

2024.04.16.

#### **4.10 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier of the Chair of the Privileges and Procedures Committee regarding improvements to the voting system (OQ.59/2024)**

Will the chair advise what improvements to the voting system, if any, are envisaged by the committee ahead of the next general election? What progress, if any, has been made towards achieving any such enhancements?

#### **Deputy C.S. Alves of St. Helier Central (Vice-Chair, Privileges and Procedures Committee – rapporteur):**

Aside from a number of small changes to the Election Law which the committee will be bringing forward later this year, the main improvement will be the automatic voter registration project, for which this Assembly approved funding in the 2024 Government Plan. We are about to appoint a project manager to take forward the development and implementation of a digital voter register. This will provide a digital version of the existing register and mean that voters will be able to cast their physical vote at any polling station on election day, as well as making the pre-poll process more mobile and allow for taking the ballot boxes out to the people. Consideration has also been given to using a postal voting system, which allows for an automated count whereby the ballots are scanned. This system is widely used across the U.K. and was utilised very efficiently in and effectively in Guernsey in 2021.

##### **4.10.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:**

I welcome the vice-chair's confirmation that it will be possible to vote in different places, particularly for people who find themselves in town, they can vote when they are at work and do not have to make that long trip out to the polling station in the distant Parishes if it is raining, for example. Does the committee plan to continue with the presence of that very grey candidate "none of the above" who, of course, ran a couple of Members quite a close run in the last election. Will that option still appear on the ballot paper?

##### **Deputy C.S. Alves:**

In short, yes, that was a decision that was taken by this Assembly on the back of a proposition which I believe the now chair of P.P.C. (Privileges and Procedures Committee) brought forward herself. So, yes, we do not envision any change unless another proposition or somebody else decides to propose something and this Assembly approves that.

##### **4.10.2 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier South:**

Does the vice-chair consider there is any particular reason that elections ought to be held on a Wednesday, when there are countries around the world that hold elections on Sundays and some, in fact, even have them on bank holidays in order to encourage greater turnout. If the committee has not considered such a thing, would she be willing to raise that up with the committee for their views?

##### **Deputy C.S. Alves:**

In the previous term, I was on the sub-committee looking at the electoral reforms as a whole. This was something that we did our own research on as well and we found much the same. I think this is something that we can do. There have been some discussions in the past with the Parishes and the Parish secretaries. I realise that there are some issues around sourcing volunteers for the count, for example, but I do know that in other jurisdictions often - comparing Madeira, which I have first-hand experience of, and Portugal - Government employees are

normally used and then they are given a day off in lieu, for example. I think there are options that can be explored, and I think they can now be taken back to the newly constituted P.P.C.

**4.10.3 Deputy K.F. Morel:**

With regard to the answers the vice-chair provided to the main question, would she be able to advise the Assembly as to what impact, if any, she expects matters such as automatic voter registration or being able to vote at different places to have on voter turnout?

**Deputy C.S. Alves:**

I think it has the potential to be a double-edged sword. Obviously, with the automatic voter registration system our number of eligible voters will obviously increase, which, if we cannot get people to come out en masse, may give us data that looks like our voter turnout has actually decreased. That will be purely because the number of eligible voters will be much more accurate. That data will be more accurate. I would like to think that with this facility, this will encourage people to come out and vote, because it will be possible to vote anywhere. We can set up different polling stations in different places and be much more responsive to the public and their needs on where they would like to vote and when.

**4.10.4 Deputy K.F. Morel:**

With that in mind, obviously we measure voter turnout, and it is often said that what is not measured cannot be managed. In this case, you do measure it but we do not manage to increase voter turnout very much at all. Will the Privileges and Procedures Committee be setting targets with this election, aspirational targets, for where they would like to see voter turnout rise to?

**Deputy C.S. Alves:**

I think that is difficult, given the kind of richness of our data in the past to be able to make comparisons with any past voter turnout figures. I do think it is important to have targets, absolutely, and this may come under the work of the sub-committee that has been made permanent now, which I set up, which was political awareness and education. I think there is a place for that committee to do some work around obviously engaging the public and making sure that they are aware. But I think that is something that we could definitely consider looking at targets and how we can use the data that we collect to do that.

**4.10.5 Deputy J. Renouf:**

Currently we are, I think, bottom of the league in terms of voter turnout and it drags down our performance in the Better Life Index. One target might be to come off the bottom. Given the seriousness of this and given the fact that it is seriously embarrassing for the Island that we have such a low turnout, can the vice-chair say with certainty that these changes of which she has spoken, including increasing the number of polling stations, will actually be in place for the next election?

**Deputy C.S. Alves:**

I would like to be able to confidently say yes. Obviously I cannot, because we are still in the process of appointing a project manager, for example. I will say this, however; I do feel that in the past there has been a lack of push from within the Government and this is something that I have addressed with the Chief Minister, and he has agreed that in my role as Assistant Chief Minister I will be given the responsibility for doing what I can to increase civic engagement from that angle. One example that I will give from past Governments is that, for example, the Government Facebook page has over 10,000 followers and during our last election there was only one post that was shared throughout the whole time about registering to vote and election

day. I think for a government page that has such a big reach, that is really disappointing. I would like to see that change for the next election.

**4.10.6 Deputy M. Tadier:**

Which of the following does the vice-chair think will come first, online voting, the new hospital, a tunnel to France or the second coming of our Lord? [Laughter]

**Deputy C.S. Alves:**

I am not sure I am sufficiently qualified to answer that question.

**4.10.7 Deputy M. Tadier:**

Just in the absence of the Dean, I thought we may ask the Deputy. There is a more serious question here in that Jersey supposedly prides itself on being a digital island. We know that we have something called Digital Jersey but we also know that we are told we have got the fastest broadband fibre speeds maybe in some parts of Europe, if not the world. What is the point in having all of this if one of the very basic things that I think the public want to do is to be able to vote at their convenience? What steps is P.P.C. taking to seriously move forward the issue of allowing people in the 21st century to be able to vote online?

**Deputy C.S. Alves:**

I think the issue of voting online and voting digitally are 2 very different things. There are all kinds of security issues that come with voting online, which is around verifying people's identity and so on. We are aiming for a digital offering instead, which will be much more secure and will ensure that people are who they say they are when they are casting that vote, which I think is really important. Obviously, in an ideal world, with everything working perfectly, I think we would love to have online voting. At the moment, our first step is to get that centralised automatic voter electoral roll, which will enable us to, at the very least, vote at every polling station in a more digital manner as opposed to online.

**4.10.8 Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier Central:**

One of the many excellent opportunities created by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, which I would encourage all Members to be part of, is to observe and train as an election observer. I did this myself and I have been observing the Isle of Man elections. One of the things they trialled in their capital, Douglas, was a system of voting in any polling station for the constituencies involved. Would the vice-chair be interested, or has the committee spoken to those who trialled that, to see whether this could be an option for St. Helier, for example, or other Parishes, given that we had the joined-up Parishes now in voting?

**Deputy C.S. Alves:**

I understand that this is absolutely an option. I do not recall whether we have spoken to any other jurisdictions about this, but I think we have spoken to election observers when they have come to do their reviews and their observations. I think this is something that would definitely be possible in St. Helier. That may be the better option to start with. But I think the Deputy has raised a good point, it is definitely worth us talking to other jurisdictions about their experiences and learning from them..

**4.10.9 Deputy M.R. Scott of St. Brelade:**

Continuing on the theme about how to improve voter turnout, there have been a number of reports commissioned by the P.P.C. in the past, including the ComRes Report in 2015, which indicated that some of the reasons why Islanders were not voting were things such as they

believed it did not make any difference and the quality of the candidates. I am wondering if the P.P.C. is pushing forward with any proposals to improve matters in those respects?

[11.00]

**Deputy C.S. Alves:**

I think with regard to the quality of candidates, I think that is very much subjective. I think obviously we have things like the Diversity Forum, which help push, educate and enable those in our community who may be less reluctant to come forward to stand for election. This has had a real positive effect. I know that a couple of people within our Assembly today attended one of those events that the Diversity Forum put on to encourage candidates to stand. I cannot remember what the other part of the question was, sorry.

**Deputy M.R. Scott:**

It was the makes no difference.

**Deputy C.S. Alves:**

Yes. I think that as a whole is around probably raising political education and awareness about how every vote makes a difference. I know there is often an infographic that goes around at election time where it shows two-thirds of people are saying that and that those two-thirds of the people would have made a massive difference. I think it is also around that and kind of pushing that message out that every vote does make a difference. We see it in this Assembly all the time when we have very close votes and I do not think it is always translated into the public.

**4.10.10 Deputy M.R. Scott:**

I wondered whether the P.P.C. has considered looking into what is meant by these things, because it seems like there might be assumptions about what is meant by not making a difference and what is meant by poor quality candidates and whether, therefore, the P.P.C. will actually drill down deeper into what the public thinks about this and why they are not voting.

**Deputy C.S. Alves:**

We did have some focus groups that were kindly conducted by Dr. Christopher Pich - he was from Nottingham Trent University and he is in Nottingham - and we have some very rich data that came out of those focus groups. Obviously, we also have the J.O.L.S. (Jersey Opinions and Lifestyle Survey) again this year. So there are some questions that we have had some input into for that survey. There is always work to do around that and hopefully now that we have re-established P.P.C. and its sub-committees, we will be able to push through to combat some of the findings about what people think and address those misconceptions.

**4.10.11 Deputy E. Millar of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:**

At the more extreme end of the scale, has the committee considered compulsory voting?

**Deputy C.S. Alves:**

This was again something that was looked at in the last term with the Electoral Reforms Sub-committee. At the time, the committee were not completely sold on the idea. I think it is always something that we should maybe keep in mind and how we would manage that. I know that Australia has a system of compulsory voting but they can still opt out. I think it is something to keep in mind for the future.

**4.10.12 Deputy R.S. Kovacs:**

Continuing on what Deputy Robert Ward mentioned about the collaboration with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and also including the Assemblée Parlementaire de la Francophonie and beyond, has the committee considered a wider collaboration or a closer collaboration with different jurisdictions with systems that work well for online registration or even gathering statistical data are working well? How could those be replicated here? Have these kind of discussions taken place anywhere?

**Deputy C.S. Alves:**

Yes, we are continuously doing research in the background and speaking to ... I know that our Greffier speaks to other Greffiers in other jurisdictions. We have especially been talking to Guernsey following the increase in their voter turnout and how they have gone about it. We do do research. We are continuously doing research. There is always room for improvement and there are always jurisdictions that we can take ideas from. We are happy to hear from people, obviously, if they have any ideas of or if they know of any systems that are working in certain ways elsewhere in the world that we can get in contact with and ask for some feedback on.

**4.10.13 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Will there still be a requirement to show I.D. (identification) in Jersey voting?

**Deputy C.S. Alves:**

The law does not specify that there has to be photographic I.D. Obviously, I am really conscious that there are people in our community who do not possess a driving licence or a passport and therefore do not necessarily have photographic I.D. The law does state that as long as the identity of that person is verifiable, I think it is, or something along those lines, by somebody within the electoral authority ... there have been cases in the past where I believe that people from the Parish have been able to confirm other people's identities, for example. We also had something I remember in the last election, I think somebody wanted to use their Yoti, they were not sure whether they could and then we found out that they could. So, generally speaking, we do not intend on changing that part of the law. There was some negative feedback around that when it was suggested in the U.K., because it served as a disincentive to some.

**4.10.14 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Yes. I think the respondent is correct when she says the requirement for photo I.D. does constitute a reason why we should not vote or reason, on the day, why you should not. I think it is important that we get this correctly identified in order to improve.

**Deputy C.S. Alves:**

I am not sure there was a question there, but I will say that I agree and I think there probably needs to be maybe clearer guidance. This is maybe something for the Jersey Election Authority to consider, for example. The experience in the U.K. was not a positive one when this was trialled.

**4.10.15 The Connétable of St. Helier:**

I am grateful to the vice-chair for her responses and to Members for their interest in the subject. I suppose it is a bit early to ask the question but I am sure some Members, some people in here and some people out there, would like to put the date in their diaries of the next general election.

**Deputy C.S. Alves:**

As things stand, no change has been made to the law and the election would be due in June 2026. The Assembly can appoint the day by Act. However, the committee has agreed to consider the timing of the next election following a request from, I think, Deputy Ahier at the first meeting of the new P.P.C. We are mindful that any changes would need to be enacted sufficiently far ahead of the next election, otherwise, the terms of office of this Assembly will need to be extended and that would not be democratic. As it stands, with no changes being made to the law, it is due June 2026.