

STATES OF JERSEY



PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM

Lodged au Greffe on 26th July 2013
by Deputy G.C.L. Baudains of St. Clement

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

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

- (a) to agree that a working party should be established to review how best to deliver the services the public expect in the most efficient manner and to report back to the States with its findings within one year; and
- (b) to request the Chief Minister to appoint members to the Working Party, which should include 2 members of the States and either a current or recently retired chief officer with comprehensive knowledge of Jersey's public sector, and be supported by expert advice.

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

REPORT

Some members may recall that a few years ago I brought a Proposition to create a Working Party to examine departmental structure (P.49/2008). Sadly, some members thought the timescale I set was too short and, as a result, I lost by one vote.

Moving forward, members will recall the presentation by the Chief Minister at St. Paul's Centre early in this new Assembly, where he outlined his plans for a review of the public sector. I was among several members who expressed surprise at the length of time he expected it to take. Five or six years, if I recall correctly.

Since then, I have pressed him on several occasions as to progress, which culminated a month or so ago in a meeting with the people involved in this exercise. I was impressed with the consultants brought in for the task (Atos), but got the feeling others were less enthusiastic.

Soon after that meeting, the Chief Minister announced he was appointing the Minister for Economic Development to this group. I am a great supporter of the Minister for Economic Development but, because of all his commitments, I thought this an unwise appointment. If his membership of the Machinery of Government Review Panel is anything to go by, he will be unlikely to attend many – if any – meetings.

A review of our public sector is, in my view, of huge importance – far more important than arguing about the number of States members – or whether Constables should remain in the States.

With few exceptions, there has been no comprehensive review to determine whether the present structure is efficient and appropriate for today's needs. I believe such an exercise has the potential to deliver massive efficiencies, possibly running into tens of millions of pounds per annum.

As a member of the Machinery of Government Review Panel, I am also aware, from our interviews with Chief Officers, that the Civil Service itself believes change is necessary. Several officers commented that we had changed the Machinery of Government (from committee to ministerial) but hadn't changed the Civil Service to match, and as such the important interface between politicians and their officers was no longer fit for purpose.

As little has changed since my 2008 proposition was debated, I thought it worth repeating some of the main points of the Report which accompanied it –

“For as long as I can remember people have questioned the efficiency of our public services. As these services are funded by taxation, it is right that such services should provide the best value for money possible.

In an effort to achieve the greatest efficiency, the States have employed various procedures: an analysis by OXERA, the Fundamental Spending Review, benchmarking and so forth, but I believe a basic question remains unanswered – if our public services were in the private sector, would they be the same? Would they be more efficient? Would the structure remain the same?

I have lost count of the occasions professionals have expressed to me not only their amazement, but, as taxpayers, their concern, at the way a particular function is being carried out. And, as a politician, I have uncovered waste and inefficiency in several areas only to be frustrated by my inability to effect real change.

Over recent months I have come to the conclusion that the real block to understanding whether or not our civil service delivers value for money could also be a cause of the inefficiency itself (assuming the latter exists).

That common denominator is Departmental structure. In my view, these structures have not kept up with modern private sector practice. This not only indicates a possible shortcoming, but also inhibits meaningful analysis.

I have therefore concluded that an analysis of Departmental structure by a working party consisting of politicians familiar with departmental practices – assisted by professionals expert in the particular structure being analyzed as necessary – would give us the information needed to establish the appropriateness of our present structures.

In today's culture of blame, where civil servants are increasingly coming under attack, I believe an analysis of Departments may well demonstrate it is the structure in which they work that is at fault, rather than failures by employees. As such, not only might productivity be increased, but staff morale as well."

I believe more than ever that a review of the services we deliver is long overdue and, whilst I am grateful the Chief Minister shares that view, I part from his approach in the timescale and scoping. Having met the team currently looking at departments, I get the clear impression that the present work is aimed at amending the present system, mainly with a view to encouraging electronic communication.

I don't believe shuffling bits of departments around and moving staff to suit is the answer. What I want is a small team, starting with a blank sheet of paper, determining what services we should be providing to the public, and by what means.

Maybe our present service is as good as it can be. Maybe we need a radically different system but, whatever it is, it shouldn't take 5 or 6 years to find out – as the Chief Minister believes it will.

What is needed is a working party to produce a Report to the States – within one year – outlining what the public sector should be delivering, what, if anything, should be outsourced, and so forth. It would then be for the States to debate and, if deemed appropriate, make the appropriate changes. Work has already started, people and funding are already in place; all that is needed is a change of membership and a refocusing of effort.

We continually cut back on services, yet the cost of running Jersey increases beyond inflation year on year. Surely the fact our public service has evolved over the last 60 years mainly by accident (rather than design) has something to do with it? It is time we undertook a fundamental review, just as any private sector business would do – only they would do it on a regular basis, not once every 50 years or so.

I would suggest a small working party consisting of the present consultants, 2 States members and a present or recently retired chief officer with comprehensive knowledge of Jersey's public sector.

Financial and manpower implications

I do not expect there to be any requirement over and above the present team's requirements. Indeed, there may be a saving in getting the work done in a smaller timescale.