

2017.11.14

2.1 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade of the Chairman of the Privileges and Procedures Committee regarding the results of a C.P.A. benchmarking exercise completed in 2016: [1(612)]

Further to the C.P.A. (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association) benchmarking exercise, which was completed in 2016 by a Privileges and Procedures Sub-Committee, does the chairman accept the findings of that exercise that there are areas for improvement and, if so, what steps are being taken to follow up in these areas?

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

I do accept the findings of the sub-committee that there are areas for improvement. Members will recall that the report of the sub-committee, which was circulated last year, highlighted how the Assembly was compliant or partially compliant against the C.P.A.'s benchmark for democratic legislatures. However, the report contained instances where Jersey did not comply. Some of that non-compliance stems from the context of Jersey's parliamentary democracy. For example, the fact that the majority of Members do not belong to a political party or the Assembly does not elect its own Speaker. But of particular note was the comparative lack of resources and support available to Members of the Assembly to carry out their parliamentary work. This was something which was emphasised to me recently during the debate we had on States Members' pay. This was something which the P.P.C. (Privileges and Procedures Committee) have taken on board and while of course we need to be mindful of budgetary considerations what we are going to do is to hold a series of workshops with Members in the new year to progress discussions in this particular area.

2.1.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

I thank the chairman for that response. The chairman may be interested to know that the subject of benchmarking did come up at the recent Commonwealth Parliamentary conference at the small workgroups that were held. It was an area of interest. It was felt to be valuable for those who took part in it. Does the chairman agree that for those of us in the Assembly who value the Commonwealth association and the benchmarks and the norms that they said it is important that we try to do everything we can to live up to those commonly applied norms?

[9:45]

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I think it is important we try stringently to maintain the highest democratic standards.

2.1.2 Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Does that mean that P.P.C. will therefore adopt the issue of elected Speaker, which seems to be ... and having read also some other benchmarks of other democratic systems, the elected Speaker is fundamental in terms of the importance of that position. Does he agree and will he support therefore the elected Speaker being also part of our democratic system?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

The Privileges and Procedures Committee is a democratic institution and there are no whips and each member of the committee will cast his or her vote depending on the quality of the arguments made during the forthcoming debate.

2.1.3 Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The committee system used to be known as “first among equals”. Is the “first among equal” chairman of the committee going to be supporting this fundamental issue of democratic democracy?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

The chairman will listen very carefully to the debate. The chairman will possibly make a contribution or 2 or 3 or 4, depending on which amendments we debate during the debate, and will cast his vote on the balance of arguments made. That is what is called democracy.

2.1.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

Will the chairman note the feedback from such conferences, not just from myself and the recent delegates, but from those who have been in the past, that although Jersey in many ways punches above its weight, and the Public Accounts Committee is a great example in the Commonwealth of how Jersey can often demonstrate best practice to other Parliaments and Assemblies from around the Commonwealth. But when it comes to the singular issue of the elected Speaker, or absence thereof in the Jersey context, eyebrows are always raised on the international stage and at the Commonwealth level the fact that we do not have an elected Speaker in the Assembly. Not only that but that the person who automatically is the Speaker is also the Chief Justice of our Island. Could that be put on record and related to the P.P.C. and reflected perhaps in its comments during the debate we are going to have in the next couple of days?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I will be absolutely honest with you, I do not think I understood the question. I will answer the question inasmuch as do we learn from our experiences when we attend conferences like the C.P.A., and of course we do. That is why we belong. We learn, we improve, we gain. But also of course other jurisdictions learn and gain from the experiences that our delegates are able to pass on to them. That is very important. I am not going to commit myself to my position on the elected Speaker. Members will find out my position when the vote is taken.