

2.18 Deputy J.M. Maçon of the Chief Minister regarding the attendance of the Chairman of the Comité des Connétables and the Assistant Chief Ministers at Council of Ministers meetings:

Why do the Chairman of the Comité des Connétables and the Assistant Chief Ministers regularly attend the Council of Ministers meetings and does the Chief Minister consider that other groups and/or interested parties should be routinely present and if not, why not?

Senator I.J. Gorst (The Chief Minister):

The Chairman of the Comité des Connétables has regularly attended meetings of this Council of Ministers and also the 2 previous councils in order to provide a link with the Parish administrations. The Assistant Chief Ministers attend council meetings in their capacity of holding responsibility for co-ordination of social policy and of external affairs. Although they do not have the ability to vote, the Ministers value the input of the Chairman and the Assistant Chief Ministers in their deliberations.

2.18.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

Would the Chief Minister be willing to keep on the tradition of having a representative from the Comité des Connétables at Council of Ministers meetings even if the Constables themselves were not automatically present in the Assembly?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I may be feeling under the weather but I do not think I am so much under the weather to fall for that trap.

Deputy M. Tadier:

He does not have to fall for it but a straight answer would be good, otherwise I may have to do another blog.

2.18.2 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Just a follow up, if the Assistant Ministers are attending the Council of Ministers and the Chairman of the Comité des Connétables, does this mean to say that - obviously they speak on the different issues - they may not have a vote, but do they not have an influencing factor on the deliberation of the Council of Ministers and is that correct? Should they be able to persuade Members of the Council of Ministers?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Of course they do speak, but it is just as important that they are aware of what the Council of Ministers are considering and the decisions they make, because of the overarching responsibilities that they have.

2.18.3 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

I noticed the Chief Minister did not answer the latter part of the question. Does he think that there are other groups or interests who should attend and thereby raise the level of debate to even greater levels than at present?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The Deputy makes a good point and it is often when one gets asked a question that one realises perhaps where gaps are occurring and the previous Council of Ministers did indeed expect Assistant Ministers of departments to attend when issues regarding their department were being considered by the Council of Ministers, and it occurs to me, looking back over the last year, that that has not necessarily been the case, and that is something that I want to encourage Ministers to do.

2.18.4 Deputy J.G. Reed of St. Ouen:

Has the Chief Minister ever considered inviting the Chairman of the Chairmen's Committee to attend at a Council of Ministers meeting?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

No, I have not. Someone sitting in front of me is suggesting that she would indeed enliven it and indeed she might, but I think it is important that there is a separation between the Council of Ministers and the Scrutiny function and I fear that should the Scrutiny Chairman attend, that separation might become blurred.

2.18.5 Deputy J.A. Martin:

In his first reply I think the Chief Minister said... and I could probably live with why the current Chairman of the Comité des Connétables needs to be there, but he did say that it is good to keep Assistant Ministers informed. Well, the other Assistant Minister or the only other Assistant Minister who sits there is his Assistant Minister who, if he is running his department well - a department without portfolio as they say, so there is not much else to discuss except what the other departments have going on - would it not be best to rotate this? All Assistant Ministers are equal except sitting around the table at the Council of Ministers and I would like to have some input sometimes. Does he not agree?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

In actual fact, with regard to my follow-up answer to Deputy Le Hérisier, the exception to that general rule is that the Assistant Ministers for Health do generally attend when it is a Health issue being discussed, so I think Deputy Martin does have input. I think that Senator Routier has got a very important role of co-ordinating social policy and I know that the social policy framework was premised on the fact that everything that we consider as a Council of Ministers should be considered through the social policy implications prism, and therefore I think his attendance helps to do that. It is well known that I believe the Assistant Minister post with responsibility for external relations should in fact be a Minister anyway, but there again we have an overarching remit and therefore I think it is important that those 2 attend.

2.18.6 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

If having the President of the Chairmen's Panel would enliven matters, would it not be good to perhaps have a Member such as the unofficial leader of the unofficial opposition to add some spice and ideas, and raise the level of debate?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I am not sure who that might be. I fear it could be any number of the other 50. Be in no doubt that we do have robust and sometimes heated debate at the Council of Ministers and we are a coalition that comes with a diverse range of opinions. While sometimes it might be difficult to manage the range of opinions, they are given full voice and generally we are able to then build consensus. Perhaps later today you are going to see an area where we are not always able to build that consensus.