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# **STATES OF JERSEY**



## **AUTOMATIC ELECTORAL REGISTRATION PROJECT**

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**Presented to the States on 22nd October 2021  
by the Privileges and Procedures Committee**

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**STATES GREFFE**

## REPORT

### **Purpose**

In March 2016, the Assembly adopted [P.10/2016](#) which, amongst other things, required the Privileges and Procedures Committee (PPC) to report to the Assembly annually on progress in introducing automatic electoral registration. Until now this has mostly been done by means of the States Assembly's annual reports and the States Greffe's business plans, which are routinely presented to the States each year. However, with the date of the 2022 election approaching, the Committee considers that it would be helpful at this point to summarise the work to date on changes to electoral registration and the current position in greater detail.

### **Automatic electoral registration**

Jersey has a household registration process based on an annual canvass conducted by each of the parishes. The annual canvass is a costly exercise and it does not capture all of the people who are eligible to vote. Although some people may choose to stay off the register some fail to register by mistake, as evidenced by the number who register late in the run up to the election or who attempt to vote on polling day and find that they are not registered. Much of the Greffe's pre-election budget is spent on encouraging people to register to vote and explaining how to do so.

PPC first commissioned the UK's Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) to consider new ways of compiling the election registers in 2013. A pilot study, comparing a selection of the electoral registers against the Names and Addresses Register (Populus), showed that 99% of electoral register records successfully matched with data on Populus, and that relatively few of those records contained inaccuracies. The AEA set out issues for the States to consider if it wished to reform electoral registration.

This work was followed up in 2016 by a more in depth study by TCB Consulting into global best practice and how it could be adopted in Jersey. This study recommended that:

Jersey goes for automatic and permanent elector registration, making best use of the new People Directory being developed by the e-Gov programme whilst retaining the central role of the parishes in owning the electoral registration system and data, as soon as the dependencies identified are in place. Almost without exception, this recommendation was supported by the parishes and other key stake holders in the States.

PPC [published](#) these studies in December 2016 and said it would take steps to introduce automatic electoral registration. The Committee wished to use data in the People Directory, which at that point was close to completion, to generate the electoral registers for each parish. It was recognised that there would be some complexity in using that data to identify people who met the residency requirements for electoral registration. In addition, it was likely that some people who are entitled to vote might not show up in the People Directory data, for a variety of reasons. However, the parishes would remain responsible for the electoral registers and would be able to add people if the Connétable was satisfied that they met the legal requirements. Other aspects of the current law – such as the ability for the Connétable to authorise the omission of a name from the register in order to protect a person's safety – would be retained. In view of the fact that automatic registration would capture virtually everyone eligible to vote for inclusion on

the registers, PPC agreed that an opt-out facility should be provided for people who did not wish to be included.

Modernising election registration was included in the Common Strategic Policy adopted by the States in 2018, following an [amendment](#) by the then PPC Vice-Chair Deputy Scott Wickenden of St. Helier. Funding of £100,000, spread across three years, was included in the Government Plan 2020-23. The Greffier undertook a proof of concept project which, with the assent of the relevant constables, compared the existing electoral registers in St. Helier No. 1 and St. Mary with registers which could be generated using Populus data. Like the earlier, less detailed work, this showed that centrally-held data could be used to capture over 95% of people on the current registers, as well as many more people who are currently not registered. Law drafting instructions were issued and a draft law was drawn up: the Public Elections Law has also been amended to allow for reform of the electoral registration process by means of regulations.

After delay due to Covid-19, a project board was set up in late 2020, bringing together staff from the States Greffe, Judicial Greffe, Modernisation and Digital, Customer and Local Services and the Comité des Connétables, with the Greffier as Senior Responsible Owner, and a project manager was engaged to scope out the proposed new electoral registration system in more detail. Business changes required in the parishes to introduce a new registration system successfully were not in scope for this project.

### **Current position**

A considerable amount of work was undertaken during the first half of 2021 to draw up detailed requirements for the new system. However, when the project manager changed in summer 2020 the Greffier expressed concerns about whether a new system could be introduced in time for the 2022 election and invited the incoming project manager to conduct a project health check. This work found that the estimated cost of introducing the new system was likely to be considerably in excess of the existing budget; an estimated 56 weeks' work would be required to create, test and introduce the new system; and additional staff resources would be required in some areas, such as testing. Given these findings, and the lack of funding for extensive further work, the Greffier closed the programme and reported the outcome to PPC. The Committee has written to the Minister for Treasury and Resources to draw her attention to what would appear to be troubling deficiencies in project and financial management, albeit in relation to a relatively small project.

### **Next steps**

The Committee is deeply disappointed to report to the States that automatic electoral registration will not be in place for the 2022 election. Other potentially desirable innovations, such as enabling voters to have a choice as to where they vote on polling day or voting by electronic means, cannot proceed without reform of the registration process.

The Committee will shortly consider an options paper on the way ahead for reforming electoral registration and Members with an interest in the subject are invited to contact the Chair if they wish to contribute to this discussion. However, decisions on how to reform electoral registration will now be for the next States and PPC to take.