

4.11 Deputy M. Tadier of the Chairman of the Privileges and Procedures Committee regarding steps to determine the reasons for voter abstention and to increase voter turnout in future:

In view of the low turnout at the senatorial by-election on 7th September 2016, what steps, if any, does the Committee plan to take to ascertain the reasons of such a high level of voter abstention and to increase voter turnout in future?

The Connétable of St. Clement (Chairman, Privileges and Procedures Committee):

Firstly, can I pay tribute to the Greffe who had very short notice, as we all did, of this by-election, and implemented most of the initiatives to engage with voters, that occurred in 2014, and will hopefully occur again in 2018. The one area they were not able to engage too much with was the younger voters because the build-up to the election took place during school holidays. Nevertheless, leaflets about the election were given to students in the envelopes containing their G.C.S.E. and A. Level results. I am not sure which paper competed the best in that particular area. The by-election was covered in exactly the same way as the 2014 general election. The vote.je website was rebooted as a central resource for all candidates and, indeed, voters. We created candidate profile videos, which had over 3,000 views by electors, and filmed all of the Parish hustings, which had over 5,000 hits. The manifesto document, which was an excellent document in my view, was circulated to all households in Jersey before the pre-poll voting station opened. A number of factors can explain the low voter turnout and, of course, each individual voter will have his or her own reason for not having turned out on 7th September. I have had things from: "I forgot it was on", "I did not know it was on", "Obviously not enough posters were put up." There is a myriad of reasons. But the P.P.C. (Privileges and Procedures Committee) will continue to provide as much information to prospective voters as we can so that they are able to make an informed choice, even if that informed choice is not to vote. As the States know, as Members know, we are aiming to introduce electronic registration before 2018, and also investigating with the team the possibility of online voting for future elections. One thing we cannot do is make people vote.

4.11.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

I share the congratulations of the Greffe staff; it seems to get better year on year [**Approbation**] and everyone involved in the election and its administration, and it also has to be said that in Jersey there is no excuse for not voting; there are certainly many ways to do it, both before and on the day, one can even walk, those methods are there. But the question must remain: does it concern the Chairman and the committee, as it concerns me and my party, when we have such high and overwhelming levels of abstention in Jersey? That must be a matter of concern for democracy in our Island.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Of course it is of concern. The reality is that people do have to make their own choices. P.P.C., the States, the Greffe, cannot force people to come out and vote, unless we go down the Australian system and have compulsory voting. Until that happens, if that happens, and I am not sure it would be a good idea - in fact, I do not think it would be a good idea at all - but that would be the only way you could make people vote. Why do people not vote? Well, I am sure Deputy Tadier and others have been knocking on doors leading up to the election and must have had the messages come through as to why people did not vote. There are so many different reasons. You cannot legislate for that. It is disappointing. One of the things which we must not forget, we have been concentrating over the last few years on getting more and more people on to the register, and we introduced voting for 16 to 18 year-olds, and a lot of work has gone into increasing numbers on the register. Therefore, it is pretty well known that

younger people in particular do not take a great interest in our local Jersey elections, therefore the percentage turnout is bound to be lower, that just happened. In this election I think there were 12,200 voters, in the 2010 by-election it was over 15,000, but going back to 2004, there were only 11,000 voters. So it will vary depending on who the candidates are, what time of the year it is and what the issues are at the time. It is impossible to know what the reasons are for each individual voter.

The Bailiff:

Chairman, if you had been a Minister, I would have cut you back on 2 of your answers. If you can try and keep them a bit more concise, please. Deputy Mézec.

4.11.2 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Would the Chairman consider that one thing that could help with voter turnout is to review the locations of where our polling stations in our constituencies are? There are some Parishes where the polling station is not at a very particularly convenient location, St. Clement being one example, where, if a location much more towards the eastern side of the Parish were chosen, it would be on people's way to work or on their way to drop the kids off at school. Would he agree that we should review where the polling stations are and try and make them in the most convenient locations so that it is easier for people to get to them, particularly for people who do not drive?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Absolutely. I think all these things have to be considered as to what is most convenient for the electors. We have always done this. One of the things we did not so long ago was increase the voting hours from 8.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. instead of 11.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. We have introduced pre-poll voting to make it as easy as possible. There is no point in moving a polling station to another part of a Parish, be it God's own Parish or another one, because it is more convenient for some people but less convenient for others, where there is no parking or where there is a lot of parking. One of the things that has happened, certainly in election campaigns that I have been involved with, and where it is difficult for people to get to the poll, who wish to go to the poll and not pre-poll or have a sick vote, or whatever, is that candidates very often provide transport for people to get to the poll. There are many hundreds of ways, or dozens of ways, that people can exercise their vote, and just by playing at the edges I do not think is going to make a huge amount of difference.

4.11.3 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

I wonder if the Connétable will agree with me that we are addressing the symptoms rather than the actual source. Surely, it is a question of education. What concerns me is that there is very little education at a young age to get people interested in the politics and how it works over here.

The Bailiff:

I think that is the question, Senator; we are not giving speeches. I have got 8 questions here. Is it a question of education, Chairman?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I think it is unfair to say that there is a lack of education. Certainly, the P.P.C., through the Greffe, organises the year 5 Assembly in this place, we have the Youth Assembly, the Youth Parliament recently came into existence. The young people do know about our politics. Perhaps I could suggest to the Senator that the candidates have a role in this as well: that they

need to go out and enthuse the public, get the public excited about their policies and what they intend to do and, in that case, they will come out and vote.

4.11.4 Deputy P.D. McLinton:

Would the Chairman agree that not only is the Greffe during an extraordinary job trying to engage to make people vote, but it is, sad to say, people's democratic right to not vote?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I think the Deputy was saying that people do have a democratic right not to vote. Yes, of course they do.

4.11.5 Deputy P.D. McLinton:

Yes. Would you agree that they have a democratic right to vote and is a great deal of that aligned as to why people are not showing up? They are deciding that they are not engaged with it, no matter how far we try and how hard we try, we cannot make people vote, unless of course we make it illegal not to.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I am sorry the Deputy was not listening to my earlier answer: it is quite clear people have a choice. They make an informed choice, and one of those choices they can make, if they so wish, is not to vote.

The Bailiff:

May I remind Members this is not a debate.

4.11.5 Senator L.J. Farnham:

Could the Chairman undertake to carry out some fairly urgent housekeeping? During the election, we saw a sitting Member stand without having to resign his seat, and I congratulate Deputy Mézec, I think he did exceptionally well and I am sure we will see him on the senatorial benches in the future, but also, during the election period, the Deputy tabled questions and propositions, which I think is probably inappropriate. Will he also undertake to investigate in time for the next election the possibility of introducing deposits?

The Bailiff:

I am not sure that either of those questions is related to the question about voter turnout at the last election, so I disallow them.

4.11.6 The Connétable of St. John:

When I first got involved in elections some 37 years ago it was, ironically, for the post of Constable of St. John. In those days we had bands going round on the back of lorries, playing around the Parish, we had cars covered in bunting ferrying people to the polling station, and a bit of a competition as to who could get the poshest car to take voters to the polling station. Does the Chairman agree that perhaps we should turn the clock back and reinvestigate the possibility of reintroducing these types of activities?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

There was also a tradition of voters being kidnapped [**Laughter**] while the poll was open. It is not a matter for P.P.C. to organise bands and bunting. I repeat what I said before: it is up to the candidates if they want to make the election more exciting, make themselves seem more attractive, to go out there, put on colourful wigs, or whatever they want to do, hire a band and

make the whole time more exciting. But P.P.C. should not be doing that, it is the candidates who have really got to enthuse the public if they want them to come out and vote for them.

4.11.7 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Saving the best until last, perhaps; I do not know. I am glad that the Chairman started by talking about young people in his first line, because the key thing to attract young people to vote is the possibility of online voting; they are online all the time. Is there a possibility, and I accept that it may not be possible to have proper Island-wide online voting in place for 2018, but what progress is he making in having a pilot available in 2018 so that we can assess the doability, the feasibility, of such schemes?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I cannot answer that question, but certainly the eGov team is working very hard to come up with a practical solution to introduce online voting. I would love to see that in place fully for 2022; whether it will be or not ... One of the things that worries me is, is total security, but if we can get over that, then obviously this is something that is going to come. But I am not involved in doing the research into this, this is the eGov team that are doing that, so we look forward to hearing from them in due course.

4.11.8 Deputy G.P. Southern:

In his role as Chairman, will he question the eGov team to assess whether a pilot is possible in 2018 rather than beyond 2018?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Yes, I can certainly ask the question.

4.11.9 Deputy M.J. Norton:

Following on from the comments there of digital online voting, I am aware that work is going on from the digital team, as just mentioned by the Chairman. Should we have an electronic central register very shortly and, if we should have that central electronic register, would the Chairman support the idea then that voters could vote at any polling station? **[Approval]**

The Connétable of St. Clement:

One of the things we are certainly expecting is that online registration will be in place for the 2018 election. Once you have electronic voting, of course, then people will be able to vote from anywhere, from home or go to the voting station, whichever voting station suits them, and vote there, or perhaps at the library, or whatever. So people should be able to vote anywhere they like.

[11:30]

4.11.10 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Is there any way that we could make it easier for those living in St. Brelade, St. Saviour and St. Helier to know what district they are in? I know it seems like a simple thing but, for many who do not know, it is that extra step, that extra barrier towards voting. Perhaps, rather than waiting for people to come to the Parish Halls to ask, could we make it really easy for people and notify people in those Parishes what their district is, before voting time?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Certainly for the next general election, the Parishes will be required to send out a notice to each individual household explaining to them who is on the register in that household, but also telling them which district they are in and where they need to vote. So that is already in hand.

4.11.11 Deputy M. Tadier:

I am sure we could all name things that might encourage people to vote, or things that would stop people or prevent them from voting. I am sure these cameras at some point will have a positive impact on at least the entertainment value that the public get out of the States, if not necessarily the voter turnout, and I am sure that the rise of political parties in Jersey will also do something to engage the politics, but we will have to wait and see. My concern is that some of the answers we have heard from the Chairman seem to favour people's right not to vote more so than the problem of such high levels of abstention, which is a democratic problem, I think, for all of us. Will the Chairman undertake to perhaps consider a survey, which could be conducted online, asking people questions: "Did you vote in the last election?": "What would have encouraged you to vote?", "What would make you more likely to vote?", "What put you off voting?", "Did you, perhaps, vote for the first time in this election? If so, what made you vote for the first time?" Questions to do with this, so that at least we can have some kind of information to look at what steps we can do. I do agree with the premise of the Chairman that there are so many ways to vote in Jersey, that it is so easy, but we need to make people want to vote.

The Bailiff:

Your question?

Deputy M. Tadier:

Will the Chairman agree to undertake that survey so we can find out why people in Jersey do not seem to want to vote and want to engage currently in our political system?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I think that is an excellent suggestion which I would like to take up, and perhaps the Deputy would forward me the sort of questions he thinks should be asked. My worry is that if 80 per cent of people decided not to take part in the election for Senator, how many are going to take part in a survey asking why they did not take part? That is the worry, but I certainly think it is an excellent idea and one I am prepared to follow up.