

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE  
PRIVILEGES AND PROCEDURES COMMITTEE  
BY SENATOR S.Y. MÉZEC  
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 11th SEPTEMBER 2018**

**Question**

Following the adoption by the States of ‘Public Elections: electronic voting’ (P.10/2016) and the agreement to introduce online voting, will the Chairman advise what progress has been made towards the introduction of online voting for the 2022 election and what the timetable is for having a fully secure system tested and in place?

**Answer**

On 22nd March 2016 the Assembly agreed:

to request the Privileges and Procedures Committee (PPC), in conjunction with the Comité des Connétables, and other government bodies as appropriate, to research and trial electronic voting systems in order to introduce –

- (a) methods for electronic voter registration; and
- (b) safe and secure mechanisms to enable eligible voters, who wish to do so, to vote electronically, as soon as practicable;
- (c) and to report progress to the States annually.

PPC subsequently lodged a [draft Law](#) to permit electronic voting to be introduced for elections and referenda by Regulations, which was adopted by the Assembly in July 2016.

PPC published [consultancy work](#) on the practicalities of introducing automatic electoral registration, based on data already held by the States, in December 2016.

PPC’s 3-year strategy for engaging the public with Jersey’s democracy, presented in January 2017, said that:

In relation to public elections, we will ensure that people can register to vote using an online form from autumn 2017, and we will continue work on introducing automatic electoral registration with a view to the new system being implemented in 2018–2019. We will also develop proposals for the introduction of online voting for further discussion by the Assembly by 2020.

Regulations to permit people to register to vote by means of an online form were lodged by PPC in January 2018 and adopted by the Assembly in February 2018. These Regulations permitted online registration in time for the May 2018, although the electoral registration system remains in all other respects paper-based. As the report accompanying the Regulations made clear, online registration is an interim step ahead of the introduction of automatic electoral registration. The States Greffe’s [business plan](#), presented in March 2018, said:

We will work with the Comité des Connétables to introduce an online method of registering to vote which we will encourage people to use in the run-up to the election. We will continue to work with the Comité and the e-gov programme on the introduction of automatic electoral registration.

On 24th August 2018 I wrote to the Chief Minister on the subject of electronic voting alerting him to the following:

That a PPC Sub-Committee is busy preparing a response to the CPA Electoral Observers' Mission report; and

That to be Venice compliant it's imperative this work is completed in two years, so that changes to the relevant legislation can pass through the Assembly in advance of the recommended cut-off period, 12 months prior to an election.

The letter drew the Chief Minister's attention to the following,

*Recommendation 5. The States of Jersey should undertake a review of its voter registration system and among other explore the feasibility of a transfer to a digitalized system – if possible linked to a public register of personal records – allowing Island-wide cross-checks for multiple registration and to perform controls of voters' eligibility criteria (residency requirements), and to allow voters in a sufficiently secure manner to check online if they are registered to vote.*

*Recommendation 6. Efforts to encourage the Island's eligible population to register to vote and to take part in elections should continue, including by outreach to ethnic minority communities in their preferred languages. If a review of the voter registration system is undertaken, it should assess if active voter registration and the complex voting system (see under Election Day) act as barriers to greater political participation and representation.*

I explained that these two recommendations are linked to the introduction of the 'People Directory' which I understood to be going live this year but which has yet to reach fruition and that this is an integral part of the electoral system as a centralised digital register would remove several layers of complexity from the existing process and allow voting to take place in a wider range of public venues.

I stated that if it is unlikely that we can rely on a robust electronic registration system being in place for 2022, we will need to consider alternative amendments to the existing Law in order to facilitate easier access to the registration and voting process.

The Chief Minister was asked to provide PPC with a progress report and advise what realistic prospect there is of the People Directory being in place within the next two years.

It was also suggested that a contact for future reference might be helpful, i.e. if someone other than the Chief Minister is taking responsibility for digital delivery.

The introduction of automatic electoral registration is dependent on the successful launch of the People Directory and associated legislative change, which are the responsibility of the e-gov programme. In addition, changes will be required to the Public Elections Law, which PPC stands ready to bring forward. Assuming that the People Directory is successfully launched during 2018 or 2019 it *should* be possible to introduce automatic electoral registration fully in time for the 2022 election which, I personally believe must not be a repeat of an unreformed 2018 election.

The States Greffe has undertaken some research on experience with online voting in a number of other jurisdictions. However, the introduction of online voting can only be considered when electoral registers are available electronically and there is a secure method for authenticating the identity of voters. The Committee will also need to consider the desirability of introducing online voting given experience elsewhere and the absolute priority which must be given to maintaining the integrity of the electoral system. Given these factors, is online voting a realistic prospect for the 2022 election? Questionable. Is electronic registration achievable by 2022? A must.

Until PPC is in receipt of a response from the Chief Minister the questioner is better placed than I to assess whether the requisite political will exists in the Council of Ministers to drive through, with energy and momentum, delivery of the **People Directory**, which represents the first essential step in improved voter engagement.

