

2025.09.30

4.9 Deputy D.J. Warr of St. Helier South of the Minister for Children and Families regarding an increase in the allocation of funds for the North of St. Helier Youth Centre (OQ.205/2025):

Further to the recently published Proposed Budget 2026 to 2029, will the Minister explain why there has been a 57.55 per cent increase in the allocation of funds for the North of St. Helier Youth Centre from the previously approved £10.237 million, to £16.129 million?

Connétable A.N. Jehan of St. Peter (The Minister for Children and Families):

I thank the Deputy for his question. The 2025-2027 Government Budget, as approved at the end of 2024, provided the initial estimated budget of approximately £10 million for the Ann Street youth centre capital build. I believe we were always clear that this was an early estimate and I think we have been open that additional funds would be required as the project developed. The funding requested in the 2026-2028 Budget is the original estimated budget with the additional revenue cost required to cover increased costs of construction across the industry, the Y.E.S. (Youth Enquiry Service) project, which is to be located in adjacent premises, the old Belmont pub, together with staffing, utility costs and ongoing maintenance, cleaning and staff training costs. Everything is required to ensure that the centre, once open, can operate efficiently and effectively and comply with all health and safety regulations. To assure the Deputy, officers have been through a value engineering exercise and have reviewed the plans and made adaptations to the project as necessary. Indeed, they have removed some items from the project to reduce costs. The children and young people of St. Helier and the Island will be provided with a new youth centre that is built to the highest standards, that is fully functional, safe and an inclusive space for all young people from all backgrounds. This is about building more than just a structure. It is about creating a foundation for personal growth, community engagement and long-term social development. Indeed, over several decades there has been no ...

The Bailiff:

Minister, I am afraid I must ask you to bring your answer to an end. You have already gone 30 seconds over the normal allocation.

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Sorry, thank you, Sir.

4.9.1 Deputy D.J. Warr:

What reassurance can the Minister give to the Jersey taxpayers that they are getting value for money and that the final cost of building the youth centre will remain at the budgeted £16.129 million?

[10:30]

The Connétable of St. Peter:

I am confident with the value engineering that has been done that we can remain within the budgeted figure. Due to obviously commercial constraints, I cannot provide a breakdown of that figure although I think it would be possible, perhaps, to provide the Deputy with something in writing, which would remain confidential, if he is happy with that.

4.9.2 Deputy K.M. Wilson of St. Clement:

The Minister will know that we have had a number of exchanges around the development of the Le Squez Youth Centre and it is quite astonishing that £6 million can be found when we cannot find £4.7 million for the development of Le Squez. Will the Minister please revisit this decision and can he explain to the residents of St. Clement, who have waited over 10 years to have their request for investment considered, what he will do to confirm and assure them that this is a commitment he will still deliver on and that we will not have any more broken promises over the next course of the Budget?

The Bailiff:

That is perilously close to being outside the parameter of the question but I will allow it.

The Connétable of St. Peter:

I have to say I was about to comment on that.

The Bailiff:

No need. That is all right.

The Connétable of St. Peter:

You have done so, Sir, so I will be fairly brief. I would say that the children of St. Helier have waited far longer than 10 years for a youth facility. My recollection as a teenager was of at least 4 youth centres in St. Helier, all of which have closed. We are committed to Le Squez. I am prepared to confirm that. However, I will not revisit the decision that the St. Helier youth centre has to come first. In the scheme of things, if we were to develop Le Squez prior to the St. Helier youth centre, we could find ourselves in a situation where both the children of St. Clement and St. Helier had no youth facility.

4.9.3 Deputy K.M. Wilson:

I am sorry if I offended the Minister and the Assembly with that question but one of the things that is very frustrating is that there is or have been promises about the development of the youth centre and the residents are talking to me about whether this will ever happen.

The Bailiff:

Deputy, you do have to just ask a question. You are now explaining why you said what you said before. It would be helpful if you could just pose a supplementary question, if you have one.

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Will the Minister please give some detail as to what will be committed to in the Budget around the Le Squez Youth Centre?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Sir, I have to say this is a supplementary about a question that we originally were sceptical was relevant to the initial question. I believe there are monies in the Budget for ongoing maintenance of the Le Squez Centre but there are not funds for the development. I think we have made it clear that that will be a future project.

4.9.4 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:

In his original answer the Minister referred to a long list of reasons why the costs have increased, which included things that to my ears sounded like running costs, maintenance, staffing and so on. Can he confirm that the capital cost estimates have gone up 50 per cent within the last year?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

The increases, as I have already explained, are partly due to the incorporation of additional build, which is the Y.E.S. centre. As I said before, due to commercial constraints, I am not going to give a detailed breakdown of the figure in the Budget, so I will leave it at that.

4.9.5 Deputy J. Renouf:

What confidence can the Assembly have in the Minister's assurances when he has just said that costs have gone up 50 per cent in a year and earlier he said he did not think they would go up any more? Why should we have any confidence that that assurance would be met?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

I think I answered that earlier. They have done a value engineering exercise on the total project now. A year ago we were looking at the very early days of the project and what might be incorporated and we were looking at a youth centre. They have now done a value engineering exercise on the total project and I have confidence in our officers and their ability to predict the costs and I see no reason at this point why we would exceed those.

4.9.6 Deputy A.F. Curtis of St. Clement:

The Minister has cited commercial sensitivity. Could he confirm whether there is an agreed delivery partner and, if so, at what point the commercial sensitivity should lift?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

The commercial sensitivity would lift, of course, when the final negotiations are completed with that partner. Yes, there is a preferred partner, hence the extensive value engineering exercise, but I cannot give an exact date. However, as I said, I am happy to share information with Deputy Warr who asked the question.

4.9.7 Deputy A.F. Curtis:

Can the Minister say whether the delivery model is that a single partner is intended to deliver the entire £16 million capital or whether the project is to be delivered in part by the department and other delivery partners, hence the need for commercial sensitivity, which I think many of us are trying to get to the bottom of?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

I can confirm there is a single delivery partner and that is really as much as I can confirm at this point.

4.9.8 Deputy K.L. Moore of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter:

In 2024 there was a £3.5 million budget allocated for the Le Squez youth club, which has now been withdrawn by the Minister. Could the Minister confirm whether that money has been transferred to the St. Helier project or what has happened to it?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Like many things in previous budgets, new projects come along. In the scheme of things, there was money originally allocated for the St. Helier youth centre, which then went on to be used for other items. In effect, there was £3.5 million. It is difficult to say whether it has actually been transferred to this project because, as with everything, budgets move, funds get reallocated, just as happened to the original funds for the St. Helier youth centre.

4.9.9 Deputy K.L. Moore:

I am a bit stuck because there are so many questions to ask after that non-answer really. As we approach the forthcoming Budget debate in December, what assurance can the Minister give that he and his fellow Ministers will be held to account for delivery in the items that are agreed in that Budget, given his previous answers? I would also like to remind the Constable that it is part of his duty as a Minister to come to the Assembly fully briefed and on top of his brief.

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Well, I really do not think I need reminding of that, but there we are. I have given assurances about this project in that we have done an extensive value engineering exercise. I am confident of the figures that have now been produced. My answer can only relate to the original question, which was about the specific item in the Budget.

4.9.10 Deputy D.J. Warr:

I guess this is the obvious question, is it not? Can the Minister confirm that a price has been agreed to purchase the old Ann Street building?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

I think that is still part of that commercially sensitive information but, as I have said to the Deputy, I am happy to share that with him in a confidential written reply.

Deputy D.J. Warr:

Sorry, was that question answered? I said has it been agreed.

The Bailiff:

It was answered with it is not going to be answered because it is part of the commercially sensitive information. How the Assembly views an answer or not is a matter for the Assembly, but it has been answered.