

**QUESTION TO BE ASKED OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE POLICY AND RESOURCES
COMMITTEE ON TUESDAY, 22nd JULY 2003 BY SENATOR E.P. VIBERT**

Question

- (a) Would the President confirm that when speaking at the recent Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Regional Conference held in Westminster and Cambridge, he told the Conference that Jersey was 'making a real effort to engage the community more closely in the political process'?
- (b) Would he inform members what this 'real effort' involves and how it is manifested?
- (c) Would he also inform members what proposals he has put to the States to develop this concept during his years in the Assembly and when will he, for instance, inform members if he has made a submission to the Legislation Committee to improve our electoral Law?
- (d) Are members to regard his statement as implying that the States has, in past years, failed to develop a 'culture of engagement'?

Answer

- (a) I am grateful to Senator Vibert for drawing attention to my speech; it was on a subject about which I feel very strongly. I was honoured to be invited by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to address their recent conference on the topic of 'Engaging the Community in the Political Process'. It is true that in my speech I did say that 'Jersey is making a real effort to engage the community and we intend to develop a culture of 'engagement', in which the community can, and will, feel much more involved in the political process.' I explained that a gap has opened between the States and the public. This is an unhealthy picture for democracy. Over the coming years we must address this otherwise we will not be able to ensure the Island is governed with the assent and support of the public. Every CPA member who attended my presentation reported similar problems.
- (b) In my speech I set out a number of actions which Committees and members have taken to try to engage the public better. These included amongst others –
 - panels of interested people with real and precise terms of reference;
 - numerous public meetings to discuss and consult upon specific issues and policies; email and computer discussion groups to promote debate;
 - on-line surgeries giving the Public the opportunity to directly question States members;
 - advisory bodies that make a clear contribution to the political process.
- (c) In asking this question it is clear that the Senator has misunderstood the content and thrust of my speech. My speech was not about what I have done, or intend to do. I was speaking as a representative of the Island and my speech was related to what the States of Jersey has done and intends to do. I have not put any proposals to the States, or the Legislation Committee on this concept, nor do I have any intention of doing so. I believe that the measures taken by that Committee, and to which I referred in my speech, have already significantly improved the Electoral Law.

Members will recall that at the briefing in May I outlined the process for developing the States Strategic Plan. This will include a proper process of public engagement during the autumn and beyond. We have all accepted the need to develop a real sense of direction for the whole of the States and really involving the public in setting this direction is a very clear commitment to listening and responding to them. Members will also recall that when I was President of Finance and Economics we launched the largest series of public

consultation processes inviting everyone to have their say on our future fiscal strategy. In terms of electoral turnout I can do no better than reiterate any speech.

‘We are moving the principal elections from the autumn to the spring in the hope that better weather will encourage voters to turn out at the poll stations we have extended polling station opening hours... we have introduced much easier more widely available postal voting and we are making strenuous efforts to improve our voter registration procedures.’

- (d) I do believe that the States generally has not engaged with the public to the extent it should and, as I said at the outset, a gap has opened up between the States and the public which is not healthy for democracy. I believe we must take firm action to try to close that gap and the Policy and Resources Committee is committed to taking a lead in this respect.