

2.10 The Connétable of St. Mary of the Chief Minister regarding the future of the BBC's Channel Island news service:

Further to reports that the BBC's Channel Island news service could be under threat in the wake of the broadcaster's aim of making multi-million pound savings across its entire operation, will the Chief Minister advise whether he considers this to be a matter of concern and whether this has been discussed at the Council of Ministers and, if so, has any representation been made to the Corporation?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur (The Chief Minister):

Any reduction in the media's coverage of issues that are relevant to the Island's political, social and cultural life is a matter of concern to Ministers. Furthermore, Jersey's distinctive constitutional, political and cultural context means more weight is placed by Islanders on local media services than might be the case in the English regions. Ministers have discussed this issue and agree that the withdrawal of BBC Channel Islands news would limit locally-produced T.V. (television) coverage of major political and cultural events and would reduce the opportunities for Members to engage in public debate. Accordingly, I have recently written, on behalf of the Council of Ministers, to the BBC Director General, Mark Thompson, and to the Chair of the BBC Trust, Lord Patten, expressing concern at the proposed closure of the local T.V. service and any dilution of BBC Radio Jersey's local output. The letters appeal to the BBC to rethink its station's proposals as it is important that Islanders have access to a diversity of news coverage, which reflects their lives, interests and experience, if informed debate and community involvement is to be stimulated. I have not yet received a reply to those letters.

2.10.1 The Connétable of St. Mary:

I was going to ask about the response. I know there has not been one. Has the Chief Minister taken any opportunity to raise this at a political level with the United Kingdom Government?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur

Not at this stage. I am awaiting a potential reply from the BBC before taking any further steps.

2.10.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisssier:

Would the Chief Minister not admit that the issue is not removing one purveyor simply because they extend the coverage, but it is ensuring that there is a lively difference between the 2 purveyors of television news who, at the moment, look awfully like each other? Secondly, would he not agree that if he is committed to the extension of media coverage, he should be committed to a much more exciting investigative approach to this coverage and that, for example, the withdrawal of Talkback and programmes such as this (admittedly tired in their current format) was a disaster and has, if anything, cut back on the very things he seeks to generate, for example, an intelligent interest in issues?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I have absolute confidence in the BBC local service to keep up to date with whatever the customers or listeners/viewers may require. I do appreciate and I did indicate the need for a diversity of views being expressed in the local media; that is a matter which clearly concerns us to some extent. The argument may be a little bit lost on the BBC,

which is why I was anxious to write to them and reiterate just why a local service is more important to us than it would be in any other local area.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Sir, a supplementary. Has the Chief Minister analysed the content of the news and found out that, on both commercial and public, they are the same?

The Deputy Bailiff:

I am sorry. No, Deputy I am sorry. Please sit down; new rules, no supplementaries for non-questioners. Connétable, do you have a final supplementary?

2.10.3 The Connétable of St. Mary:

In light of the fact there has not yet been a response, will the Chief Minister undertake to follow this up with a further communication after a suitable interval has expired?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I certainly will.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Very well; we come to question 12, which Deputy Shona Pitman will ask of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture.