

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE CHIEF MINISTER BY
DEPUTY G.C.L. BAUDAINS OF ST. CLEMENT**

ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 11th MARCH 2008

Question

Would the Chief Minister inform members whether his Department still employs the services of public relations advisers whose remit is to ensure that correct messages are relayed and, if so, can he further state whether these advisers were used during his recent interviews by the national media?

Answer

My department does employ a team of people to handle communications and ensure that ministerial proposals and departmental priorities are relayed to the public, the media and our staff. They provide a wide range of communication support, including management of the States of Jersey Website, internal staff communications, major public consultations, such as Imagine Jersey, and liaison with the media. They are generally resourced and set up to deal with the local media on a daily basis and to undertake occasional work with the national and international media.

However, they were not equipped to deal with the unprecedented level of media activity that broke after the Police statement on 23rd February 2008 that human remains had been found at Haut de la Garenne.

The cost of the Communications Unit has frequently been challenged in Business Plan and other debates. I have long believed they are under-resourced and not set-up to deal with emergency situations, but it would have been impossible for me, in the climate of controlling States expenditure, to propose further increases to their budget. We had previously employed the services of a London-based public relations company, but that contract was ended a few years ago as part of the States cost cutting programme.

In dealing with the national media on the child abuse allegations I had the support of the Communications Unit team and most of the 20 or so interviews I conducted went smoothly and were, I know from reports, generally well received.

However, many have expressed their concern and disappointment at the Newsnight interview and the press conference, which I acknowledge and share. Lessons have been learned.

I think Members will nonetheless be interested in the attached record of events around the Newsnight programme and what was said and by whom.

NEWSNIGHT TRANSCRIPT

What was actually said between me and Senator Syvret was:-

SS: "Frank we're talking about dead children."

FW: "Yes Stuart exactly. **So you shouldn't be politicising it you should now be throwing your support**

behind the Police and behind every effort to find out who was responsible.”

SS “Indeed I have repeatedly expressed my full support.”

FW – “No you’re trying to shaft Jersey internationally.”

What the BBC broadcast was:-

SS -“Frank we’re talking about dead children.”

FW –“Yes Stuart exactly. So you shouldn’t be politicising you’re trying to shaft Jersey internationally.”

Mr Paxman then put the following question to me:-:

”In response to the remark ‘We’re talking about dead children’ you said ‘We’re trying to promote the international image of Jersey’.

Those were not my words and that is why I challenged them.

I will leave Members and others to judge the above for themselves. In the meantime I am extremely grateful to members of the public, in Jersey and in the U.K., who made their own judgment and complained to the BBC.