

4.2 Senator P.F. Routier of the Chairman of the Comité des Connétables regarding the accessibility of Parish buildings to electors and candidates with physical, sensory or health disabilities: [1(545)]

Is it the policy of the Comité des Connétables that all buildings and facilities used as polling stations or venues for hustings should be accessible to all electors and candidates with physical, sensory or health disabilities?

[10:00]

If so, will he ask the Comité to carry out an accessibility audit of such buildings and request the Connétables to proactively promote barrier-free access to Parish buildings?

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

Yes, indeed that is our policy but it is a policy backed up by law because the Public Elections Law 2002 requires the provision of polling stations such that: “The Autorisé is satisfied that all persons have reasonable facilities for the exercise of their right to vote.” The law goes on to make specific provisions for those who are disabled or ill. Just as an aside, I should say that the hustings meetings are the responsibility of the candidates, not the Connétables, although the Connétables do co-operate with the candidates for hustings meetings. As to Parish buildings, Parish Halls, certainly most of them were built in less-enlightened times but over the decades successive Connétables have recognised that the Parish Halls are indeed the heart of the community, need to be inclusive so that all members of the community have access to those buildings. I think over the years the Connétables have made tremendous efforts and successful efforts to ensure that all people have access to the Parish Halls.

4.2.1 Senator P.F. Routier:

I am reassured that the Connétable recognises in the legislation there is a requirement to enable everybody to be able to get into the Parish Halls and to take part in the election process. But would the Connétable consider involving people with disabilities to carry out an audit of existing facilities?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

If any individual, disabled or otherwise, believes that access to the Parish Halls or other Parish facilities can be improved, each and every Connétable would be pleased to hear from them and I am sure will take appropriate action.

4.2.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Comité des Connétables be considering increasing the number of polling stations in certain Parishes? Certainly, I feel that, for example, for the disabled St. Clement’s Parish Hall is not particularly conveniently placed; the fact in my own District, in No. 2 District, we have to trek out to Springfield when Hue Court is in No. 2 and is right opposite the Parish Hall, the Town Hall. Will he consider increasing the number and thereby the access for all to polling stations?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

That really is not within the remit of the Comité des Connétables. It is the Autorisé who is responsible for ensuring that all electors have a reasonable access to cast their vote and that would be the position. If we could improve voter turnout by increasing polling stations, that might be a possibility but it is not the responsibility of the Connétables.

4.2.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

In the absence of an actual election, who is the authority to whom I have to go to say: “Is it possible to increase the number of polling stations?” Can the Chairman tell me about that because the Autorisé is not appointed yet? Who do I go to?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

This is something that the Constables could take up on behalf of an individual, certainly speak to the Court or the Autorisé or the Jurats. It is not something that has been considered before.

4.2.4 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Would the Comité des Connétables consider bringing pressure to bear on the Executive to improve access to this Chamber for the public and for elected Members? There is no lift to the public gallery for anyone who is disabled ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Senator, this is not something within the responsibility of the Comité des Connétables.

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

No, but perhaps the Connétables, as a body, Sir, can lean on the Executive.

The Deputy Bailiff:

No, Senator, this is simply nothing for which the chairman of the Comité des Connétables has any responsibility at all. You cannot ask him to do anything on behalf of the Connétables because the Comité have no responsibility.

4.2.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

Would the Comité Chairman take on board the comments that have been made? It is a strange observation, it is a strange fact that, for example, in my constituency or my Parish there are 2 polling stations, one in St. Aubin and one in Quennevais, right in the heart of the constituency. Yet in St. Clement, which is a much bigger Parish population-wise, there is only one polling station. It would seem obvious, for example, to have another polling station at the Good Companions Club where a lot of the population live in that district and, similarly, many parishioners in St. Helier want to vote at the Town Hall or the old Magistrate’s Court because that is central and it is something they know. Could provisions be made in short order to supplement the great work that has been done by the Greffe to encourage voter turnout in practical terms and, in particular, in these 2 districts?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Clearly I cannot talk about St. Brelade but I can talk about St. Clement, if you wish, but I thought I was answering questions as chairman of the Comité. But certainly, as far as St. Clement is concerned, the Parish Hall is an excellent venue because it has good parking, as a polling station. If you move to the Good Companions Club or the school you are then talking about a lack of parking, making it difficult for people to ... a small number would be able to walk there but most people want to use their vehicles and that there is very little parking facilities there. But I am quite happy to discuss the matter further with the Deputy but I do not really think this is a matter for the Chairman of the Comité.

4.2.6 Deputy M. Tadier:

The supplementary would be just to add that it is not an either/or. I think parishioners in that Parish would be grateful to have a choice and it might be worth that the Comité consult generally with their parishioners about what optimisation can be made for voting in all elections. Does the Chairman agree?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Yes, I do agree to make it as easy as possible for people to vote. One of the things that I am working on with another hat on, of course, is the online voting, which will make it even easier for people who will not even have to go and leave their own homes to cast their vote.
[Approbation]

4.2.7 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Is there scope for the Connétables to be able to inform individuals that have been highlighted in this manner to remind them of the alternatives, such as pre-poll voting at St. Paul's Centre, which does have disability access, as well as the home visits that can occur in order to get votes because people are not necessarily always aware about the options about how they declare their vote? Could the Connétables be doing more in order to make people aware of that, as it is not just about voting on polling day?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

No, the Deputy is absolutely right. Over the years this Assembly has made it easier and easier for people to cast their vote, so pre-poll voting is an obvious example and those who are unwell, unable to leave their homes, can also vote by having people collecting their votes from them. A lot of publicity is given leading up to any election or particularly a general election about how people can vote, where they can vote. Certainly, for the first time this year before general election a notice will be going out a few weeks before from the Parish Halls, which will remind people who are on the electoral roll and, obviously, who are on the electoral rolls, households will be able to work out from that who are not and that will include all voting information as well. I really think a tremendous amount of information, sufficient information for them to make their choice about how they wish to cast their vote.

4.2.8 Senator P.F. Routier:

As the chairman is speaking on behalf of the Comité, would he be prepared to put on a future Comité agenda the issue of all Parishes being very proactive in enabling people to get into their Parish buildings to enable them to vote, if they wish to vote, by going to the Parish, as opposed to doing online voting? It is quite possible that people want to be able to have the freedom to be able to go into a barrier-free building. Would he put it on the agenda of the next Comité?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

As I tried to say in one of my earlier answers, the Constables have worked extremely hard over the decades to make the Parish Halls, where most of the voting takes place, accessible to as many people as possible. There will always be those who are ill or disabled sufficiently that they cannot leave their home. I cannot bring them into the Parish Hall, it would be silly to try and do that but I think the vast majority can get into the Parish Halls. The Senator is responsible for the States Disability Strategy. I would welcome him to come to a future Comité meeting to discuss his concerns if he really has them and to tell us how we can improve even further. We want to improve what we can. Perhaps he would be able to guide us as to how that improvement could take place.