4.2 Deputy B.B. de S.V.M. Porée of St. Helier South of the Minister for Economic Development regarding delivery of the Better Business Support Package for employers and employees during the transition towards a living wage. (OQ.102/2026)

Will the Minister advise what measurable improvements in the availability and affordability ... sorry, wrong question. I will start again. Will the Minister provide an update regarding delivery of the Better Business Support Package for employers and employees during the transition towards a living wage; and will he detail any demonstrated outcomes of the £20 million allocated to the scheme?

Deputy F.G. Voisin of St. Helier North (The Minister for Economic Development):

The Better Business Support Scheme was introduced in 2025 as a 2-year programme to support businesses through the transition to a living wage. In the programme's first year, 337 local businesses benefited from funding.

[10:00]

There has been strong demand for the available funding, with productivity, visitor economy and skills grants all being fully subscribed by June 2026. Apprenticeship funding remains open for businesses investing in their employees. The programme has also encouraged private sector investment. For every £1 of government productivity funding, businesses have invested £1.40 of their own capital. Much of this investment was spent on-Island with 3 out of 4 projects, including expenditure with local companies. Targeted support has also been delivered to the agriculture, marine, and visitor economy sectors; 154 businesses benefited from the rural and marine funding via the Better Business Support Package in 2025. Other targeted support includes funding for route development, including securing new connections to Amsterdam, Paris, and Bordeaux, and supporting destination marketing through Visit Jersey. The latest figures reported in August showed overnight visitors up 9 per cent year-to-date to August, indicating positive momentum in visitor demand and engagement. Early results are encouraging, including strong demand on air routes and positive awareness of "Bergerac" among U.K. (United Kingdom) audiences. While these are encouraging early indicators, it is still too soon to draw firm conclusions about the programme's full economic impact. A final delivery report will be published in quarter one 2027, followed by an evaluation of the programme. This will assess the extent to which the package has delivered against its objectives, identify lessons learned and help inform the design of any future business support. The programme's longer-term economic impacts are expected to become clearer over time and will be considered as part of the evaluation.

4.2.1 Deputy B.B. de S.V.M. Porée:

What assessment, if any at all, has the Minister made or intends to do to assess if employees are seeing genuine improvement in their household income as a result of the scheme, and how is it going to be measured, if at all?

Deputy F.G. Voisin:

Following the question, I will make sure that that is part of the evaluation. What I can say is that we believe that, of the businesses that have been helped through the support package, 100,000 hours have been redeployed from low-productivity areas to high-productivity areas, which would indicate at least sustaining income, if not improving.

4.2.2 Deputy L.D. Carpenter of St. Helier Central:

Given the Minister's stated view that the minimum wage is strangling the economy, and that at the election he stood on a Value Jersey platform he now shares with a *J.E.P. (Jersey Evening Post)* columnist who advocated for scrapping the minimum wage, can the Minister confirm that he agrees with action point 3.3 and the Government's Common Strategic Policy that it will continue working towards a living wage?

Deputy F.G. Voisin:

Just a point of correction, I did not stand on a platform of scrapping the minimum wage. What I would say is that as far as the Common Strategic Policy is concerned, it is, I believe, everybody's intention on the Council of Ministers, my own included, to make people better off in Jersey. Quite how that is to be done, of course the Council of Ministers will be discussing in due course. But certainly that is the aim, to make people in Jersey better off.

4.2.3 Deputy L.D. Carpenter:

I am not sure that the Minister actually answered my question on whether he agrees with that particular action point.

Deputy F.G. Voisin:

I have just said, it is my view, my belief, my aim, to improve the lives of people in Jersey and make them better off.

4.2.4 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

I wish him all the best with that trickle-down economics. I have come across many individuals who have benefited from the productivity but only one last week who said that his application for his company in the tourism field had worked wonders this year. He was able to be much more productive and he asked me whether the scheme was going to continue next year. So that is the question I am asking the Minister. It seems to have been a successful scheme on the ground. Will it be continuing next year, and if not, why not?

Deputy F.G. Voisin:

Thank you, and may I congratulate the Deputy for an excellent question. On early indications it would seem that the scheme has been successful in some areas and it does raise the question, how are we, as a States Assembly, going to encourage investment in our economy? What we have seen, as I said in the answer to the first question, is that for every £1 of States money that has gone into the scheme, £1.40 has been invested by private businesses. It is really important that if we are going to grow the economy, we have got to unlock investment, and the funding scheme is a good way of doing that. So we may not have ... I am afraid that there is not the budget to continue the scheme in 2027 but it is certainly something that is going to be on my list of funding requirements for 2028, 2029 and 2030.

4.2.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

Would the Minister agree with 2 premises: the first is that businesses generally need stability and certainty rather is the question. The second is that when we have a scheme that is just running for one year, whether it is this - or another example would be the free entry to the museum, which I think lasted a couple of years - it is really important that we do not just chop and change when it comes to government policy and that we let a long enough period go by where we can properly assess the economic benefits or otherwise over a longer period than just one year. With that in mind, if the Minister does agree, and he says so, would he then be amenable to an amendment coming forward, either by himself or by somebody else, to secure funding for the Better Business Support Package to be in place again for next year, so that businesses can already start gearing up for next year for their applications?

Deputy F.G. Voisin:

Yes, I do agree that businesses need certainty for the future, but in this case the scheme was always a 2-year scheme. What I would say is that I think it is a bit premature to leap to bring an amendment to the Budget or the Common Strategic Policy, because I am currently working with private investors to explore the opportunity of a fund for private investors to invest in the local economy, and I think that if that gets nowhere then that would be a time to look for additional funding elsewhere. But at the moment I think that it is right to see if there is private money that can be invested instead of the States money.

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

In his answer the Minister mentioned roots connectivity. Number one, does the Minister agree that connectivity is key to the development of Jersey's economy and, following that, and given the success of

some of those European routes, will he commit to continuing support for some of those key European routes, one of which I understand the operator is very keen to expand in future years?

Deputy F.G. Voisin:

Yes, we are keen to continue to support those routes, and funding has already been earmarked to achieve that.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Good to hear somebody else praise the Better Business Support Scheme.

4.2.7 Deputy B. Ward of St. Clement:

The £20 million that was given to the investment fund obviously was provided by withholding money from the States grant that goes into the social security scheme, which I absolutely opposed. If further investment is being looked at and being considered for the future after this year, because that £20 million was for 2025 and for 2026, can the Minister give the full assurance that money is not taken from our social security grant?

Deputy F.G. Voisin:

I do not know that it is in my remit to decide whether to take money from the Social Security Fund or not. I think that is for the Minister for Social Security. If I am going to make a bid for increased funding for the department, then that will go to the Minister for Treasury and Resources, and how that money is provided is for him and possibly the Minister for Social Security.

4.2.8 Deputy B.B. de S.V.M. Porée:

Has there been any evidence of higher wages due to an increase in productivity from the Better Business Scheme?

Deputy F.G. Voisin:

I am not aware that there has been any evidence, but as I said in a previous answer to a question, I will make sure that that is included in the delivery report, which is to be published in the first quarter of 2027.