

STATES OF JERSEY

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DRAFT AMENDMENT (No. 28) OF THE STANDING ORDERS OF THE STATES OF JERSEY (P.5/2005): COMMENTS

**Presented to the States on 1st February 2005
by the Privileges and Procedures Committee**

STATES GREFFE

COMMENTS

In this proposed Amendment to the Standing Orders Deputy Southern is seeking to make 2 changes to the new procedures on oral questions that were introduced on a trial basis in May 2004 and made permanent on 26th October 2004. As can be seen he is firstly seeking to increase the number of oral questions that any member can submit for each meeting from 2 to 3 and he is also seeking to increase the time allocated to oral questions from one hour to 1½ hours.

The Privileges and Procedures Committee referred this matter to the Working Party on the Arrangement of Public Business which brings together 2 members of the Committee with a number of other members of the States representing the Policy and Resources and Economic Development Committees and 'backbench' members.

The Working Party considered this matter at its meeting on 11th January 2005. The Working Party concluded that it did not wish to amend the current structure of question time and therefore recommended that Deputy Southern's proposition should be rejected. It noted that, to date, all oral questions asked had received a response, and felt that it would be entirely appropriate for the Bailiff to allow questions drawn at the lower end of the ballot to fall away if previous questions were highly topical and generated significant interest from members asking supplementary questions. The Working Party was of the opinion that to continually attempt to ask all oral questions submitted into the ballot negated the whole purpose of holding a ballot. It was acknowledged that the Bailiff may attempt to organise the one-hour period so that all oral questions are asked, but it was also accepted that, on some occasions, it may not be possible to achieve that objective. Any questions which were not answered within the 60-minute period could be resubmitted as an oral question at the next sitting (and would again be subject to the ballot) or could be submitted as written questions.

The Working Party was also of the opinion that limiting the number of oral questions to 2 per member required members to be disciplined in choosing their 2 "most topical" or "most important" questions for submission to the ballot. This ensured that only oral questions of a high quality were submitted to the Assembly.

The Working Party was of the opinion that, after submitting his or her 2 most significant oral questions, a member should submit any additional questions as written questions although it was recognised that deadlines for submission would have to be observed.

The Working Party noted that Deputy Southern states that he has submitted oral questions via another member, and the only comment that can be made is that this action can result in the third question placing the member's 2 "best" questions further down the ballot order with the result that there may be insufficient time to ask and answer any one of those questions.

The Privileges and Procedures Committee itself considered the proposition and the comments of the Working Party at its meeting on 24th January 2005.

The Committee noted that the benefit of increasing the time available for oral questions to 90 minutes as proposed by Deputy Southern could, effectively, be lost if the other part of his proposal, to increase the number of oral questions, was also approved. In practice it would be likely that more questions would be submitted and the problems perceived by Deputy Southern would simply persist. The Committee was therefore unanimous in its opposition to paragraph 1 of the Deputy's proposal as it feels that 2 questions per member is adequate.

The Committee was split on the matter of increasing the time available for oral questions to 90 minutes. The Committee noted the view of the Working Party but decided, by a majority, that Deputy Southern's concerns about question time being unduly rushed were valid and that question time would be improved by an increase to 90 minutes.