

4.8 Senator P.F. Routier of the Chairman, Privileges and Procedures Committee regarding the accessibility of States Assembly buildings to elected members with physical, sensory or health disabilities: [1(546)]

Is it a policy of the Privileges and Procedures Committee that the States Assembly and associated buildings should be accessible to all elected members with physical, sensory or health disabilities and, if so, will he agree to the committee commissioning an accessibility audit and to seeking to remove any barriers that are identified?

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

Absolutely, yes. Anyone elected to serve in this Assembly should be able to do so without impediment. We and the Greffe are committed to supporting any Member with a disability to discharge their duties. An accessibility audit is an excellent suggestion and I will be happy to recommend to P.P.C. (Privileges and Procedures Committee) that we do this.

4.8.1 Senator P.F. Routier:

A supplementary? Would it be possible to involve people with disabilities in carrying out that audit and also to perhaps publish it as well?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Absolutely, yes.

4.8.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

The Senator focuses on the plight of potential elected Members which is a valid question to ask but there is also an issue for members of the public having access to this building, not just the gallery which is terribly inaccessible for many with even perhaps a slight disability, but I know I had an embarrassment only a few weeks ago when I tried to meet a constituent in one of the meeting rooms and could not get them in with their wheelchair, so we met across the road at a café which was fine in the end. But does the chairman agree that this is a public building, it is important that public have access to it easily and that where it can be facilitated that we should be publicly-accessible, not just for elected Members but for members of the public too?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Yes, I do agree with that. Once again, this building was built in a less-enlightened age. Much work has been done to improve accessibility but I am sure that more could be done. Therefore, if the committee agree to do the audit, it should be included for public access as well.

4.8.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Would the committee perhaps consider an experiment physically where they try to get into the building with different conditions? Would they consider going about in a wheelchair trying to access this building as a member of the public might and see where the pitfalls are, where the ramps need to be and what parts of the building are quite frankly inaccessible?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

There are many types of disability, not just wheelchair users, and we need to think of people with all sorts of different disabilities. I think if the committee agree to do an audit, it needs to be done professionally together with people who have experience of disability rather than with amateurs riding around in wheelchairs which I do not think would be very helpful to anybody.

4.8.4 Connétable J. Gallichan of St. Mary:

Will the chairman also possibly take on board consideration of whether in fact this building is the right location for the future States Assembly to meet? There are, as we know, lots of

implications, not only for how the public access us but also for how we work now. This building was not constructed in the electronic modern age and we all know that the court services is desperate for extra court facilities. Perhaps the scope should be widened to consider whether this is the best place and whether the public could be better served by a more efficient use of this building, perhaps by the court services.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I think if we go down that road now, the audit for disabled access will be waiting many, many years. I think we need to concentrate on what we can do now. Clearly, it would be nice to have a bright spanking-new building; it would be ideal to start with a greenfield and build a new Assembly building, but I think that is a long, long way away. I would rather concentrate on what Senator Routier has suggested.

4.8.5 The Connétable of St. Mary:

It is not necessarily a question of building a new building. We know that St. Helier is being regenerated, we know that things are moving around within this capital. I am sure there are other buildings that could be fitted out. Office buildings are regularly fitted out within a matter of 6 months, so I think it would be perhaps short-sighted not to consider all options at this time.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I am prepared to put it to the committee that they should consider all options.

4.8.6 Senator P.F. Routier:

I thank the chairman for his response. Is he aware that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association is promoting greater diversity to ensure that all sections of our community are able to be elected and that is particularly including people with disabilities? Is he aware that there are some very old Assemblies around the Commonwealth which have had alterations made which have managed to retain their character? In fact, I was at a Commonwealth parliamentary conference recently whereby the speaker's chair had been lowered because the speaker was in a wheelchair and it would enable anybody who was sitting in that chair to gain access to it. So is he aware that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association is promoting greater accessibility?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Yes, I am and that is why I am very pleased to accept the suggestions made by the Senator.

[11:00]

But lowering a chair is a very relatively-simple operation. It is getting access from the ground floor or outside in the Royal Square to that chair which I think is going to be the more challenging.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Prior to asking my question, may I apologise for not being here for the first question? I have sent you a note as to the reasons why; I was unavoidably delayed because of a personal matter and if I could ask the first question, in view of the time, after this question.

The Deputy Bailiff:

There is time available to do that and you have given me an explanation, Senator, which I think is an acceptable explanation. So you can ask question 1 after question 10.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I am grateful.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Is there someone nominated to ...

Senator A.K.F. Green, Deputy Chief Minister:

The Assistant Chief Minister, Senator Routier.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Very well. Thank you very much indeed.