

## **2.11 Deputy T.M. Pitman of the Chairman of the Privileges and Procedures Committee regarding citizens' media sites' access to information:**

Will the Privileges and Procedures Committee reconsider its previous decision not to afford citizens' media sites the same rights to access material and film meetings as the mainstream media are allowed to do?

### **The Connétable of St. Helier (Chairman, Privileges and Procedures Committee):**

The Code of Practice on public access to official information sets out the information access rights of the accredited media and members of the public. Neither group is afforded preferential treatment under the Code. The committee will be considering the matter of filming rights again next month. The provisional view of P.P.C. is that if the States made their own broadcasts available to the public over the internet, it might obviate the need for any third parties to film the committee in open session. However, the committee has since considered the findings of a feasibility study on web-casting and decided against pursuing that option in the short term. P.P.C. is conscious that the issue of filming rights was considered by the former P.P.C.'s Media Working Party, whose findings were appended to the projet P.100/2010, Media Relations: code of conduct. The States was never given the opportunity to debate these findings because P.100 was withdrawn. P.P.C. acknowledges that the States, the accredited media and the public would expect consistent application of rules on filming by all committees and panels. For these reasons, it is the committee's intention to revisit P.100/2010 to consider the Media Working Party recommendations and to consult further with the Chairmen's Committee before deciding whether to lodge a proposition recommending a way forward.

#### **2.11.1 Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

I thank the Chairman for that; I am encouraged by his answer. Earlier I referred to an actual interview that the Minister for Treasury and Resources did with a citizens' media site. Now, I mention this because also on that citizens' media site, they carried the other side of the story with the argument being put by Senator Ferguson. I think, if I may say so, this gets to the nub of the issue. With citizens' media, for all its limitations, you see in-depth arguments from both sides, something I have to say, you never ever see in the *J.E.P. (Jersey Evening Post)*. Does that not say to the Chairman all that needs to be said? We want a level playing field that all can sign up to but all can be held accountable to and if they breach it, then they fall by the wayside.

### **The Connétable of St. Helier:**

I do not necessarily concur with the Deputy's view that citizens' media interviews necessarily show both sides of the story but I do not want to get involved in a debate on individual broadcasts. The committee's concern is that proper standards are put in place so that the members of the public in particular do not find themselves being broadcast on the internet without their permission or without their full knowledge.

#### **2.11.2 Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

May I just follow that up because the only incident since that when members of the public have been filmed and appeared on TV is by the mainstream media. It is not citizens' media who have broken that. The point I was trying to make, and I hope the Chairman will agree, is that citizens' media offer every one of us the chance to put their side. This does not happen in the mainstream media, particularly with places like the *Jersey Evening Post*. Does that not suggest we should have some kind of level playing field and do it as a matter of urgency?

### **The Connétable of St. Helier:**

We have said that we will look at this again in June. Again I cannot comment on whether one media organisation is more balanced than another but I agree that they should be on a level playing field.

**2.11.3 Deputy J.A. Hilton of St. Helier:**

I was at an opening of a facility in St. Helier last week. It took place in the Town Hall and I was very disturbed to see that somebody, citizens' media, was at this event and proceeded to record and film 2 members of the public at this event who had absolutely no idea who this gentleman was. When I spoke to them later, they thought he was a member of the Parish. When I pointed out to them that he was citizens' media and that there was every possibility that the content of what he had recorded and filmed would end up on the internet, the women concerned were very upset. Does the Chairman of the Privileges and Procedures Committee think this is acceptable behaviour?

**The Connétable of St. Helier:**

No, I have already alluded to a recent example of this kind of web posting causing distress, as clearly was the case after the opening of the Changing Places disabled toilet in Seale Street last week. I think that is why it is important that the meaning of accredited media and proper standards are set in place for those which are not accredited, because the accredited media do have standards and they can be taken to task if they breach those standards.

**2.11.4 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:**

Why has the committee rejected web-casting?

**The Connétable of St. Helier:**

The committee was not convinced of the public demand for web-casting of its meetings. The committee was advised that it would cost £20,000 for a one-year trial in terms of equipment and the same again for officer support. So the committee basically could not justify the expenditure of £40,000 for a one-year trial on the basis of, I think, only one or 2 requests that such a facility be provided. However, the committee does have, as a matter of principle, openness. I personally have opened Parish meetings to the public, including all kinds of media when they come, so I think the committee is going to look at this again. The committee is also aware that the Chairmen's Committee has been looking at the issue of web-casting of Scrutiny meetings and we want to operate in a joined-up way with other States committees.

**2.11.5 Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

I think Deputy Hilton's point is a good one and it really sums up the issue. Why do we not have everyone registered, because the Chairman has said that the mainstream media can be held accountable? How, then, does he suppose this happens when certainly TV breached that by showing an abuse victim, even though I, as a Scrutiny Chairman, had asked them not to film? The Chairman says we can hold them to account yet the Press Complaints Commission was disbanded even before the Leveson Inquiry finished its report because it was absolutely toothless and a complete waste of time. How does the Chairman think we hold the mainstream media to account? Sorry, it is just not true.

**The Connétable of St. Helier:**

With respect, I feel that the last question has gone a bit off the track of the original question which is about P.P.C.'s decision not to allow citizens' media to film its meetings. I cannot really comment at this stage on the press complaints procedure but if P.P.C. come forward with a proposal for filming, then they will have to look very much at what recourse the public will have if things go wrong.