

2017.06.20

3.10 Senator S.C. Ferguson of the Chief Minister regarding the publication of the numbers assigned to Freedom of Information requests: [1(3590)]

Will the Chief Minister ensure that the numbers assigned to Freedom of Information requests are listed on the States webpage listing all the requests for F.O.I. (Freedom of Information)?

Senator P.F. Routier (Assistant Chief Minister - rapporteur):

The unique reference numbers assigned to Freedom of Information requests have not been used on the States of Jersey website on the advice of the Law Officers' Department. The advice was that the number could be used by someone pretending to be the requester or used to link the request to the requester's details.

3.10.1 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Yes, but does the Minister not realise that the sequential numbering means that it is possible to identify where Freedom of Information requests have either been delayed, disposed of or ignored? Is it not time to put an end to over-enthusiastic redacting and wilful delay of Freedom of Information requests?

Senator P.F. Routier:

The Freedom of Information team I believe go about their work as diligently and as effectively as they possibly can. I would not want Members to think that there is any political oversight of the requests that have come in or the answers that are given.

[10:45]

These are pulled together by the Freedom of Information team and they work within very strict guidelines of how they should operate. There is an issue, which I do accept, that the way that the information is put on to the website could be improved. There is no doubt about that. There is certainly a way of making them more accessible to the public that needs to be found. I hope that we will get to a position where we are able to achieve that. This information that is on the Freedom of Information website is really useful information because it gives the public a lot of detail about the work that goes on within government and, quite rightly, they should be aware of what is happening on their behalf.

3.10.2 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

When Freedom of Information requests are received and then sent on to departments for them to gather that information, does the Minister know if they are anonymised or not?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I can only talk for the department I am involved with and they certainly are anonymised. There is absolutely no indication or there is no desire from a Minister to know who has asked the question. It is just a matter of the system we have is that it is completely anonymised.

3.10.3 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

The Assistant Minister says that he is speaking from his experience in his department. Would he be willing to simply say that this is the case across the board for all departments and then report back, just so we know for definite that they are anonymised when sent out?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I am prepared to do that but I am convinced that that is the case, certainly.

3.10.4 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

This is meant to be an open and transparent executive. Why is it not?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I do not believe that I can answer that question in the way the Senator is asking me to. This is an open ... we have been more open during recent years than there has been for many a year. There is so much information available; the opportunity to ask questions of the Assembly, which has increased over the period. The Freedom of Information legislation, which this Government brought into place so that the public can have access to information, is far better than we have ever had for a many a year. I just hope that Members and the public will use it and to use it effectively and perhaps ensure that the questions they are asking are of importance and of value to the community rather than perhaps ... there have been some reports of some frivolous questions being asked which do take up officers' time. If there are questions to be asked and they are on an important topic, I hope the public and the media - no doubt the media use the system as well as the public - will use it in an appropriate way.

The Bailiff:

We come to question 11 which Deputy Higgins will ask of the Chief Minister.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

If I could I would like to a question of clarification from the previous speaker. Would he not acknowledge ...

The Bailiff:

No, sorry, we have gone on to question 11.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

They are claiming credit for the F.O.I. which was actually P.P.C.