

2015.09.22

#### **4.8 DEPUTY S.Y. MÉZEC OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMITÉ DES CONNÉTABLES REGARDING ELECTION TURNOUT:**

Following the low turnout in the recent elections for Procureur du Bien Publique what discussions, if any, have taken place on what can be done to increase the profile of these elections and increase democratic participation in future?

##### **The Connétable of St. Clement (Chairman, Comité des Connétable):**

The committee have discussed the process of the election of Procureur many times over the last few years and a number of improvements of course have been made. Firstly that now each Parish elects one Procureur on the same day every 18 months there is a greater awareness that the election is taking place. We are now placing information about the Procureur election, which are indeed a public election, on the vote.je website. Much use was made on the most recent occasion, certainly by the Parish of St. Helier, on social media but I do accept that it is difficult to capture the public's imagination for such an election.

[10:45]

Having said that, since the Procureur elections came under the Public Elections Law we have seen turnouts of in excess of 36 per cent in St. John, in excess of 30 per cent in St. Ouen, in excess of 22 per cent in St. John again, and St. Martin over 20 per cent. When you think about it, those percentages are greater than Deputy by-elections in St. Helier in recent years. So there is some work done obviously possibly by the candidates, but I do feel for the candidates because they are standing for election for an administrative role rather than a political role and it is very difficult I think to canvas on that basis. But, nevertheless, clearly sometimes it happens.

##### **4.8.1 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

I thank the chairman for his answer. He mentioned that there are now elections for one Procureur every 18 months. Does he agree with some comments that I have heard, especially from some candidates for Procureur, that this was a retrograde step and they would prefer to go back to the system where they were both elected on the same day? Does he not think that making an election bigger, rather than smaller but spread out, would improve turnout on that occasion?

##### **The Connétable of St. Clement:**

No, I certainly have not heard those comments, in fact exactly the opposite, that in the past I think generally speaking Procureurs were not elected on the same day, they were elected as Constables were - going back several years - when their term ended. So you could have an election for Procureur in January and then the other one in 3 or 4 months' time, so very rarely were the 2 together. But one of the disadvantages of having the 2 together of course is you could lose 2 experienced people at the same time. That is one of the advantages of having them every 18 months, that there is always a public trustee with at least 18 months' experience in post. I think that is the bigger advantage than any negative situation.

##### **4.8.2 Deputy M. Tadier:**

I would like to congratulate whoever was involved in the continuation of the vote.je website which was extended to the Procureurs election and which I am sure was a useful tool for those who wanted to find out information. The question I do have to ask though is, first of all, at some point could the chairman let us know what the cost was for putting those manifestos up, and whether it is appropriate for the States to pay for that website, if they did, when what is involved are elections for Parish positions?

##### **The Connétable of St. Clement:**

I am advised by the Greffe the cost of updating the website was next to nothing, probably a bit of time with one of the officers. Of course it is appropriate that the States, the Parishes, and all of us as individuals, should promote public elections. We are the heart of the democratic process, and to suggest perhaps that we should deny people the right of access to democratic facilities I think is ridiculous.

#### **4.8.3 Deputy M. Tadier:**

Of course I never said that, but I think it is important to have transparency. Even though I am sure things were done on a goodwill basis there was nonetheless a notional cost where Greffe staff, or whoever updates that website, were essentially doing Parish work, and it might be worth considering in the future that the Parish pays for the work that the Greffe does on their behalf for what are essentially Parish elections. I would ask the chairman if he agrees, because we have to ask a question.

#### **The Connétable of St. Clement:**

I doubt if I agree. We are talking about an election held under the Public Elections Law, not under the Electoral or Parish Assembly Law. This is a public election for the public of the Island, in this case St. Helier and Grouville, under the Public Elections Law. But all of the Parishes have an election, it is just that 10 of them did not have a contested election. That is the only difference.

#### **4.8.4 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier:**

The chairman may know that the unsuccessful candidate in St. Helier's Procureur election was supported by Jersey's only political party. Does he feel that the party should take more ...

#### **Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

A point of order, that is not true.

#### **The Deputy Bailiff:**

This is question time and it is for the Connétable to ask a question and for the chairman to respond to it.

#### **The Connétable of St. Helier:**

I apologise if I have misrepresented the case but I understood there was some at least support, if not endorsement, by the Reform Party for the unsuccessful candidate ...

#### **Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Again, not true.

#### **The Deputy Bailiff:**

Deputy, please do not intervene, it is a matter for the Connétable to make whatever statement he likes. If it turns out he is inaccurate in anything he says then it is a matter to be corrected at another time and it is a matter for his question to be put and then for the chairman of the Comité des Connétables to answer it.

#### **The Connétable of St. Helier:**

If I could rephrase the question: does the chairman feel that the endorsement of a political party would be useful in giving a higher profile to these elections in future? **[Laughter]**

#### **The Connétable of St. Clement:**

If it is done properly in future then of course it would.

#### **4.8.5 Deputy A.D. Lewis:**

When speaking to the candidates during the election the other week there was a call from both of them to suggest that - and I ask the Constable this - was the old system better, i.e. elected by a Parish Assembly, or not? Or is he convinced with, having had a few now, that all the Parishes are content

with the new way of doing it using the Public Election Law? Or was it better dealt with by the Parishes in the Parish Hall by way of Parish Assembly? I just wonder what feedback he has had from his fellow Constables on that matter.

**The Connétable of St. Clement:**

We have discussed this matter and it is a very difficult situation to go back to a Parish Assembly election, although there could be improvements in a Parish Hall election by having nominations in advance and having secret ballots at the Parish Assembly. It would need quite a considerable change to the Parish Assembly and there could be some merit in that. But at the same time it is an important role and, therefore, to give the wider members of the public the opportunity of voting, and not only voting on the day but also pre-polling and sick voting and so on, having all those facilities is also important and possibly gives the position some status. But as I said in my original answer to the question, one of the difficulties for the candidate - and I am thinking what would I do if I was a candidate for that election - it is not a political role, it is an administrative role, so how do you go about knocking on doors and telling people why the public should vote for you? It is not easy. There is merit in the old system with improvements, and there is merit in the current system, and the debate will no doubt go on for a considerable time.

**4.8.6 Deputy A.D. Lewis:**

Was the Constable concerned or was he happy with the pre-polling process? I understand that came under a bit of scrutiny and was not as well run as it could have been. Was he satisfied the pre-polling process was adequate?

**The Connétable of St. Clement:**

I have not been made aware of any difficulties with the pre-polling system.

**4.8.7 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

In his original answer the chairman referred to turnouts in other Parish Procureur elections which were significantly higher than St. Helier's recent Procureur election and the Procureur election they had previously. What consideration, if any, has the committee given to what I know was the sentiment felt by both candidates for Procureur in St. Helier, that they believe that the system for electing local Parish positions in St. Helier should not necessarily be the same as Parishes which are much smaller. I know that they would like to see a system more unique to St. Helier that takes into account its different position, and what consideration has the committee given to that idea?

**The Connétable of St. Clement:**

No consideration has been given to that because no suggestion of that type has been made to the committee, but should someone make such a recommendation of course we would consider it.