

Mary Young

Parishes and government Review Panel

I write in regard to the current review of the relationship between the States of Jersey and the Parishes.

Having read many of the submissions already made I would agree with nearly everything that other contributors have said and in particular with those that say that the Parish system, which, whilst relevant in times gone by when Jersey's economy was based mainly on agriculture, transport was by horse and cart and many residents never left their Parish, is no longer relevant nor working. In today's highly developed and technically advanced world the Parish system is an anachronism which we can do without. When you consider that the population of Jersey is less than half that of a London Borough in the UK then it is clear that adding 12 differing layers of administration below the overarching Government of the Island which is the States Assembly makes no sense whatsoever. So 12 different refuse contracts when only one would be required if administered by the States. 12 different rating systems and appeals processes. 12 different roads authorities. Obscure practices. Obscure appeals procedures. It is nonsense and over administration on a massive scale. What's more the antiquated rates system is having a real life and serious impact on the ability of Jersey residents to get credit as credit reference agencies in the UK will not bother with checking the credit worthiness of Island residents when we make it so difficult for them to do so.

Furthermore, in Grouville Parish we have the obscure relationship between the Parish Constable and the Grouville Tenants which in recent times has led to questions of conflicts of interest.

And I would agree with Mark Houze when he points out that it is almost impossible to make a complaint against Parish Officials. At the moment you have to do so through the Parish, a clear case of the Parish marking it's own homework. And if you disagree with the outcome of your complaint, it is very unclear where you go to escalate your complaint.

I would say that the Parish has a role to play if Parish officials, being supposedly closer to their Parishioners than States members, were helpful and proactive in dealing with Parishioners problems. However, it has not been my experience, having attended innumerable Parish surgeries and I and my neighbours having written innumerable letters to elected Parish officials, have not found the response to be helpful, professional nor democratic. That's even if we get a response at all. A role the Parishes could have usefully played when all the local bank branches closed was to instigate community banking, in particular for the elderly and disabled who cannot easily get into St Helier. I sent the Consumer Magazine Which's Guide on community banking to Parish officials and didn't even get an acknowledgement. As far as I'm aware no Parish has looked into setting up community banks which rather indicates they are not close to their Parishioners and not looking at ways to meet their needs.

So my conclusion? The whole Parish system is an anachronism. It serves very little, if any, useful purpose. It adds an unnecessary and costly layer of bureaucracy and if anything hinders the efficient and effective provision of services to the Island Community. It may be that Parish Halls could be maintained as community hubs where central government could maintain an outreach function to prevent everything being centralised, particularly for the elderly and disabled in the community. Otherwise I can see no reason why the centralisation of the services currently undertaken by the Parishes could be anything but positive.