4.6 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade of the Minister for Planning and Regulation regarding the Jersey Care Commission's reduction in budget. (OQ.113/2026)

Will the Minister explain the rationale for the reduction in budget allocated to the Jersey Care Commission, advise what risk assessment, if any, has been undertaken regarding potential consequences to vulnerable people in care, and state whether this reduction in funding received the unanimous support of the Council of Ministers?

Senator Sir M.J. Boleat (The Minister for Planning and Regulation):

The Jersey Care Commission has been asked to deliver savings of £84,000 from a total budget of over £2 million as part of the Cabinet Office's contribution to overall Government savings requirements of £9.6 million. The rationale for these savings is set out in the Budget, which was approved by the Council of Ministers. The Council of Ministers did not consider the specific reduction of this nor of similar reductions in other budgets. The savings are necessary to help strengthen the Island's long-term fiscal position while protecting investment in priority public services. The savings programme focuses on reducing administrative overheads, simplifying internal processes, and ensuring that public resources are directed towards activities that deliver the greatest value and impact for Islanders. The Cabinet Office is in active discussions with the Commission to ensure that this will not affect its operations in 2027, and that the first inspections of the hospital take place as planned next year.

4.6.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

I was pleased to attend the briefing that the Jersey Care Commission made available to all Members yesterday. In their strategic document for next year, it highlights the fact that from 2024's base budget from Government, which was £1.9 million almost, it is going down to £1.7 million, just under, next year. This is despite the fact that they are taking on extra regulation following last year's legislative changes, and there is also a removal of the registration fees, which cost them another £40,000 a year. Is it really viable to expect an organisation, which we are giving more responsibility to, to operate on less in real terms, given the fact that they are the first line and perhaps the only line of defence that some vulnerable and lonely elderly people and others in Jersey have against neglect or possible mistreatment?

Senator Sir M.J. Boleat:

The Commission is being asked to make savings, as indeed are all parts of Government and other regulators. The use of modern technology enables things to be done at less cost than was previously the case. The last thing we want to see is a reduction in the ability of the Commission to perform its functions and, as the Member has correctly said, it is taking on new responsibilities in respect of the hospital. We are talking regularly with the Commission to ensure that they are able to deliver their programme of work. Of course they would like more resources, and of course we would like to give them more resources, as I would like to see more resources devoted to other regulatory functions for which I have responsibility. But we have to recognise our overall budgetary position and the need to ensure that the Island is run in a financially, fiscally responsible position. I think asking the Commission and indeed other semi-independent bodies related to Government to make the same sort of savings as we are asking of government departments is a reasonable thing to do.

4.6.2 Deputy L.V. Feltham of St. Helier Central:

The Minister mentioned that the Cabinet Office is currently working with the Care Commission to get assurance that it can meet all of its obligations. Why did the Minister not seek that assurance prior to the Budget being agreed and launched?

Senator Sir M.J. Boleat:

This is just part of the normal process. I do not think this would have come as a huge surprise to the Commission. The Commission is well aware of the budgetary constraints under which the Government is

having to operate. I am absolutely sure they are right to say that they would like more resources, and that the less resources they have the less they are able to do. As I have indicated, I have exactly the same situation with all the regulatory functions that are undertaken under my responsibility. There is a long list of things we would like to do. There are things we would like to put more resource into and to do better, but I do not think it is reasonable to exempt independent regulators from the same constraints that we are imposing on our own regulatory functions.

4.6.3 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

The Minister said that he doubts that this would have been a surprise to the Commission, however in correspondence to the Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel the Commission notes that it had worked on its business plan and put that forward to Government ahead of this decision being made. It feels like there has been an issue with regard to process here. Would the Minister commit to looking at the process that was followed and seeking assurances that the Commission can do the work that is so important and needs to be done within the budgets. If it cannot, will the Minister commit to ensuring that the right budget is available for the Commission.

Senator Sir M.J. Boleat:

I think that is an excellent point and I will commit to looking at the process to see what was followed this year and improvements we can make for future years. We are looking towards a longer-term budget for next year and it will be important to have correct processes when dealing with such an important regulatory body as the Care Commission.

4.6.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

I am concerned about the phrasing of the Minister suggesting that they are wanting more resources when actually what they are facing here is a cut in real terms and in actual monetary terms. I think the message is that they would like at least the same and certainly not a cut; not necessarily more. To get to the heart of the Minister's response, does he accept that it is the independence of the Care Commission as a regulator which is at question? If it is possible for any Government to effectively limit what they may be doing in terms of their effectiveness and their scrutiny of Government, the job that they have been asked to do, by impending threats of cutting their budget every year, in fact that independence fundamentally come under question. Is that something the Minister shares my concern about?

Senator Sir M.J. Boleat:

The Member has raised a very good point which applies well beyond this particular regulatory body. It is important that they have an element of independence. On the other hand, they are reliant on some Government funding. There are some regulators that are entirely funded by the fees that they charge to the bodies that they regulate, and that can give them more independence. But regulation is a public good, and it is questionable as to how far the bodies being regulated should be paying for that. I could ask the Minister for Health and Social Services whether he would like to pay for the cost of regulating the hospital, but I do not think I would get a favourable reply there. That would simply be coming from another bit of Government. But I think the point made is an extremely good one of how do we ensure, in looking at regulation generally, that we can protect the independence of regulators and have a funding model that works. There is no perfect answer. It is a balance between fees - and the Commission does charge some fees - and the amount of money that the Government feels able to allocate, bearing in mind all the other calls for Government expenditure.