STATES OF JERSEY

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COMPOSITION AND ELECTION OF THE STATES ASSEMBLY: PROPOSED REFORM (P.145/2006): COMMENTS

**Presented to the States on 1st May 2007
by the Council of Ministers**

STATES GREFFE

COMMENTS

The Council of Ministers has considered the report and proposition of Senator Ben Shenton on the 'Composition and Election of the States Assembly' (P.145/2007), together with the 4 sets of amendments that have been lodged and it is disappointed that the States are being asked to consider this matter at this time. Ministerial government is still in its early stages, having been introduced in December 2005, and in the Council's view it would be preferable to wait until a longer period has elapsed before deciding upon changes to the composition and number of members in the States Assembly.

The Council also considers that it is premature for the States to be asked to take a decision when this subject is currently being actively reviewed by the Privileges and Procedures Committee. The terms of reference of the Committee include keeping under review the composition of the States Assembly, and in this connection the Committee has been conducting a wide-ranging public consultation exercise, including 2 opinion surveys and an 'in committee' States debate. It is unfortunate, therefore, that the debate on P.145/2006 will be going ahead prior to the completion of the Committee's work.

The Council also wishes to comment on the proposals for a change in date for the elections and consequential appointment of the new House as set out in P.145/2006 – amendment and P.145/2006 – second amendment.

The current election timetable, whereby an election in October/November, with the new House appointed in December, is designed to allow the Council of Ministers time to develop its Strategic Plan and have it approved by the States, followed by the minimum time in office before being able to have an impact on spending and budget plans.

At present, the Annual Business Plan is lodged in July and debated in September, followed by the Budget debate in December. Therefore a new House appointed in December inherits the spending plans and Budget of the old House for only the first year in office.

If the election date were to be brought forward to May or June, with the new House appointed in September, there would not be time for the new Council of Ministers to develop its strategic direction and produce a complementary business plan and budget by the end of that calendar year. Therefore, one of the first things the new House would be asked to agree is the Annual Business Plan, which was prepared and lodged by the old House, and to which the new members would have had no input. It would be further complicated by the fact that the new Council of Ministers' Strategic Plan could not be available to be approved by the States for at least 4 months. In the meantime the new House would also be asked to approve a Budget which would be based on the proposals of the old House.

The alternative, providing for the old House to approve both the Business Plan and Budget, would be for these to be brought forward to July.

Either way, this would still mean that the new Council of Ministers would have been in office some 16 months before it could tailor annual spending and budget plans to complement its new Strategic Plan.

In the U.K. the new government inherits for one year the proposals of the previous party and then sets 4 year proposals of its own. The spending and budget (tax) proposals for the following year are all proposed and agreed before the new parliament sits.

Whilst U.K. elections are typically in the summer sitting, this reflects the fact that the U.K. financial year is April to March and therefore mirrors the current Jersey position where elections are 4 to 5 months earlier in line with a financial year which runs January to December.

The Council recommends that no decision be taken on any change that would bring forward the month in which elections are held until a full review of the implications for the financial planning timetable has been undertaken.