

2018.02.20

3 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier of the Chairman of the Comité des Connétables regarding the levels of voter registration: [OQ.33/2018]

Is the Comité des Connétables satisfied with the current levels of voter registration and what measures, if any, does the Comité have in hand to increase voter registration and voter turnout in the upcoming general election?

Connétable L. Norman of St. Clement (Chairman, Comité des Connétables):

In addition to the initiatives of the Constables, which are detailed in the answer to Written Question 7 this morning, those wonderful people at vote.je will be pushing people to register through various activities. For example, on social media there will be posts to encourage registration especially when online registration comes into effect, and that will be next week if the States approve the regulations that we are debating later on in this session. Vote.je will be using traditional media, such as posters and banners, but have also produced 3 short videos which are being translated into Portuguese and Polish, which explain all about the registration process. They have also commissioned a play with Love Theatre, which will go around all the 16-plus schools and colleges the week before the Easter holidays so that young people can be encouraged to register before 9th April, and therefore be able to pre-poll if they so wish. If I could add: while registration is obviously very important the main focus of the vote.je campaign is for those registered to actually vote. Registration is only half of the democratic process and candidates must play their part by enthusing voters during their campaigns to turn out.

3.3.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is it not the case that the registers were viewed and names were removed who had not signed up – registered - in the previous 3 consecutive years? Did the Comité not notice that the electoral cycle has changed from 3 years to 4 years and that when this removal of names took place it was at the end of last year, just the very worst time it could have been, in order to ensure that people were maintained on the register for this coming election?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

We have a 3-year electoral roll, therefore every 3 years or so, it can vary, we are required by law to remove from the register folk who have passed away, have moved away, or have elected not to be on the electoral roll by not returning an electoral form after 3 years. But before they are removed those people are written to at their address to make sure they understand that they are being removed. That is a matter of law.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the chairman not agree that this was the very worst timing that it could have occurred for the next election?

The Deputy Bailiff:

You will have a final supplementary.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

He did not answer it, Sir.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

No, it is not because if people have died or moved away or do not wish to vote by not being on an electoral register it will make no difference whether they are knocked off last year or knocked off next year.

3.3.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

On a positive note I am pleased to hear that videos are being produced in Portuguese and Polish telling those communities why they cannot stand for election, but at least doing so in their own language. The Constable spoke about candidates need to be playing their part to enthruse voters and, indeed, candidates should also be doing their part to make sure that people are registered to vote before the election. The problem is it is very difficult with our electoral roll law for people to access the roll in a meaningful way to collect information about who it is that has not voted. In fact, to the point of being obfuscatory. One can of course sit down with the roll and make a perfect copy of it in handwriting but one is not allowed to make a copy of the roll in order to go around and register people to vote. Is this something that the Constable will look into to make it easier for groups and individuals to engage with the public before an election process and before the roll closes?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

We say in answer to Written Question 7, and the comments I have just made, it is up to the individuals to make sure if they wish to vote they are on the electoral roll. We do everything we can to make sure that people are on the electoral role, even this year for the first time - next month - we will be sending out a letter to all homes in the Island with a list of people who are registered to vote.

[10:15]

Those homes which have got nobody registered to vote will also get letters so those people will still have the opportunity of coming on to the electoral roll. We want more people on the electoral roll. We want everybody on the electoral roll. But more importantly we want those people to vote.

3.3.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

I am glad to hear the Constable wants everybody on the electoral roll because the corollary of that is of course to have automatic registration so that everybody we know about is automatically on the roll. But in the absence of that, could he clarify under whose name these letters will be sent out? Will they be sent out signed by a Parish Secretary who is an independent member of the Parish administration, or will it be signed by the Constable, who is not just an incumbent politician but a potential candidate in the election in that Parish?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

The electoral administrator under the law is the Constable, therefore the Constable is responsible for completing the roll; although, in effect, of course, it is the Parish staff who deal with that. But of course automatic registration, the Deputy reminded me, will hopefully be coming when the ... I think it is the name and address register is completed and the 2 are dovetailed. That will need a change in law but that is what is P.P.C. (Privileges and Procedures Committee) and the eGov team are working on achieving.

3.3.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I shall take a look at St. Clement's registration, which in 2014 was 6,200, it rose in 2016 to 4,500, has now fallen to 3,800. Will he be talking to those 700 potential electors that are no longer on the register, and who may not be aware that they are no longer on the register, in order to bring the numbers back up to the 5,300 that it should be, plus population rise?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

As I explained earlier, the number removed from the list are because they have moved away, passed away or no longer wish to be on the register. I was speaking to my staff about this this morning, and after the referendum, which the States decided to go against what the public had decided in the referendum, a lot of people came into the Parish Hall and said: "I do not want to be on the electoral roll anymore because you do not take any notice of what we say." That actually happened. But of course the other thing that happened in St. Clement was Andium knocked down Les Squez Estate. So we lost a heck of a lot of voters at that time and it is currently being rebuilt. So it is not surprising that in St. Clement the numbers went down.