



Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel

Quarterly Hearing

Witness: The Chief Minister

Friday, 6th February 2026

Panel:

Deputy H.M. Miles of St. Brelade (Chair)

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter (Vice-Chair)

Deputy A.F. Curtis of St. Clement

Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade

Connétable D. Johnson of St. Mary

Witnesses:

Deputy L.J. Farnham of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter, The Chief Minister

Deputy M.R. Ferey of St. Saviour, Assistant Chief Minister

Dr. A. McLaughlin, Chief Executive Officer

Mr. P. Wylie, Chief Officer, Cabinet Office

Mr. J. Whitfield, Chief Information Officer, Digital Services

Ms. D. Drieu, Head of Organisational Development & People Operations

Mr. A. Hacquoil, Group Director, Strategic Finance

[10:31]

Deputy H.M. Miles of St. Brelade (Chair):

Good morning, everybody. Welcome to this public hearing of the Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel. Today is 6th February 2025 and this is our final quarterly hearing with the Chief Minister. I would like to draw everyone's attention to the following. The hearing will be filmed and streamed live. The recording and transcript will be published afterwards on the States Assembly website. All electronic devices, including mobile phones, should be switched to silent. For the purposes of the recording and the transcript, I would be grateful if everyone who speaks could ensure that you state your name

and your role. To start with introductions, I am Deputy Helen Miles. I am chair of the Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter (Vice-Chair):

I am Deputy Lucy Stephenson. I am vice-chair of the panel.

Deputy A.F. Curtis of St. Clement:

Deputy Alex Curtis, panel member.

Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:

Deputy Jonathan Renouf, also a panel member.

Connétable D. Johnson of St. Mary:

Constable David Johnson, panel member.

The Chief Minister:

Good morning. Deputy Lyndon Farnham, Chief Minister.

Assistant Minister Chief Minister:

Deputy Malcolm Ferey, Assistant Chief Minister.

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

Paul Wylie, Chief Officer of the Cabinet Office.

Chief Executive Officer:

Andrew McLaughlin, Chief Executive Officer.

Group Director, Strategic Finance:

Andrew Hacquoil, Group Director of Strategic Finance within Treasury.

Chief Information Officer, Digital Services:

Jason Whitfield, Chief Information Officer.

Head of Organisational Development & People Operations:

Denise Drieu, Head of Organisational Development & People Operations within People Services.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Thank you very much. Chief Minister, as I said, this is our last opportunity to have a public hearing with you. We have got quite a few questions and we would like to hear from you predominantly, if that is all right. We have got 2 hours allocated for this hearing. The first round of questions is really about the C.E.O. (Chief Executive Officer) recruitment and succession planning. The panel understands that the current C.E.O. - that is you, Dr. McLaughlin - is going to be leaving the post in December 2026 and that plans are now underway to recruit to the post for 2027. Could you please update us on the recruitment process and succession planning being followed for a permanent replacement to this post, Chief Minister?

The Chief Minister:

Yes, I certainly can. We have been working on it for some time now and the first stage of that is looking at how or if we might be able to fill the role internally. That work is ongoing. Deputy Ferey can update you with a bit more detail on that because he is vice-chair of the States Employment Board. When we complete that work, we will then look to consider if we need to go externally, which I think we might do, and start interviewing shortly after the June elections. As you said, the current Chief Executive Officer is due to leave at the end of this year. Malcolm, do you want to add anything?

Assistant Minister Chief Minister:

We have engaged Odgers, a recruitment consultant, to look at the talent that we have got within the existing structure and we have identified a number of people who could be developed into that role and there is a number that we have. I think first of all any proper recruitment should be done post-election, so obviously it will be the next government that will be working with that candidate. The plan is, depending on the level of expectation around whichever are the preferred candidates, they might move into a deputy C.E.O. role and that would enable them to get developed and increase their skills during that timeframe until Dr. McLaughlin actually moves on.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

So in terms of the deputy C.E.O., the deputy C.E.O. would go into post before Dr. McLaughlin moves on.

Assistant Minister Chief Minister:

That is a possibility.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Is it also a possibility that there may be another interim C.E.O. and a deputy C.E.O.?

Assistant Minister Chief Minister:

That is a possibility as well. All options are open but I think going forward, once we have the new C.E.O. in place, we should also have another deputy C.E.O. so that there is a natural line of succession. Obviously if the C.E.O. has to be away for whatever reason, we have got someone who can automatically step up to that role and we can continue to develop that talent in the next number of years until we recruit for a new C.E.O.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Have we got some fairly developed succession planning practices in place?

Assistant Minister Chief Minister:

Yes. There are a number of people, and obviously I do not want to go into individuals, who fit the criteria and who have been identified as talent that we can continue to develop.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

What is being put in place to develop them across the public service?

Assistant Minister Chief Minister:

There is a structure. There is a structure in place for us to follow and where we want to get to is to not be in a position where ... so there will be a natural successor. It does not mean that they will automatically get the role next time. There will still be a recruitment process but there will be a smoother handover, hopefully.

The Chief Minister:

I do not know if you want me to outline some of the succession planning.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Yes.

The Chief Minister:

I will just start by saying, as Deputy Ferey mentioned, there is a possibility we could have a deputy C.E.O. take over. There is a possibility there could be an interim, but it is our favoured position that we move to a permanent Chief Executive. We have had 2 or 3 interims now since Mr. Parker and I think for stability we should be favouring a permanent C.E.O. Stage 1 assessments, occupational and psychological, testing numerical reasoning, 3-hour in-depth interview, that all took place in December. Following stage 1, participants who were identified to have potential will progress to stage 2: market benchmark interviews, skills comparison between the successful candidates and a capability to external talent to ascertain any gaps and informed target at the relevant areas. That is the 2 stages to the succession, if that is helpful.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Okay. Thanks very much.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Obviously it is a period of change, another period of change for the organisation. What steps are being taken outside of the recruitment to ensure continuity and stability for the organisation itself and to keep positive working relationships?

The Chief Minister:

May I ask the Chief Executive to ...

Chief Executive Officer:

Is this in the context of C.E.O. succession still?

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Yes.

Chief Executive Officer:

The first thing to say is that we had a very clear indication from S.E.B. (States Employment Board) that they wanted a thorough assessment process of potential internal candidates with 2 outcomes in mind, understanding, as Deputy Ferey said, whether or not we have got candidates who would be competitive against the role profile that S.E.B. have developed for the role. If for whatever reason they were not and needed further development, that we had a development for those candidates. An appreciable number of colleagues went into that process. We allowed people at C.E.O. minus one to opt into the process and we used performance data, which the Minister can talk about in more detail ... we used 4 or 5 years' worth of performance and other data to identify people below C.E.O. minus one with potential to accelerate quickly to that level of role. We had a number of candidates go through this process. The detail of it, not just the assessment centres but the way in which we used the data to identify candidates and the way in which we cross-checked, we shared in full detail with the senior management group which, correct me if I am wrong ... how many people is that these days?

Head of Organisational Development & People Operations:

We had 170 attend.

Chief Executive Officer:

Yes, 170, so we have been as transparent as we can with the leadership group about the year-long process we are going through and, more importantly, why we are going through it, which comes from the aspiration that if we have got the talent in the organisation, I think it is less risky to develop it because we have seen appreciable risk with external candidates coming in who, for one or other reason, have not been able to settle. I feel that that in itself, the way that we have consulted with the senior management group and involved them has, I think, demystified the process, been transparent and allowed them to engage with it. I think that has helped with confidence. In terms of continuity, it is important to say we already have 2 very, very experienced and long-serving de facto deputies. They are not called deputies for some reason but my predecessor put 2 of the more experienced colleagues in the role. I think she called them Assistant Chief Executives. So we have already got 2 very experienced candidates who de facto perform the deputy role if I am not there for whatever reason and that gives a measure of stability and predictability to the organisation. I am not concerned about morale at the event of C.E.O. succession. A primary concern, based on prior feedback from colleagues, is to address the situation that they felt in the past there was too much mystery around how C.E.O.s arrived and they did not feel that there was enough opportunity for internal candidates to be able to demonstrate their potential for the role. If nothing else, I hope this approach that S.E.B. is overseeing addresses that.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Thank you. You have touched on that the incoming Government will be involved in the recruitment process full-time. Are there any other mitigations to it? Obviously they are still going to be seeing out a C.E.O., a new government coming in that are going to want to hit the ground running. Are there any other mitigations that help that process over those perhaps 6 months or so?

Chief Executive Officer:

I think it is important, we have always said we would like the next Chief Minister to be in a position where when they come in something like this is in front of them and it identifies what this process has said should be the internal candidates. They can then add to that, of course, with an external process and we have made the preparations for what an external process would be. We just have not obviously triggered it pre-emptively. I think it will be very organised from that perspective. We have put a lot of thought into, as we should always do at change of Government, the nature of the handover in the briefing for the incoming Government. I think this is a big feature of it. To some extent the idea of identifying and appointing a deputy in advance is part of that preparation. It was felt that if we had a candidate who met the benchmark, at the very least they have got the potential to be a deputy Chief Executive. Of course, the next Chief Minister might have other views about who the Chief Executive should be. At the very least we want to have someone there, I think, or the S.E.B. do, who have met the benchmark, gone through a rigorous process and they can say they could do this job if you wanted them to. I think that will give us enough stability through the change.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Thank you. Moving on to the objective of this Government to curb public sector growth, could you, Chief Minister, provide us with an update on the progress made on that objective and the impacts and what steps ... well, any further steps that are being taken in this Government term as well?

The Chief Minister:

As you know, I have always been on the record for saying the current position was unsustainable and that, I think, has been backed up on more than one occasion by the Chief Executive Officer. It became our early intention to start curbing the growth in the public expenditure, which we have started to do. We still have a long way to go. We have to really double down on our efforts there because it does take time. When you see something get into trajectory on the rise, it takes time to turn it, of course. The challenges we have had with curbing the growth, while we have done that in the centre by reducing, I think, over 200 positions in the centre, that has been taken up, of course, by the expansion of health services and education. Where we have saved costs in the middle, we have invested in front line services, mainly in nurses, health staff, teachers, teaching assistants, to bring them up to a full complement.

[10:45]

Now we are that stage, I think the hard work begins now. We are currently ... as members will know, we have 4 or 5 workshops and a number of States Members workshops to get a steer on the policy we develop around reorganisation and billing more to reduce costs. It is about, I think, getting better value while maintaining our services. It is not going to be about austerity. It is going to be about better use and better prioritisation of how we spend money.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

For the public, who obviously are not party to those workshops that States Members have been involved in, what are they and what follows from it? Is it just an information exercise for States Members? Are they actively involved in the decision-making? Give us a rundown. Pretend you are not speaking to a States Member but to the public.

The Chief Minister:

It is very difficult when I have got 5 of you glaring at me, but I will do my best. As a Government, as I said, we have identified that we need to double down on the growth in expenditure and we have charged the Chief Executive and his team with coming back with some options as part of that work. I thought it would be a good idea to involve all States Members. In the past we have had States Members workshops. It has not been really a feature or factor of the Assembly or Government work

for some years, like I say, to get a steer to allow States Members to express their views on how we might do that. As you can imagine, there are a number of views from States Members, some who would like to invest more, maybe use reserves to invest now for the future, and some who would like to take a far more cautious approach. Really those workshops have been about taking a steer, which will assist the Government in their thoughts and guidance for the Chief Executive Officer. As I said before, I will be presenting a report before the end of this term with our findings on that.

Deputy J. Renouf:

When you charged the Chief Executive Officer with investigating this, what exactly did you ask him to do? Was it to find ways of curbing growth or to cut numbers? What was the actual instruction?

The Chief Minister:

Well, I do not have the letter in front of me but broadly I asked the Chief Executive to look at ways of curbing, if you like managing, the growth in the public sector, finding reductions, reprioritisation if necessary without having harmful impacts on the service we provide to Islanders. I think, Andrew, that sort of sums it up.

Chief Executive Officer:

Yes. Certainly if you look at the objectives that we share quarterly with the P.A.C. (Public Accounts Committee), if those are available to you, you will see in there roughly speaking the guidance to me. I think if you step back from individual measures, there is a couple of big messages from the Chief Minister to me. One was there was an appetite for curbing the growth to extend to ... I hate to use this term because the front line is everywhere in the public service but what people colloquially call front line services as far as possible were to be shielded, if not fully protected, that there was a feeling that we could make more economies in the centre of government. There was specific guidance given on health and education effectively opt-out and that is why they have consumed ... they have been the drivers of the growth in the non-Ministerial departments, there have been the drivers across. Everyone else is zero or down in all likelihood. So there was that guidance but there was also I think a really important part of the guidance, which relates to Deputy Stephenson's questions as well. What the Chief Minister effectively said was: "I have only got 2 years. I want us to lay the groundwork for the next government because we need to get some kind of consensus around various aspects of the public finances, which is not necessarily in the Assembly at the moment." The workshops and the work was partly about trying to not only take some practical measures to slow things down. It was also about trying to share information and share discussion to see if more of a consensus could emerge around in this case the public finances but the same is true of other things. It was the spirit of doing today's work today, also trying to lay the groundwork for the next government, because this Government, I think, felt that they have come into the middle of something and there was not going to be enough time to analyse it fully and take effective action.

There had to be a balance struck, so in the objectives you see both things at play. One is can we do some things that help in the short term and can we take some steps that start to build that consensus. That really was where the workshops, which Paul has been leading on, came from.

Deputy J. Renouf:

What I am trying to get at is: is there a different instruction that might go to a chief executive, which would be can you find waste in the civil service and shrink our numbers, because we have people with defined functions that are no longer necessary to be done and we want to shrink the civil service. Is that something that you think needs to happen?

The Chief Minister:

Absolutely it is and we have been clear about that. I think that is something the Chief Executive wants to make sure that our public sector workforce is fully utilised in delivering value for money with prioritisation on the areas that matter most for the Island. I hope the front line service ... I know it is a general term but that is ...

Deputy J. Renouf:

That would mean job cuts. Do you think that the civil service should identify the roles that are no longer required and close them?

The Chief Minister:

Sometimes I feel like I am trying to avoid a headline of "massive job cuts across the civil service" but it is about, yes, I think we need to bring down the numbers and that is part of the brief in the public sector. Now, I hope that will do. We are aiming to not only curb the growth but double down on costs and that could mean some further redundancies in the public sector, if that makes it clear. What I want to re-emphasise is we are focusing on improving services such as health and education and that is where all the growth has been.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

We have obviously spoken about succession planning right at the top of the organisation but does that kind of approach ... are you seeing it having any impact on succession planning at lower levels and across departments as well, or do you envisage that it will?

The Chief Minister:

Yes, it has because the recruitment freeze has meant right through the system staff and managers have had to rethink their operating models. One of the things we did is we took 1,000 job vacancies out of the system a year or so back, 18 months or so, which meant a lot of posts that were empty or

had been lying empty for a period of time went. I think that caused the positive step of getting managers to rethink exactly what they do need.

Chief Executive Officer:

The answer to the question is yes. I can think of several examples where positions have become vacant, pretty senior positions, and those have been filled internally, sometimes as interim roles as part of this development strategy, giving people a chance to demonstrate in role rather than going to the market. We are pretty discouraging of external recruitment unless it is absolutely necessary under the recruitment freeze process that we have. I think where colleagues find it difficult, and I know you will have heard some of this from some of them, is that where we go for the internal elevation, we do not backfill or if we do backfill, eventually the music stops and a seat has gone. There is quite a bit of that going on, but again I think we are trying to strike the balance between ... there are 9,000 of us. In a population of 9,000, we should have enough talent to do many of ... certainly for our enterprise-wide leadership roles, I think it is a real justifiable critique of the organisation that for its enterprise-wide leadership roles it has not prepared its internal cadre to compete. Obviously if you have a specialist technical role, sometimes you have to go external because you cannot develop that role on the Island, but for the actual leadership roles we should be much, much better and certainly the instruction from the Chief Minister and S.E.B. is that that is the area where they want to see improvement. They want to see a next generation of enterprise-wide leaders in Jersey being developed as far as possible from within the public service and not through external recruitment.

Deputy A.F. Curtis:

I will continue, if you do not mind, Chief Minister, on the recruitment freeze, focusing in particular on the extension to it that went from December to February to do a complete freeze outside of front line services. I note that that seems to be still the case, checking careers.gov. Could you just briefly, specifically with regard to the most recent freeze, talk about the impact that is having, about the complete freeze? Obviously you have had freezes of various effects since 2024. This freeze goes a step further and I just want to understand the impact and whether you are seeing any acute areas.

The Chief Minister:

We commissioned some work internally to understand how the recruitment freeze had been working and, had we not taken that action, the growth trajectory of early 2024 had been allowed to continue there would have been an estimated 515, I think, more staff than we have now. That is the first point. We wanted to establish how effective it had been and so that is the figures we have. We are waiting for the 2025 figures to come out but, for example, it extended to the use of consultants as well, the restrictions on the use of consultants and temporary staff and that dropped ... in 2024 it

was £29 million less than in 2023 and that has continued to fall in 2025, so we will have the figures at the end of this month on that.

Deputy A.F. Curtis:

Chief Minister, I am not looking at the money. I am currently just trying to understand the impact on the service delivery. There is an ambition to save money but I am trying to understand in particular in December and January, has anything been raised to you about the impact of the complete freeze?

The Chief Minister:

No, is the simple word. Andrew, you are closer to operational matters than I am.

Chief Executive Officer:

When we say complete freeze, one of the things we did was we did extend the original recruitment restrictions to health and education at the end of last year. The opt-out went effectively - but I think I already said that before in another place - so it was an extension of the freeze, if you like, to those 2 departments. That is the first thing to say. The second thing to say is even though there has been a freeze, it is not, to use your words, a complete freeze. There is a process for essential and non-essential roles for people to make their case. Even since the start of January, for example, across all the public service, colleagues have put forward 52 roles, through the process, to say: "We believe these are essential, we feel we need to fill them", for whatever the rationale is, and they will seek approval for those roles. The approval rate for those roles is typically about one in 4. In other words, 25 per cent of them I will reject through that process.

Deputy A.F. Curtis:

Sorry, 25 per cent are rejected or 75 per cent are?

Chief Executive Officer:

That is 25 per cent typically would be rejected from those requests. Typically, 50 per cent would be approved and there is always 25 per cent, for reasons that I am still coming to terms with, just following through process, either on check and balance they do not proceed or the service decides to change the service in some other way. We still have a level of recruitment, I accept. It is greatly reduced compared to the sorts of run rates that we have seen in the past but it is very important to note that that was the instruction to me, which you can see in my objectives. It was not a hard stop. It was trying to slow down the rate at which we were recruiting, in part to try and create opportunities for internal development.

The Chief Minister:

These are not necessarily new roles. Often these are when people leave and there is a replacement.

Chief Executive Officer:

Yes. When they have a replacement, they will say it is essential or they will say it is non-essential when they want to recruit.

Deputy A.F. Curtis:

When will we and yourselves be getting the numbers out of the system to understand the attrition rate from this, those who are ... as you said, I presume most jobs are those that are replacing, a removal of post, somebody who has left the organisation or moved to a different place in the organisation. To what extent are you tracking the attrition in live time for the 25 jobs you may have approved through the exemptions in January? Roughly speaking, how many have we lost in January? Is that data real time?

Chief Executive Officer:

That all gets fed into ...

The Chief Minister:

We have a monthly operational dashboard that I am happy to share with you, that looks something like that, which covers all of them. It is something we introduced at the beginning of 2024, which lists every single department.

[11:00]

For example, in January, if we just look at this, it has got the actual F.T.E.s (full-time equivalents), the actual headcount and the starters in the last 12 months and we monitor each month. Then if you look at that it says that all of the growth in the public sector has come in Healthcare Jersey and C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills). We do monitor and are happy to share that information with you.

Assistant Minister Chief Minister:

Another really important tool in the whole process is the use of redeployment. Where a role does become redundant, there is a possibility of seeking to redeploy into that role and then that post does not get backfilled. There is still a saving but you are using your talent that you have got in place and it saves on the cost of recruitment costs.

Deputy A.F. Curtis:

I am conscious of time. I have got 2 more questions. The first one is you have highlighted that both Healthcare and C.Y.P.E.S. are the areas we are seeing growth. I think the case for understanding

the growth in Healthcare is quite well explained by the demographic challenge, but are you at this time considering, prior to the election, any further restrictions on C.Y.P.E.S. and Education or are you still going to continue the same policy that is currently in place?

The Chief Minister:

We will continue the policy that is currently in place until the end of this term.

Deputy A.F. Curtis:

Until the end of this term. Then with regards to the restrictive freeze, that was described as going from December to February. We are now in February. What is the plan for the freeze? Is it again to just roll that on?

The Chief Minister:

We are rolling that forward.

Deputy A.F. Curtis:

The complete freeze, not complete freeze, if I can call it that. The one that has exemptions.

Chief Executive Officer:

We have always had process. If you think about what we have been trying to do, we have been trying to slow the thing down, not stop it. I think we have always been clear about that. We have been trying to slow the rate of growth in public spending and the rate of growth in public employment generation, not stop it completely. We have no remit from the S.E.B. to do that, but to try to put it in some perspective, I think a key thing to look at is new starters as well, what is coming into the system. In 2023 we had almost 1,200 new starters. In 2025 we had 879. If you want to understand what slowing it down means in that context, that gives you an idea. Slowing it down means knocking, in that case, 25, 30 per cent off the old run rate. When we look at that all across the board, that is what you see happening. We have seen that even at E.L.T. (Executive Leadership Team). We have not recruited externally in areas like health. We have moved people around, we have promoted people. All of those measures is what the recruitment restrictions are achieving. There has never been a situation where someone has said: "This role is critical. I cannot fill it internally. I must have it" where it has not been approved if the organisation feels that the case is made.

Deputy J. Renouf:

The budget review that the Scrutiny Panel wrote, Chief Minister, you published a response to it and most of the recommendations in that report were rejected: consider whether to update the Future Jersey Vision, rejected; action on the C. & A.G. (Comptroller and Attorney General) recommendations relating to the performance framework, rejected; re-establish the central

performance function, rejected; government-wide strategy for ensuring consistent and sufficient data collection, rejected; develop a consistent approach to outcomes-based accountability, rejected. What was the point of us doing the review when those things, which are so moderate in terms of “consider” doing things, were not even felt worthy of consideration?

The Chief Minister:

We welcome all the Scrutiny reports. I will say that in the first instance. They are all useful. In this one, you had 56 findings, 21 recommendations and we accepted 6 and rejected 15, and that was after careful scrutiny and consideration of the report. At the end of that we felt we could accept 6 of them. That is not to say that there is no point in you doing the report. It is very valuable. The findings were particularly interesting and we take note of all of the Scrutiny work, but the Government, and predominantly the work led by the Treasury and the Minister for Treasury and Resources, when we studied it all, that is the outcome we came up with. I think there is not really much ... we can go through if you want to, if we have got time. We can go through the individual ones, yes.

Deputy J. Renouf:

We can go through the theme, I think, that was in there, which was there were quite a few recommendations relating to cross-government working and trying to establish whether cross-government working was efficient and whether the goals were being met. Those were all rejected, I think on the grounds of added bureaucracy. Guide us through that thought process.

The Chief Minister:

I think we feel we do not often agree with some of the recommendations of Scrutiny. They are well-founded and I believe, and Treasury believe, we do a lot of cross-governmental work. I would go as far as to say there is far more collaboration now across government than we have seen for a period of time. Part of that is because of the challenging financial circumstances we have been facing. In simple terms, we have just disagreed with the recommendation.

Deputy J. Renouf:

The C. & A.G. recommended enhancing the performance framework. The central performance function was designed to ensure that there is consistency across government and integration of functions. Why is that not something that you were prepared to take on?

The Chief Minister:

Just mentioning the C. & A.G. briefly, in the last 10 years C. & A.G. has made over I think about 1,030 recommendations and we have implemented I think about 1,010 of them. It is just ongoing

and we keep doing that. I am not sure if Andrew would like to talk a little bit if you want to hear a bit more detailed rationale.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Paul, I think, is desperate to get in. Mr. Wylie, I beg your pardon.

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

Only because Andrew would send it back my way anyway. If we are talking about performance management, I think we absolutely respect the views of the panel and I think what is behind that feedback is, of course, we are on a good set of foundations here. The Future Jersey work is excellent and in the medium term as a professional I cannot see any reason to change it. The Jersey Performance Framework is and does have outcomes-based accountability at its heart. That is the way it was designed in terms of its outcomes indicators and its service performance measures. I think what we are getting into is more of a choice around how do you then manage performance across government. For a short period we had a central delivery unit. There are ways to ensure cross-government work, cross-government delivery, cross-government accountability through strong Ministerial sub-groups, which we have in areas like safeguarding, and through groups at senior official level to make sure that these things are happening. We can do that through other ways rather than necessarily having a central team, which does add cost.

Deputy J. Renouf:

I think it is about how you monitor, is it not? How do you evidence things rather than just tell us that, yes, it is all okay?

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

Yes, and that is why - I hope you would agree - the way that Statistics Jersey has now been able to present that data is better and more transparent than ever.

Deputy J. Renouf:

One of the central issues in the budget was around the gap between revenue and expenditure. Chief Minister, do you accept that there is essentially a structural deficit going forward?

The Chief Minister:

No, I do not think there is a structural deficit.

Deputy J. Renouf:

As defined by an excess of spending that is not going to be covered in future by the current Government.

The Chief Minister:

The fact of the matter is balance the budget, curb the growth in expenditure. We are projecting forecasts. We have introduced proposals to protect long-term, to protect funding for capital infrastructure that we have neglected in the past. We have also identified that with the demographics, geopolitical challenges coming our way that we cannot take our current financial position for granted, which is one of the reasons why we have launched the biggest ever review into the competitiveness of our financial services sector, for example, which is we have started the growth and started to think about reorganisation of the public sector, because we cannot take our financial good fortune we have had in the past for granted moving forward, and that is at the heart of all of our thinking.

Deputy J. Renouf:

The Fiscal Policy Panel says: "Budget 2026 proposes both an increase in day-to-day spending that exceeds revenue growth and a larger capital investment programme." That sounds like a structural deficit to me.

The Chief Minister:

No. I would disagree with you on that. Expenditure growth that exceeds growth in income, yes, I think that is correct. We are seeing growth in income but despite reducing the growth ... I think growth in 2025, if you take out inflation, was 1.25 per cent, ex-inflation it is about 2.5 per cent in 2026. We are faced with hyperinflation in the health sector. Now, a tough decision: do we freeze health spending; do we increase it significantly? We think we have found a balance of I think practically two-thirds of the growth of about £50 million is going to the health area and that is about preventative medicine, introducing more preventative digitisation. That is investment in reducing the cost of the health service moving forward, as an example.

Deputy J. Renouf:

I think you have committed to doing further work to try to identify how you close that gap between spending and revenue. Can you update us on what work is underway to do that?

The Chief Minister:

I will turn to the Chief Executive on this. He is leading that work.

Chief Executive Officer:

On the thrust of the question, the Island still has a doubly-rated balance sheet credit rating. It would be difficult to have a rating like that if your credit rating agencies believed that you had a big structural deficit. The independent validation is more that you have got pressures, which are pressures

common across a number of public sectors, and you have got time to deal with those pressures but those pressures must be dealt with. I think that the rating agencies are still seeing this as a sectoral issue post-COVID rather than a structural issue, if it helps with your first question. I think I would concur with those rating agencies, as does the Chief Minister. Obviously if you then take them at their word and they say: "You have got pressures, we think you should address them", one of the ways you address them is to see where you can reduce public expenditure or at least reduce the rate of growth in public expenditure below the level at which your income is rising. You can get the operations going that way and you can address the deficit over a period of time credibly. That is essentially what we are trying to do and I would be disappointed for the new government, when they get to see their income for the end of this year and they see their expenditure for the end of this year, if they do not inherit a stronger position than the current Government inherited when they came in. I would be very disappointed if that was the case. Those 2 things, I think, are very important to say for public confidence because some wild adjectives get thrown around in the period leading up to elections. On options for going further than we have already gone, I think very much the guidance to me from the Council of Ministers is do as much thinking as you like, keep working on a number of things but these are really a matter for the next government given where we are in the electoral cycle. When we have the next workshop, which I guess will be the last workshop, is it, Paul, before the election, what we want to do there, I think, is share the views of the civil service, frankly, on our view as to why spending has grown so rapidly, our views on why we have ended up where we have ended up, not the "what", the "why", to see if there is some consensus that resonates. If we get consensus around the "why", I think we can very quickly move on to saying: "If that is why you think it is growing, some options are more or less palatable for addressing it." The guidance to me has been that those specific options are ones that should be put on the table of the next government if that government has the appetite to continue with this work, which obviously we have to wait and see.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Chief Minister, do you think something like a 10 per cent cut in workforce or something like that is appropriate?

The Chief Minister:

I do not think it is appropriate to go bandying such general figures around.

Deputy J. Renouf:

The budget relied on a temporary fix, I think it is generally accepted, in terms of taking money from the social security reserve contributions. Do you accept that either another source of revenue or cuts equivalent to that amount of money, or roughly equivalent to that amount of money, will have to be found before that funding source runs out?

The Chief Minister:

We have referred to it as a temporary fix, I think, during this period where we are planning to still put a significant amount of money into the Social Security Fund. I think it would be well used working with the actuaries, as we are doing, to find out exactly what sort of funding moving forward. Arguably it is overfunded at the moment with 7 to 8 years reverting and that is discussions we are going to have to have

[11:15]

Deputy J. Renouf:

Is your hope that that funding source will continue perhaps at a smaller level, that you might be able to ...

The Chief Minister:

I think absolutely we should be investing in our Social Security Reserve Fund and our Strategic Reserve Fund. We absolutely need to be clear we must increase our surpluses of revenue over expenditure so we can continue to support the reserves at the level ... we have been working at a level that is probably outdated now, given the success of the fund. What we should do is review what we put in on our regular basis to make sure it is the appropriate amount.

The Connétable of St. Mary:

I will move on to a different topic. At the corporate hearing we held in September last year a few questions were raised as to the Arm's Length Bodies Oversight Board and potentially a few questions to get an update. The first one is: has the board met since then and can you please update us on any recent meeting?

The Chief Minister:

I will ask Paul to take that one.

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

The Oversight Board is only the most significant accountable officers who are responsible for what we might call arm's length organisations. In reality that is only myself as Chief Officer at the Cabinet Office and the Chief Officer for the Economy. The board met in August and what we looked at was the way to proceed further with this was through the work that the Chief Minister and Chief Executive have commissioned on what growth occurred between 2018 and 2024, why that happened and, if the public sector was minded to do so, and if the Ministers and the Assembly were minded to do so,

how might it be reformed in the future. It is all part of that same debate in terms of what we want our public sector and wider landscape to look like in the future.

The Connétable of St. Mary:

Is not one of the main purposes of the board to not get conformity but see where savings and different methods of approach can be brought together?

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

That is the responsibility of each accountable officer and then through them to the chair and the board where those apply. They do not apply to all of the arm's length organisations. That process continues to take place on a quarterly basis. As I have described to the Public Accounts Committee, I meet each of the arm's length organisations on a quarterly basis and we review their oversight, their performance, their finance, their risk, et cetera. We do it through targeted intervention not at the centre.

The Connétable of St. Mary:

You mentioned the workshop. There was a workshop in September. I am not sure if you went to that one or not. Can you please advise on the outcome of that? Are there any further meetings in that area to consider and understand any potential changes?

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

Of course. As the Chief Executive described, we have gone through a process of trying to do a comprehensive analysis of what changed between 2018 and 2024, of which the arm's length organisations were a considerable change, both new ones and some of them grew. The workshop presented what changed and the workshop that we are talking about next week - on which I think I am coming to give a briefing on on Tuesday - is to explain, at least from an executive perspective, why we think that happened and if you were minded to do anything about it in the future, what are the kind of levers that you have available at the States Assembly to do something about it. It has absolutely been developing in that period. It has been part of the Chief Executive's objectives and what you will see next week is the product of that.

The Connétable of St. Mary:

Going on to that meeting next week then, will we see any further decisions made that can then be shared with the panel?

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

We should declare it is not a decision-making meeting. It is a workshop. It is exposing why we think these things happen and it is a largely a decision for the long term. It is for the next Council of

Ministers, next Chief Minister, next States Assembly: if you were minded to reform it, might you do it? The chance is to have that workshop and potentially build a political consensus that something needs to be done.

The Chief Minister:

May I just say, I intend to get to the end of this term and leave a firm set of recommendations on certain issues for the next Assembly and next government. So we are not kicking everything down the road. We are doing this work so, if you like, there is a foundation laid that is ready to go should the new government and the new Assembly wish to go in that direction.

The Connétable of St. Mary:

My final question was what trajectory would you set for the next government when that is in hand? Will it be a trajectory as such or how will that be put to the Council of Ministers?

The Chief Minister:

Sort of paraphrasing the U.K. (United Kingdom) Prime Minister a little bit when he came into office 1½ years ago and the same goes ... the timing of it is not great but let us just say the international context, not just Jersey but other countries around the world, have grown too large and too complex. I think we have even caught a lot of structures. Every time something has gone wrong, we bring in a new structure or more regulation because we want to avoid making the mistakes again, and there is another body, another procedure, another consultation. In my experience as Chief Minister, I think that for Government is one of frustration at times, because every time we want to pull a lever and make something happen, there is a whole chain of regulation and procedure and process that goes on. Some of that is absolutely right but I think some of that slows us down and we get bogged down in regulation. I think what we are looking to do is deliver a more swift way of dealing with things, without compromising the regulation we really need, and then we look at some of the A.L.O.s to ensure we are not seeing too much duplication. By reducing duplication and making sure we have what we need and not more I think is in line with the recommendations we will be making but, of course, a lot depends on the next workshop because we want to get a steer from Members.

Chief Executive Officer:

I do want to reassure the Constable that individual accountable officers are robust in their evaluation both of the business plans for the A.L.O.s they are responsible for and the level of challenge provided to those organisations and to the Ministers. This is another area that needs the workshop, needs a consensus, because the biggest lobbies for more money for these organisations are typically in the Assembly. We need to somehow get to a point where we reach a better agreement. When I looked at the history of these bodies, I do not think we can call them arm's length in many cases. They are delivery bodies. Ministers in the past, sometimes distant past, have believed that for reasons of

commerciality, for reasons of wanting to borrow money, for a belief in it was an innovation yield to be had, felt that these structures, these delivery body structures with independent boards and chief executives, could do a better job than the public service as delivery bodies. That is a Ministerial intent, not a civil service intent, and still is. What has happened is the C. & A.G., over I think a period of 10 years, has cast serious doubt over that political proposition and those doubts are shared by civil servants, and there can be no doubt about that. We do need to get to a consensus about do we want to continue with this volume of organisations and delivery bodies that sit between a Minister and an Islander. I understand in the U.K. they could have a place in multifaceted communities. It is less understandable in a place like Jersey and that is what the civil servants have been calling out and that is what the C. & A.G. has been calling out. We are intrigued to see what the P.A.C. conclude because I think that will be the next trigger for us having a discussion.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

That report is due this week, I think.

Chief Executive Officer:

Is it? I knew it was imminent.

The Connétable of St. Mary:

One final question. You referred to some of the A.L.O.s and they come in different shapes and sizes. Which ones are actually under the remit of this board?

The Chief Minister:

I would rather not refer to individual A.L.O.s because we are still working out the policy on it, but I am happy to give you a private briefing, if you like.

The Connétable of St. Mary:

All right.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

I am just going to ask my next set of questions, which I think might ... you say that you have done a lot of work around civil servants' ideas and States Members' workshops. Are you going to consult with the relevant boards and A.L.O.s about Government considerations? One thing they told us during our budget review was that no formal discussions had taken place with Government about your plans for either merging or reducing or changing their functions.

The Chief Minister:

I think you are right, we have not done that yet although we have had, if you like, unofficial discussions over a number of weeks. We did talk to them. I think before we do that we want to get a steer and we can then start talking to the relevant arm's length bodies and other organisations.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Do you understand the frustration that A.L.O.s are demonstrating?

Chief Executive Officer:

I think 2 points are relevant. Firstly, individual Ministers who had specific policies under development for their A.L.O.s have consulted with those A.L.O.s. There is not many of them, I grant you, because there has not been many specific policies. Secondly, we felt that, and the Cabinet Office felt that, when it became clear that P.A.C. - and I cannot remember when it became clear - wanted to undertake a very comprehensive study and having seen the request from the P.A.C. to those bodies and to us about those bodies, subsequent request, I think we felt that it would not be right for us to add to that burden in this winter period, that we should wait for P.A.C.'s report and the evidence there and wait for our workshop, which handily sounds as if they are going to be back to back, and then engage from there. But I go back to what I said, we concluded, I think, with the Council of Ministers that this is something in which we need to do more work to reach a consensus with the whole Assembly, otherwise the legitimacy of any options that come forward will be continually questioned. That is kind of what has happened in reality.

Deputy J. Renouf:

The way you talked about it, Chief Executive, suggests that the civil servants are not convinced by the A.L.O. model, which sounds like the civil service would like to absorb those functions back or thinks that that is a more efficient method. What is the preferred model?

Chief Executive Officer:

No. What I said is that the C. & A.G. has issued a number of reports over a number of years casting doubt on the efficacy of this delivery body model in the hands of its proponents in terms of what it would deliver.

Deputy J. Renouf:

With respect, you did go on to say that the civil servants ...

Chief Executive Officer:

The civil servants share those concerns.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

About some of the A.L.O.s.?

Chief Executive Officer:

Yes. I am not going to get into individual bodies. It is not a policy position of the civil servants. It is a shared concern, for example, that it is difficult to get effective risk transfer at arm's length for some of the activities of government, therefore it is difficult to get what you thought were going to be the benefits because you still have the oversight of costs of the arm's length body. There have been concerns about aspects of governance, which the C. & A.G. has mentioned, around rencos(?) and so forth. Those are shared concerns.

The Chief Minister:

Can I just clarify that there are absolutely no plans, nor would they be politically supported, to start bringing a lot of that work back into government, and I know the Chief Executive ... we are for smaller government, bigger economy, but we are just looking at ways we can deliver it.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

I think the A.L.O.s have raised concerns regarding changes that could compromise independence, the trust, diluting the functions and the services. Are those elements being considered in your discussions and how are those concerns going to be alleviated?

The Chief Minister:

As the Chief Executive alluded to, Ministers have been discussing it with their boards and chief executives of some of the A.L.O.s, yes, of course, they will, but we have probably let the majority of them run unchecked now. When I say unchecked, we have not looked at how we can do it better for over 10 years. The taxpayer has invested tens and tens of millions into these organisations, so I think it is the right timing for a review and how we might deliver better. Yes, we will be as collaborative as we possibly can, of course. It will not be a surprise that some of the A.L.O.s will want to retain their own independence and their own boards but we ...

Deputy H.M. Miles:

I think the Council of Ministers report is going to be the catalyst, is it not?

The Chief Minister:

Exactly, yes.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

I am sorry to push on it but I am not sure I quite understand the position and I think there has been some contradictions in some things that have been said. For my own understanding, I would just

like a clear ... I seem to get the suggestion that the model does not work generally or there are challenges with the model of A.L.O.s and how it is currently functioning, yet politically, Chief Minister, I think you have just said there is not an ambition or any commitment to change the model.

[11:30]

What will a review achieve? It seems, to speak quite frankly, that the civil service is saying one thing and the politician at the table is saying the other. I am not trying to be confrontational. I would like to understand how the 2 are going to work together in your ambition going forward.

The Chief Minister:

I completely disagree if it sounded that way. Chief Executive, civil service, Government are on the same trajectory here. We are trying to make sure, as part of the broader work we are doing, that all aspects of public spending we are delivering right, that we have good value for money. That is why we are having a look right across our arm's length organisations, and that goes beyond just the 3 or 4 that we are talking about, the economic ones. There are lots of bodies, many, many bodies that receive taxpayers' money to deliver services, so we are looking at all of those. Some of those we think are probably doing a good job and we will leave exactly as they are; some there could be some areas for consolidation, and that is where we agree. We agreed we would have a look and find out where we can do things better.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Consolidation outside government but not bringing them into government?

The Chief Minister:

There are no plans to bring any of those services inside government currently. When we have done the work we might identify some areas that might differ.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

You have talked about the bodies that are delivering services. What about the bodies that are set up to make sure that government is delivering services, doing the right things, like the commissions, the Office for Children's Commissioner, the Care Commission, the Jersey Advisory and Conciliation Services? Those bodies were set up for a very specific reason, to make sure that Government services are doing the right thing.

The Chief Minister:

Absolutely. We will support that and, if anything, work to strengthen the work they do but, for example, if there are 3 or 4 bodies that could ... 2 or 3 bodies that could be of regulation, that could

be merged or amalgamated and still deliver stronger, which would free up further investment so they can deliver on that. So that could be a possibility but ...

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Is that currently being considered as part of the workshop format that you are doing or are you simply focusing on the A.L.O.s that deliver service?

Chief Executive Officer:

There is a number of things here. Back to the top - in case of some confusion at the other side of the table - when the Government decided it wanted to look at curbing growth, it said it wanted to include all of the delivery bodies, not just the core of the civil service. I think that was a reasonable proposition, given tens of millions of pounds are distributed to bodies, most of which are 100 percent Government funded, they do not have independent sources of funding. I think that was a sensible thing to do, is to understand that. The second reasons was, with such a body of watch from the C. & A.G. to say you better have another think about this because it is counter-trend to the places that you copied it from. She gave us a particular example of Wales, which she is familiar with, and how they have fundamentally changed the delivery body structure, partly because of public finance pressures, partly because of effectiveness. All of that is consistent with the world theme of curbing growth. We then got into a situation - I am pretty sure it is almost a year ago now, but it might not have been as much - where we realised through the workshops that we had to spend more time on the why than on the what. Why have things happened? Why are things the way they are? What was the original political and policy reasoning? We had to do more work in that in the workshops before we could ever get any kind of consensus around this or any other part of the public finances. In the middle of that, the P.A.C. let us know that they wanted to do their own deep dive study of all of these organisations. That caused us not to step back, but to recognise that we should wait for that work before going forward. In the end, if we conclude that we are not getting value for money, or even if we think we are getting value for money, that it is just not affordable to run the public service of Jersey this way, we will have to look at options which give us a chance deal with it. The Council of Ministers has been clear that the time to look at those options in any detail is at the start of a new government, not at the end of this Government.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

You have not answered my question. My question was specifically about what are you doing regarding the commissions that are set up ...

Chief Executive Officer:

All of that would be included.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

... to hold the Government to account, rather than deliver services. For example, the Office of the Children's Commissioner was set up for a very specific reason: to make sure that the Government was delivering safe and secure services for children. When they come to you and say we have not got enough money, your reaction is to hold that money in the budget. As you know, we brought an amendment to that effect. I think what we are trying to establish is whether you consider there to be a difference between the arm's length bodies that hold you to account and the arm's length bodies that deliver services for you.

The Chief Minister:

Of course there is a difference. They have different functions, different roles. We recognise that.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

But the 3 agencies that provided a submission to the budget said there was no consultation from Government about their services and their funding.

Chief Executive Officer:

Can we just stop you there because the Children's Commissioner is in the Cabinet Office? We have given a lot of evidence on this already, but let us go through it again, Paul.

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

As I said to Constable Johnson, I meet with the Children's Commissioner's Office and her on a quarterly basis. We have regular catch-ups outside that and on an oversight basis, of course. We meet and we discuss budgets. We saw how it played out in the budget in December, but the accountable office for that billed ... I note that the amount of money that was spent by the Children's Commissioner's Office in 2025 is still lower than the budget that has been given for 2026.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

The Children's Commissioner told us quite clearly that to date no formal conversations have taken place with them during the time of the current commissioner about the merging of their functions with other arm's length organisations.

Chief Executive Officer:

That is correct.

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

No, that is a separate thing. That is a very different thing.

The Chief Minister:

We are not considering merging the Children's Office of the Commissioner ...

Chief Executive Officer:

On their budget, she has had a lot of consultation on that. She would not have, for the reasons I mentioned earlier.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

At what point are you going to extend that consultation to the bodies that are involved and, of course, to the public?

The Chief Minister:

My view is we are waiting for the further report to come out from the P.A.C. When we get to a position, an agreed position of where we want to go, that is when we start consultation with the bodies, but just to be clear, there is no ... I think the Children's Commissioner, in light of the foundations upon which it was built, would be subsumed almost with anything.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Thank you. Did you have any follow-up? Okay. Change of subject completely now.

Deputy A. F. Curtis:

We are going to take a complete change of subject here, Chief Minister, and talk about digital.

The Chief Minister:

Great.

Deputy A. F. Curtis:

But first, thinking back to your comments about the recruitment freeze and the need to curb the growth, to what extent have you put a priority on the departments' Ministers using digital services to ensure they can deliver in the absence or the shrinking of especially some of the back-end functions?

The Chief Minister:

With Jason, this is ...

Deputy A. F. Curtis:

I guess this is a top down you have put a direction out, you want services to be high quality. Have you put any priority that, the way that quality services are going to be delivered in a shrinking workforce is digital? Is that something you have put a direction on yet?

The Chief Minister:

I think we all agree with that. We are specifically working towards better use of A.I. (artificial intelligence). I am not sure where our I.T. (information technology) strategy links in here. Maybe it is an opportunity for me to sideways pass to Jason. But yes, improving I.T., embracing A.I. are key to delivering better service and improved productivity moving forward.

Deputy A. F. Curtis:

Do you think it should form hand in hand a way for addressing what you might have described as the top heavy or the growing public service?

The Chief Minister:

Yes. Let me give an example. The vastly improved implementation of digitisation across the health service is one example.

Deputy A. F. Curtis:

My follow-up will now be about the technology strategy, which is half a year after publication. Could we have an update on how that is delivering and whether that is delivering change within the wider public service?

Chief Information Officer, Digital Services:

Certainly, thank you for the question. Just finishing picking up on the linkage, the projects and the programmes, before I answer that question about digitisation, there are a number of cross-government programmes in the Government Plan that we are delivering, that we are working to, that provide those efficiencies for digitisation. We can bring that alive if you want to go a level down. To pick up on your question on I.T. strategy, as you know - just to recap for the public - we published a strategy that was approved last summer and work is now underway. The next level of detail we call roadmaps and standards, and there is some new I.T. policies that we are developing, rolling out. Some of that has already been implemented under a programme called I.T. Infrastructure Improvement Programme, so the underlying technology infrastructure with new standards and policies. Some of it is implemented by the Cyber Programme, Cyber 2.0, which is in the Government Plan. We achieved a significant level of improvement in cybersecurity in the second half of the year, where we focused on some particular areas that we were concerned about. Specifics on the I.T. strategy around service management, when I carried out my first review in 2024 and took an overall assessment, concluded that a lot of the problems with front line services systems failing was actually caused by change projects. Change projects were not tested properly, they were being put into production too quickly. What the industry calls the change control process goes for a number of sequences getting ready to go into production. In the second half of the year, driven by the I.T.

strategy, we completely overhauled that change control process, including training for the teams and the staff involved in that, and significant improvement and lift off.

Deputy A. F. Curtis:

When digital services struggle to deliver or have to keep up with some of the basics, we see politically that that impacts delivery of new laws, new legislation. The rent and dwelling licences show that when you cannot implement a modern process you then see friction within departments. Is the recruitment freeze having any impact on your ability to deliver and, therefore, enable departments to deliver the smoothest services they need to?

Chief Information Officer, Digital Services:

Coupled with the Government Plan, no. The Government Plan lays out the priorities. I work extensively with the E.L.T. at least quarterly on which projects are priority. That is a very agile prioritisation process. Things come up and down. Very deliberately, we do it department by department so we can rely on the new legislation and regulations, things that are changing. Sometimes, we simply pause a project on number 2 or 3 so we can move something up to the first. As regards to change freeze for capital projects where there is sudden and urgent demand, we put it on the local market quite a lot with third parties and contractors. We put a lot of focus for the local market. As Andrew mentioned, very specialist roles, we do put on third parties. Change freeze per se, as we have the Government Plan, when we need something, if we have not got the specialist right there for a change project, then we request forward, mentioned by Andrew, an exception process, and we mobilise. Maybe it has taken a month or 2 longer for some of those projects but this is all, I would say, part of curbing the growth.

Deputy J. Renouf:

I have got a question at a higher level. If you want to keep on going with the detail ...

Deputy A. F. Curtis:

I have got one more back to the Chief Minister, which is back to whether the department is able to deliver what your wider Ministerial ambitions are. We know, for example, there is a raft of different legislation coming forward that will require the public to engage with departments. Departments have had very tight restraint on finances like regulation. Are you confident that you are staffing and you are funding digital services to enable new legislation like the Food Law that will require new licensing, the Animal Welfare Law that may require new licensing. Are you ensuring that the funding in the budget and the priorities align with Ministers? Is there enough cross-cutting?

The Chief Minister:

I am assured on the current budget because we did a lot of collaborative working with the department to ensure, we were ... as Jason said, we are funded to deliver our priorities, but that is where we have to build in the discipline. We chose our priorities, we stick to it. Once you start broadening and broadening and do things that are rather nice to have rather than the important things, that is when we risk getting into trouble.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Is any strategic work being done to think about how A.I. is going to be the next step in Government? There are claims made by people that this could involve re-engineering Government quite substantially. I wonder whether that work is underway, whether anybody is thinking about the next step, because it could happen quickly. The benefits will be there if we move quickly, potentially.

The Chief Minister:

The short answer to that is yes.

[11:45]

Chief Information Officer, Digital Services:

Yes, very much. We have a A.I. strategic plan which includes addressing some of our underlying data issues because A.I. is not very useful without foundational data. I have a plan in front of me. I am happy to talk through a break out session if you want to pan to the detail. We have already rolled out some A.I. We have A.I. solutions that we have been experimenting in some areas from the early part of 2025. As we published the I.T. strategy, we went quite widely on consultation across the departments. We had a number of projects in that prioritised list that we have. Foundations are important with A.I. We have to do it safe. We have to be ethical. It is a big part of our A.I. policy and the steering group that I chair. So we are addressing things right now that may not sound too exciting, like our address directory, our people directory, our organisational directory, so our foundations are safe. That is well underway. We have a number of pilot projects. We have recently rolled out, across the whole of government, Microsoft Copilot, as our strategic partner and strategic solution. Again, that is about keeping us safe. We have had some really great feedback from departments and front lines for that. In simple terms, yes, we do. I chair a steering group and it is very deliberately cross-department and that is a huge area of cross-government focus. There is some measure of understanding with maybe the way I have communicated the project prioritisation process. I have talked all about departments, that we do not have cross-government focus. This is very much ... our A.I. approach is all cross-government with a very big focus in healthcare. As mentioned earlier, I support colleagues in digital health work.

Deputy J. Renouf:

That is the government workings. Will the public see a difference through that or is this about efficiency within government?

Chief Information Officer, Digital Services:

That is a good question. Synthetic workers, synthetic roles, to use some terminology.

Deputy J. Renouf:

They really need better words, do they not? [Laughter]

Chief Executive Officer:

You asked for it, Deputy Renouf.

Chief Information Officer, Digital Services:

Yesterday, Digital Jersey hosted their annual review event. The Chief Minister and I attended. They were talking about how augmentation of data applied to roles gives additional headcount through synthetic roles. I agree, fancy terminology. That is the industry terminology. It is not always about headcount reduction. Sometimes it might be headcount addition through artificial intelligence. There are some pockets of examples - we have looked at other jurisdictions - that could be beneficial here. My strategic plan that I laid out in the strategy is we are going to work with each department this year on their digital strategies. In other words: what do they want to automate better? Where do they need more efficiencies? Where is the volume of their data and their human work where we can drive efficiencies? That is where we need to study and there are plans for that this year.

Deputy A.F. Curtis:

Thank you. Can Andrew make a brief comment?

Chief Executive Officer:

Yes, just on this strategy point, A.I. has not been looked at in the context of some sort of holy grail for transforming public finances, to answer your question. There is a legitimate case for that being something the next government may want to look at, because there are about 7 or 8 ways you can change the public finances and we have only been discussing one of them in here, which is chopping spending down in areas that you are already spending it. I think that is right. Where A.I. is more featuring, in policy under development, education is a good example of that. All of you will know that A.I. is already quite heavily deployed in teaching and aspects of teaching already. In those areas it is a much more strategic debate which is if you look at education in Jersey, you look at our demography and the projected decline in pupil numbers, you look at the way in which A.I. is coming into education, usually through existing software packages that we have already got in education existing suppliers. The big policy debate here in education and everywhere is as the pupil numbers

decline, is that an opportunity to release resources if you had your saving money mindset on or is it going to be completely offset by a rising need per pupil? In other words, what you think is a saving from A.I. is not really a saving at all because the amount you have to spend per pupil is going to rise almost proportionate to the decline of pupils. That is a massive policy issue which the current Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning is thinking his way through with his officials. Again, I keep saying this, it is one of the areas where this Government realised they were not going to change anything in 2 years but they needed to put in better groundwork for whoever the next Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning is, to really arrive in office and see some information about those sorts of choices.

Deputy A.F. Curtis:

Just a couple more questions focusing on the cost pressures and your plan. Part of the technology strategy is about simpler systems consolidation, and we note that the software contract for Concerto, which is used for asset management, is up for renewal. Are there any plans to look at where that system will be simplified into existing platforms, like the S.A.P. (Systems, Applications and Products) Connect?

Chief Information Officer, Digital Services:

That is a good example. Yes, there is a study, and I am part of a steering group working with the Chief Officer and his team on the future plans for Concerto. There is a draft paper that we talked about a few weeks ago at a workshop and, yes, that is under review.

Deputy A.F. Curtis:

Some of these larger enterprise platforms obviously make up a large amount of our licensing fees that your budget goes to. Are you seeing any cost pressures rising that will put further pressure on the department for renewals or anything that you are going to have to then start thinking quite astutely about?

Chief Information Officer, Digital Services:

Yes, great question for me now. The inflationary level of the technology industry is higher above averages, as you are probably aware. I am not going to give the specific company, but we have recently spent 3 months negotiating with one of the major contracts and we have saved a significant amount of money with the negotiation. The Treasurer approved it a few weeks ago and committed to that contract. That has gone towards my savings plan for this year. That is my absolute intent in focus to keep focusing on the non-staff costs, the licences, because I need key resources and I need more specialists and I want to obviously build that base. We are very pleased in that area and more to come during the year focusing on the contracts.

Deputy A.F. Curtis:

There is an interesting point that you made, we need more specialists. That goes slightly counter to we are adequately staffed to deliver the Government's priorities. Could you explain the difference between we need more specialist and we are up and ready for whatever the Government are throwing at us?

Chief Information Officer, Digital Services:

My answer earlier was about now and the projects and the programmes we have. A good example on a very strategic project, we have looked at how much we are going to put in the public cloud and how much in the private cloud. Microsoft is our partner in this particular area and the cloud technology is called Azure. It is a platform and we have a few specialists but not enough as we move away from on-prem to things in our data centres to cloud-based. I would like to have double the number of Azure specialists, as one example of many areas. Cybersecurity would be another area. We have got some very impressive tools that we have got a lot of value out of in the last 6 months. I would like to have more specialists in those areas that are on the full-time headcount because unfortunately cybersecurity is not going to go away. It is a problem stuck with us for many, many years, probably our lives. As part of that, we are looking at how we use private clouds so we get the benefits of cloud technology but some control on data sovereignty here. Thank you.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Another change of subject on to gender pay gap now. At a hearing last year, we heard that Government were working with businesses, I.O.D. (Institute of Directors) and Mind The Gap on a toolkit. That was launched in November, I believe. Can you give us an update on uptake by businesses since it has launched and what feedback have you received from them?

Assistant Chief Minister:

Sure. As you correctly say, that initiative was started and what we have done is a whole communication piece around that because what we found is some businesses were really good at having their own internal mechanisms for producing their gender pay gaps statistics, others were not. What we wanted to do is get across the landscape of what it looks like in Jersey. There are 2 pieces of work going on. One, of course, is by Deputy Alves who is leading that piece of work with Jersey Business and the I.O.D. website being that repository for that information that businesses can feed into. Then, of course, the other piece of work is our own internal gender pay gap, and we are producing a report on 16th February that will bring us up to date with where we are on our own gender pay. The ethics behind it, of course, is that a diverse workplace always produces better outcomes and to make sure that all of our jobs are always based on skills and abilities, very, very rarely on gender but, of course, there are some parts of the business that naturally males or females gravitate towards. Manual workers tend to be male. Teaching assistants and teachers, broadly

there are a higher percentage of females in those roles, but we always work towards skills and abilities in terms of recruitment and selection and in terms of promotion.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Thank you. The toolkit, what has the uptake been like so far since November?

Assistant Chief Minister:

The uptake so far has been good. There is still an ongoing piece of work and an ongoing communication piece to better understand and better encourage businesses to get involved and report their statistics but it is a pretty easy process. It is not onerous. It is quite an easy process to feed in and form part of that picture.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

How are Government communicating it, promoting it to people, and then what data is being collected about, first of all, how many people are using it? I sense maybe you do not know that answer at the moment because you may have told me, and then also what they are doing with it. For example, when you go on the website, it says "download it". Do you know how many people have clicked and downloaded it to start with and then followed up from there?

Assistant Chief Minister:

Yes, so there will be those statistics that come out. It is early days yet. It was just November was when it started but it is an ongoing piece of work with the communication piece and the throughput from that data that we are collecting.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Will you collect more data than just how many downloads there have been?

Assistant Chief Minister:

Yes, of course.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Is there an engagement that goes on with businesses as well?

Assistant Chief Minister:

There is an ongoing piece of engagement with that piece of work.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

I would just like to understand how that engagement is going to work. How is data going to be collected? How is it being measured, the success of that?

Assistant Chief Minister:

Yes, there is a communication piece around, firstly, encouraging businesses to get involved. Secondly, when we have got reports to produce out of the backend of what we are collecting then obviously that will be distributed widely, not only to the people who have contributed but broadly as a communication piece from Government as well.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Okay. You mentioned the internal work around the Government's own data and own pay gap. What steps are Government taking to address trends and patterns that may have come up from the last report that we may hopefully see come through in the next one?

Assistant Chief Minister:

Yes, so I think what we try to position and remind all our staff is that, firstly, we are a family-friendly employer. There are lots of policies and procedures in place, as well as legislation of course, that allows people to have access to flexible working, if it fits their situation, and allows people to work from home, if that is appropriate, or when there are busy periods of work, allows staff to take time back. Although we very rarely offer overtime, it has been highlighted that people with carer responsibilities very often are not able to have access to that overtime, so we do try to make sure that any overtime, if it is available, is distributed as widely as possible, not just the first person that is available to fill that requirement.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Just to wind you back to the private sector, the perceived weakness of non-mandatory pay gap reporting is that there will be some companies that are not interested, for whatever reason. Is not the risk here that your tools you are putting out, the reporting gap and so on, will go very happily to the companies that are already keen on this stuff? What are you doing to address the areas where companies might not be keen to? Are you trying to proactively identify areas of non-involvement and engage?

Assistant Chief Minister:

Yes, that is always a risk, is it not, the people that are doing the right thing are the people that are more likely to feed into it? Again, what we can see as we build up that data, we can see where the gaps are. Again, we will proactively go out to those individual businesses or sectors and remind them of the importance of this data and how it is going to improve the situation.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Just as a final one from me. You said the Government report will come out February.

Assistant Chief Minister:

It will.

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Are there any trends or barriers, or perhaps even improvements as well, that have started to come through that you are seeing in the organisation already?

Assistant Chief Minister:

Yes. What we have noticed is that if we measure the median hourly pay gap, that has come in. From 2023 it was 12.5 per cent, 2024 it is 10.3 per cent. We have seen that gap closing, which is encouraging. Of course, we want to do more and that report will highlight the further initiatives that we are taking to make sure that we can continue to close that gender pay gap that we have got.

[12:00]

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

You are expecting it to come down yet again in the next report.

Assistant Chief Minister:

Hopefully, yes. That is it. It is moving in the right direction.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

While you are still talking, Assistant Chief Minister, I have a question about freedom of information.

Assistant Chief Minister:

Yes.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

I think you told us last time that the consultation was undertaken between September and November. Can you update us on the consultation responses?

Assistant Chief Minister:

Absolutely. Consultation responses have been really good, and the consultation is now closed. The final report is going to be produced in the next week or 2. What we are finding is there are a couple of things that I have highlighted already. The first one is better publication schemes so that

scheduled public authorities proactively produce information rather than people having to go to look for it. That in itself will reduce the frequency of requests that are made to Government. We are also looking at the options - without getting too technical - in the U.K. Scheduled public authorities are in a schedule in the legislation and it is vast but at least you know whether that organisation is in or out of the legislation. What I would like to see is a review of our schedule 1 to make sure that all the scheduled public authorities that should be named are named in the law. It will be clearer and more transparent. That is one thing which is relatively easy to do. The other thing, of course, is the question of States-owned entities and, following the proposition from Deputy Carolyn Labey a number of years ago now, we are to the point where we will make firm recommendations for where we should be going with that and how far it should be extended. Of course, having met ... and I personally went to some of the consultations. While a lot of those organisations agree with the thrust of the law, they look at the practicalities of how it is going to affect them. We need to make sure that if we do move in that direction, it is appropriate and that the individual organisations are able to cope with it. It may be they get 2 or 3 a year but they may be inundated at certain times and obviously Government experience shows that we started with 60, when the legislation first came in, to about 1,200 now. It is a lot of work to go through all those individuals. What we are looking at as part of the process as well is a policy around repeated and vexatious requests and, again, how we can better manage the requests that we are getting.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Okay. Thank you.

Deputy J. Renouf:

The Government published the Common Population Policy Annual Report just over a week ago, I think. A couple of technical questions about it really first of all. We need an Appointed Day Act to bring into effect P.15/2025. Is the plan to bring that in before the election and, if so, when?

The Chief Minister:

Paul, can you help me with this?

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

Yes, of course. Yes. Deputy Alves is working on it and that is the objective, yes.

Deputy J. Renouf:

It will be brought. Okay. Can you update us on the work to consider modern remote working practices on housing and work controls which was due in Q1 2026. I think this is to deal with the fact that people are not necessarily working in the place where they are ... or paying tax where they are working and so on.

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

Yes, I do know what you are talking about. I think we will have to write to you on that one, I am afraid.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Okay. Thank you. The report mentioned a line that said: "There are planned changes for early 2026 to open up new routes to encourage high-earning individuals to relocate to Jersey." Chief Minister, what is being planned in that area?

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

It is the J-Cat.

The Chief Minister:

Yes. The high net worth scheme needs to be for high net worth and we get applications from people and businesses that do not quite meet that criteria. We are looking at an expanded J-Cat in certain circumstances, so where there is a business that wants to relocate, for example, business owners that want to relocate that do not meet that criteria.

Deputy J. Renouf:

These are the people who do not pass the threshold in terms of income and capital and so on.

The Chief Minister:

Yes, but have propositions that are economically compelling.

Deputy J. Renouf:

What process will that involve? Who will decide on these? Is this another H.A.W.A.G. (Housing and Work Advisory Group)?

The Chief Minister:

No., it will run through the existing process and go through the existing H.A.W.A.G..

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

We have the Locate Jersey process. What this is is non-preferential tax rates. These are people or businesses, as the Chief Minister says, who could relocate and add value to Jersey.

Deputy J. Renouf:

How will this be actioned? It says “planned changes”. What will come forward? Is it Ministerial Orders?

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

Its guidance underpins the Locate Jersey process and the intermediaries who already work with Locate Jersey to find businesses and encourage growth in Jersey. They will just be made aware of these slightly expanded criteria to encourage entrepreneurs and other individuals and families who would benefit from it.

Deputy J. Renouf:

What will we see? Will something be published to show what these changes are?

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

Yes. We can share that when it is ready.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Okay. Do you have any sense of how many people or businesses you are targeting through this? Presumably you identified a need. Do you have a sense of how many ...

The Chief Minister:

Fifteen a year. Just kidding. **[Laughter]** No. The demand we have seen is quite small, but we do not want to miss any opportunities. Somebody might need a longer - we refer to them as J-Cat - entitled status to give them time to establish a position.

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

As the Chief Minister has described, we are using the old colloquial term of J-Cat. That is because this scheme has always existed. We are just clarifying how it should apply in the future to be making sure we are not missing opportunities.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Okay, but nothing else is planned in this term of office in relation to Control of Housing and Work (Jersey) Law.

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

No.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Okay.

Deputy A.F. Curtis:

Just a few more questions on the Common Population Policy that yourselves and Deputy Alves published and co-wrote the foreword for. The policy references obviously a number of statistical pieces of evidence. What, beyond the typical year-to-year statistics that you work on, created a highlight within the research to create this year's Common Population Policy? Did anything change in preparing the Common Population Policy in research or evidence that you gathered to inform the creation of it?

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

The Chief Statistician will be able to describe this process far better. If you want the detail, we are happy to ask Ian to do that, but what we have been doing for the past 4 years now is making better use of what you might call administrative data. That is recognising that the census only comes around every 10 years. What can we do with the known data that we already have that we are just not pulling together? That is why, in this report and in the annual updates for projections that Statistics Jersey produces, we are getting better and better knowledge of who is currently here and what we can project going forward because it is based on a variety of data sources, not just that 10-year census.

Deputy A.F. Curtis:

The statistics tell one side but how one understands what is behind them and what you need to drive from a policy perspective is another. One area I know that the population policy talks about is the establishment of a migrant safeguarding group, in part probably driven from the data, but did any work happen in preparing that to then use that data to go out to the community to look at that? Could you provide an update of the establishment and operation of that group?

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

Yes, you are right. If you look at the Common Population Policy Report, which looks at the nationality basis, it has changed quite considerably post-Brexit and we welcomed other nationalities, particularly Filipinos and Africans in recent years. This is making sure that as part of that in a policy census, as you were describing, we are ensuring that there are sufficient migrant safeguards for those individuals. The Migrant Safeguard Ministerial Group is being established and the terms of reference, et cetera, are being devised. It has not met yet, but it is underway.

Deputy A.F. Curtis:

Okay. There are other areas that look at where policies might exist. One area is pro-natal policies is referenced very briefly and it says that there is very little evidence that pro-natal policies in other jurisdictions apply. I am not disputing that, but where have you captured the evidence in compiling

this year's policy report for those to understand ... again, this is what I mean when I talk about evidence.

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

Okay, sure.

Deputy A.F. Curtis:

You have got statistics and then you have ultimately got the research going into dictating where policy might be taken, where groups may be set up to address new and incoming problems, demographics. That is the kind of information I am looking for. What has gone into the post-quantitative research?

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

Of course. Pro-natal, for example, we had a whole session on it in the Housing and Work Advisory Group plus the Ministerial group. What you are largely relying on there is international experience and there is good academic justification for that assertion. It might in some cases encourage that additional discretionary child. It is a strange term but that is how the academics describe it. In the main those sorts of levers do not move the dial on what is a Western nation trend towards fewer children.

The Chief Minister:

There are very interesting examples around the world of that but not many of them would fit our community.

Deputy A.F. Curtis:

My last question is a slightly larger section than some of those ones in there, which is the reporting and update on the Ageing Well Roadmap that the 2024 policy report dictated. Could you just provide an update as to the work going on to co-ordinate actions? I think we are expecting a key update.

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

Absolutely. Again, we drive that through the Housing and Work Advisory Group. It has all the key Ministers who have a responsibility for that. It was also in the Investing In Jersey programme that we published in August of last year. We need to build Jersey to ensure that we are ready for that changing demographic and that is also consistent with Deputy Gardiner's proposition on that front as well.

Deputy A.F. Curtis:

The Chief Minister's work programme detailed a number of deliverables for this quarter. Are you on track for all of those? I would go into more detail, but we are short on time.

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

Of course. Most significant was the lodging of the Comptroller and Auditor General (Jersey) Law which we did 2 weeks ago.

Deputy A.F. Curtis:

Okay. Thank you.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Thank you. Again, just a very quick question around the Care Inquiry workstream. It was during our previous hearing we were informed that the consultation was underway regarding the apology plaque wording and its placement and installation. We were just wondering if you could update us on the outcome of that consultation and the progress.

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

The plaque.

Assistant Chief Minister:

Yes, we have tweaked the wording, and we are writing out to survivors in the next couple of days just to inform them that the plaque will be installed, low level to be fair. I know this is a public hearing but there will not be a big razzmatazz. We are going to put it at a place to remember on a bench in a nice quiet area.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Okay. Thank you for that. Is there a timeline for the completion of any outstanding Care Inquiry workstream commitments?

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

That is the main one.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Okay.

Head of Organisational Development & People Operations:

And an ombudsman. Do not forget that.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

That is a very nice segue into Connétable Johnson. There we are.

The Connétable of St. Mary:

Moving on to the complaints mechanism. Following Deputy Scott's review of complaints handling in the meeting of the C.O.M. (Council of Ministers), the findings and proposals C.O.M. asked that further work be undertaken for the cost-benefit analysis of the 2 options: ombudsperson or just strengthening the existing complaints mechanism. Chief Minister, can you update us, please, on the outcome of the cost-benefit analysis of those 2 options?

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

Deputy Scott is finishing her report and that will be announced and published shortly.

The Connétable of St. Mary:

Can you elaborate on the word "shortly", please?

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

No. She is working with the team. We will do it as soon as possible.

The Connétable of St. Mary:

It has been a long time coming.

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

Before the election. We are talking at the very least at the end of March.

The Connétable of St. Mary:

It will definitely be before the end of March.

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

That is what I am trying to say, yes. It stems from her detailed work on what is necessary. She received the steer from the Council of Ministers that we wanted a more detailed look at the cost-benefit analysis, as you say, and this is then her follow-up report.

The Connétable of St. Mary:

It has been a long time coming, if I am allowed to say that. Are there any particular hurdles we should be aware of why it appears to have got bogged down?

The Chief Minister:

Not hurdles as such but I think Deputy Scott works to a level of detail, and she wanted to make sure she is content with her position. That is what she is working on.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Is it a report - you keep referring to a report - or is it a proposition?

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

To be determined.

[12:15]

Deputy A.F. Curtis:

Sorry, can I just understand? As the Connétable of St. Mary says, this is a long time coming in the workstream with Deputy Scott. Is it, Mr. Wylie, your team that is supporting?

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

Yes.

Deputy A.F. Curtis:

Could you be a bit more specific as to where you are? What are the remaining elements of the report that need to be provided? Is there further evidence to capture? Is it about policy ideas? We are aware that obviously it had gone to the Council of Ministers quite some time back and it would be good to understand specifically what is outstanding, whether there needs to be further evidence, consultation or policy decision in making this report.

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

What we have seen with the ombudsman debate for a decade now is the legislation itself is perfectly possible. We see it in other jurisdictions. In Jersey we have the bones of drafting instructions and that has never been the issue. What it comes down to, though, is that judgment as to: is the investment, in terms of the size and the cost of the ombudsperson in their office and the effect it has on the public service in terms of a change in responding to that, justifiable compared to the situation we have at present with the Complaints Panel? That is a judgment. It is always going to be difficult to determine. It is not maths, so it is going to be a political judgment eventually, but what we have here is Deputy Scott's hard work to set out her position at least.

The Connétable of St. Mary:

There are 2 points I would like to come back on. One is on the cost. That will depend to a certain extent on the ambit of the ombudsman's responsibility. I think one of the options proposed by the

Law Commission was that on health, for instance, that could be deferred. Is that distinction being taken in your cost analysis?

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

Yes, absolutely. Health could be deferred but if we look at how health is dealt with in other jurisdictions, it is usually about 60 per cent, two-thirds, of the casework. We have got to be honest that if you establish an ombudsperson without health in their remit, there is in all likelihood a path that leads to expanding to health and therefore we need to go into this eyes open and say it may cost about £1 million initially for the non-health elements but if we are going to go for health, it is going to be considerably more.

The Connétable of St. Mary:

Yes, but without health at least it would open the door, shall I say, and the knowledge there could be expanded and that would be more palatable to the Exchequer.

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

Again, this all comes down to judgment. Yes, that is a legitimate view. It has got to be balanced against the effects it would have on the public service, on the public purse.

The Connétable of St. Mary:

Yes, my general point really is, as I say, I am frustrated, as you can gather.

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

Of course.

The Connétable of St. Mary:

I happened to be chair of L.A.P. (Legislation Advisory Panel) when the Law Commission proposed it was introduced. The Chief Policy Officer encouraged us to take it forward. The L.A.P. were unanimous in a decision about taking it forward. The States passed the appropriate resolution. The C. & A.G. weighed in, the Care Commissioner weighed in et cetera. I am concerned about the risk basically of not implementing it in some way and the fact that costs might, shall I say, trump the value to the social conduct of our population. I am just hoping the cost is put in its right place really.

Chief Officer, Cabinet Office:

Absolutely. I hear what you are saying but, again, it goes back to that judgment.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Chief Minister, can I just check, are you really saying that after all this time we still do not know whether there is going to be a proposition or a report and there has been no decision taken on that?

Deputy H.M. Miles:

A proposition has been made. It would have to be rescinded.

Deputy J. Renouf:

I mean a new proposition.

The Chief Minister:

I think it is likely to lead to a proposition. As I said, Deputy Scott is working on the detail about the scope, costings and things like that, which we really need to know before we decide what any sort of proposition would be like.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Are we going to have a proposition before the end of your term?

The Connétable of St. Mary:

If the report does not come out at the end of March, there is no possibility of getting a proposition in that time.

The Chief Minister:

I cannot either confirm or not. We need to wait to see. I think it is possible, but we have limited time.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

I think it is fair to say, to use the vernacular, this is kicking the can down the road again into the next government.

The Chief Minister:

Well, I can understand that, but I would come back and say we have not left it like previous governments have in the past, not necessarily the last government because the last government brought it forward, but it has been pushed along. I think we have done more work, a lot more detailed work on it to understand ...

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Deputy Scott has been working on this for a very long time.

The Chief Minister:

About a year now. Yes, 12 months and we are also pressured by the pressure in costs as well. We can keep setting up the organisation so there is some juxtaposition around Council of Ministers about its value.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Talking of Deputy Scott, she has just lodged a proposition, P.23/2026, to request that the Chief Minister develop and implement a framework agreement by 31st March to ensure that the Ministerial Office maintain the explicit ability to support Ministers in challenging executive officers of government departments. Chief Minister, are you able to provide your position on those proposals?

The Chief Minister:

We are considering that. We are having internal conversations about that. I am not sure, I am hoping that Deputy Scott may be in a position, when we have looked more closely at the way the Ministerial Unit works at the moment, to withdraw that proposition. I do not think it is necessary because I think we are in a slightly different position than she may originally have thought but we have to ...

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Can you shed any light on the reasons that she has brought this particular proposition to the Assembly?

The Chief Minister:

I would have to refer to the proposition. I had a brief conversation with Deputy Scott. We had a brief exchange of emails and then it was lodged very recently, and I have not had a chance to study it.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

You are hoping she will withdraw it following discussions.

The Chief Minister:

We have had a conversation, and I am hoping when we have reconsidered she would consider withdrawing it. I do not think it is necessary because I think we achieve at the moment a lot of what she is asking for.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Okay. Thank you. Does any of the panel have any final questions?

Deputy J. Renouf:

Hit them with the killer final one.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

The killer final one.

The Chief Minister:

Thank you.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

The final question is just about reflections. This is your final quarterly hearing with the Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel. Apart from Deputy Renouf and Deputy Curtis, looking back over your term of office, what has been the most challenging?

The Chief Minister:

I have written something down which will take me about 3 minutes to read but I will start by answering that question that just about every task is challenging. Every day is challenging but it has been an absolute honour to do this job.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Can we just check this is not the manifesto? **[Laughter]**

The Chief Minister:

This is not even the foreword to the manifesto. I do not have time to think about manifestos but, of course, that will all come and we look forward to that. I apologise, some of what I am about to say I might have repeated it, but they are my reflections. Over the past 2 years, our priority has been to provide stability, consistency and delivery at a time when the Island has faced political uncertainty, fiscal pressure and growing global challenges. When this Government took office, we inherited a fragmented position, and I first want to say I do recognise the good work that the previous government did in certain areas, but it is never easy to pick something up after a confidence vote. That was unfortunate, but I just wanted to make sure we do recognise the work of members of a previous government is a difficult role and I would pay tribute to any Minister, anybody who goes into bat for that. Our first task was to steady the ship, try to restore confidence in decision-making and refocus government on practical outcomes for Islanders. I believe we have made solid and measurable progress. We have stabilised public finances through a more balanced and disciplined approach, begun curbing the growth in expenditure while protecting front line services. We have begun a comprehensive review of public spending with a clear emphasis on productivity, efficiency and providing better value for money based on reprioritisation and not austerity. We have also

shifted the focus of Government towards longer term planning, the launch of Investing In Jersey and the creation of a ringfenced capital investment framework will for the first time provide a structured and sustainable approach to funding major infrastructure in the public realm in the years ahead. This gives future governments and future Assemblies greater certainty and avoids the short-termism that has historically delayed essential projects. Alongside this we have taken practical steps to address the issues that matter most to Islanders. It does sound a bit like a manifesto, but it is not.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Do not worry, I have got a follow-up question. [Laughter]

The Chief Minister:

These include expanding access to affordable and family housing, supporting cost of living measures where we can by keeping government charges as low as possible, progressing plans for the new hospital, strengthening childcare and early years support and do a review of the competitiveness of the financial services sector and all of these actions. That is just a small selection of what has been achieved. When I say by the Government, by the Assembly as well because a lot of these have been supported by the Assembly but we have aimed that to make a tangible difference where possible to everyday life of Islanders, which should be at the forefront of any Assembly's mind. We have also worked to strengthen resilience and preparedness, whether through energy security, supply chain planning, transport connectivity or emergency planning arrangements, recognising that Jersey must be ready for an increasingly uncertain global environment. Importantly, we have tried to do this collaboratively. The Council of Ministers has represented a broad set of views which has not always been easy to manage but where we have often disagreed, we have tried not to be disagreeable. We have worked collegiately and constructively, putting the Island's interest ahead of individual politics and that spirit of co-operation has enabled, I believe, steady delivery across departments, a more stable operating environment for the public service. There will always be more to do. Every Assembly will inherit a great workload, and we can never stop learning. I have learnt, I think, something new every day, especially that it is important to learn when we have made mistakes and learn from them moving forward. I believe we will leave office with firmer foundations, more stable finances but still work to do there and clearer long-term planning, improved resilience and reforms underway that will support a sustainable public service long into the future. Those are my reflections. I know there are questions to come - I am not running the clock down, do not worry - but can I thank Scrutiny. I think we have had a good, strong, collaborative working relationship. We have not always agreed. You have put us under pressure. Some of these hearings have been uncomfortable but I think beneficial for all of us. What we must not forget, for us as Ministers, the preparation we do for Scrutiny is really valuable and important because it ensures we remain engaged and I would like to thank you for that.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Thank you.

Deputy J. Renouf:

You mentioned learning from mistakes. Any mistakes/failures?

The Chief Minister:

Not that I can think of. Basically, when I say learning from our mistakes, learning what we can do better. We look at a whole range of big decisions we have made, how we have come to them. With anything, could we have made any different decisions? I am not sure. I cannot think of anything that the States have approved or rejected that has caused a major problem, but in Ministerial office and in the role of Chief Minister dealing with different people ... and I think I have often changed my views on certain things, having been prepared to listen, I would say that. I would commend other Ministers for doing that as well because there have been quite entrenched positions where the Council of Ministers made a decision and those Ministers who were against it have flipped and gone with it.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

What advice would you give to the next Chief Minister and the next government?

The Chief Minister:

I think stability and confidence for the Island is paramount. I think the key focus needs to be on continuing to double down on public expenditure and I would say without austerity. We must avoid austerity. We must not let public service and Islanders suffer because we arguably might not have addressed our priorities in public spending, that we prioritise and focus on that. I think it is also really, really important to try not to fall out with each other. I know it is difficult at times, and we disagree, but it is really, really important that we are prepared to change our mind if the evidence suggests we should.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Thank you very much. That is perfect, look at that, on the dot of 12.30. Thank you very much, Chief Minister. On that I will close.

[12:30]