Jersey, Jersey Business and much of Visit Jersey would have to be taken out. You would not only be massively harming the tourism economy but, as far as the innovation and the investment side of bringing business to Jersey is concerned, I think it would have a really harmful effect on that as well. I think, as I said, there is work to be done in the organisation. I think what needs to happen in that situation is that you do not just withdraw most of the money that supports them, it is that you reorganise those organisations that they can deliver better for a similar or possibly slightly less amount of money, but not a sum of money that effectively, as I said, would take out 2 Digital Jerseys and one Jersey Business. The other elements that I do wish to speak to is the tone around the arm's length organisations. I think one of the things that I have been most disappointed about, and I blame myself for this, is the narrative around arm's length organisations in this Assembly. The reason I blame myself is not because I agree with that narrative, it is because I disagree with the narrative. But I clearly have not been defending them in a way that people understand. One thing I have really learnt over the last 8 years in the Assembly, and particularly the last 3½ years as Minister for Sustainable Economic Development, is that Government, most particularly the civil service, does not really talk the same language as business. To be honest, it does not even keep the same hours. It does not operate at the same speed and it does not understand the same considerations and same concerns. That is why, time and again, whether it is tender processes, health and safety forms and policies, I see administrative burdens being placed on to business that are absurd, duplicative and utterly time and money wasting. The whole point of having the arm's length organisations is that they can operate outside of that environment and speak and engage directly with the private sector. That means a private sector internationally and so a private sector that really expects something quite special from Jersey and the really deep understanding of what international businesses is. It also means a private sector that feels that locally it is understood and communicated with in an appropriate manner. My belief, having spent 3½ years as Minister of Sustainable Economic Development, is that the civil service is not best placed to do that. The civil service around these areas is very good at the policy side, the legislation side, it is very good at dealing with the arm's length organisations who can repeat the message from the private sector, the civil service is very good at then translating that into something that can be used politically, whether it is new legislation, new policy, et cetera, and so on. But we need those arm's length organisations

because were we to get rid of them, I think there would be an absolute breakdown in communication between Government and the private sector in all its areas. To just ask for £5.7 million of savings from the arm's length organisations I think would be very short-sighted, would cause immeasurable harm to the economy of the Island because it would, I think, put a wedge - a massive wedge - between the Government and the private sector. With regard to Health and the Treasury savings, I cannot speak to them directly other than to know obviously, when you read the report, there is very little evidence as to what the impacts would be. There is no real understanding as to what harms would be done or created by those cuts. It could be argued that, well, it would just be the lack of investment. But, as Deputy Gardiner has just said, we do need to invest in these areas. Do I believe that they are areas which can also be run more efficiently? I am sure that is the case, but I am not in a position to be able to say where and how, that is left to those Ministers to do so. But to argue for a withdrawal of £57 million of expenditure from the health service and a withdrawal of £20-something million from the Treasury side, without actually understanding or providing an explanation for how the impacts would be felt and what the benefits would be of those impacts, I think means that this amendment cannot stand. I do definitely suggest and urge all Members to reject this amendment. I say all this with an understanding that I do subscribe to the view that Jersey's overall cost of government is rising too fast, too quickly and, as we head towards an election, I think it will be those Members who speak to that who will likely be most successful. There is a reason for it. As much as anything, we have a 20 per cent tax rate, that means you can only do so much and we do need to understand that we cannot deliver all of the health solutions, we cannot deliver all of the economic solutions, we cannot deliver all of everything that everybody in Jersey would like. What we need are States Members who are willing to put a line in the sand and say: "No, we would love to deliver that but we cannot." Maybe we can use the U.K., maybe we can use France to help us deliver that from a health perspective. Maybe we can use and work with Guernsey to deliver it to reduce costs. These are questions that need to be answered and I would hope that when a new Government is delivering a Budget in a year's time, that they are really looking at the issue of this cost of government in Jersey and making deeper inroads than we are at the moment. But we do need to invest in health and we do need to invest in very many other areas of Government, not least the public realm and other areas of infrastructure which are absolutely vital. Because if we do not invest in these areas, then Jersey will no longer be attractive, not just to tourists but it will not be attractive to people wishing to live here either. So investment is needed. A proposition or an amendment to the Government Plan which just talks for cuts without any real understanding of what those cuts will do, I think is dangerous and should therefore be rejected.

#### **2.10.5 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier South:**

This has been my favourite amendment so far. I am sure that there are other Members that have felt that way, too. Now we are really getting going; this is a proper Budget debate now. So I want to start actually by thoroughly commending Deputy Moore for her speech and for bringing this amendment because, as a former Chief Minister, she has an experience and perspective that is absolutely of interest to those of us with an interest in the governance of the Island to hear from and hear about how she thinks things have gone and how things could have been done differently, et cetera. I also commend her for putting forward an amendment and an argument which she knows lots in the room will have found uncomfortable to hear, and which inevitably is setting her up to get rebuttals from others, which can sometimes be uncomfortable to listen to as well. So I absolutely commend her for all of that, even though I think almost everything she said was wrong. I want to talk about some of that, but there was one phrase that she used that I did find particularly ironic. She describes looking back on the formation of the current Government, it being about some who wanted power but did not really know what to do with it. The reason that that struck me is because I spent 2 years hearing people say the exact same thing about her Government. The point must be made, in relation to this amendment, that at the start of this electoral term, the proposer of this amendment had an absolutely golden opportunity to set the groundwork for dealing with lots of the issues that she is

now raising. That opportunity was completely squandered. It was squandered for multiple reasons, but I am of the view that it came about as a Government that had no vision for what Jersey ought to look like, that itself was a coalition made up of many who themselves wanted power but did not know what to do with it. I will not be uniquely critical of Deputy Moore for that because I think that is institutionalised in our politics, that we deliver Governments that are not capable of delivering on a vision, and that is why spending keeps going up. That is why things are so unaccountable, because our Members of Government are mostly unaligned when it comes to their manifestos. They have no obligation to back one another, they have no obligation to hold each other to account. They can have a Government promote a position and then outside of the room when speaking to conditions, can completely absolve themselves of it.

[15:30]

That is why we end up in the situation where public spending can often become so wasteful. Working within that framework as best as we are, I cannot accept what the proposer of the amendment says when she describes this as a “do-nothing Government” because I think this Government has grasped the nettle on some key issues and has dealing with things that previous Governments absolutely failed on. This is the Government, after years of talking, that has delivered a new Residential Tenancy Law supporting renters in the Island where others in the past ran round in circles unable to achieve it. This is the Government that is introducing free hours of childcare for 2 to 3 year-olds, something that is going to be absolutely uplifting for so many parents and families and, of course, the children at the heart of it as well. That will be great for our economy and great for our society. This is the Government that, after over a decade of some of us banging our heads against a wall on the subject of the living wage, is now taking the biggest strides towards that than any of our predecessors before. That is because of the commitment of the Chief Minister, of the Minister for Social Security and all of us around the Council of Ministers’ table who decided that action was necessary. It is a shame he is not in the room, but I was also going to give a shout out to Deputy Morel who has, in the last few days, lodged his Licensing Law, something that is decades overdue. If the Assembly accepts it, that will be another thing to tick off the list of something that successive Assemblies and Governments did not deliver, but this one hopefully will have. We are not in the position that the Deputy argues when calling for this amendment, and we are certainly not in the position that she suggests, when she was quoting another Member calling a previous Budget, the first one led by socialist principles. This point does need to be made, because the word “socialism” has a dictionary definition. It is not a synonym for whatever I do not like. What it means is from each according to their ability, to each according to their need. It is the principle that the States ought to work in partnership with its population to create a society in which everyone is capable of achieving their potential, irrespective of their background, their race, their religion and their social class. That is what it means. Those are good principles, ones which I hold dear. I know many of my colleagues in Government do not agree with those, but in the interests of Jersey we work together to find the compromises we can take things forward. I am very pleased that this Budget seeks to do that. But we have to contend with the fact that if this amendment is adopted, it will put Government in chaos. It can do no other thing other than that where we give our public service merely weeks’ notice that literally tens of millions of pounds will be swept from beneath their feet, disrupting all sorts of work and causing all sorts of damage in the meantime. That is, in a sense, a shame, because the underlying point that the Deputy makes about Government spending being unsustainable, being out of control and consistently rising is right. Everyone agrees with that, including the socialists who also believe that too. But unlike the other wings of politics in Jersey, we are the ones with the proposals to actually deal with it by restructuring how our democracy works in Jersey so we do not constantly go round in circles every Budget on this without dealing with it. We are the ones who say that we can drastically reduce public spending in Jersey by eliminating the waste that is caused by the institutionalised, fragmented politics delivered by our system of independence. We are the ones who say that we can enhance our economy and therefore the prosperity that is generated and the tax take we get through enhancing the economic

participation of those who are currently held back in our society from reaching their potential. Yes, we include in that tax reforms. That does not mean tax rises, it means tax reforms. It means some going up, some going down, depending on what is most appropriate for our economic and social needs. That is a different way of doing government. I dare say, that is a better way of doing government. It is the one that we promote and it is one that our mission is ongoing but that I have faith one day will be achieved. However, it certainly will not be achieved by supporting this amendment, however much I commend the proposer for bringing it in the spirit she did. I thank her for livening up this debate.

#### **2.10.6 Deputy M.R. Scott of St. Brelade:**

It is the last Budget before the election, so a number of States Members might wish to stand on a soapbox at this moment or to restore their standing in the community. Containing public spending was one of the platforms for my manifesto so I recognise that Deputy Moore's proposition is well-intentioned, that there are some people in the community who think: "Well, why do we not keep grasping the nettle? Why do we not just simply turn around to the public sector and say this is how much you are going to have, deal with it?" However, these measures do seem draconian and I think that they precede some necessary work that does need to be done within Government and which I do hope from my position on the sidelines of the Council Ministers that I might help along, with the help of other Members in the States Assembly. Deputy Stephenson and Deputy Millar have vented feelings in the States Assembly. I do find it somewhat ironic that, as an Assistant Minister and a States Member, I am subject to 2 Codes of Conduct that suppress my powers of speech, particularly not to criticise the States Assembly or the Council of Ministers. That is how it goes, but it also suppresses my ability to vent certain feelings and views. I did feel somewhat the grief that there has been suppression of an economic impact assessment report in the case of the Residential Tenancy Law, seems to have been; it has still not been published. I think that that should have been. Now, I think we all agree that investment of public funds needs to be done wisely and public sector growth I do believe needs to be curbed, and so I agree with Deputy Morel that that is something that anybody standing on the next election needs to speak to. He mentioned the argument for arm's length organisations. What I would like to mention is the struggle that can go on within the civil service in managing arm's length organisations, and the reason for that is what I would call a lack of performance management culture, as I recognise it, as many people who work or have been in the private sector might recognise it. I note that there has been an argument in favour of public sector pensions and that some Members of the Council of Ministers are in receipt of one. I feel, nevertheless, that I cannot support this proposition because it creates perhaps more problems than it solves, but I do recognise where it comes from. I believe that as States Members, we should all be managing performance, and that includes within Scrutiny. Maybe we need to challenge a bit more spending, whether you are the P.P.C. (Privileges and Procedures Committee), you are talking about the cost control in the States Greffe, there needs to be more opportunity for Scrutiny to look at the some of the finer detail of public spending. What happened to the Audit Committee that we used to have, where people would actually look a little more closely into public sector spending? I really cannot support a line of banishment that is so high level that it just says: "We are going to reduce all your department's expenditure by X per cent" without looking at performance management generally. I will not be supporting the proposition in line with the Council of Ministers' position but, as I say, I can accept the frustration from which this comes.

#### **2.10.7 Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier Central:**

I feel I have to stand in defence of some of the people I work with day in, day out. It has been an absolute eye opener for me to walk in and take on this role and work with the civil servants I work with, because I found them to be professional and supportive. We have a culture in the department around the Ministerial table where everybody has the right to speak. I want to know whether the decisions I am making are really bad decisions, because these are professionals who have been in



this role a long time. I think the civil servant baiting that goes on day in, day out in some sort of austerity-based hysteria over the way to save this Island is to, in some way, just lose every everybody in the public sector and then everything will be fine. That is not just short-sighted, it is incorrect. Some of the growth in Education has been in teaching assistants, front line staff, 200 who go into schools every day and support our most challenging and needy children because we recognise the need that they have. We recognise that if we are going to include those young people in our society in the future, we need to give them the support from day one. That is where some of the growth is, and I am quite happy to stand here and talk about that growth. In fact, even the word “growth”, its need. Education is the basis of a modern society and we have increasing demands all of the time. We are open about them. We are open about the increasing need and recognition of special educational needs. We are open about the increasing changes to the demands made at every single classroom and expectations. I mention as well about pensions. Why are people anti people receiving a pension? If we have people receiving pension when they retire, they can pay their way and they have a standard of living and make less of a demand financially long term. It is a sensible thing to do. As a younger generation growing up, I joke with my son, he is a smart lad - very smart lad, doing his research and his biotechnical research, et cetera, way beyond me - and I say to him: “One day you will get a pension. I will explain what that is to you, Tom, because you will not have a clue about it.” It is a real worry that the narrative behind this is fundamentally wrong. We are criticising the wrong people for the wrong reasons at the wrong time and in the wrong way. This is not what brings an Island together, this is not what brings a workforce together and this is not what enables us to challenge the future. I am glad Deputy Mézec gave a definition of the term “socialism”. It is not an insult to me, it is about what we need for our society and if, politically, people want to gather together openly and honestly about their political allegiances and work together, party politics is the way forward. Form a proper opposition, an opposition that gives genuine alternatives. An opposition that does not at the last minute make the last minute changes to pieces of work that have been going on for a long, long time in order to throw more money at something that it does not need. That is where we are with some of the amendments that have come forward. People are being polite and I will try to be polite. I agree this is a proper debate, it is quite nice actually. I thank the Deputy for that. This is not about political grandstanding, this is about standing up and saying what you believe in in this Assembly. What do you believe in? We may disagree but, politically, show what you believe in, be open about it. If you are working collectively with groups of people, you are working as a political party. Declare as a political party. Show what your beliefs are, give your references, give your funding, give everything that makes you what you are working collectively and come forward together and stand on that platform. That is what we need at the next election: clarity, clear manifestos and clear messages for the future. That is what we will bring again. We have done it consistently and that is why we have built and moved forward. Finally, I would say these will not just affect the departments that I mentioned in the comments paper, because that level of removal of funding across the department will hit everybody. It will hit Education, it will hit Health, it will hit every single sector that we have. It will also say to a workforce you are not valued. When I picked up this role, I picked up a workforce that was told you are not valued and were actually on strike. We do not have that, we have not had that for nearly 2 years and we are still repairing the damage that was done to try and say you are valuable workforce. It is still not there, I recognise that, but we are trying. I urge every Member to reject this, not simply because of the numbers but because of the narrative and the principles that lie behind it that are fundamentally incorrect for this Island and this Assembly.

[15:45]

#### **2.10.8 Deputy T.J.A Binet of St. Saviour:**

Three weeks before the start of the new year, Deputy Moore is proposing to reduce the 2026 Budget by almost £90 million. Apparently, with only hours to prepare, this saving can be achieved by reorganising the structure of the organisation at a high level and developing a culture of high

performance that harnesses technology and merges some functions. By adopting the changes outlined in the amendment, we can anticipate that this new way of working will become embedded across the organisation and drive continuing efficiency in other areas of government. I think these ideas are very laudable, and it may surprise the Deputy to learn that I actually support them in principle. Much restructuring is still required, more savings can be made and technology must be applied wherever possible. However, the idea that these far-reaching objectives can be achieved simply and in the timeframe suggested demonstrates a worrying level of naivety and very little understanding of the way in which these changes have to be approached. But more frightening for me is the judgment, or lack of it, involved in identifying the targets selected for the proposed savings. As already explained by the Deputy, by far the biggest part of this grand plan is a staggering reduction in the Health budget of some £57.2 million. Given my current involvement in this area, I would like to correct some of the many inaccuracies contained in the amendment and inform Members of the likely consequences of adopting it. While the amendment asserts that the Assembly is now being asked to allocate an additional £66 million for 2026 in Health and Care, it fails to mention that some £22 million of that sum is simply a transfer of costs from other departments, principally ambulance, public health, 40 plus members of staff from the I.T. (Information Technology) Department and other smaller numbers from elsewhere. This is not new money. It also includes almost £10 million to cover the annual cost of living pay increase for all health staff. Once again rather difficult to define as new money. Another £12.5 million of the supposed £62 million reflects a cost-of-living increase for non-staff expenses, albeit that this is now calculated at 3 per cent over inflation rather than last year's plus 2 per cent. But in relation to the overall sums involved, the additional funding amounts to less than 1 per cent increase in the Health budget. As Members may know, in recent years of higher inflation, the health service cost-of-living increase was set well below the real inflation rate and as a consequence the service proceeded to run what was described unhelpfully as an overspend. For a number of years, this was made good at the year end, and Deputy Moore will be well aware of this because in her period of tenure as Chief Minister she supplemented the Health budget by £14.4 million in 2022 and a further £32 million in 2023. I think I should repeat that that's £32 million, in spite of the Deputy's apparent abilities as a reformer. 2024 saw a lower supplementation of £28 million and in 2025 it reduced again to £12 million. Fortunately, rampant health inflation and the rapid and costly improvement in treatments, drugs and equipment have at last been recognised as a reality. £12 million has now been added to next year's budget in advance in order to give the Health team a more honest chance of coming through within budget at the end of 2026. Once again, this is no more new money than the sums that the Deputy herself applied to supplement the service's budget in previous years. In any event, whatever funds are applied to Health, they are all wholly dependent on the service achieving £9 million worth of savings in 2026. This increase is much lower than it appears and, once again, this small balance can hardly be definable as new money. Taken together, the figures described demonstrate that the actual Health budget increase proposed for 2026 is not £60 million as claimed by Deputy Moore, but is instead approximately £15 million over inflation. That is £8 million for digital development, £4 million for preventative health measures, an additional £3 million to help with higher health inflation and to assist with delivering the additional treatments and drugs that will become available over the next 12 months. In addition to these inaccuracies, the Deputy, in a report to the amendment, asserts that the former Minister for Health and Social Services was close to bringing a proposal to the Assembly which would not only have sustained the very savings that we contending to deliver, but also a plan to transform the health service into a high quality, efficient service. I have to tell Members that if there was such a plan, it was a very well-kept secret. Indeed, unless everyone within the health service has been less than honest with me, not one of them was able to point me to any substantive work in progress, despite numerous enquiries from me when I first took office. Finally, we are informed that in addition to the fictional £60 million overspend, we have no costed workforce strategy and no grip on the spiralling costs associated with the hospital development. Well, I do not believe that we have kept the work currently being done on the workforce strategy a secret, and I am sure that most of us here are well aware that the hospital

projects remains within budget almost 2 years after the Deputy's departure from office. I think if the Deputy was completely honest with herself, even she knows that a reduction of the scale proposed would have catastrophic consequences. No cost-of-living increase for staff, a huge reduction in services, no investment in the digital system that has been rated at zero in the internationally recognised H.I.M. (Hope in Medicine) scale, no investment in preventative health measures and additional spending cuts of £22 million to fund the recently transferred ambulance service. It is just too hideous to contemplate. I think I will conclude now by saying that if any Member of the Assembly thinks that improving financial control in 2026 is best achieved by savaging the Health budget to the tune of £57 million, it will take a better man than me to persuade them otherwise. I think I will leave it there.

#### **The Bailiff:**

Does any other Member else wish to speak on this amendment? If no one else wishes to speak, I call upon Deputy Moore to reply.

#### **2.10.9 Deputy K.L. Moore:**

I thank all of those who have spoken. I think there have been some very thoughtful and considered speeches and, as Deputy Mézec rightly observed, it is important and healthy actually for us all to engage with the issues at stake and our political approaches to them. Without, I think, going into the detail of each and every speech, I am quite aware of what the result of this vote will be when we get to it. I think it is important to have had this conversation. It is important to raise these issues because there is a huge amount of concern out there in the public. We need to continue to challenge ourselves and we need to do better. I would like to just make it extremely clear what I did say about public servants, because I have a huge amount of respect for them and I thank them all for their public service commitment. I think I would like to say exactly what I did say, just for the avoidance of any doubt, I said: "I have a great deal of respect for many public servants, particularly those on the front line. The majority demonstrate on a daily basis a commitment to public service" and I gave a simple example of one minor issue with performance management, but surmised that say there were 10 similar issues across the organisation than that perhaps could lead to a considerable saving. But when we consider at the heart of this amendment, yes, it is a large amount of money, yes, it would equal a lot of work and it would be a great challenge, but this is not something that would have to be started on 1st January. As I said in my opening speech, this is something where there are reports that sit on dusty shelves, there is work that has been begun and there would be many weeks to start to move and take a different approach to achieve these savings by the year end. It would actually be by the year end that we would have to reach the position. It is sometimes necessary to set a challenge to an organisation. I think everybody around the Assembly has acknowledged that we can see the issue at hand. We know what the F.P.P. have said. They have said they are concerned about public debt, which will hit 17 per cent of G.D.P. (Gross Domestic Product). They have said they are concerned about spending outstripping revenue. This is on our watch. Agreeing to this Budget means that we are saying that is okay. It does not mean that we are taking it in hand and responding to the challenge. I think I will end simply by sharing the wise words of the former chief executive of Jersey Finance in a recent article he wrote: "A more disciplined state is not an ideological preference, it is a requirement for Jersey's long-term stability and for future generations who will inherit the decisions that we make today." I move the amendment and I ask for the appel.

#### **The Bailiff:**

The appel has been called for. Members are invited to return to their seats and I ask the Greffier to open the voting. If all Members have had the opportunity of casting their votes, I ask the Greffier to close the voting. I can announce the amendment has been rejected:

|                           |  |                          |  |                     |
|---------------------------|--|--------------------------|--|---------------------|
| <b>POUR: 2</b>            |  | <b>CONTRE: 40</b>        |  | <b>ABSTAINED: 1</b> |
| Connétable of St. Brelade |  | Connétable of St. Helier |  | Deputy K.M. Wilson  |

|                   |  |                             |  |  |
|-------------------|--|-----------------------------|--|--|
| Deputy K.L. Moore |  | Connétable of Trinity       |  |  |
|                   |  | Connétable of St. John      |  |  |
|                   |  | Connétable of St. Clement   |  |  |
|                   |  | Connétable of Grouville     |  |  |
|                   |  | Connétable of St. Ouen      |  |  |
|                   |  | Connétable of St. Mary      |  |  |
|                   |  | Connétable of St. Saviour   |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy G.P. Southern        |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy C.F. Labey           |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy M. Tadier            |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy L.M.C. Doublet       |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy K.F. Morel           |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat      |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy S.M. Ahier           |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy R.J. Ward            |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy C.S. Alves           |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy I. Gardiner          |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy I.J. Gorst           |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy L.J. Farnham         |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy S.Y. Mézec           |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy Sir P.M. Bailhache   |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy T.A. Coles           |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy B.B. de S.V.M. Porée |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy H.M. Miles           |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy M.R. Scott           |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy J. Renouf            |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy C.D. Curtis          |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy L.V. Feltham         |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy R.E. Binet           |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy H.L. Jeune           |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy M.E. Millar          |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy A. Howell            |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy T.J.A. Binet         |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy M.R. Ferey           |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy R.S. Kovacs          |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy A.F. Curtis          |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy B. Ward              |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson    |  |  |
|                   |  | Deputy M.B. Andrews         |  |  |

**Deputy L.J. Farnham of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter:**

I wonder if the Constable will be free for a meeting in 5 minutes. [Laughter]

**2.11 Proposed Budget (Government Plan) 2026-2029 (P.70/2025): twenty-third amendment (P.70/2025 Amd.(23)) - Increased Police funding**

**The Bailiff:**

We now move on to the twenty-third amendment proposed by the Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel. I asked the Greffier to read the amendment.

**The Deputy Greffier of the States:**

Page 3, paragraph (b)(viii) – After the words “as set out in the Appendix 2 – Summary Tables (5)(i) and (ii) of the Report” insert the words – “, except that, in Summary Table 5(i), the head of

expenditure for “Health and Care Jersey” shall be reduced by £240,000 and the head of expenditure entitled “States of Jersey Police” shall be increased by £240,000”.

**2.11.1 Deputy C.D. Curtis of St. Helier Central (Chair, Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel):**

This amendment is based on detailed written submissions from the Police Authority, from many statements made by the police chief and other police officers in many public hearings over the last few years. The Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny work is based on evidence. The reality is that the police force is underfunded. No growth in officer numbers for the last 6 years while the workload is increasing. During the last few weeks, our police chief has met with the panel and we have had follow up conversations to discuss this underfunding in more detail. What we have heard was that new and more complex types of crime are growing exponentially. It is not just the new V.A.W.G. (Violence Against Women and Girls) offences in which there is currently a 27 per cent increase in reported crimes, there is all the other extra crime generated through the online world, a growing number of scams and fraud. There are more than 100 registered sex offenders to keep track of. There are the large numbers of children in distress who go missing, which has been left to the police to manage. There are new maritime laws, new dog laws. In the words of our police chief, “Without new funding it is death by 1,000 cuts.” The intention of this amendment is to allow for some interim funding to try and prevent some of the immediate cuts. It is intentionally for one year only because we believe that a thorough overhaul of the police budget is necessary, which should take place as soon as possible next year with the nature of many crimes changing and becoming more complex. This year there has been a massive increase in mental health-related incidents. A thorough review of the police budget for the next few years is very much needed.

[16:00]

Without recognition of the changing nature of crime and the workload, there will be more consequential impacts, which we can see now with the numbers of community police being cut from 9 to 6. That is not good news. The original plan was to have 12. The community police provide that bridge for people, especially young people, to see that the police are there to help and protect them. They are also a huge support for the Parishes working with our Honorary Police. Besides, overall police numbers are lower than many other jurisdictions. For instance, Jersey has 1.9 officers per thousand population, the U.K. average is 2.1, Guernsey 2.2, Isle of Man 2.7 and Gibraltar 7.6. While Jersey is supported by the Honorary Police, we have to keep in mind that some of the Parishes are finding it difficult to recruit more honorary officers, possibly due to today’s busy lifestyles. So there is even more pressure on our States Police Force. The Chef de Police has stated that the cut in community police officers will add to the existing strain on the Honorary Police force. The planned enhancement of the Digital Forensics Unit has been cut by £47,000. The Digital Forensics Unit contributes to approximately 90 per cent of police investigations, because nearly all crimes now involve technology, including phones, laptops, and other devices. Digital Forensics helps to make savings and speed up the criminal proceedings by generating early guilty pleas and delivering justice to victims more swiftly. Providing insufficient funding for this unit is not cost effective. It means longer drawn-out investigations which cost a lot more. Now I quote from the Budget submission from the Jersey Police Authority which is: “Staff costs account for around £28.5 million or 91 per cent of total expenditure, leaving very limited flexibility within the remaining budget to absorb operational pressures, cost inflation or strategic investments. This static funding position means that once inflation and unavoidable cost growth are considered, the States of Jersey Police will face a real terms decline in available resources over the next 4 years.” The panel hopes that the Assembly gets the true picture of the police force’s current funding and future outlook and will support our amendment. While we ask for the funding to be taken from the Health budget, we do not wish to have any negative impact on the health service, but as a responsible panel we have to take funding from where we think is most appropriate. We settled on the Health budget for 2 reasons but as a

responsible panel we have to take funding from where we think is most appropriate. We settled on the Health budget for 2 reasons. Firstly, the insufficient police budget - as I have already described - will have an impact on public health. By cutting community policing and the Digital Forensics Unit we could see an increase in crime and a greater impact on physical and mental health. Full support for these vital aspects of the police force could well mean less need for some responsive health services. So this is a matter of forward thinking rather than firefighting. Secondly, the Health budget at £381 million and, therefore, has the most potential for reassessment. That is a fundamental principle of fiscal management and we are looking for less than 0.1 per cent of that budget. I do thank the Minister for Health and Social Services for his helpful communications on this matter but I would have hoped that the Government could have come to some sort of agreement in support of this amendment. So, to conclude, the aim of this amendment is to supply a small amount of interim funding while the Government proceeds with a comprehensive review of the police budget. I ask the Assembly to support our police force and to vote for this amendment.

#### **The Bailiff:**

Is the amendment seconded? **[Seconded]**

#### **2.11.2 Deputy M.E. Millar of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:**

Following the debate on the budget of the Environment Department we are seeking to accept this amendment, and Treasury officials are working on amendments now which will deal with both the additional funding for Environment and this proposed funding for the police. I would say that it is not likely to come purely from the Health Department and will be shared across a number of departments because that is the only logical way we can do it. But we will be bringing something forward to do that. I do have some words to say on the amendment, aside from giving that commitment that we will be looking to accept. We all share the commitment; we recognise that importance that Members place in community policing, and we all know that feeling safe is one of the most important factors that makes Jersey such a wonderful place to live and raise a family. As reported by Statistics Jersey's Better Life Index, Jersey ranks first for safety out of 455 regions. This is something we should celebrate; it is not something we should take for granted. The Minister for Justice and Home Affairs I am sure will have something to say on this, and she is conscious of the pressures in police funding and is committed to addressing them in a strategic way. Our police force do an exemplary job in keeping Islanders safe but, as with all areas across the public service, are being asked to operate with increasing efficiencies to meet savings requirements. I must stress, however, that it is entirely inappropriate for the Assembly to seek to allocate funds for specific operational purposes. Operational decisions such as how resources are deployed are matters for the Chief of Police and his team, and there is no guarantee that by extending additional funding to the police now it will be spent in any way other than as in the discretion of the Chief of Police. That is what separation of powers is all about, and it is entirely inappropriate for us to interfere with how the Police Chief makes operational decisions, so that underlies our acceptance of that amendment. Next year we will of course be discussing legislative changes to address violence against women and girls. This is an issue we cannot ignore and it will require more resources. Those needs will be fully analysed and quantified in time for the debate, allowing them to be properly considered in the Budget for 2027. That is the right approach: a strategic system-wide plan which would see resources directed where demand is greatest, and capture the implications across the criminal justice system, rather than being limited to the police alone. For now our immediate concern is ensuring that the police have sufficient funding for 2026, and I believe the Chief of Police himself has confirmed he is content with the position for 2026. I have already signed a letter of comfort guaranteeing that they can recruit and train 10 new officers in 2026. We are also planning to use balances in the Criminal Offences Confiscation Fund to invest in technology for digital forensics team. These actions will make a real, meaningful difference to the police budget and we already have them in hand. As I say, our budget proposes additional allocations to Health and Care Jersey to ensure they can meet their commitments.

While the proposed amount removed from the Health budget may seem small, it will add to the financial pressures faced by the department, which has already committed to delivering £9 million of savings in 2026. So, while we accept the amendment, subject to those caveats, we will present an amendment sharing the cost of this and the Environment funding as soon as we can.

### **2.11.3 Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat of St. Helier North:**

It has been my stated position that police funding has eroded over many years and needs addressing. This was my view as a Back-Bencher and remains my view as the responsible Minister. However, I am part of a team and I consider myself a team player. I know my fellow Ministers understood my position in relation to police funding, and perhaps they are sick of hearing it, but I know I have their support, and I have throughout this situation in relation to funding. In particular, I would like to thank the Minister for Social Security and the Minister for Health and Social Services because we have worked hard in relation to trying to resolve it. I am also grateful to the Minister for Treasury and Resources for providing the possibility of recruiting 10 new police officers by a letter of comfort, and you will all be pleased that those officers will be joining the force in January, which is a positive thing because, let us remember, that all our police officers are community officers, not just those that are put into a community team. It is a good outcome for myself as well as for the States of Jersey Police that we have been able to and are working on this funding. The one thing I would like to comment on, which has already been mentioned by the Minister for Treasury and Resources, is the operational independence. As a former police officer and now politician and Minister I have a unique perspective of the operational independence of the police. Members will not be surprised it is something which I feel strongly about, and in fact I voted against having States Members on the Police Authority back when it was brought to the Assembly. The fundamental principle is a cornerstone of policing and ensures that the police operate impartially and without undue influence. We must all commit to uphold this. I think the amendment brought by the panel was a good amendment. I do not believe that in bringing this amendment the panel had any intention to undermine the principle, far from it, but Members must be wary of the precedent this might set. From my perspective, I would also like to say that I support the changes in relation to the proposal on the community policing team, which will remain dedicated community officers for Parishes as part of a team with the Offender Management Unit who manage individuals living in our community who could pose a risk to public safety. It is a model that has been used in forces elsewhere and will make best use of our community officers in order to maximise public safety. The force have my full support in implementing this change, and I would urge those Members who have concerns in relation to that possibility to keep an open mind. I am delighted that we are able to find the funding for this and, of course, in the new year there will be legislation brought forward. With that legislation there will be identified the resources that are required for the States of Jersey Police, but let us not forget that it is not only the States of Jersey Police that will need funding in relation to these changes. There will need to be potential funding for the Legal Advisers' Department and other agencies that work with victims. When the legislation comes that review of resources will be made and at that time I would look forward to the support of the Assembly.

### **2.11.4 Connétable M.A. Labey of Grouville:**

As vice chair of the panel, I thank the chair for putting this case forward. At this time, I understand completely that the budget of the police force is an independent one and is adhered to by the police chief, but I would like to pay tribute to the community police officers that operate throughout the Island at this time because they do provide us with a great deal of support in the Parishes throughout the Island. I would like the Minister to pass that on to the police chief, as I am sure we will have the opportunity to do so. Our police force is running at 50 per cent of its actual capacity at the moment. Island-wide the Honorary Police is 57 per cent of its capacity. I know my Connétable colleague behind me, his officers are full, but most Parishes are not. So any support that we can and do get is very much appreciated. We see our community police officers at least twice a month. When I pull

up into the Parish Hall and see a police car I do feel slightly insecure for a few moments, I have to admit, but then I go in and see the wonderful community officers and why they are there to talk to us about any issues we may have. They give us a great deal of daytime support because a lot of our officers are at work during the day, and they give us a great deal of help. So I would just like to say that on behalf of my parish.

#### **2.11.5 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:**

I am slightly concerned by 2 things, even though the Government has said that they are accepting this amendment, but 2 things I feel that are necessary to put on the record. One is the question around process, the process by which the Chief of Police felt it was necessary to go to a Scrutiny Panel to say that he ultimately needed more money, or at least that the Scrutiny Panel feel that they need to bring this.

[16:15]

But I am slightly perplexed as to whether or not the police actually do need more money. I will give an example of the recent court case of Natalie Strecker - which we are allowed to talk about now because it has been concluded - where we have a situation where 5 or 6 police officers, I understand, turn up at a middle-aged woman's house who is not in any way violent or a threat to anybody, minding her own business effectively. They feel it is a good use of officer time to spare 5 or 6 officers at that time of the morning, early in the morning, to go around and arrest her, I understand, to ultimately still bring her in for questioning which she would have probably done voluntarily at that point anyway. It adds to my concern when I also hear her own comments, which I will quote now, that: "I am a care survivor, a survivor of abuse, because of the failings of our Government and institutions as a child and I walk out of court today with my head held high." But she did say that the whole process that the police had subjected her to, as well as the courts: "This has been a personally incredibly traumatic and dehumanising time, compounded by old wounds triggered by the manner in which I was arrested." I do wonder if this is the same police force that we are talking about that still needs extra funding. Certainly I am in a very difficult position here because as somebody who traditionally will stand up for front line services as a proud trade unionist, I do have concerns that the police are pleading poverty when they seem to have this excess within their department to be able to put on such excessive force early in the morning to arrest ultimately somebody who was proven to be an innocent woman. I wonder whether some of that money will perhaps be used for training about how to deal with care leavers and not pursue complaints that I understand were made by possibly one member of the public, in which she was tried under the Jersey system and ultimately acquitted. How much money did the police waste in that process of this innocent woman that could be money that they are asking to get back now for the next year or so? Something does not really stack up for me. So certainly I cannot support this additional funding when there has been a waste of money demonstrated by the police, who I think have not shown that they have learnt their lesson. There has been no apology issued, I do not think, by the police for what ultimately was an undue arrest of this innocent woman, but at the same time I am not going to press the contre button because I do believe in our public services. But I do think that there are bigger questions that need to be answered by the police on this particular case, and the juxtaposition of this proposition that is being brought to the Assembly to ask for more money for this police force, which I think still needs to get its house in order in this area, is something which I find very regrettable.

#### **2.11.6 Deputy M.R. Scott of St. Brelade:**

I am just speaking in response to Deputy Tadier's comment just now. I am noting that the court did not criticise the police itself; that there is a complaints process against the police which any member of the public can refer to. I would like to remind and encourage people to complain where they have the right to complain, and I would encourage the States Assembly to support complaints procedures



and their improvement generally, which is why I have been honoured to do the work I have done so far in on the ombudsman.

#### **2.11.7 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier:**

Deputy Scott has got there before me and, as they say, I was not going to speak on this debate because the amendment has been accepted. But it is quite wrong for Deputy Tadier to say the things that he did about the States of Jersey Police Force. Quite wrong. **[Approbation]** He is doing so because he has privilege to say what he likes and we know that Deputy Tadier makes frequent speeches, some of which are relevant but in a kind of funny way, but the irrelevance of today's speech to my mind was verging on the malicious. The people he is speaking about have no right of defence. I think that this Assembly needs to be very careful about those kind of speeches. It reminded me a bit about Deputy Moore's swipe at civil servants who she claimed were ganging up against her when she was Chief Minister. We simply cannot use the States debate - particularly on a Budget - to get these kind of personal gripes off our chest. It is not appropriate and I think that Deputy Tadier should withdraw his remarks because the recent court case that has taken place clearly is a matter that will be investigated and talked about and researched and commented on, but this is not the place to do it, and I very much regret that he happened to make those comments. **[Approbation]**

#### **The Bailiff:**

Does anyone else wish to speak on this amendment? I call upon the chair of the panel to reply.

#### **2.11.8 Deputy C.D. Curtis:**

I am pleased to see that the Council of Ministers has recognised the need for this interim funding. I am grateful for that. Of course the panel understands police independence; it is ultimately for the police chief to decide how to allocate his budget. The fact remains that cuts are being made to community policing and to the Digital Forensics Unit because the budget is insufficient. Yes, there are 10 new officers starting in January; they will be in training and not fully ready for 2 years. This amendment simply asks for interim funding while a further review is I think going to be carried out to help prevent cuts, which will have an impact. I thank all those who have spoken, and I echo the appreciative comments made by the Connétable of Grouville about the community police officers. I ask the Assembly to support our police force and vote for the amendment.

#### **The Bailiff:**

The appel has been called for. Members are invited to return to their seats. I ask the Greffier to open the voting. If all Members have had the opportunity of casting their votes I ask the Greffier to close the voting. I can announce that the amendment has been adopted:

| <b>POUR: 36</b>           |  | <b>CONTRE: 5</b>          |  | <b>ABSTAINED: 1</b> |
|---------------------------|--|---------------------------|--|---------------------|
| Connétable of St. Helier  |  | Deputy K.L. Moore         |  | Deputy M. Tadier    |
| Connétable of Trinity     |  | Deputy Sir P.M. Bailhache |  |                     |
| Connétable of St. John    |  | Deputy A.F. Curtis        |  |                     |
| Connétable of St. Clement |  | Deputy K.M. Wilson        |  |                     |
| Connétable of Grouville   |  | Deputy M.B. Andrews       |  |                     |
| Connétable of St. Ouen    |  |                           |  |                     |
| Connétable of St. Mary    |  |                           |  |                     |
| Connétable of St. Saviour |  |                           |  |                     |
| Deputy G.P. Southern      |  |                           |  |                     |
| Deputy C.F. Labey         |  |                           |  |                     |
| Deputy S.G. Luce          |  |                           |  |                     |
| Deputy K.F. Morel         |  |                           |  |                     |
| Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat    |  |                           |  |                     |
| Deputy S.M. Ahier         |  |                           |  |                     |
| Deputy R.J. Ward          |  |                           |  |                     |

|                             |  |  |  |  |
|-----------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Deputy C.S. Alves           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy I. Gardiner          |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy I.J. Gorst           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy L.J. Farnham         |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy S.Y. Mézec           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy T.A. Coles           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy B.B. de S.V.M. Porée |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy H.M. Miles           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy M.R. Scott           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy J. Renouf            |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy C.D. Curtis          |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy L.V. Feltham         |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy R.E. Binet           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy H.L. Jeune           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy M.E. Millar          |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy A. Howell            |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy T.J.A. Binet         |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy M.R. Ferey           |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy R.S. Kovacs          |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy B. Ward              |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson    |  |  |  |  |

## **2.12 Proposed Budget (Government Plan) 2026-2029 (P.70/2025): twenty-second amendment (P.70/2025 Amd.(22) - Victoria Marine Lake – Repair and Maintenance**

### **The Bailiff:**

We now move on to the twenty-second amendment lodged by Deputy Gardiner, and I ask the Greffier to read the amendment.

### **The Deputy Greffier of the States:**

Page 3, paragraph (b)(viii) - After the words “Summary Tables 5(i) and (ii) of the Report” insert the words - “, except that - (a) in Summary Table 5(i), the head of expenditure for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture should be reduced by £200,000, such funding to be allocated from the budget for Arts, Heritage and Culture; and (b) in Summary Table 5(ii), within the section entitled Infrastructure, there should be inserted a new row entitled “Victoria Marine Lake - Repair” with an allocation of £400,000 for 2026, and a decrease of £200,000 to the row entitled Infrastructure Rolling Vote and Public Realm”. Page 3, paragraph (b)(xii) - After the words “in the Appendix to the accompanying report” insert the words - “, except that on page 60, after the words ‘to revitalise St. Helier.’ there should be inserted a new paragraph as follows - ‘The Budget allocates £400,000 for 2026 to provide funding for the specific repair for the Victoria Marine Lake, £200,000 of the funding required to be allocated from the funding for Arts, Culture and Heritage and £200,000 from the Infrastructure Rolling Vote. The Minister for Treasury and Resources will request funding from the States of Jersey Development Company of a further £200,000 to support the repairs in addition to the Government funding. Going forward the Marine Lake will be allocated up to £60,000 per year from the Head of Expenditure for Infrastructure. During 2026 the Minister for Infrastructure will also seek expressions of interest from operators for the site.’ with any consequential amendments to be reflected as necessary throughout the Budget”.

### **2.12.1 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:**

The Victoria Marine Lake, or West Park Bathing Pool, opened in 1897 to mark Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee. It is one of our oldest public seawater pools, and more recently has been designated a grade IV listed heritage asset. Yet, despite its historic value and its importance to the community, it has been closed for more than 2 years because it is no longer structurally safe. My amendment proposes something that has happened before: a co-funding model to repair the lake. It is proportionate, grounded in precedent, and directly in line with our commitments for supporting community well-being, heritage protection, and revitalising St. Helier. I am sure that Members will be maybe happy to hear that my speech will be pretty short, concentrating on 7 points based on comments that we all received from the Council of Ministers. But I assume that Members read my report and I do not need to expand more, but I would like to address comments from the Council of Ministers. (1) Let me begin by correcting a point about listing, and I have spoken with the people who are working in heritage and who worked as architects. We have been told that listing may increase costs. May. That misunderstands the purpose of the listing. From my checks, listing identifies structures historic or of architectural significance; it does not prohibit alteration, it does not dictate materials in advance. It is designed to support a proposal that preserves or re-enforces a structure of heritage value. In the case of the Marine Lake, the 20th century concrete capping and reinforcement are part of its historic evaluation. They are essential to resisting marine forces. Removing these elements would accelerate structure failure and using marine grade concrete is a standard approach worldwide, and is both practical and entirely consistent with preserving the character of this unique structure. (2) Now let us turn to the objective costs are too uncertain, £600,000 might not be enough. They might, they might not be. I would like Members to think that a certainty is the result of an action, not a justification for it. The Government held assets for decades and it has more than 2 years since closure to commission a full, transparent engineering survey, yet the Minister did not publish any cost assessment. I have submitted a written question. They said it is commercially confidential. It is understandable, I do not have any problem, but at the same time if it is commercially confidential Members cannot receive comments saying that the costs are unknown. Either they are unknown or are they confidential but we needed to have some cost over the last 2 years. I calculated a publicly available benchmark and information on restoration in 2014 plus inflation plus deterioration. (3) We have heard that repairs should not be done now and we should focus to make it safe. I need to thank the Minister for Infrastructure because £65,000 has been spent in 2025 and I received photos from the group saying: "Looks like good progress was made, given tides. I can only guess that it was achieved in less than 10 days on the site." But we all know that it is not enough, important not to stop money. Money spent now does not reduce the future bill and does not return the asset to the community. Money spent now, we need to ensure that there will not be deterioration and we will continue and repair and the residents and visitors can enjoy swimming in 2026.

[16:30]

(4) We have been told that usage was low after 2014 and there is no public case. That is factually incorrect. Since closure, public engagement has been remarkable. Not many petitions gathered over 1,500 signatures in 6 weeks. Dozens participated in meetings, they came to talk to me, around 50 came to talk to the Minister and the Constable, or they are writing to the Members. Islanders across all generations, and interestingly enough in particular older residents, have explained the health, heritage and well-being benefits of the pool. This is I think one of the most publicly-discussed community issues. I know there are several others but the mandate is clear, we did have a clear petition. (5) The Minister said that neither the Infrastructure Rolling Vote nor Heritage Fund can be used, yet the budget itself defines Rolling Vote as funding for sea defences, public realm, and vital infrastructure. The Marine Lake and marine wall is I would say all 3. The heritage spending is assessed under U.N.E.S.C.O. (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) categories, which include protection of listed structures. If restoring a grade IV public listed pool does not qualify as heritage protection, I am not sure what would. (6) Ministers urge that S.o.J.D.C.

(States of Jersey Development Company) should not contribute, but S.o.J.D.C. did contribute £100,000 in 2014 for restoration under the same remit. This amendment simply repeats a successful precedent combining Government, Parish and S.o.J.D.C. co-funding model that delivered real public value. The objection ignores both history and practicality. I would also challenge, if the Victoria Marine Lake is not part of the S.o.J.D.C. waterfront ambition ... it is a question, where we have a joint thinking. Finally, Ministers should wait for an expression of interest. I welcome that there will be an expression of interest in 2026 but, to be clear, I asked for engagement back in September from Jersey Property Holdings because there were operators that actively approached me with ideas of various things that can revitalise the area and bring life back to that area which is loved and used by thousands of Islanders. Members, doing nothing is the most expensive option. Each winter more of the walls are lost. Each delay increases repair cost. Each year indecision undermines the chance of a community partnership. I believe this co-funding, in which everyone can participate, will protect heritage assets, support public health, enhance the waterfront and restore a cherished community resource. I am looking to hear Members views and I move the amendment.

**The Bailiff:**

Is the proposition seconded? **[Seconded]**

**2.12.2 Connétable A.N. Jehan of St. John:**

Firstly I would like to thank Deputy Gardiner for her engagement with me in recent months regarding the Victoria Marine Lake. We have had a number of helpful and constructive discussions and Deputy Gardiner was good enough to meet me before lodging this amendment, and I appreciate that courtesy. When I attended a public meeting about the Victoria Marine Lake on 4th September - a well-attended meeting which Deputy Gardiner organised - I said then that my priority was to make the structure safe and then to look at its full repair. My position has not changed. My first priority is safety. I have got a moral obligation to do that and a legal obligation to do that. That is why we have spent some £65,000 this year on the structure, which I have to say is in a very poor condition at present. We will need to spend more next year to make it even stronger. I emphasise though that until we undertake a full repair of the Marine Lake the site will not be completely safe. As the tide comes up on a rough day, any day, it could make holes in that wall. In due course we can look at making the Marine Lake operational again, but there are a number of variables in that respect which, in my view, this amendment unfortunately jumps ahead of. There are some Islanders who are passionate about the Victoria Marine Lake and want it to be repaired and operational again as soon as possible. Many of those were among the 1,700 who signed a petition on the subject, and their voices have been heard. Equally, I have been stopped in the street by a number of people who have told me not to spend another penny on this site and to focus on other priorities. As I find out all too often in this job, there is nothing like consensus. **[Laughter]** Earlier this year my officers in Property Holdings procured estimate costs for the repair of the Marine Lake. We did not and do not have the funding available but we had an idea of what would be needed to repair the structure. Subsequently, however, the Marine Lake has been given a grade IV listing which does change the nature of the work that can be carried out and the way it must be carried out. While I recognise that we will be able to replace concrete with concrete, the ability to do that in other areas I am told is limited. This means that a new estimate needs to be sought. Inevitably, that estimate will now very likely be more expensive, and for commercial confidence reasons we have not published detailed figures but, as we have said in the comments paper, we now think it is reasonable to believe that even the Deputy's request for £600,000 might not be sufficient for this project. Arguably, the worst outcome would be an insufficient budget for the work and setting ourselves up to fail from the outset. Our first priority in this respect must, therefore, be to acquire new, realistic costings for the repair of the now grade IV listed structure. There is more to this though. I remind Members that the Marine Lake - as the Deputy has pointed out - was repaired in 2014 with over £300,000 of public money, and the Bosdet Foundation were licensed to operate the lake. Unfortunately, the site failed. Public usage was low,

primarily because of the sea lettuce in the bay which regularly filled the pool, and the Bosdet Foundation withdrew from operating the site. Some might argue that we have been here before and we should learn from past mistakes. I am conscious of that, but I also met with those swimmers who used the site regularly who live in and around the West Park area and swim all year around. I, therefore, accept Deputy Gardiner's request for us to undertake an expressions of interest process for the Victoria Marine Lake. I think the Deputy is aware we have spoken to some who have previously expressed an interest. If we can find an independent or private party interested in running the site in the long term, and whether there might be some private funding available to support its repair. This in itself would help us to confirm if £60,000 is the correct figure for annual maintenance. This amendment runs ahead of all of that work. There is a separate but related question particularly in terms of this amendment as to whether public money is best spent at all on the Victoria Marine Lake. As I have said, that is a matter of varying opinions, but certainly in 2026 the effect of reallocating this money would be to the detriment of high priority core infrastructure and public realm investment, especially in St. Helier. This is a £2.5 million budget which is already under pressure from inflation and has existing commitments on it, including for Parish neighbourhood improvement areas, at the request of Deputy Gardiner. Once we know the cost of repairing the lake, and if it is deemed a viable project in view of competing priorities, we can identify an appropriate funding source which does not put at risk other key infrastructure projects. I will leave others to comment on the proposal to utilise money from the Arts, Culture and Heritage Fund and from the States of Jersey Development Company. The comments paper sets out the Council of Ministers' position in respect of both. In asking Members to reject this amendment, Ministers are not dismissing it out of hand, I am not dismissing it out of hand. I am saying the amendment is just a bit too early and that we have got some work to do first. That work - and notably the new costings for the repair and the expressions of interest process - will commence early next year. With that commitment, and in view of my remarks, I ask Members to vote against the amendment.

**The Bailiff:**

A point of clarification, Deputy Gardiner?

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Yes, a point of clarification.

**The Bailiff:**

Are you prepared to give way for a point of clarification? Yes, Deputy?

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Would the Minister advise does he anticipate that the residents and visitors will be able to swim this summer?

**The Connétable of St. John:**

Residents and visitors have been able to swim at all times, but we have asked them to do so with caution. It depends on the state of the tide. If the tide is outgoing then the risk becomes far greater for anybody in the water. We have done our very best to repair holes and we will continue to do so.

**2.12.3 Connétable M. O'D. Troy of St. Clement:**

There is potential for investment in this area by private enterprise, but also there is an opportunity I think with some different ideas regarding the seaside, whereby Property Services could commercialise the area and suit up the Marine Lake with the inland opportunity that is quite barren, which used to be the old café in the circular area. You have to be mindful of the weather and wind and rain and storms, but beach huts can be leased and rented, and a small café could be built in that area, which is something I thought about only last week. I have to lay down the principle that I am not interested in that myself, so before Facebook gets overexcited, this is an idea I give to Property

Services through the Minister for Infrastructure. Beach huts are a very old fashioned idea but they operate all the way along the south coast and even up as far north as Scotland. I would not sell them; I would rent them, and I would make them worthy enough that they can stand a certain amount of pressure from storms and high tides. But if you made a run of 10 to 12 of them above on the sea wall and had access and changed the sea wall whereby on one hand you had a slope, potentially for beach mobility, to make their headquarters with their mobility hut, and you provided a small café and perhaps also an information centre, you could rent all of that out and that would potentially pay for the general upkeep of the Victoria Lake. But, as I say, I give that to the Members as an idea. I cannot overstate that I am not interested in taking it on.

#### **2.12.4 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:**

When I first heard of the idea of revamping the Marine Lake I was certainly open minded and, in principle, interested to potentially support it. I have spoken to some people, including a gentleman in St. Brelade who I referenced earlier on, I think yesterday, who told me that as a young boy he used to play in it. But he said: “For goodness sake, do not spend any more money on that, it is just not viable. There is a reason it has fallen into disrepair and with the recent tidal changes that may have occurred from the reclamation it is just not going to work.” I did take that on board because I think he had experience and a much longer memory than I have. So while I think it is probably right that the Minister does look at whether this is ultimately viable, my question back to him is how much is that interim study going to cost to find out if we are in a position? Also, what is the implication for the grade IV listing on this? I do not want to speak from a position that sounds like I am anti-heritage but sometimes I can feel the public getting exasperated when they think: “Why would you put a listing, albeit a grade IV, on a dilapidated swimming pool which is no longer functioning and which has been patched together over the decades?” The grade IV listing criteria here says that places of special public heritage interest to Jersey being a good example of a particular historical period and architectural style. Well, it might be an example of a Victorian swimming pool but it is not a good example of a Victorian swimming pool, is it? It is a bad example of one because it has not been maintained. Some strange things have been said: you can only swim in this currently when the tide is coming up. How does that work then? So you wait for it to be full and for the tide to be coming up still when you can swim in it, when the tide will be there anyway so you could swim anywhere along that beach, you do not have to swim in the pool. The whole point of the pool is that you need to be able to swim in it when the tide is going out or the tide is not there because you would have to walk out on the very long and slow gradient beach. The other point is, just wait six hours, then you can swim anyway. In Jersey, just wait six hours, you have got a pool ready to go. It is called the sea. You can swim along the whole of St. Aubin’s Beach if you want to, if you think it is clean enough and you do not mind the seaweed. I would be much more interested to figure out, do we have a body that we give these kind of developments to?

[16:45]

If only there were some kind of body that delivered projects for Jersey’s Government. Maybe if it was called the Development Company or something like that, or the Jersey Development Company, and it had projects down on the waterfront that it was looking into. Maybe if the pool was not as far out at sea with nothing around it, no amenities, but if it was built close in so you did not even have to leave the land side and you could just jump into the pool. I am thinking probably like at Dinard. I have been to Dinard recently, I go there now and again with my wife, and they have got a lovely pool at the back. It is circular, it is very well used, full all the time, and it is well maintained. So I do think that part of St. Helier is crying out for a seawater pool that can be used all year around that is deep enough and have lanes that you can swim in, possibly even diving boards. The imagination can run wild. I just do not know if it is a good use to try and rebuild that Marine Lake. It is a great idea and I do not knock anyone who has ideas, I just think that there is perhaps something better on this occasion that we could be putting even the preliminary money into. So maybe if the Minister

could talk to whether he thinks even the small funds that he is looking at, at the moment could be put to better use elsewhere.

#### **2.12.5 Deputy L.V. Feltham of St. Helier Central:**

I rise to speak as a representative of St. Helier Central and I just want to explain my voting position on this particular amendment. I have sympathy for where the Deputy is coming from, and as somebody that lives in town and has West Park Beach as my local beach, of course I would love to imagine Victoria Marine Lake go back to its former glory, but I do have concerns around this amendment, and that is around viability and feasibility. I was comforted to hear the words of the Minister for Infrastructure. I know that he is committed and he has regular conversations with me when it comes to the summer months about the green stuff that we find on the beach. For me that is a much more pressing issue because at the moment we cannot use the sea when the tide is up. A lot of people do not feel that they can use that sea. For me that is the pressing issue for the West Park area. But I do want to address, a couple of people have talked about putting life back into West Park. West Park at summer is teeming with life. When you go at sunset to the slipway and around La Frégate area it is absolutely full of local families, families that live in St. Helier trying to enjoy the beach. This is where for me the priority is not necessarily the Marine Lake but ensuring that our beach is usable, and I thank the Minister for Infrastructure because I know that he has worked quite hard to make more areas of that beach accessible to families by the work that he and his team have done in removing as much green seaweed as they possibly can. But also it is important that we have family friendly activities there as well. I do want to impress upon the Assembly that this is a very, very well-used area, and that is in spite of the current state of the Marine Lake. So for me the issue here for this amendment is viability and feasibility. I do not think it is the right step to take right now, and I fully support the Minister for Infrastructure in his efforts to see what the best way forward is going to be. I would be more than happy to work with the Minister and Deputy Gardiner and our other local Deputies in that respect, so I will be voting against this amendment.

#### **2.12.6 Deputy K.F. Morel of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:**

I want to start where Deputy Tadier also hinted at, the danger here when you want to say what I see is to me something which is fairly obvious, but I am not anti-heritage, I am very pro Jersey's heritage. Jersey's heritage is something that I engage with all the time and I value and promote. But sometimes you have to let things go, and I think one of the dangers that we have in this Island is that we just do not want to let things go. The Victoria Marine Lake was set up in 1897, and I thank Deputy Gardiner for alerting me to that in her report, but it was set up with a purpose. Jersey had a burgeoning tourism sector, it had links to the U.K. particularly that it had not had before via train in the U.K. to the ports at Weymouth, et cetera, and then coming to Jersey. The Marine Lake, to enable people to swim there throughout the day, I can really understand how that would have been of huge benefit to the Island. But it is now almost 130 years later and the truth is not many people use it. I know there are some and I know 1,700 people signed a petition, and I know there will be some who say: "I use it X amount of times a week" or a month or a day. But the vast, vast majority of Islanders never ever use that lake. They go swimming in the sea. Some people have their own swimming pools. There is the Lido obviously at Havre des Pas, which is effectively another marine lake that people use as well. I completely agree with Deputy Feltham; I go to West Park through the summer and it is full of life, so there is no question of the area being devoid of human life. It is fantastic sitting on ... not even the seawall, I do not know how you describe it but the big concrete kind of blocks that make up the wall, and there are people drumming, people singing; it is an absolutely amazing area. That is without a functioning Marine Lake. I do worry when we are talking about the constraints on expenditure, and they are constraints which affect developing the economy, they affect developing education, developing health, developing policing, things like this. Yet we know there are these constraints but we are talking about spending probably far in excess of £400,000 maintaining a structure which was primarily a functional structure, it has not been made to look beautiful because it is not intended to

be an aesthetic structure, it is functional structure. We are talking about maintaining it in perpetuity. Well, if it was £300,000 in 2014, and from the Minister for Infrastructure's indication it is going to be at least £600,000 now, if not a lot more, what will it be in 50 years' time? What will it be in 60, 70, 80 years' time? It is going to be many millions and millions of pounds just to maintain something. Then the icing on the cake - and obviously it is planned so it may never come to fruition - is that my understanding of current waterfront plans puts an open air swimming pool right next to the Victoria Marine Lake, so we would have one open air pool full of seawater next to another open air pool, which to me makes no sense. I will not even refer to taking it from the arts, culture and heritage budget, I do not think it is relevant. As a States Assembly we need to start to draw lines and just say we cannot afford this, it has served its purpose, it is time to let it go, safely. So I do support the Minister for Infrastructure in maintaining that structure from a safe perspective, but unless there is a real way forward in the way that the Constable of St. Clement has suggested, where there is a way to pass it over to a private sector who can somehow fund it and make money, I just do not think it should be a priority of the States Assembly now or at any point in the future to maintain what will always be a structure in the sea that is being eroded, beaten, battered, and pulled apart by the elements, for something which we have plenty of provision for swimming in this Island; whether it is on the beach, in people's swimming pools, in public swimming pools, or future swimming pools yet to be built. So I do urge Members to reject this amendment.

#### **2.12.7 Deputy M.E. Millar of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:**

I would just like to make a few points regarding States of Jersey Development Company. Firstly, the funding from S.o.J.D.C. as proposed by the Deputy is by no means certain, and even if it was taken from J.D.C. it has a number of unintended consequences. Yes, in the great scheme of things the sum involved is relatively small, however, the proposed funding from S.o.J.D.C. establishes a potentially unhelpful and damaging precedent, whereby the reserves of S.o.J.D.C. - or indeed any States-owned entity - may be targeted for the spending plans of Government or to meet the objectives of individual Members. This is particularly relevant when the development works are quite clearly outside the remit of S.o.J.D.C., as the comments paper demonstrates. It must also be borne in mind that a dividend, as contemplated by the amendment, can only be requested by a shareholder, and would only be paid if the board of directors are satisfied that the company will remain solvent after payment of a dividend or at least able to meet its own objectives. We must remember that directors must act in the best interests of the company. The directors will be cognisant of the impact a dividend will have on the company's future plans and commitments. All these legal considerations re-enforce the point that the Deputy's amendment does not have certainty around the funding. The comments paper does demonstrate that there are tangible implications for S.o.J.D.C.'s future plans if a dividend is paid. The regeneration allocation has already been earmarked and fully allocated to the initial planning development works for Fort Regent. Alternatively, the reserves from historic profits are planned for reinvestment in future investment projects, including the South Hill development, the waterfront, and future I.F.C. (International Finance Centre) buildings. Each development is financed partly from the reserves of S.o.J.D.C. and the balance from third party lending, so pooling dividends from the reserves means less equity for S.o.J.D.C. to finance their own developments. Notwithstanding the legal issues and the harmful precedent this would create, I would suggest to the Assembly that we do not want to hamstring S.o.J.D.C. from continuing to progress their development programme, which all Islanders will ultimately be able to benefit from. In closing, it would be worth reminding ourselves that the Regeneration Steering Group has political oversight over S.o.J.D.C. and its activities. Through the guidance provided by the R.S.G. (Regeneration Steering Group), S.o.J.D.C. has already delivered significant public realm improvements that sit squarely within its remit. For these reasons I cannot support the amendment and I ask Members to reject.

#### **2.12.8 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:**



I am not going to support this amendment but I did want to say a few words, possibly unfashionably, in the defence of the listing process and the heritage protections that we have in this Island. There is a sort of unwritten assumption in some of the comments that have been made that listing means nothing can happen to a structure, that it will be preserved as it is for all time. Listing is a recognition that a building or structure or place is of significance, is of historical and heritage significance. It asks us to consider what we might do before we take action. That is part of what a modern society should do. We have various conventions that we have signed up to that says we will protect heritage assets. We have an independent process for determining them, it is on the recommendation of advisers at Jersey Heritage, and there is a graded system for deciding how significant and sometimes what parts of a structure are significant. I think that is something of incredible value to the Island. It is always the case that listing will appear in some circumstances to some people to be an obstacle to development that might want to take place. All that listing does, it does not say it will never happen, it calls attention to the significance and says: "If you are going to do something with this you must justify it. You must explain why the plans you have are sufficiently advantageous that they should overrule that heritage interest." I must say, in my own case for my own personal opinion with the Marine Lake, I may well err on the side of those who feel it has outlived its purpose, but I would certainly want to give it a lot of consideration. I would certainly want to read the heritage listing and look at the factors that led to it being listed. I think it would be a shame if the Assembly took those issues lightly. I am sure Members do not really feel that but I just detected a hint of that in some of the contributions, and I do want to stand in defence of that listing system and make those points.

[17:00]

But as I say, in this case I will not be supporting the amendment because I think, on the substantive issues, the arguments that the Government has made are strong.

#### **2.12.9 Deputy M.R. Scott of St. Brelade:**

I will not add too much to what has been said already. Certainly in terms of the utility value of the Marine Lake times have changed. There is also the question of how much money you really can put into supporting heritage. One thing that strikes me is that I know a very passionate group of people would like us to be putting more money in German bunkers, for example, which could be of historical interest going forwards. But again, how much can you really support things in this really? I wanted really to focus on the commercial opportunity. The Constable of St. Clement mentioned beach huts. In fact that is something that has been mentioned in the context of St. Brelade's Bay at the time the Wayside development was not developed for tourism, but that was something that somebody said: "Is it not really strange we do not have these in the Island?" But the real thing here is the whole kind of issue of private investment that we should be seeking and the obstacles to that. In this particular case, one particular one that has been identified by Deputy Feltham already, and indeed in the Council of Ministers' report, is sea lettuce. I think I might invite Deputy Gardiner to perhaps think a bit higher in terms of logical level and whether there is more to be had in the discussion with the Minister for Infrastructure here, because sea lettuce affects St. Brelade as well and its visitor economy. I know at one point there was a campaign group, Save Our Shoreline, who was even suggesting that maybe the answer was to have oyster beds in St. Aubin's Bay. I do not really know what has happened in terms of exploring the feasibility of that, but if you are perhaps thinking maybe we could go for private investment and looking at the obstacles in the way, that might be something to explore. In the meantime I will not be supporting this amendment for the reasons given by others.

#### **2.12.10 Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier Central:**

This is interesting because there is a lovely phrase I like which is when someone has moral in a corner of the truth, and I have to say I think Deputy Morel - and I do not often say this, to be honest about the Deputy - but he has moral in a corner of the truth here when he talks about heritage and what we have to do. It is very interesting to have the debate because as well I would like to thank the Constable

of Clement because I travel to that area a lot, I walk along the area most days and along the seafront there, and I think the idea of the beach huts is a really good idea and I think it could be extended further. This is what we need for that area, a really joined-up approach, not just one isolated area because of its heritage or not, but the whole area there in terms of what we can provide for people who are living in that area, because that beach is such an important beach for St. Helier as a whole. I must also raise the issue of the sea lettuce, and I think the Minister for Infrastructure may have received quite a few emails from myself as well over the years, because it makes the beaches unusable for a significant length of time and we have to address that. I do not know how a company would function there in the summer months, the most important months for any business, with the sea lettuce as it is, because that is when it blooms. The combination of factors that lead to that bloom will not be enhanced by doing any work down there, so I do not think it is going to affect it all. I would also say, as a St. Helier Deputy, that anything that would get in the way of the development of the improvement zones and the realm itself I cannot support. We need to get those zones and those realms improved as quickly as we possibly can for the residents of St. Helier. I am concerned about that and subsequently I cannot support this amendment.

#### **2.12.11 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier:**

I have been asked to point to a couple of things. Firstly, that £250,000 a year is spent on the clean-up of sea lettuce. As Deputy Feltham rightly observed, it is the summer sea lettuce that is the problem for thousands of people who would otherwise be swimming. Not everybody is a hardy winter swimmer like me. A lot of people wait for the warmer water, which is of course when the blooms happen, and I think that really must be a priority. It is of course, to answer Deputy Rob Ward, why the 2014 scheme failed. The Government, the Parish and S.o.J.D.C. put a lot of money into the restoration, Bosdet was ready to run it, lots of exciting plans, and the next summer you could not move in that sea for sludge and decomposing sea lettuce. So that is a really obvious practical problem involved in spending a lot of money on restoring the Marine Lake. However, the sea lettuce is only there for relatively a few months of the year, and if there are hundreds or thousands of people to the west of St. Helier, people for whom the Lido is a bit of a trek, who want to navigate Victoria Avenue and go for a swim in February the sea lettuce will not be a problem. But safety must be the priority and I think the Minister for Infrastructure is to be congratulated for recognising the problem. We have been down there together with officers, we have seen the large holes that create a vortex when the tide is going out that would be fatal to anyone who is swimming in the vicinity. It is absolutely right that steps are being taken to get those holes plugged, but how long will they be plugged for? They may well reopen in the new year; hopefully not when the new year swim is taking place in the area. We really have to get the safety right, and if that means putting rock armour around the structure - which it might well do, I am not a civil engineer but that would seem to me a good solution to put rock armour right around the whole thing - it would not look very nice, it certainly would not be consistent with the listing by Heritage, but it might mean that the thing could be held up for another decade or so. But with rising sea levels, what is the long term future of this facility? It has got to be pretty short. So I draw comfort from the fact that Jersey Development Company do have ambitious plans for a 50-metre seawater pool in the area if they get their plans approved to further regenerate that part of the waterfront. It is difficult for St. Helier Deputies, it is difficult for the Constable of St. Helier to say no to this amendment, but of course it is also a problem for me that Deputy Gardiner wants to take the money from a very small budget for the public realm. Anyone who is in town for the recent switch-on of the Christmas lights or the Battle of Flowers Christmas parade will have been struck by how the new public realm in New Cut, coming around into Broad Street, was so exploited by thousands of people who came to town to see the switch-on. There is no question about it, that the public realm investment equally in Halkett Street is making a material difference to people who live in town, people who come to town for work, people who visit Jersey. To take that money away and spend it on a structure which may well be broken down by the next big storm I think would not be wise. My final comment is about beach huts. I think beach huts are great and I think there are

places, particularly in the Harve des Pas area, where you could have beach huts, but I really would not put them at West Park. The last big storm I remember, the stones were flying across the wall, they took off the coping stones which require a digger to lift, they took those off and a few well-placed bits of granite through the beach huts will be the end of that project as well. We need to focus on the here and now. The Minister has agreed to carry out further work to see what the cost will be of repairs, whether it is feasible. I think we need to wait and see those reports and wait and see how much it would cost either to take the structure down or to make the structure safe for the next decade or so. So I urge Members to vote against the amendment.

**The Bailiff:**

Does anyone else wish to speak on this amendment? Deputy Gardiner.

**2.12.12 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Thank you to Members for contributing. I would like to address a couple of points, and regardless of the outcome of this vote - which I think it is pretty clear which way it is going - I am really proud that we did debate it because I do represent at least 1,700 parishioners who want this to happen. We can dismiss it but not many petitions raise these numbers. I do represent my parishioners as a St. Helier Deputy. Not many St. Helier parishioners have private swimming pools, and not many St. Helier parishioners have St. Brelade's Bay that gentleman talked about, or other beautiful beaches that we have in the countryside. I will not apologise that St. Helier actually does want to have safe swimming, and unfortunately West Park and anything connected to Victoria Avenue, we need to walk probably for 2 miles before the west part of St. Helier can go have a swim at any time of the day. This is why people signed the petition and asked to be considered. I understand the Minister has priorities, absolutely. Where was the Minister's priority when we signed off from the Strategic Reserve about £3 million to buy Grève de Lecq? How many of us swam at Grève de Lecq? But we had the Chief Minister and also the parishioners demanding to have Grève de Lecq for them, but they are not St. Helier parishioners. This amendment does talk about a joined-up approach with the businesses. I am really grateful for the Constable of St. Clement, he brought some new ideas, and people who approached me and talked about options for inflatable park and they were not worried much about sea lettuce; and I will address sea lettuce in a minute. An inflatable water park that is working across different places, and it is deep enough if it is properly secure, and it is big enough. We have kayaks there, the children go to try and do kayaking. Thank you to Deputy Renouf because Deputy Renouf raised a valid point. The heritage is not a restructure, it is just a suggestion to reflect what does it give. The joined-up approach could be between businesses and others. Now, sea lettuce, absolutely we do have a problem across the Island; £250,000 to clean the sea lettuce. But if somebody is operating the site they do not need to wait for all this time because it is daily they need to create the place that will be clean, and it is only for 3 months. Lots of parishioners who came to the meeting said they swim even with sea lettuce, but most of the time they swim without sea lettuce. Sea pool from S.o.J.D.C., and actually let us talk about S.o.J.D.C. I love what we said; S.o.J.D.C., the whole idea it was set 14 years ago: to deliver regeneration of St. Helier. How is it not in the remit of S.o.J.D.C. is beyond me. Another thing, the Minister for Treasury and Resources used hamstrung S.o.J.D.C. by £200,000. Wow. We have £200,000 that will come from S.o.J.D.C. They cannot contribute. The Constable and others mentioned St. Helier would have an open seawater swimming pool, when, and would it be for free, because most of the stuff that S.o.J.D.C. does, it is not for free. We need to pay, children need to pay, parents need to pay. If we are investing £400,000 restoring and bringing private investment to maintain and operate the site we would have 24/7 for all St. Helier parishioners and visitors and somebody who would like to come along to swim for free when they wish. It is absolutely right that people cannot swim when the tides are out because it is not safe and secure. I think that I will close here.

[17:15]

Islanders have been clear, they want this to be reopened. We could find millions for other projects but we struggle to commit a fraction to these assets to overwhelming public support. I am asking for the appel and I ask Members to consider how they would like to vote on this amendment.

**The Bailiff:**

The appel has been called for. Members are invited to return to their seats. I ask the Greffier to open the voting. If all Members have had the opportunity of casting their votes I ask the Greffier to close the voting. I can announce that the amendment has been rejected:

|                       |  |                             |  |                     |
|-----------------------|--|-----------------------------|--|---------------------|
| <b>POUR: 2</b>        |  | <b>CONTRE: 41</b>           |  | <b>ABSTAINED: 2</b> |
| Deputy L.M.C. Doublet |  | Connétable of St. Helier    |  | Deputy D.J. Warr    |
| Deputy I. Gardiner    |  | Connétable of St. Brelade   |  | Deputy K.M. Wilson  |
|                       |  | Connétable of Trinity       |  |                     |
|                       |  | Connétable of St. John      |  |                     |
|                       |  | Connétable of St. Clement   |  |                     |
|                       |  | Connétable of Grouville     |  |                     |
|                       |  | Connétable of St. Ouen      |  |                     |
|                       |  | Connétable of St. Mary      |  |                     |
|                       |  | Connétable of St. Saviour   |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy G.P. Southern        |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy C.F. Labey           |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy M. Tadier            |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy S.G. Luce            |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy K.F. Morel           |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat      |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy S.M. Ahier           |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy R.J. Ward            |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy C.S. Alves           |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy I.J. Gorst           |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy L.J. Farnham         |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy K.L. Moore           |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy S.Y. Mézec           |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy Sir P.M. Bailhache   |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy T.A. Coles           |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy B.B. de S.V.M. Porée |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy H.M. Miles           |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy M.R. Scott           |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy J. Renouf            |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy C.D. Curtis          |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy L.V. Feltham         |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy R.E. Binet           |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy H.L. Jeune           |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy M.E. Millar          |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy A. Howell            |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy T.J.A. Binet         |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy M.R. Ferey           |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy R.S. Kovacs          |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy A.F. Curtis          |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy B. Ward              |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson    |  |                     |
|                       |  | Deputy M.B. Andrews         |  |                     |

**The Deputy Greffier of the States:**

Those Members voting pour: Deputies Doublet and Gardiner. Those Members who abstained: Deputies Warr and Wilson.

**The Bailiff:**

The next matter listed for debate is the thirty-fourth amendment. Chair of Comité, do you still propose that matter?

**Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade:**

Yes, Sir, I propose it but would ask that it be withdrawn on the basis of a letter recently received in the last hour from the Minister for Treasury and Resources confirming that the States Greffe will be provided with funds via underspends to support the costs, and we would just agree to that based on the fact that under the Elections Law the States has to meet the additional costs of a Sunday election. So I would ask that it be withdrawn. **[Approbation]**

**The Bailiff:**

Thank you very much. The next matter to consider is the twenty-eighth amendment, lodged by Deputy Wilson, and I ask the Greffier to read the amendment.

**Deputy M.B. Andrews of St. Helier North:**

Sir, can I propose the adjournment? Considering there is only 10 minutes left it might be best for the proposer to be given the opportunity to maybe come back tomorrow and start afresh.

**The Bailiff:**

The mood seems to be against that. Do you want to vote on it? Do you want to withdraw the proposition? We can have a debate if you want to on it.

**Deputy M.B. Andrews:**

We can have a debate on it, yes, absolutely.

**The Bailiff:**

Is that seconded? **[Members: No]** Right. **[Laughter]** I ask the Greffier to ...

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

Sir, before you do that, I would still quite like to know if I could seek the leave to debate my amendment to my amendment, and I think we are going to go over ...

**The Bailiff:**

Do you want to do that now instead, do you?

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

Can we do that now just so I know where the ...

**The Bailiff:**

Are Members content to do that now instead? It needs to be done.

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

Not instead, but I just think if we could just ...

## **2.13 Reduction of Lodging Period**

**The Bailiff:**

The Greffier was about to read the twenty-eighth amendment but Deputy Tadier needs to propose that the lodging period be reduced in relation to the amendment to his third-third amendment. Are Members content to deal with that quickly? Yes, Deputy Tadier.

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

If I can just explain very quickly what is happening. I have put my own amendment to put Jërriais back in so it is included in the 1 per cent. I have come to an accommodation, we should call it, with the Ministers about what else can be put in. Effectively the Jersey Music Service would come under the 1 per cent, which I am happy to accept, but not Jersey Library and not the Community Compass. I think that is a good compromise and it clearly defines what constitutes arts, culture and heritage for the next few years I would hope at least. With that in mind ...

**The Bailiff:**

Will it save a debate on it?

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

Yes, so I would propose the ...

**The Bailiff:**

I was just wondering for Members' interest, not my own. [Laughter]

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

That is the headline, Sir. I think I would still have to propose my amendment as amended with the Minister's amendment, and it would be accepted and it would not need a long debate.

**The Bailiff:**

Is that proposal to reduce the lodging period seconded? [Seconded] Does anyone wish to speak on the proposal to reduce lodging period? Deputy Morel, you want to speak about it?

**2.13.2 Deputy K.F. Morel of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:**

Yes, please, Sir. Just because I appreciate there is some confusion. The Greffier may nod or otherwise but I understand the Council of Ministers' amendment to Deputy Tadier's amendment is still with the Greffe, so while we can debate and propose the reduced lodging period for Deputy Tadier's amendment I do not think we can do that yet for the Council of Ministers' amendment because it has not been published. So we will still be having another shortening of the lodging period proposal tomorrow for this subject, just to let Members know.

**2.13.3 Deputy A.F. Curtis of St. Clement:**

Just very quickly, I did not realise that we were going to have a habit of negotiating the Budget to the last minute. I do not think it is a bad thing that we are doing this, just perhaps if I had known I perhaps would have also brought things and reduced the lodging period. I thinking about this, a genuine thought, we all think about whether our lodging periods are still relevant for the way we can negotiate to get the best out of politics here. I just want to think about that.

**2.13.4 Deputy M.R. Scott of St. Brelade:**

I would prefer to debate both requests at the same time because they both relate to the same subject matter, the Council of Ministers and Deputy Tadier's amendment.

**The Bailiff:**

Well we cannot debate amendments not before us because the amendment that you have not lodged, you have not lodged. We can only debate this now, which is the reduction of lodging period in relation to this particular amendment.

**Deputy M.R. Scott:**

Sir, it is with the Greffe.

**The Bailiff:**

It has not been approved for lodging. I have not seen it; it has not been approved for lodging. Does anyone else wish to speak on this proposition that we reduce the lodging period in relation to the amendment to the thirty-third amendment? I call upon Deputy Tadier to reply.

**2.13.5 Deputy M. Tadier:**

It may be slightly clumsy timing and I should have probably done this earlier on in the day. I was expecting to do it earlier. It is simply to say that my amendment was going in anyway, irrespective of any further conversations that then happened with the Ministers. I think there was value to that amendment, which I would be happy to explain later if need be. I am grateful if Members would agree now and then when the further amendment is submitted then it obviously makes sense to approve that if Members are content tomorrow.

**The Bailiff:**

Those in favour of the lodging period being reduced, kindly show. Thank you very much, the lodging period is reduced and that matter can be debated.

**2.14 Proposed Budget (Government Plan) 2026-2029 (P.70/2025): twenty-eighth amendment (P.70/2025 Amd.(28)) - Funding for respite care**

**The Bailiff:**

The Greffier will now read the 28th amendment.

**The Deputy Greffier of the States:**

Page 4, paragraph (b)(viii) - After the words “in Appendix 2 - Summary Tables 5(i) and (ii) of the Report” insert the words - “, except that in Table 5(i), the Head of Expenditure for the Central Reserve should be decreased by £525,000, to be allocated from the growth bid funding for Assisted Dying, and the head of expenditure for Health and Care Jersey should be increased by £525,000, to be allocated to the funding line for Respite Care”. Page 3, paragraph (b)(xii) - After the words “as set in the Appendix to the accompanying Report” insert the words - “, except that, on page 42, in Table 9 - (i) the Head of Expenditure for Central Reserves should be decreased by £525,000 in 2026, £727,000 in 2027, £688,000 in 2028 and £718,000 in 2029, with funding allocated from the growth allocation for Assisted Dying; and (ii) the Revenue Head of Expenditure for Health and Care Jersey should be increased by £525,000 in 2026, £727,000 in 2027, £688,000 in 2028 and £718,000 in 2029, funding to be allocated to Respite care, with any consequential amendments to be reflected as necessary throughout the Budget.”.

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

Sir, can I propose the adjournment? I feel that it is a little unfair to ask somebody to speak very last thing when everybody is tired. In my limited time in the Assembly we have generally adjourned in this situation in the past. I think for a person who has an unlimited time to speak, should she wish to use it, it would be fairer to resume the debate tomorrow and have a clean debate right from the beginning.

**The Bailiff:**

Is that seconded? **[Seconded]** Do Members wish to adjourn? The Assembly stands adjourned until 9.30 a.m. tomorrow morning.

**ADJOURNMENT**

[17:25]