

2.16 The Deputy of St. Martin of the President of the Chairman's Committee regarding the lodging of the revised Draft Code of Practice for Scrutiny Panels and the Public Accounts Committee:

Would the President advise Members when the revised Draft Code of Practice for Scrutiny Panels and the Public Accounts Committee is likely to be lodged for debate?

Deputy S.C. Ferguson (President of the Chairman's Committee):

I am grateful to the Deputy for asking this question as it allows me to outline the position as it stands to the Assembly. I do not want them to think that the Code of Practice has sunk without trace. There have been considerable meetings and to-ing and fro-ing since June and an updated and slightly amended Draft Code of Practice is currently being circulated to Scrutiny Panels for consideration and for feedback of comments to the Chairman's Committee for its December meeting. It is anticipated that the Draft Code of Practice will be lodged during December with debate in February 2008. This will allow time after the Christmas period for consideration by Members and lodging of amendments. I have, in fact, a detailed timetable of what has been happening since the Code of Practice was withdrawn from debate and I will be delighted to share this with the Deputy and any other Members who are interested. I do not particularly want to read all the way through and be stopped half-way through.

2.16.1 The Deputy of St. Martin:

I think the President will confirm that in the report which accompanied the Code of Practice proposition it was stated that the Chairman's Committee considered it to be vital that the Code of Practice was put in place as soon as possible so that Scrutiny Panels were functioning in accordance with the Code at the earliest stage of Ministerial government. Given that one of her main reasons for successfully bringing in a vote of no confidence against the former President was the delay caused by the implementation of the Code of Practice, and as the President has now been in office for at least 8 months and probably almost 12 months before the new Code is implemented, is the President giving serious consideration to her position?

Deputy S.C. Ferguson:

Yes, I agree. I believe that it needed to come in as soon as possible. In fact, the panel and the Public Accounts Committee have been working to the principles that are in the Code of Practice. The Deputy talks about a year's period. I would remind him that for a start there was 6 weeks holiday in the last 6 months so that cuts it down quite a bit. It was essential that Scrutiny members met with the Attorney General and had their queries about the legal advice issue answered. In fact, we had a meeting with the Attorney General but sadly not all the scrutiny members came so I hope the rest of them understand the issues. We have also had a number of meetings between the Executive and Scrutiny working party to thrash out some of the matters such as access to Part B papers and papers being sent under confidentiality cover, responses to Scrutiny reports and most of these items we achieved an agreement on but there are some, as one would expect, that have not been agreed and therefore will be part of the debate early next year. We will, in fact, issue an aide memoir to Members so that they know what the position is and which items we have not totally agreed on. Yes, we have been pushing to get this through but, in fact, we have had about 8 meetings. It is obviously not as easy as it might be to arrange meetings at the drop of a hat with either the Chief Minister or the Attorney General who, as we all know, can be somewhat of a moving target [Laughter]. We are anxious to bring it forward and get it debated as soon as possible and on the statute book.

Mr. W.J. Bailhache Q.C., H.M. Attorney General:

May I ask the President if she can confirm that she has not got me in her sights? [Laughter]

Deputy S.C. Ferguson:

Only metaphorically speaking. [Laughter]

