

2017.03.14

4 Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier of the Chairman of the Comité des Connétables regarding the management of elections for Deputies in the districts agreed by the Assembly: [1(138)]

What discussions, if any, has the Comité had about how elections for Deputies will be managed in the new districts agreed by the Assembly, and what plans, if any, have been put together as a result? Thank you.

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

The Comité has not yet discussed how these elections will be managed but initial discussions have taken place between Parish officials and the States Greffe and subsequently there will be brought forward the required changes to the Public Elections Law for approval by this Assembly. But before this happens, discussions will need to take place with the Judicial Greffe and the Jurats of course who are the Autorisés and therefore responsible for the conduct of the election.

4.4.1 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Well today there has been something lodged which says: "We will maintain Parish base on the large districts", so is the Comité Chair saying that they have not discussed this around the Comité itself, who I think will still be running the elections?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

No, as I said, the Comité have not yet discussed it. The running of the election is the responsibility of the Judicial Greffe and the Autorisés, I understand. They are certainly assisted by the Connétables. The Connétables do have a role but the election is run by the Autorisés.

4.4.2 Deputy R. Labey of St. Helier:

I wonder if the Chairman could tell us if he envisages nominations meetings in constituencies consisting of more than one Parish having to be held in one place or could you have nominations meetings in each Parish still at the same time?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

The Deputy is asking me to speculate. I suspect that there will be one nomination meeting for each constituency as there is currently for Senators where the nomination meeting takes place by law in the Parish of St. Helier. The Constables elections take place in the individual Parish Halls and I imagine a venue will be found within the districts of the new constituencies for nomination meetings to take place. That may be the Parish Hall, it may be a school, it may be some other place but that is a matter which the States will decide in due course.

4.4.3 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Following on from that, would the Connétable as Chairman of P.P.C. (Privileges and Procedures Committee) like to recommend to the Comité des Connétables that voters may vote in, well, for instance, myself? Will I be able to vote in St. Ouen, St. Peter or St. Brelade?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

That is very much a matter for management of the election and it would be far too early for me to speculate on whether that would be practical or safe.

[11:30]

The Bailiff:

I am quite sure you will only be allowed to vote once, Senator. [Laughter]

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

A supplementary? Well it might be quite fun trying.

4.4.4 Deputy A.D. Lewis:

Would I be correct in asking the Chairman that an aspiration of P.P.C. is to enable electronic voting at some point so one can vote at any polling station in any jurisdiction once you are on an electoral roll? Is that still an aspiration of P.P.C. and would that help resolve a number of these issues that may occur as the electoral changes begin to fall into place? So, is that an aspiration of his committee to move forward and how far has he got with it thus far?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Am I permitted to change hats halfway through a question because I am answering this question as the Chairman of the Comité des Connétables not the Chairman of the Privileges and Procedures Committee? But the answer is, yes, our policy and our aspirations have not changed and we are looking forward to the work of Deputy Wickenden and his team to come forward in due course with something again which is practical but, most importantly, as far as I am concerned, secure.

4.4.5 Deputy R.J. Renouf of St. Ouen:

Does the Chairman have a view on who should pay for the costs of running these elections in the large new districts, is it to be funded centrally or is it to be funded by the Parishes? If the latter, does the Connétable have a view or does he foresee difficulties on how the costs may be apportioned between the Parishes comprising a single electoral area?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

This is a personal view which I feel will be shared by my fellow Connétables, is that currently the Senatorial elections are funded essentially by the taxpayer, the election for Connétables and Deputies is funded by the Parish and there is a logic to that. I suspect that the election for Senator will continue to be funded by the taxpayer, the election for Connétable will be funded by the Parish, the ratepayer, but I do think - and this is a personal view, as I say, which we have not discussed or decided upon yet or to make recommendations upon - the funding of the new Deputies which are no longer Parish Deputies should be funded by the taxpayer.

4.4.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:

When will the Connétable, with his hat on as Chairman of Comité des Connétables, come to this House with some provisional arrangements about the coming election, either with his Constable's hat on or with P.P.C.'s hat on or having talked to the Greffe in terms of organisation? When are we likely to see any outline about how we are going to proceed?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I imagine that would be a few months away. A lot will depend on whether we approve our proposition later on in this sitting for referenda but it needs to be sorted out. I would have thought by the autumn so that the education programme for electors can take place, the vote.je programme, and so on because whatever changes are made, they are going to impact on the electorate. We will need to explain very carefully how the new system, whatever it might be, is working, so we will need time to get that in place, so, therefore, I would have thought by the autumn would be a target date.

4.4.7 Deputy J.A. Martin:

It is quite disappointing to hear that very limited meetings being taken when we are just under a year away from the nominations; we do not even know where they will be held. So, how much does the Comité Chairman put on the urgency to get this sorted? Like Deputy Southern, I want to know the arrangement before I pass the States of Jersey Law. Would the Chair of the Comité not say, if this does remain Parish-based, in all likelihood in the districts you will have St. Clement, St. Saviour and St. Brelade people always winning because they are bigger by the numbers that can elect the people? You cannot change the system and maintain your Parish bases. Thank you.

The Bailiff:

I am not sure what the question is, Deputy.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Well one was about how much urgency and does he not agree about the size of the Parishes? If they remain Parish-based, in the districts they will out-vote the other 3 or 4 in that district and does he think that is fair?

The Bailiff:

How much urgency and is it fair, Connétable?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

The penny has finally dropped, has it not? The penny has finally dropped. We have decided to implement large constituencies based on Parish boundaries. Some Parishes are larger than other Parishes, therefore, their voters will have a greater say in who the Deputies are in this place than the smaller Parishes. That is a fact, that is something we must have realised 4 or 5 weeks ago when we made that decision, and we still made that decision. That is a matter of physical fact and nothing I can do about it. As to the matter of urgency, I hope the Deputy will remember, it is only about 5, maybe 6 weeks ago, that we made the decision. To say that we have got to put the plans and the management in place before we approve the States of Jersey Law is putting the cart before the horse. We need to have a States of Jersey Law amended so we know for certainty what the arrangements are going to be next May. P.P.C. have lodged today the first part of the change in the constituencies in the States of Jersey Law, that will be debated in 6 weeks' time. Following on from that if that is approved, we will come to the changes to the Public Elections Law, which is slightly more complicated, to be done. But we have got to know if the States are or are not going to change their minds, which happens so often in these issues of reform, before we can put the plans into place. As I say, it is not at the end of the day totally for the P.P.C. or the Connétales or indeed the Assembly but the people who manage the election are the Autorisés who are free of political interference. That is another important thing which you must remember when we are talking about the management of elections.

The Bailiff:

We would normally come to question 5 but the President of the Assembly is adopting a policy to assist a breast-feeding mother in her return to work and that is going further down the list. We now come to question 6 which Deputy Mézec will ask of the Minister for Housing.