

2026.01.20

4.1 Deputy H.M. Miles of St. Brelade of the Minister for Social Security regarding the funding situation of the Jersey Employment Trust (OQ.5/2026):

Will the Minister advise what action, if any, is being taken to address the funding situation of the Jersey Employment Trust to ensure that the vocational training service provided to Islanders with disabilities and long-term health conditions can continue?

Deputy L.V. Feltham of St. Helier Central (The Minister for Social Security):

I can confirm that, following positive discussions with the Jersey Employment Trust, I have offered some stabilisation funding to the Trust in addition to its core funding, so it will receive the same funding in 2026 as it did in 2025, while we continue the work that we had started in 2025 to work collaboratively to develop a business case for a sustainable future funding model for the organisation. There are no anticipated changes to the provision of the vocational training service.

4.1.1 Deputy H.M. Miles:

The recent media coverage reflects a genuine lack of confidence in the Minister's handling of this situation. Does the Minister regret her decision and will she apologise to those affected for causing genuine distress?

Deputy L.V. Feltham:

I think it is important to note that I would consider the petition that was circulated to be factually incorrect. The petition was asking me to not undertake an action that I had not taken. At each point in the discussions with the J.E.T. (Jersey Employment Trust) I have sought to be truthful and honest with them about public finances and the ongoing financial situation that we face. At every opportunity, I have given the Trust more money where I could and been open about the collaborative work that we would need to do in order to put together a business case for any additional, secure, ongoing funding in the future. I have also been open with them that I think it is better that we have sustainable funding models for organisations such as the Trust that would lead potentially, in my view, to multi-year funding agreements so that we do not end up in this situation on a year-by-year basis. It was not my decision to go to the media. We were still in ongoing discussions, and my position was that we had come to an arrangement with the Trust just before Christmas. I had offered them some additional money at that time so that we could avoid them getting into a position where they were putting their staff at risk of redundancy. I think it is regrettable that all staff were put at risk of redundancy.

4.1.2 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:

The Minister initially, when this became a newspaper story, accused the Jersey Employment Trust of overspending. She then said she had a duty to look after taxpayers' funding, presumably because the Jersey Employment Trust were not in some way. Then she blamed them for failing to provide data. It sounds like she wants now credit for finding the top-up funding after all, but it is a bit like planting a bomb and then expecting credit for defusing it. Can she explain why she spent 3 days defending the indefensible?

Deputy L.V. Feltham:

I think when it comes to expenditure of public money, it is important that we use consistent language across the piece. I was very clear and open with the Jersey Employment Trust about what the budgeted funds were, both in last year's budget and this year's budget. The Trust came to me towards the end of 2024 and said that it would not be able to work within that budget. So we did agree a planned overspend on that budget. That is exactly the same language that we use when we refer to overspends in Health, for example, which are also providing essential services. In exactly the same way as what we have done with the Health budget this year, I used an underspend that I had within my budget to ensure that J.E.T. could continue its services. I have done exactly the same thing this year. I think it is important

that when we are talking about services that are wholly funded by Government, we maintain consistent language around that so that we know exactly what we are talking about.

4.1.3 Deputy J. Renouf:

The fact remains that the Minister spent 3 days trying to defend the position she has arrived at, she initially staked out, and then finally has come to a different view. As my first question stands, why did it take so long when the answer appeared so obvious to so many people?

Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Had the Deputy undertook to have any form of conversation with me, he would know that I have been entirely consistent with my views and my conversations with the Trust for the past 2 years. It is my view that we need to work collaboratively with the Trust. It is my ambition that we work with them to ensure that services are co-ordinated across government departments and with the Trust on a person-centred basis. That is how we should be delivering disability and inclusion services, and I am committed to that. I maintain my commitment to that, collaboratively working with the Trust.

4.1.4 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson of St. Mary, St. Owen and St. Peter:

It is obviously important that funding has been found for the immediate term but there is a long-term issue here that is a very important one. Will the Minister summarise the differences between the proposed new agreement her department was seeking to sign with J.E.T. and the existing one, and explain what happens to that contract now? Is she still expecting that contract to be signed?

Deputy L.V. Feltham:

We have had very productive conversations with the Trust over the past few days. We will shortly be issuing a joint media statement with the Trust. I do not believe in sticking plaster politics, and that is exactly why I undertook to have the conversations with the Trust over the past few years that I have been doing. That is exactly why I have been providing stabilisation funding to the Trust, so that we could come to a position where we have got a clear business case about any gap in funding need so that that could be put forward and we can make sure that we are acting with absolute responsibility over public funds, we are being accountable, we are being fair. The Trust is not the only organisation that comes to Ministers with requests for additional funding, and it is really important that we treat all organisations fairly and that we have clear processes in place for that.

4.1.5 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

What assessment has been undertaken of the future demand for J.E.T., for example, by looking at current school cohorts? What reassurance can the Minister provide for these future potential clients that support will be available to them?

Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Working collaboratively with J.E.T. has been first and foremost in what we are doing. Also working collaboratively across Government, so we have been working with our colleagues in the Health Department and our colleagues in C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills) on this. This has been a truly collaborative approach. It is obviously going to take longer now than what I had anticipated at the beginning of last year, and I would hope that by mid this year we will be in a much better place and that we will have resolved some of the data-sharing issues. Again, I will reiterate, it is really important that we take a person-centred approach and make sure that individuals have co-ordinated services that they need.

Deputy M.R. Scott of St. Brelade:

I was going to ask a question about the data sharing, but I noticed that that has been mentioned, so I will withdraw the question.

4.1.6 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

While some former Ministers seem to wish to use this as a political football, which I think is particularly distasteful, could I ask the Minister whether in future she thinks that there is scope for more cross-

governmental funding? She has mentioned cross-governmental working, but the work that J.E.T. does in partnership with Government is highly valuable, not just for her department but for Economic Development, for Health, as she has mentioned, and has educational benefits too. Is it possible that future Governments need to work on a more realistic sum, as she said, so that top-up grants are not needed, but that each department, which ultimately is benefiting and should be supporting this, is actually contributing its fair share too?

Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Yes, collaborative working across Government is absolutely key to making sure that we are providing the most efficient, effective and the right services to people. I have been working collaboratively with the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning and the Minister for Health and Social Services. I would more than welcome more Ministers being part of that conversation, including the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development. But I would hope that colleagues know that I do put collaborative working front and centre. I think that is the only way that we are going to achieve the most efficient and effective Government and, at the end of the day, the best services for people.

4.1.7 Deputy Sir P.M. Bailhache:

My understanding is that one of the difficulties faced by the Minister was an inability to obtain important information from the Trust. Will the Minister, in seeking to arrive at some final solution with the Trust, ensure that this information is obtained?

Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Yes, I think it is important to approach sharing of data sensitively, and I will do that. I think what is important to remember in the cases that we are talking about in relation to the Jersey Employment Trust is that appropriate data sharing may be different for different people. We will endeavour to work with the Trust to ensure that we, as I said, are taking a person-centred approach to ensure that people have the right services that they need, and that we are providing that in a sensitive manner. I do recognise that some of the people that use the services of the Trust may not wish to go through government services but, by the same token, what I also want to ensure is that our own government services are as inclusive as possible and people are not being bounced from service to service. I will indeed be making sure that that is not happening.

4.1.8 Deputy H.M. Miles:

I thank the Minister for her answers. This situation highlights the difficulty with a Minister having responsibility for policy around disability and inclusion and equally acting as the gatekeeper of funding. Does the Minister agree that policy should transfer to another Ministry so that organisations delivering services for Government are not held to ransom?

Deputy L.V. Feltham:

I have not and never would hold any organisation to ransom. **[Approbation]** That is simply not the way that I operate, it is not the way that I work, and I am quite disappointed to think that the Deputy would consider that I would act in such a way.