

STATES OF JERSEY



CORPORATE MANAGEMENT BOARD: ACCESS TO MEETINGS AND MINUTES

**Lodged au Greffe on 23rd January 2008
by Deputy G.C.L. Baudains of St. Clement**

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion –

to request the Chief Minister to –

- (a) make available to elected members the minutes of the Corporate Management Board meetings;
- (b) arrange that elected members are advised of the Board's meetings so that they may observe those meetings should they so wish.

DEPUTY G.C.L. BAUDAINS OF ST. CLEMENT

REPORT

I have to say that the Chief Minister's attitude, when asked whether he would disclose the deliberations of these meetings, is quite unacceptable. He has now refused, at two separate question times, to move from his position, which is not that the meetings of these people are privileged, but that he believes matters discussed are implementational, and therefore not what members should be involving themselves with.

Such a position appears terribly arrogant. It is not for the Chief Minister – or any other Minister – to decide what would constitute a waste of backbenchers' time. That is for member themselves to decide. We are not schoolchildren needing to be guided away from activities that are of no concern to us. We are all members of government, and anything done in our name should at least be monitored by us. At present, it would appear no-one is monitoring these people.

Since the advent of ministerial government, many functions previously carried out by politicians are now delegated to civil servants. The idea that the latter merely implement policy generated by Ministers is misleading. Ministers don't have the time or resources to develop policy, so it is developed by senior civil servants, and offered to Ministers as solutions.

If the Council of Ministers truly believes it develops policy, it deludes itself – and misleads others. The truth is each Minister is briefed by his Department; meaning, in fact, that it is the Department which develops policy. States members have a duty to scrutinise such activities.

The Chief Minister assures us that discussions at Corporate Management Board meetings are about policy implementation. As explained above, it must be obvious that these are pretty high-level discussions. Indeed, one might hope that a meeting between people whose combined salaries far exceed a million pounds per year does not involve mundane matters of a managerial nature.

Quite apart from the suspicion generated by keeping these meetings secret, one has to ask how such a position fits in with today's supposedly 'open' government? If, indeed, such meetings are of no interest to politicians, then those members will soon tire of reading the minutes or attending meetings. I suspect the reality may be somewhat different. Either way, it is not for the Chief Minister to tell other members there is no need for them to know what's going on – it's for members to find out for themselves.

Naturally, should commercially sensitive or otherwise confidential material come up for discussion at these meetings, then the obvious way of dealing with it would be an 'A' and 'B' agenda – the latter having only a reference to the subject concerned.

We are in an age where more authority than ever has been given to civil servants – and where public spending is rising at an alarming rate. An age where projects of public interest appear from nowhere yet, without debate or consultation, seemingly develop a momentum of their own. The ability to get behind some of the initial thinking that subsequently coalesces into these projects can only be beneficial to democracy and, at the same time, help reconnect politicians with the public.

There are no financial or manpower implications for the States arising from this proposition.