

2015.11.03

### **3.1 Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier of the Chairman of the Comité des Connétables regarding welfare payments for vulnerable members of the community:**

Will the Chairman advise what discussions, if any, have taken place with the Social Security Department following the suggestion by the Connétable of St. Peter in the States on 6th October 2015 that a welfare payment for vulnerable members of the community could be introduced in conjunction with the Parishes, and outline what consideration has been given to the assistance that would be provided and how people could apply?

#### **Connétable L. Norman of St. Clement (Chairman, Comité des Connétables)**

No discussions have taken place with Social Security, but the Comité des Connétables remain ready to offer assistance to that department, should they need it, to meet their obligations. I would like to point out that welfare is not simply about providing money and the real strength of the Parishes is in offering practical assistance, advice, guidance and support to the most vulnerable in our society and it is in this area that the Connétables, Parish staff and community support teams dispense such an invaluable service.

#### **3.1.1 Deputy J.A. Martin:**

So the Chairman is saying either before the M.T.F.P. (Medium Term Financial Plan) cuts or after there have been no discussions collectively between the Constables how to offer welfare assistance? Is he saying that he does not think that as the Constables do offer this or could offer some assistance, how many Constables does he know or has he himself called a Parish Assembly to discuss the effect of the cuts on the elderly?

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

I am not aware of any such meetings.

#### **3.1.2 Deputy J.A. Martin:**

Just one more supplementary. If he cannot answer for anybody else, is he intending in his Parish to hold an assembly to discuss the cuts? Because the concern for the Constable of St. Peter was he knew that there would be 20 to 25 per cent of the elderly who would be affected by the cuts and he was hoping that this may help them. But obviously the Constable is now saying nothing has been done collectively, what is he intending to do himself?

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

The Constable of St. Clement is going to continue working for and on behalf of all the residents of St. Clement and will be offering support through the community support teams for our charitable trust to the most vulnerable in our society. Where people need help and guidance with income support we will direct them to the appropriate department and people within that department. Where people need help in other areas, whether it be simply someone to talk to, someone to give them guidance, someone to give them advice, we will do that as well. We support the parishioners of St. Clement, and I am sure the other Parishes do, in a very practical and sympathetic way. As I said in my answer, welfare is not simply about doling out money. It is about doling out support, advice and guidance.

#### **3.1.3 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier:**

In light of that response, will the Constable table an issue for his next meeting of the Comité des Connétables to discuss any rise they may have detected in complaints of hardship because of the cuts to income support?

**The Connétable of St. Clement:**

Should that scenario arise of course we will.

**3.1.4 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:**

The Constable has said that welfare is not simply about doling out money but doling out support, advice and guidelines, so on the latter, what support, advice and guidelines will this Connétable and the Comité be doling out to their parishioners who are finding it particularly difficult with the barrage of often multiple cuts that they will be facing this Christmas and throughout the next few years?

**The Connétable of St. Clement:**

In the Parish Halls each parishioner is dealt with as an individual. Each family is dealt with and each have their own special circumstances and they will be guided by the community support team, by the Parish staff, or by the Connétable himself as is required to sort out their needs and requirements. Proper professional advice and guidance will be offered.

**3.1.5 Deputy M. Tadier:**

What specifically can the Comité des Connétables offer to perhaps individual, single parents who are facing a loss of £2,500 per year in their incomes or to disabled people who are facing in the region of £600 a year loss of income in their particular situations? Will they be able to go to the Parish Hall and seek welfare in all its forms?

**The Connétable of St. Clement:**

I think that the Deputy must have forgotten, but in 2008 the financial side of welfare, the monetary side of welfare, was transferred to the Social Security Department, to the States, to the taxpayer, and that part of it named income support. It is up to the States to decide whether they wish to increase, decrease or change the income support criteria. What the Parishes will do in special circumstances or in circumstances which they consider appropriate will give guidance and support to their parishioners. But the financial side of income support is absolutely with the Social Security Department.

[9:45]

**3.1.6 Deputy J.A. Martin:**

In hindsight, would the Chairman not say that all the Constables - that at least this should have been put on the agenda? When the cuts were mooted in the M.T.F.P. the body of Constables could have acted like their House of Lords in the U.K. (United Kingdom) and they could have looked at maybe saying no - maybe looking at ... we do know that 20 or 25 per cent of our parishioners, elderly, will be affected. They could have asked them to maybe target it, maybe means test it. Does the Chairman of the Constables not say, in hindsight, next time cuts are brought by the Council at least they should be discussed on the agenda by the Comité?

**The Connétable of St. Clement:**

Certainly they were discussed and we were pleased to welcome a delegation from the Social Security Department and indeed the Minister and Assistant Minister to a meeting of the Comité and

at the end of the day every Constable voted and spoke as he or she felt on the proposals that were being made in the Medium Term Financial Plan.

### **3.1.7 Deputy J.A. Martin:**

Supplementary. The Chairman started his answer to the first question saying they have never discussed this. Now, which one is the truth? I am sorry, Constable.

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

I answered the question absolutely truthfully. "Will the Chairman advise what discussions, if any, have taken place with Social Security following the suggestion of the Constable of St. Peter in the States on 6th October." We met the Minister and the team well before 6th October.

### **3.1.8 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Could the Constable give that date on which they received a delegation from Social Security?

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

Not off the top of my head, no.

### **The Bailiff:**

The final supplementary has taken some time and that is my excuse for saying that I overlooked Deputy Andrew Lewis. If he would like to ask a question he certainly may. He was already on my list.

### **3.1.9 Deputy A.D. Lewis of St. Helier:**

My question to the Constable was: he mentioned 2008 changes and perhaps the urban Parishes are the most to benefit from the changes in centralising welfare. However, one of the big changes that was talked about was the less consultation with parishioners and whether the Constables of the Parishes have had as much of a handle on what was happening in their Parishes with regard to welfare as they had before. Does the Constable feel that anything has changed significantly and does he fully understand his parishioners now that welfare and the benefit system has been centralised in the way that it has. Does he have a full handle on his parishioners needs for benefits?

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

I would like to think I do and I like to think that we do. I came into office as Connétable in 2008 and I did recognise that contact had been lost undoubtedly with some members of the community who needed support. As I say, not just financial support. That is the easy bit in many ways. That is the easy bit. Just give them £50, £100, whatever it is. But it is the contact, the advice, the guidance, the warmth that a community can provide to each other, particularly to the most vulnerable in society. That is why at that time I set up the St. Clement community support team, which has been followed by other Parishes who probably felt the same thing. It is not just about money. It is about support, advice, guidance and practical assistance. Sometimes when a lady of a certain age is living by herself, changing a lightbulb can be major thing and that is where we have volunteers who will just go round and do that for them. But people are suffering from perhaps a temporary invalidity situation. They need to get to the hospital or to a doctor or even do some shopping in town. We have people who volunteer and take them in their own cars to do that or do the shopping for them. That help, it is immeasurable how valuable that is. It is not simply a matter of money. It is a matter of support and advice and I do think that we have got more of a handle now than we did perhaps when income support was first transferred on helping these people. Judging by the number that we are able to help I am very proud of our community support team.

**The Bailiff:**

Just for the sake of Hansard, a note that although he was out of the Island about 8 minutes ago Senator Ozouf has arrived, and I have no doubt by helicopter.