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4.5 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of the Chief Minister regarding reform of the administrative structure of the Parish of St. Helier:

What consideration, if any, has the Chief Minister given to reforming the administrative structure of the Parish of St. Helier in order to move more towards a council system as part of the “new deal” for St. Helier?

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

I have not given consideration to governance matters relating to the Parish of St. Helier. What is important is that we work together to help achieve the Strategic Plan objective so that St. Helier can become a vibrant and attractive town of distinctive character that people want to use, visit, invest and live in.

4.5.1 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Does the Chief Minister accept that to help make St. Helier a better place to live there must be better communication streams from the people who live in St. Helier, from the people who do business in St. Helier, up through the ranks to the top? Does he believe that the democratic system within the Parish structure in St. Helier at the moment with having, for example, a Roads Committee, which is not elected by a ballot in a public election like some of the other positions are, does he consider that to be satisfactory in terms of leading to a Parish administration that can work with local government to make the Parish a better place to live in? Does he believe that it should be reformed to fit more with what a 21st century capital should have a governance structure for?

The Bailiff:

There are quite a lot of questions there, Chief Minister, but ...

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Indeed, there were, I am pleased you spotted that. I am not sure that it is central government’s role to suggest to the Parishes how they might improve their governance and their administration. **[Approbation]** For my part I think the Parish system works incredibly well. The Deputy there asked about the Roads Committee. It is my understanding that St. Helier is like other Parishes; members of the Roads Committee are elected at a duly convened Parish Assembly.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I said public election; they are not elected under the Public Elections Law.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

No, but they are elected by a duly convened Parish Assembly. I know that the Deputy in his opening question asked about the council system and we know that idea has had a long history. It is not one that I automatically find favour with because I think it is just creating another layer potentially of bureaucracy and politicians. If particular Members feel that their particular parochial system can be improved, I am sure that they would have a good hearing. They would be able to have a conversation with their own Connétable and if it was agreed that changes were to be made they could in due course be taken to the Comité and brought to this Assembly for consideration.

4.5.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Chief Minister envisage a time where we could make St. Helier so attractive and so vibrant that even the Chief Minister might consider living there?

The Bailiff:

Do you wish to answer that, Chief Minister?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I, like many Members, am pleased to say have roots in various parts of the Island, and one of the things that makes Jersey the great place that it is is that individual families associate with certain areas and they have a community there, and they have support there. What we want to do is make sure that that same tradition is delivered in St. Helier for those members of our community who are more recent arrivals, not to dilute what is good about Jersey, but spread and create that feeling throughout the Island.

4.5.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Supplementary. There is a serious underlying question. It is very easy for politicians to talk about what is good for St. Helier, and it is very good to say that we should protect greenfields in the countryside and pile them high in St. Helier, and in the future there will be jam tomorrow. But at the same time when this Assembly has failed to give the democratic mandate to the people of St. Helier, already they are under-represented and we want to pile more people in there higher, and there is no talk about giving an equal democratic representation to the specific needs of the St. Helier demographic. Is that something which the Chief Minister will deal with in his term of office?

The Bailiff:

That does not seem to me, Deputy, to come into the administrative structure of the Parish of St. Helier. That is a matter of general application in relation to the electoral representation of St. Helier.

Deputy M. Tadier:

If I might rephrase the question. Would the Chief Minister then give the support to the Parish of St. Helier to allow it to make the administrative decisions which would bolster democracy at Parish level and then feed into the wider democratic scene?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I am a great supporter of local democracy. That is why I think the Parish system works so well and why I supported the Connétable in this Assembly, because it connects that local democracy with national government, which is what this Assembly is. As you rightly said, P.P.C. (Privileges and Procedures Committee) are doing a piece of work about representation and we will see the ideas that they come up with and consider those in due course. But I would remind the Deputy, as I said earlier, if there are specific areas that Deputies wish to see amended and changed or be involved in their parochial process then it is right that they can take those up with individual Connétable or the Comité.

4.5.4 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier:

This is perhaps more a request for clarification but in his answer to the first question put by Deputy Tadier the Chief Minister said he wanted St. Helier to become a vibrant, attractive and distinctive town for people to live in. Does he not agree with me that it already is vibrant, attractive and distinctive? **[Approbation]** He went on to say in another answer that he thought it would be good for new arrivals to live in St. Helier. Does he not agree with me that St. Helier is a town where people who have lived there for centuries are very happy to live?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I agree with everything that the Connétable has said and the comments that I made I hope were not misconstrued to suggest anything other than that. I know that he did not. What I was trying to say that those what I think are great benefits of the Jersey community, which is support, which is family network, which is the parochial system, which is community, I want to make sure that everybody enjoys those and experiences those, when you think there are some sectors of our community which

currently do not, and I think we need to make sure that they do. St. Helier is for some a great place to live, for some a great place to work, and for some a great place to socialise in. What I want to do is make sure that it is for everyone.

4.5.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Would the Chief Minister extend his support for local democracy to supporting the Constable in his fight against the piling of 300 new residences on the top of the Town Park?

The Bailiff:

How does that connect with the administrative structure of the Parish?

Deputy G.P. Southern:

It connects with the Chief Minister's answer that he has every support for local democracy, and the local democratic representatives are 10 Deputies and one Constable.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I am not sure how it connects with the opening question but I am always happy to answer questions and the Deputy, of course, always has an eye for the main chance of slipping in some unrelated question as well. He knows in this particular instance that I commented during the debate - I am not sure if it was the last sitting or the one before that - and said that this very firmly is a matter for the planning system to deal with. I have no doubt that in due course they will do so and they will have due consideration for the Island Plan, for the planning framework, and for representations made by the Parish and parishioners and residents nearby as well.

4.5.6 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I think the Hansard to the Chief Minister's answer to my previous question will show what was obvious to me as I was asking it, which was that he was not really listening. My question was not about the Parishes, it is about St. Helier. His strategic priorities document accepts that St. Helier, as the capital of our Island and as our main business centre, is a special case, so my question is: should its administrative structure also be a separate case?

[10:30]

He is not even listening now, so I do not even know why I am bothering to ask the question. Does he accept that a different structure for St. Helier, as our capital, one that is more in line with how a 21st century capital should be governed - similar perhaps to what they have in the Isle of Man, where Douglas is governed by a different law, has a different governance structure to the other local authorities in the Isle of Man - does he believe that is something that should be considered as part of his "new deal" so that the Parish is better able to deliver the services that he thinks it should be able to, to deliver a better quality of life and business as well?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

If that is what the Connétable and the municipality of St. Helier wish for and wish to discuss with Ministers then of course that is what we will do. But I do not believe ... I cannot see at this moment in time the benefits of introducing such a system, as I said earlier, and those with greater historical knowledge than me... The Connétable of St. Helier himself said that these are proposals which have been discussed and considered for 200 years. I do not think the case has been made necessarily strongly enough up until now. I do not think it should be for central government to be imposing solutions on the Parishes or on St. Helier. In actual fact, right at the heart of the "new deal" and the plan for St. Helier is to allow St. Helier to be more in charge of its own destiny and to see what powers and authorities we could delegate down to the Parishes rather than the other way round.