

16 October 2024

Sent by email only to: M.Magalhaes@gov.je for delivery to Deputy Helen Miles

Deputy Helen Miles
Chair - Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel
Scrutiny Office, States Greffe
Morier House, St. Helier
Jersey JE1 1DD

Dear Deputy Helen Miles,

Re: CSSP Letter of 4 October 2024 - Review of Proposed Budget (Government Plan) 2025-2028 (P.51/2024)

Thank you for your letter with respect to your panel's review of the matter referenced above.

In the broader context, the Statistics Users Group (SUG) believes that it is critically important to maintain and expand upon the current range of statistical reporting by Statistics Jersey and other public authorities to better inform strategic policy development and decision-making by government, and also for the benefit of business, the third sector and the public more generally. The results of SUG's annual statistics users surveys show how public authority statistics are used by respondents and additional areas of interest – see 2024 Report <https://statistics.je/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/SUG-Statistics-User-Survey-2024.pdf> at pages 25, 27, 28 and 29.

We also draw your attention to the **Fiscal Policy Panel's** work and highlight the following recommendation in their recently published **2024 Annual Report**:
<https://www.gov.je/SiteCollectionDocuments/Government%20and%20administration/FPP%20Annual%20Report%202024%20FINAL%2024%20September.pdf>

*In Section 1.2 - The Budget has been brought forward relative to previous years and the Panel's Annual Report has been drafted in September 2024 before the publication of the 2023 GVA statistics. This has made it more difficult than in previous years for the Panel to assess the performance of Jersey's economy. The Panel has, however, been able to draw on the Business Tendency Survey and other data and information. **The Panel recommends improvements are made to the frequency at which GVA data is produced as this is essential to enable a full assessment and understanding of the performance of Jersey's economy.***

To address your specific request, the SUG was first made aware of the issue of discontinuance of certain statistical reports in May earlier this year and have engaged in a number of discussions with the Chief Statistician since then to better understand the context behind his recommendations. Although there may be merit in reducing overall government expenditures, SUG's strong view is that the production of statistics by Statistics Jersey and other public authorities should be prioritised to support continued progress on key strategic objectives and assessments of performance against Jersey's Island Outcome Indicators and the overall health of Jersey's economy.

These discussions culminated in our advice that was provided on 13 September 2024 to the Chief Statistician by email, reproduced below for your ease of reference:

SUG Advice to Chief Statistician:

Ian,

As discussed at our formal meeting on Friday, I am writing with SUG's advice on your recommendations to discontinue publication of certain reports. Note that I've changed the subject line in this email chain for ease of reference.

First, to confirm our understanding of the broader context as discussed at the meeting, it was useful to understand that the core statistical report output from Statistics Jersey (SJ) and the corresponding FTE requirement has not changed significantly since your appointment and that most of this activity falls under Dan's area of work. We also understand that a requirement for additional FTEs and supporting activity would be necessary to increase the core reporting activity to any significant degree - in the order of roughly £100K increments to be useful.

Second, we expressed our view that cutting back on SJ's production of statistics does not seem to align with the government's core strategic objectives and we are concerned about the impact on timely policy development and decision-making. Although not all of our questions about specific resource requirements and impacts of cessation were addressed, we believed that we had a constructive discussion and understand that you (and Dan) have been tasked with making some difficult decisions that have resulted in the following recommended cuts to SJ statistical production:

- 1. Business Tendency Survey - likely to result in an information gap as no other government department/public authority has committed to picking this up*
- 2. Actively Seeking Work Report - Customer and Local Services have committed to publish this data on a quarterly basis but with no supporting narrative report*
- 3. Energy Trends Report - some confidence that this reporting will be picked up by Carbon Neutral team who will have less constraints from a data protection perspective that will hopefully enable more granular analysis*
- 4. JOLS Survey - every two years instead of annual with implementation of modular approach to accommodate more questions*

SUG accepts these recommendations with some reservations that are perhaps more usefully shared with the Minister as we discussed.

We also discussed and understood, on a hypothetical basis, that if an additional roughly £100K were to be available to SJ for additional report outputs, the first priority would be to move to quarterly GVA reporting rather than reinstating the BTS and ASW reports. A second additional £100K might then be deployed to move back to JOLS on an annual basis. SUG would be supportive if these opportunities arose.

Kind regards,

Gailina

[end of email]

Finally, we draw your attention to two specific sections of the annual assurance statement that must be signed by all accountable officers (see <https://www.gov.je/SiteCollectionDocuments/Government%20and%20administration/Governance%20questionnaire%20template.pdf>):

Principle 1 – Question 5

Are there arrangements in place to ensure that you meet all reporting requirements to the public and States Assembly? These must include: (a) tier 1 statistics to ensure that they meet the statistical standards under Article 7H of the Statistics and Census (Jersey) Law 2018 and the Statistical Code of Practice; and (b) statistics that are required to meet the Strategy for the Jersey Statistical System published under Article 7(2)(a) of the Law.

Principle 2 – Question 3

Are there arrangements in place for your Department to minimise environmental impact in line with the Carbon Neutral Roadmap Policy EN1 “Decarbonising Government” to reduce operational emissions in line with the Paris Agreement to reach net zero by 2050?

It is our view that the provision of additional resources for the production of statistics by Statistics Jersey and other public authorities, rather than a reduction in resources, is most likely required for accountable officers to meet these assurance responsibilities.

In closing, we would urge you and your panel to recognise and support the critical importance of protecting and enhancing the current statistical output of Statistics Jersey to allow for, at minimum, the introduction of quarterly GVA reporting and maintaining JOLS on an annual basis. Enabling the production of high quality, timely and comprehensive range of public authority statistics is fundamental to ensuring Jersey’s competitiveness and continued progress towards a sustainable economy for the benefit of Islanders currently and into the future.

Kind regards,

Gailina Liew

Gailina Liew
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