

2020.06.16

6 Deputy C.S. Alves of St. Helier of the Chief Minister regarding communications in different languages during the Covid-19 pandemic (OQ.162/2020):

What consideration, if any, was given to sending texts out in different languages in order to ensure that all sectors of the Island's community were made aware of the support and information available to them during the COVID-19 crisis?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré (The Chief Minister):

The communications team has regularly communicated with Islanders in a number of languages. But using languages other than English in text messages was considered but discounted because, for example, it would have meant sending out at least probably 5 types of text messages. In essence, it would have been English, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian and Bulgarian. It was felt that would be excessive. Also, upon clarification of the telecom companies, the team had been informed that they do not hold lists of nationalities in their database and so one would not be able to segment messages into individual languages tailored to the individual recipient. But other significant efforts were made in a different form to communicate effectively Islanders who do not speak English as a first language.

3.6.1 Deputy C.S. Alves:

Just picking up on what the Chief Minister said there, that the telecommunications companies do not hold less of those who cannot communicate in English, was there any communication made with the consuls, for example, to distribute any information to Islanders who they might hold contact information for, who may not be able to communicate in English?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

My understanding is that the consuls have been very helpful and supportive in all of this area. Essentially there was co-ordination of distribution of translated documentation and relevant to community specific settings, and they were distributed to key figureheads within communities. That would obviously have included the consuls and we have worked very well with the entire consular network in Jersey, which we are very lucky to have. Just to give an example, leaflets and posters with things around hygiene measures, social distancing, precautionary measures and support available were translated into Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Jèrriais and also more recently Bulgarian.

3.6.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Could I ask the Chief Minister what would have been the problem of sending multiple text messages out in different languages?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I suspect it is all about effectiveness. It was whether sending what would have been 5 texts out to where any one recipient would probably have only been able to receive one or, at best, 2 of the texts being received. There is always this balance between the effectiveness of the text, and that is usually about trying to use it relatively sparingly. So to increase the number of texts received by a factor of 5 would probably have lost that effectiveness, given that there were alternative communication methods undertaken to deal with those who did not speak English.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Deputy Southern, I believe I have asked for a question on this.

The Bailiff:

Yes, you have, that follows on from Deputy Tadier. I was going to ask Deputy Tadier if he wanted to ask a supplemental question.

3.6.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

I did, Sir. I do not know if this is too far off the mark but seeing as the Chief Minister has already spoken about getting the balance in not wanting to annoy the public versus informing them, could I ask when the matter of Government sending out text messages to the public became a thing because clearly there is an issue there about informing the public versus bothering them? When did this become a thing that Government would send out what some would see as propaganda measures to the public?

The Bailiff:

I think you were right to highlight the fact it might be a little wide of the mark, Deputy. The question relates to sending things out in different languages to ensure all sectors of the Island's community were made aware, not the general policy as to sending texts. Did you wish to ask a different question or shall I move on?

Deputy M. Tadier:

Thank you, I will let Deputy Southern ask a question.

3.6.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Was this decision made on grounds of convenience or on grounds of costs?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

One thing I can say is that to the best of my knowledge there have been no issues dealing with the COVID-19 crisis that have been put off because of issues around costs. We have been very clear, as Ministers, that all resources have been applied, always based on the best advice we have.

3.6.5 Deputy C.S. Alves:

The Chief Minister states that he was concerned of the loss of effectiveness of sending out so many messages. However, 4insight recently did a survey where it was stated ... one of the findings was that text messages was the best way to communicate among everyone. Is the Chief Minister aware of how many individuals are still coming forward who have not received that information and have potentially been weeks without any income, as I am still getting phone calls to this effect?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I do not have details on that. All I would say is if the Deputy is receiving individual issues either refer them through to the helpline or, alternatively, obviously to C.L.S. (Customer and Local Services), depending on the nature of the issue, would be the best approach. I still believe that, in terms of the overall penetration of communications messages throughout the Island, overall the comms message has been well put together.