

2024.06.25

3.5 Deputy H.M. Miles of St. Brelade of the Chief Minister regarding the embargo of press releases (OQ.124/2024)

Will the Chief Minister provide details of any change in policy or process relating to the embargo of press releases?

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

There has been no change in policy. Embargoes enable us to share information with the media in advance so it can be communicated to Islanders at the right time and to avoid delays in informing the public of important issues. The reasons to use an embargo can vary from the official publication time of report to the need to inform individuals or groups particularly affected by Government announcements in the first instance. The policy remains that news releases are shared with States Members at least an hour before publication or an hour before the embargo is lifted.

3.5.1 Deputy H.M. Miles:

I thank the Chief Minister for that response. I am a member of the Women's Health Political Group and we were told last Wednesday at our meeting by a senior official, after some pressure, that Health had provided an embargoed press release to the *J.E.P.* about an emerging story that related to women's health. Members of that group were very surprised to hear this and none were aware, including both Assistant Ministers for Health and the Minister for Social Security. In the light of the Ministerial Code about no surprises, does the Chief Minister think that it is acceptable that a political group responsible for woman's health were not trusted with this information?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Well, the original question I was asked about was the policy for embargo press releases. The policy relates to communication with States Members. I think outside of that, communication with interested bodies is a matter for the relevant Minister to decide, depending on the circumstances.

3.5.2 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

Can the Chief Minister advise what actions he and his Council of Ministers are taking to be more transparent with the full States Assembly on key issues that arise? Especially given this seem to be a strong part of the report, the vote of no confidence and indeed part of the own Chief Minister's speech when he became Chief Minister, and also in the C.S.P. (Common Strategic Policy)? How does he intend to improve this transparency?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Well, I hope we are being transparent. It is our policy to be transparent. We regularly discuss the importance of sharing information, especially with States Members and the public. If Members do not feel we are being transparent in any particular issue, I would like to hear about it so we can deal with it accordingly.

3.5.3 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

I therefore refer the Chief Minister back to the second question of Deputy Miles, where there was a group of politicians, including those within his Council of Ministers, who did not know about a very specific issue, a public matter, and the politicians involved felt they were not

trusted with this kind of information ahead of the report on Monday being published in the *J.E.P.* but journalists were.

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Yes, I will certainly look into that. The policy is that before any department issues a media release, Ministers and State Members are informed. If that has not happened, we will try to find out why.

The Bailiff:

Final supplementary, Deputy Miles. The Connétable of St. Martin, you put your light on slightly after I called the final supplementary.

3.5.4 Deputy H.M. Miles:

The Chief Minister often tells us that he prides himself on respect, courtesy and professionalism. Can he assure us that withholding information is not going to become a feature of his Government?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Yes, and I will make sure I use every ounce of influence I have to ensure that we remain transparent and we do not withhold information unnecessarily. I would urge Members that if they hear of any such instances to bring it to me, I will certainly look at it and treat it with utmost seriousness.