

Council of Ministers

(41st Meeting)

10th October 2023**Part A (Non-Exempt)**

All members were present, with the exception of Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North, Minister for Children and Education, Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf of St. Saviour, Minister for External Relations and Deputy M.E. Millar of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity, Minister for Social Security, from whom apologies had been received.

Deputy K.L. Moore of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter, Chief Minister
 Deputy C.F. Labey of Grouville and St. Martin, Minister for International Development
 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour, Assistant Minister for Children and Education (in lieu of the Minister) (not present for item A1)
 Deputy K.F. Morel of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity, Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture
 Deputy I.J. Gorst of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter, Minister for Treasury and Resources (for items A2, A4 and B2-B6 only)
 Deputy D.J. Warr of St. Helier South, Minister for Housing and Communities (not present for item A1)
 Deputy H.M. Miles of St. Brelade, Minister for Home Affairs
 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade, Minister for the Environment (not present for item A1)
 Deputy T.J.A. Binet of St. Saviour, Minister for Infrastructure
 Deputy M.R. Ferey of St. Saviour, Assistant Minister for Social Security (in lieu of the Minister) (for items A4 and B5 only)
 Deputy K.M. Wilson of St. Clement, Minister for Health and Social Services

In attendance -

Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade, Representative of the Comité des Connétables
 Connétable P.B. Le Sueur of Trinity (for item A1 only)
 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity (Assistant Minister for the Environment)
 Deputy A. Howell of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity (for item A1 only)
 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter, Assistant Chief Minister
 Dr. A. McLaughlin, Interim Chief Executive and Head of the Public Service, Government of Jersey
 M.H. Temple, K.C., H.M. Attorney General
 W. Millow, Deputy Greffier of the States (for items A2-A4, B1-B2 and B5 only)
 A. Scate, Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment Department (for items A3, B1-B2 and B4 only)
 T. Holvey, Chief Economic Adviser, Department for the Economy (for item B3 only)
 A. Hacquoil, Group Director, Strategic Finance, Treasury and Exchequer
 Dr. L. Magris, Group Director, Strategy and Innovation, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department (for items A3 and B1-B2 only)

R. Buchholz, Head of Property Strategy, Infrastructure and Environment Department (for item B4 only)
Ms. H. Butcher, Head of Economic Programmes, Department for the Economy (for item B3 only)
J. Vautier, Sector Lead – Rural and Marine, Cabinet Office (for part of items A4 and B5 only)
P. Bradbury, Head of Ministerial Office
K.L. Slack, Secretariat Officer, States Greffe

Note: The Minutes of this meeting comprise Parts A and B.

Welcome and perspective from the Connétable of Trinity.

A1. Connétable P.B. Le Sueur of Trinity thanked the Council of Ministers for visiting the Parish and introduced the members of his supportive and constructive team. He indicated that the relationship with the Holy Trinity Parish Church was strong and that the Parish was fortunate to have Canon G. Houghton as Rector.

The Parish finances were healthy, aided primarily by a development of first time buyers' homes on land that had been gifted to the Parish. The purchasers had been required to fund two thirds of the price of the properties, with the Parish holding a charge of one third, which was repayable upon the sale of the dwelling. The intention had been to build properties for life that were adaptable for growing families and only 4 homes had changed hands since the development had been completed 9 years previously. Works had recently finished to install a wall and pavement outside the aforementioned development and thanks were expressed to Deputy T.J.A. Binet of St. Saviour, Minister for Infrastructure and his team for their assistance in developing road safety improvements for Trinity, which would be presented to Parishioners on 12th October 2023.

As in many other Parishes, it had been necessary to increase the rates for 2023 by 7.5 per cent. There had been very few new homes built to contribute towards the rates, but the Parish received a small management fee from the 29 retirement bungalows. The impact of the increased cost of living on households had been evidenced in the slower payment of rates bills during 2023. The Council was informed that one reason for new developments being limited in Trinity was the lack of capacity in the sewer network.

Monies received from the post-Covid stimulus fund had been spent on modernising the youth centre, which was used by 3 separate youth groups and housed the 6th Jersey Scout Group. The centre was provided and administered by a Trust and the facilities were rented out to commercial users to keep costs as low as possible. The Connétable suggested to Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter, Assistant Chief Minister with responsibility for sport, that some funding might be required to assist in improving the playground area, which could be used for netball and basketball. There were a range of community activities within Trinity, including a pétanque terrain, a bowls club (which played at the youth centre), the 'three-in-one' senior citizens' club which met monthly, a bridge club and a climate change group.

There was a good local primary school, which had grown in size over the years, leading to associated issues with traffic management. The Parish was working with officers from the Infrastructure and Environment and Children, Young People, Education and Skills Departments to deliver a safer crossing across La Route de la Trinité to the playing fields on the opposite side of the road, which were currently underutilised due to issues associated with getting the children across the road in a safe manner.

The Connétable informed the Council that a source of frustration for him was the lack of resources to support those elderly Parishioners who were no longer in a position to live independently, as there was no easy access to support from Government. Also, some of the residents of Trinity had expressed irritation at the levels of bureaucracy in accessing Government services, but generally all was well in the Parish.

The Chief Minister, Deputy K.L. Moore of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter, thanked the Connétable for his input and noted the request for help with supported facilities and for those who required care, which was an Island-wide issue that the Council was endeavouring to address. She also indicated that the Council intended to deal with the increasing levels of bureaucracy. The Connétable and his officers withdrew from the meeting.

Minutes.

A2. The Minutes of the meetings of the Council of Ministers of 5th and 19th September 2023 (Parts A and B), having previously been circulated, were taken as read and were confirmed subject to a number of minor amendments. The progress that had been made on actions arising from the latter meeting was noted.

Gas supply:
update.

A3. The Council of Ministers received a verbal update from Mr. A. Scate, Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment Department, in connexion with the temporary gas network closure, since the morning of Saturday 7th October 2023, as a consequence of a software issue, which had resulted in the gas plant at La Collette entering 'safe mode'. This had led to the network closing and in order to re-open and re-supply, Island Energy Group ('IEG') would need to purge and repressurise the system.

IEG had asked customers to ensure that all gas appliances were switched off, to turn off the gas supply at the meter using the emergency control valve and to notify it once they had taken these steps by means of an online form. Jersey Post was assisting in these endeavours by undertaking an emergency letter drop on 10th October 2023 to those houses on mains gas and informing IEG of those properties on the gas network which were vacant or where they had been unable to contact the homeowner.

At the current time, it was envisaged that the system would be purged on 11th October and that supplies would automatically be reinstated to most customers on 12th October 2023. However, for approximately 600 customers, whose system was fitted with a more complex type of valve, they would require a home visit from an engineer and this was also the case for commercial premises. Priority was being given to those needing heating and hot water and impacted Islanders wishing to shower in the meantime had been offered the use of the facilities at Les Quennevais Sports Centre.

With respect to compensation for impacted customers, the Council was informed that there was no statutory right thereto but that IEG had announced that it would consider any approaches for compensation on a case by case basis. It was noted that a meeting was scheduled to take place at lunchtime on 10th October 2023 between officers from the Infrastructure and Environment Department, IEG and other agencies and a further update would be provided thereafter.

The Council noted the position and thanked all those who had worked over the weekend of 7th and 8th October 2023.

Forthcoming
business.

A4. The Council of Ministers discussed the following items of public business which were due to be debated by the States Assembly at the meeting that was

scheduled to commence on 17th October 2023 –

Reporting of headcount and vacancies (P.69/2023)

It was recalled that this Proposition of Deputy M.B. Andrews of St. Helier North had initially sought 6 monthly reporting on staffing, vacancies and turnover by the Government and States-owned entities and arm's length organisations from January 2024.

Whilst the Government was committed to producing and publishing this information in relation to the public sector workforce, the proposed timescales would be challenging, particularly with regard to vacancies, as the reconciliation between finance and human resources' data was underway but was not due for completion until December 2023. It was noted that Deputy Andrews had since lodged an Amendment to his Proposition, seeking the information every 12 months rather than every 6.

The Council expressed a preference for making the data public in a defined public release schedule and was of the view that the States-owned entities and arm's length organisations should be including details of their staffing, ideally in their annual reports, but felt that time was required to engage with the 22 entities that fell into these 2 categories. Accordingly, it could not support parts (b) and (c) of the Proposition, but decided to amend part (a) and delegated final approval for such an Amendment to the Chief Minister;

Audit of Government Department Vacancies (P.73/2023)

This Proposition of Deputy Andrews requested Departments to audit job vacancies and identify those that could be removed as unnecessary by June 2024 and to report back to the Assembly on savings arising as a consequence of that audit. It was recalled that significant work was already underway in this area to improve the data held on payroll and the workforce and that any Department wishing to advertise a vacancy was already required to undergo rigorous examination to justify such recruitment. However, it was not possible to quantify the savings that could be made by an audit and, as a consequence, the Council felt unable to support the Proposition; and

Increase in revenue expenditure for Agriculture and Fisheries (P.74/2023)

Deputy S.G. Luce of Grouville and St. Martin sought to increase the amount of money spent on the traditional industries of agriculture and fisheries to the extent that it represented one per cent of all revenue expenditure. The Council indicated its support but was concerned that by linking the finances into a percentage of revenue expenditure in this way it could be problematic as it removed the ability of Government to budget on the basis that any unforeseen increase in expenditure would lead to growth in the level of support. It also felt that the Proposition was pre-emptive of the debate on the Government Plan and that an Amendment thereto would have been the appropriate course of action.

The Council decided to reconvene on the afternoon of 12th October 2023 to discuss those items of public business that it had not had the opportunity to consider at the current meeting.