

STATEMENT ON A MATTER OF OFFICIAL RESPONSIBILITY

5. Chairman of the Comité des Connétables will make a statement regarding those who helped during recent blizzard conditions in the Island

5.1 Connétable J.L.S. Gallichan of Trinity (Chairman, Comité des Connétables):

On behalf of all the Connétables I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those across the Island, who gave of their time to help join the bitterest conditions we experienced last week. The strengths of the Parish system were once again put to the test and the Parish Halls provided a point of contact dealing with many calls and inquiries. We were able to assist and advise Parishioners who were experiencing hardship, whether that was due to road condition, fallen trees, loss of services or the inability to obtain essential medicines and supplies. Parish staff and honorary officers worked alongside the Transport and Technical Services, the States Police, the fire and the ambulance services to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all Parishioners. We must also thank the contractors, the tree surgeons and especially the J.E.C. (Jersey Electricity Company) who worked, I think, in exceptional conditions to try and respond properly to calls for assistance; and the media for ensuring that up-to-date information was available to all. Thanks must also go to the many other Islanders who volunteered with 4 by 4s, tractors, chainsaws, who have just helped their neighbours. There are too many to mention by name without leaving someone out, but I trust the Members of the Assembly will endorse our sincere thanks to all those who worked tirelessly to ensure the Island could return to normal as soon as possible.

[Approbation]

The Deputy Bailiff:

The Member is available for questions if anyone wishes to ask any.

5.1.1 Senator I.J. Gorst:

Would the Connétable agree with the sentiments that I issued earlier that the parochial response in particular proves the considerable worth that our community gains from the Parish system, and they are to be congratulated with the way that they responded to this particular difficulty? We therefore tamper with that system at our peril. **[Approbation]**

The Connétable of Trinity:

I am not going to get involved into whether we tamper it, but all I would say to the Chief Minister is that the local knowledge that is held in the Parish Halls is invaluable in times of necessity like this, and it once again proves that the office staff and the Honorary Police are the people who know their own Parishes. I can only speak for mine, but I know every Connétable will say exactly the same for the administration of their own Parish. They are the people who know where the problems are. They know the names of the roads and it is most helpful when you get someone who can answer these questions quickly and if possible put some sort of assistance to these people. I thank the Chief Minister for his concerns, but I can assure him the Parish system is not dead yet.

5.1.2 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Yes, I add my voice of congratulations, even though I never saw a gritter down St. Brelade's Bay, but that is another story. Would the Connétable not agree that it would perhaps be useful if some of the mobile telephone numbers of vital staff at T.T.S. were included in a bad weather plan so that there was an ease of contacting people and making communication more efficient?

The Connétable of Trinity:

I think the T.T.S. did a fantastic job. **[Approbation]** I think what the Senator fails to realise is that most of the Connétables were looking after their byroads. The main roads were handled by the T.T.S. In some cases some of the Parishes did help to clear those. But I think everyone is amazed who comes to this Island to see how many roads there are in Jersey. The byroads system

in this Island is really ... in my Parish alone I have 26 miles of byroads. To try and clear those where you have any field that had nothing of protection from the easterly wind which was exceptional, they were just filled up with snow. I will be quite honest with you; I think I have a couple which are still filled up with snow, and it could be there all week. But the main thing is, the main thing the Connétables did in their Parishes was to make sure that inhabitants who were blocked in by the snow had access to get back to normal life. That is what we did. I think we did it well. Whether we have more mobile numbers, I know, that is possible it could help; but on the other hand, there is only so much you can do in these times. There were so many calls for people to go out it had to be handled on a case by case basis, and that is what we could do. Maybe the Minister for Transport and Technical Services may freely be giving his mobile number, I am sure they would not be too keen on that.

5.1.3 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Supplementary question. There was a comment made by one of the colleagues of the President of the Comité des Connétables that it would have been helpful if he had had the mobile numbers of vital people at T.T.S. in order to facilitate clearing of main roads. I merely ask and suggest that it might be a good idea if there was a mobile phone directory for the convenience of the Connétables.

The Connétable of Trinity:

Yes, I am sure that is a very good idea and maybe the Minister for Transport and Technical Services could have an emergency number that we could call on. But I am sure they were very, very busy over the last week.

5.1.4 Senator L.J. Farnham:

I was only going to add my admiration for the people that worked round the clock, but I ask the Constable if he is not very pleased we do not have super-constituencies because they take much longer to clean up. [Laughter]

The Connétable of Trinity:

This statement was never meant to be anything to do with politics.

5.1.5 Deputy J.H. Young:

I would like to add my thanks and congratulations. I think tremendous work was done by all concerned, particularly the honorary officers and community. But I would like to ask the Constable, obviously there is a difference between emergency works and long-term clearing up. We have heard on reports of the tremendous damages to trees and branches all over the Island and we have heard about the real problems of resources which organisations like Men of the Trees and others are faced with. Would he be having discussions in the Comité des Connétables and with the Minister for Treasury and Resources to see if there are any additional sources of emergency funding that can be used to get a programme going so that these trees and so on do not just lay there unattended?

The Connétable of Trinity:

I think the responsibility is really to the householder and to the property owner to look after these trees. Not everything can be passed on to the Island or to the Parish. I know St. Brelade and the main problems with the trees that were falling are the evergreen oaks and also the conifers which because of the weight of the snow caused many boughs to break. In an emergency like this one has to just get the priorities right. You cannot just clear the Island. There is no difference in a great storm. These trees obviously will need work on and a lot of house owners have asked that question. It is their responsibility and whether the Minister for Treasury would be kind enough to offer them compensation to cut these trees up I very much doubt. At the end of the day you have to prioritise where the damage is most urgent which needs to be looked after firstly and

then the others can take a little bit of time. But at the end of the day, all those people - and I say the contractors were handling out ... to go and cut trees in those conditions I can assure you is bad enough on a nice day, but with this north-easterly wind of force 8 or 9 to try and clear roads which really in all reality would not be clear anyway because of the snow that was falling, it was more sensible to be out there on Wednesday when the wind had dropped, which is also much safer for any one of those contractors working under those conditions. But the Minister for Treasury and Resources is not here; maybe he is having trouble with snow as well at this moment.

5.1.6 Deputy J.M. Macon:

Would the Chairman of the Comité des Connétables join with me for once in thanking the immediate co-operation during this whole event and all those people who perhaps are not necessarily initially linked in with the Parishes who did a lot of voluntary work caring for their neighbours and going out?

The Connétable of Trinity:

I totally agree with the Deputy. I did in my statement thank the media. I must say the radio, and I think I should also give some praise to Education; I think they made a great decision by closing the school for 3 days. Anyone who - and this may be in the south of the Island - does not realise how bad it was in the northern areas of the Parishes, there was extreme snow, extreme danger to go on the road, and I think what was good about it, they made decisions early in the morning so there was no one having to go out. I know sometimes you get criticised for making early decisions, but I think in this case Education got it right. As one saw on the Thursday, it was even chaos going on that day, so you can imagine what it would have been like on the Monday, Tuesday or the Wednesday of that week. It did give time for people to find their way through and the media was essential. I say I take my hat off to those who ventured into work at 6.00 a.m. to transmit all the news to everyone in the Island and we thank them; they are a vital part of our community now and it is essential that we have this radio to give us the information for all the Islanders and I know it is appreciated by, especially, the older generations. I concur with everything you said, Deputy.

5.1.7 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I fully endorse everything the Constable has said. They were exceptional, exceptional circumstances that arose. I went to the T.T.S. South Hill and walking home, a tree fell in front of me. I stopped the traffic and they said: "Why have you stopped me?" and as I turned around, 2 more trees fell down. They were exceptional circumstances. I would just like to reiterate my thanks to Transport and Technical Services. The gritting teams that were out all night long and into the early hours of the morning, they worked in shifts around the clock and the tree clearing teams. As has been said, it is a matter for landowners but we have to be pragmatic. As I say, they were exceptional circumstances. Also, thanks to Liberty Bus. I know the Constable of St. John was very pleased to have cleared a road, turned around and saw a bus coming behind him. Also to the 4 by 4 drivers, I would like to extend my thanks or does the Constable not agree?
[Laughter]

The Deputy Bailiff:

Well done, you saved yourself for the bus.

The Connétable of Trinity:

I do agree but I think I did omit to also praise the airport staff for clearing the runways. I cannot imagine how you come to clear a runway when you have got a north-easterly force 9 keeping on going. It must be thankless as you just go up the runway and it is full again. I know there were a lot of people who were delayed. I think even they were amazed when they came to the Island and saw how bad it was and then they appreciated maybe that it was right. Can I just say, I think

many times the weather forecaster got it exactly right. It was an A warning and it did come exactly as it was forecast and I thank everyone for airing their thanks and we appreciate everyone in the Island who did turn out in these extreme conditions and hopefully it is every 30 years. It will not be me giving the next statement next time. **[Laughter]**

The Deputy Bailiff:

Very well. That means we now come on to Public Business. The first item is the ...

[12:00]

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Sir, before we do, could I just extend an answer I gave to Deputy Young about the planning and performance review. One was produced for 2011 and is available on the governmental website, which he may wish to peruse.