

8. Statement made by the Chief Minister regarding all those involved in the recent gas works incident

8.1 Senator I.J. Gorst (The Chief Minister):

I think, Sir, in light of your last intervention it might be better if you made the statement. **[Laughter]** I am sure Members will join me in expressing sincere thanks to all those involved in responding to the fire at the gasworks. **[Approbation]** The response of the emergency services and their efficient co-ordination of all the agencies that formed part of the operation maintained the safety of the community during a worrying incident. I am sure I speak for all of us when I say how much we appreciate the leadership given by the police, fire service and all the emergency services. I would also like to thank the honorary officers who maintained the cordon and supported the police. **[Approbation]**

[14:45]

Our colleague, the Connétable of St. Helier and the Parish officials who welcomed residents to the Town Hall, the voluntary organisations, church and community groups who gave their time to make sure people were as comfortable as possible until they could return home. The hoteliers who offered beds to those in need of shelter and the many individuals who offered spare rooms, food, children's equipment and bedding. **[Approbation]** And I would like to express my appreciation for the States of Jersey staff who stayed at work late into the evening to make sure that displaced residents were secure for the night. The emergency response also confirms something that is often alluded to here in this Assembly; namely just how well the people of Jersey work together as a community. I would also like to thank those people directly affected by the fire for their patience and understanding during what must have been a very worrying time.

8.1.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:

I thank the Chief Minister for his comments about St. Helier officials, which I will certainly pass on to them. I endorse his comments about the Honorary Police and would remind Members that they perhaps, more than anyone else involved, were working long after the rest of us had gone home because they stayed up all of the night to maintain the cordon. I would also like to specifically, if I may, put names to a couple of groups; St. John Ambulance were on the scene very quickly and maintained a very high profile throughout the event in the Town Hall and were enormously appreciated by everybody who was there. Jersey Samaritans also put faces to what is normally a telephone service and came round and helped. The Freedom Church, in particular, came down and cooked hot meals for everyone in the Town Hall so a big thanks to them. As I say, I would like to endorse what the Chief Minister has said about all the professionals involved because it was a tremendous example of Jersey's community spirit. I would ask the Chief Minister whether he agrees with these views.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Indeed I do. By the time I got to the Town Hall late at night, I was overwhelmed by a sense of pride that our community, often criticised, we often find things which are bad to say about each other rather than looking at the positive. The day after, I was, of course relieved that the incident was not much more serious than it was. But my lasting memory of that evening as I got down to the Town Hall was one of pride in how this community pulls together and works together and shows that it can be responsible to each other, that it can be concerned about each member of our community in a way that I want to see more day by day even when times are not quite so difficult.

8.1.2 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

It is obviously to be hoped that we do not have other serious accidents but presumably we sadly will do in one form or another in the future. Could I ask the Chief Minister when such an

occurrence does sometime happen, that there is one source of information? I found it rather confusing, we were getting one message on the news, we had an email from the Acting Chief Executive, we had then one email from the Chief Minister which was quickly changed to reverse the information that it contained and I did find it rather confusing. If there could be, for these major incidents, one source of information, I think it would be beneficial.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Inevitably, with events like this there are lessons to learn. I think the overall lesson is that the emergency services responded incredibly well and that the community responded quickly. We live now in an age of modern social media and we need to understand in future how that can be used as an effective communication method; Facebook and Twitter, and how we can get information out in a more co-ordinated fashion. I think one of the lessons perhaps that we have learnt is that we need to have somebody directly responsible for communication at Gold Command so it can be communicated seamlessly. We can use that modern media rather than some individuals trying to use traditional methods of communication and others trying to use modern media because most people now are accessing modern media so that we have a unified message right across. So I think there is a piece of work to do there and we are going to do that but I would thank all those people who were involved in communication, I think generally it went very well. Of course I was trying to keep States Members informed in more of a real time basis than perhaps has ever been done before. I think that is important but we need to make sure that it is done seamlessly in future.

8.1.3 The Connétable of St. Peter:

May I also add the thanks from the Minister for Health and Social Services to the Health team that prepared the emergency plan within the hospital in case there was an escalation of the incident? I think it is worthwhile noting that. Also to share with Deputy Baudain's thoughts about the cascading of information through Gold Command, I would urge the Chief Minister also - as he has already alluded he will do - to bring forward a best procedure for information much earlier on in the piece. Because there are a lot of resources outlying in the country Parishes, which could have been brought to bear, should the incident have escalated as well.

The Deputy Bailiff:

And your question is?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Does he agree with me that we should involve the country Parishes as early as possible?

The Deputy Bailiff:

I think the short answer this time, Chief Minister.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The answer is of course, yes.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Thank you. [Laughter]

Senator I.J. Gorst:

With these events, obviously the situation is changing throughout the event happening and therefore information does change in a fairly time quick basis, but it is important that it is communicated.

8.1.4 Deputy T.A. Vallois:

Could the Chief Minister please pass on the gratitude and thanks from many parents to the Education officials and the teachers who were affected by the incident, for their proactiveness and keeping the children safe.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Yes, indeed I will and there are many others who acted in a very similar fashion to keep people safe and to ensure that people were not involved in the incident.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Any other questions or statements? No. Very well. That brings Statements on the Matter of Official Responsibility to an end and we now come to Public Business.