

5.12 The Deputy of St. Ouen of the Chairman of the Comité des Connétables regarding the requirement for annual rates returns:

Does the Chairman consider that the requirement for Parishes to post to each ratepayer an annual rates return is a poor use of resources in terms of time and money, given that the information in the great majority of cases will be unchanged from the previous year, and if so, what consideration, if any, has been given to improving procedures?

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

The Parish rate, and indeed the Island-wide rate, is taxed annually and therefore the Parishes do need to have up-to-date and accurate information on a yearly basis. But having said that, the Parishes are always very keen to improve the services and become more efficient for the benefit of the ratepayers. In this particular area, 2 things have happened in recent times: firstly, about 3 or 4 years ago, the returns sent out by the Parishes were pre-completed with the information provided by the owner the previous year, so if there are or were any changes, they just had to indicate what did change, and if there were no changes, just tick the box and return the form to the Parish Hall and the whole process would take about 5 minutes. Now that has been improved even more and this year property owners can return their forms online: if there are no changes, just tick the box that says that, press the send button and it comes back to the Parish Hall, job done within 2 minutes. If there are any changes, they can be indicated on the form online very easily. In fact, this facility has been well-received by parishioners, and those that have come back, the forms that have come back in the last month, over 30 per cent of them - I think it is 33 per cent - have been returned online, so that is good news for all the Parishes. Just to correct the Deputy's question, it is not all ratepayers are sent an annual return, just the property owner who is responsible for completing the form and indicating any changes or changes in occupier.

5.12.1 The Deputy of St. Ouen:

A supplementary. Nevertheless the forms still appear reasonably complex and the Parishes do have to send one to each property owner. But Article 12 of the Rates (Jersey) Law 2005 places an obligation on persons transferring the ownership of land in each Parish to notify the relevant Connétable of the change, therefore could a similar obligation not be placed on persons making changes to their properties with perhaps just an obligation every 3 or 5 years to complete a more detailed return?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

We had not thought or had not discussed changing every 3 or 5 years because the rates, as I said in my answer, are taxed every year and therefore we need accurate and up-to-date information, particularly who is occupier, because if we did not have changes every year, occupiers could change and then the rate bills would be going out to the wrong people and that would create a lot more work and inefficiency than the Deputy thinks exists at the present time, where I think the rates system is extremely efficient, well-run. It is understood

by the landowner and the ratepayer and is fair and works extremely well. We are, as I have indicated, trying to be more and more efficient as each year goes past.

5.12.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

I think the Chairman has made a good case as to why the papers are still sent out. Has consideration been given to whether or not additional information could be inserted into the letters, provided that it did not increase the postage cost, to give other salient information as to when the next Parish Assembly is, what is on the agenda, so that everyone who receives those letters would know if Assemblies are coming up which have fixed dates and so on?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

We do try and communicate as much information to our parishioners as we possibly can, but the rates returns only go out once a year. Parish Assemblies occur at different times, perhaps sometimes 2 or 3 months, sometimes not one for 2 or 3 months, so it would be impossible to do as the Deputy requests. But we have other means of communication with our ratepayers, not simply the *Gazette*, which you are required to do by law, but most - or least many - Parishes now have a database of email addresses and which information is sent to parishioners about the sort of events that the Deputy refers to.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Did you want a final supplementary, Deputy?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

No.