

3.5 Deputy L.D. Carpenter of St. Helier Central of the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning regarding the procurement process that took place in appointing Apetito to provide hot school meals for Government primary schools (OQ.81/2026).

Will the Minister explain the procurement process that took place in appointing Apetito to provide hot school meals for Government primary schools and advise whether any local companies were considered during the process?

Deputy C.D. Curtis of St. Helier Central (The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning):

The contract for the primary school meals programme was awarded following a formal tender procurement process in accordance with Government of Jersey procurement requirements. The tender was open to all eligible suppliers, including local companies, and local organisations did participate in the process. Importantly, suppliers were not required to submit a proposal covering all 22 primary schools under a single delivery model. The tender deliberately allowed flexibility in how services could be delivered, recognising the differing infrastructure and operational arrangements across schools. Bids were assessed against published criteria, including nutritional quality, social value, deliverability, resilience and value for money. The assessment was not based on whether a supplier was local or off-Island but on which proposal offered the strongest overall solution for Jersey's children, families and schools. Following a full evaluation against the published criteria, Apetito achieved the highest overall score and was, therefore, awarded the contract.

3.5.1 Deputy L.D. Carpenter:

Given that awarding government contracts to local companies boosts the Island economy and reduces capital leakage, could the Minister please confirm whether local companies are awarded any additional weighting within the procurement process or if it is simply a level playing field to all?

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

My understanding of the procurement process is that there is no additional weighting currently but there is a section around social value. Social value includes looking at opportunities for local employment, training and other skills opportunities. There is a consideration there for local companies. To point out though no bidder, including local bidders, proposed a wholly fresh locally-produced model capable of delivering meals at the scale required. The local bids we did receive also relied on imported meals from off-Island suppliers.

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

I am just wondering if this contract included any element which requires either the purchasing of locally-produced food or a pathway to greater purchasing of locally-produced food through the length of the contract.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

The procurement process itself does not cover that but what I have done in the past while in Scrutiny and have continued to do in my Ministerial position is to request that the successful bidder looks into obtaining more local produce through their wholesale supply as much as they possibly can.

3.5.3 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Does the Minister recognise that one of the strongest and fastest ways to encourage the use of local produce is through government contracts, such as school or hospital feeding programmes? Is that something that is understood by the Minister?

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes, of course. But, unfortunately, all the people who applied, even the local organisations, were going to import food from outside of the Island.

3.5.4 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour:

I am struggling a bit because my question was also asked by Deputy Morel. In terms of the local suppliers - and it does seem that the appetite, as it were, across the Assembly is to encourage this - is there any way that perhaps your department could link up with another department and look at the Rural Support Scheme and the funding that is going there and have some kind of pathway to more local produce being distributed, rather than just settling on this contract?

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

I think work towards a pathway would be a very beneficial thing to do. But at this stage we needed to ensure that there would be safe, nutritional and a steady supply of school meals over the next few years, so that had to be the priority. But it would be a very interesting course of action to liaise with others to see if there can be some progress towards more local food supply. I am encouraged to think that there are new people coming into the agricultural industry. I can see that there is progress there. But at this stage, our priority had to be the supply of school meals that would be steady and continue over the next few years.

3.5.5 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

It is really good to hear that the Minister is open to that. Is there perhaps a set point that the Minister could review that and look at the landscape in the agricultural sector in Jersey and determine whether some progress could be made?

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

I do not really think I can answer that question because it would depend on how I can work in with others as well, but I think it is an interesting idea.

3.5.6 Deputy S.J. Gleave of St. Helier South:

Is the Minister aware that when Apetito was originally awarded the contract, so when they first came into the Island, Caring Cooks was also a bidder, a bid that included fresh food being cooked from scratch, rather than microwaving meals brought in from the U.K.? Given we are trying to teach children about how to prepare food, is it a good example to be showing them that this is how meals are prepared; you simply microwave a meal?

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

First of all, they are not simply microwaved. These are highly nutritional meals which have been passed by Jersey's food standards for primary schools and recognised as the best option by Public Health. They are the best way for us to continue. As for the Deputy's comments about Caring Cooks, I do not particularly want to discuss individual organisations in the Chamber. But I can say that Caring Cooks themselves have published recently online a statement about how providing meals on this scale is such a huge undertaking. They believe it is positive to see the service that they helped establish now reaching children across the Island. We have had very good feedback from local organisations about how we are continuing. Also, that organisation continues to provide meals at the moment in the schools and also does so in secondary schools and does other very good work in the schools.

3.5.7 Deputy V. Li of St. Helier North:

I agree with almost every single person having discussed about social enterprise earlier, and I agree with Deputy Voisin's idea of collective effort. Again, because I think ultimately is that we want to promote the competitiveness of our local business. I think, back to this school meal, is a great example how we can use this as a pilot scheme to see where the gaps are and how we can deliver it collectively. I wondered if the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning would willingly take this as an opportunity to look through and to work collectively with other Ministers on this project.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes, I think I have already said I would be happy to work with other Ministers and aim to source more local produce. I think the main point to keep in mind is that this has been an extremely successful project. It is now delivering thousands of nutritious hot meals every day to children, some who receive them as free

meals and other families pay £2.50 for a hot main meal and a dessert. From its start in 2019 in 4 schools and now the roll out across all primary schools, it has been an extremely successful project.

3.5.8 Deputy V. Li:

I think I just want re-emphasise, I am not debating whether this is a good project or not. Because I believe that providing hot meals to the children, particularly the ones who are struggling with cost of living, is crucial. I want the kids to be able to study when they have a full tummy.

[10:30]

What I am trying to understand is, I do not want to discuss further about how long the contract with this food provider has been signed or whether we have potential to grow with local business, I think my question is more about if this contract is not signed longer than 4 years' time, are we able to look into the possibility of engaging children with local-grown food, local business and then tie it into all the things that we are trying to do to promote the local economy? Because I believe that Time to Win is not just for the finance sector, it needs to be looked at across the whole Island.

The Bailiff:

Your question is?

Deputy V. Li:

Where the Minister take this as initiative and to look into the possibility of looking at how the local companies can get involved under the framework of a social enterprise, as we discussed earlier.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

I think I have already answered the question that I am happy to look into developments of more local enterprises.

3.5.9 Deputy L.D. Carpenter:

The Minister mentioned that social value is one of the evaluated criterion. Could the Minister please elaborate a little on what is meant by social value and what kind of things are considered?

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

I think I will have to get back to the Deputy on that because I am not that knowledgeable about the official procurement process. But I did look at what social value covered and my notes are that it is about opportunity for the local employment training and some other opportunities, but I will have to get back to the Deputy on that.