

2018.06.26

Senator S.Y. Mézec of the Chairman, Comité des Connétables regarding a review of the honorary system: [OQ.73/2018]

Will the Comité commit to holding a review of the honorary system to determine what can be done to improve recruitment to the Honorary Police and secure its future as an important part of our community?

Connétable D.W. Mezbourian (Chairman, Comité des Connétables):

I thank the Senator, not only for his question, but for his welcome recognition of the value of our Honorary Police. **[Approbation]** As well as that recognition, he acknowledges the need to secure its future as an important part of our community. I am sure his view is endorsed by all Members of this Assembly and I welcome approbation again. **[Approbation]** Thank you. The Connétables are accountable for the efficient and effective policing of their Parish. It almost goes without saying therefore that we are committed to reviewing how we can improve recruitment to ensure that persons of suitable calibre are recruited and elected. However, it is fair to say that the recent election of 6 Centeniers and one Vingtenier to this Assembly as Connétables and Deputies has left several Parishes with the need to fill these roles. As Connétables, we are already committed to and continually review the system to determine not only how we can improve and promote recruitment to the Honorary Police, but to promote the benefits they bring to our community.

10.15.1 Senator S.Y. Mézec:

I heard use of the word “review” but not “a review” which is not necessarily the same thing. Of course I have raised this question because of the issues that were raised by 2 former Centeniers about this. I see lots of commentary provided by current and former Honorary Police officers who have made a range of constructive and well-meaning suggestions, which they believe would make the system more effective, more modern and allow more people to get involved. Does the Comité believe that having a wider review rather than something internal or per Parish, but a wider conversation with the public about what can be done to improve engagement with the system, is worth having?

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

Yes, I do, as do my fellow Connétables. To that end, we are beginning a formal review by having a workshop on 14th July at which we intend to discuss recruitment and the involvement of the wider community, as the Senator has suggested.

10.15.2 Deputy J.H. Young:

Will the chairman of the Comité des Connétables’ review include a review of the age restriction on membership of the Honorary Police? Is she aware of a number of persons who have expressed an interest being over the age of 69 who feel they could do certain tasks to assist in preparing prosecution papers and so on? Would that review include that matter?

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

Yes, I would expect it to be a wide-ranging review and that matter has been raised before. I am aware that persons of the age of 70 who are already in office are able to continue to serve to complete their term of office but that there is an age restriction, an upper age restriction, on people who are able to join. It seems that the Honorary Police has to adapt to modern-day needs and as people live longer and are healthier potentially than they were at that age in years gone by, I would not rule out looking at that.

10.15.3 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

The chairman will recall the breakfast meeting with the finance industry some years ago to point out to the industry that the qualities developed in the Honorary Police are those required in management by the industry. Does the chairman not think it is time for another of these events to market the Honorary Police to the wider world?

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

Yes, I do not disagree with the Senator. The personal benefits that an Honorary Officer can gain from the role are readily transferable to the workplace and they include skills such as problem-solving, decision-making, team-building, leadership, responsibility, safeguarding knowledge, communication skills, to name but a few. I do recall the breakfast briefing that was held some years ago and have already arranged to put in place another such briefing in due course, but hopefully within the next few months.

[12:45]

10.15.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

Over the weekend I was approached by someone. I did not solicit the answer or initiate the conversation but he said that he had been working in the Honorary Police for some 10 years, now retired, and he did say that it was obviously rewarding in some ways; he said it was challenging in other ways. He said the part that he did not find he was comfortable with was the presenting cases in the Magistrates' Court. He said that he thought consideration should be given to removing that ability for the Centenier to prosecute. With that in mind, and given also Advocate Sinel's recent comments about the value but also the changes in evolution that might have to happen in that regard, can she assure us that the issue of whether Centeniers charge and who indeed brings charges in Jersey will form part of that review and, if not, why not?

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

That review was carried out some years ago by a former Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel, and I refer the Deputy to it. At the moment, I do not see that a review of the Centenier presenting cases in the Magistrates' Court would form part of our review. They present guilty cases only and they receive training to do that. The view expressed by the Deputy is clearly one individual.

10.15.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

May I ask a supplementary? It seems very strange that we have a review going on about the Honorary Police and clearly this one individual, I suspect there may be others, and a senior advocate who have advised that people may be put off joining the Honorary Police because they wish to serve the community but simply do not wish to act as a prosecution agent, which in other jurisdictions would be done by an independent function. Surely it is particularly closeminded of the chairman of the Comité not to even allow that to be part of a review and refer to a political review which took place many years ago.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

That review remains as pertinent today as it did then and I am certainly not closeminded at all.

[Approbation] The role of the Centenier in the Magistrates' Court is as flexible as all the other positions that the Honorary Police are expected to undertake. Any Centenier who does not want to or is not able to present in the court is permitted to make that decision. Indeed, in St. Helier, as far as I am aware, they take the view that some of their Centeniers only present in the Magistrates'

Court and others undertake other functions. We need to be as flexible as we can in order to recruit and retain the right calibre person to do the job.

10.15.6 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Will the review, as discussed, include a look at the possibility of an Island-wide pool of Honorary Police officers that could be used to provide policing where needed on an *ad hoc* basis?

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

No. We are not there to supplement the States of Jersey Police, which I believe is what the Deputy is indicating.

10.15.7 Senator S.Y. Mézec:

The Connétable mentioned a workshop that is due to take place. Could you just give us more information about what format this is going to take, how it has been advertised? Is it being facilitated by a professional body? When will they report back and who will they be reporting to?

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

It is not a workshop that is open to the public. I see the Senator grimacing at that comment. However, it is a starting point - one of our regular starting points - to review all parts of the honorary system. It is being held in conjunction with the States of Jersey Police, the Chefs de Police ... I should say the Comité des Chefs, the Comité des Connétables and the Honorary Police Association. The professional body chairing it is the Attorney General.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I propose that we continue for the last Oral Question and then break for lunch.

The Deputy Greffier of the States (in the Chair):

Fine. If that is the agreement of Members, then that is what we will do. Then we move on to the final question, which is a question from Senator Moore to the Chief Minister.