

# STATES OF JERSEY



## COUNCIL OF MINISTERS' MEETINGS: PUBLIC ACCESS – COMMENTS

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Presented to the States on 8th December 2014  
by the Council of Ministers

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STATES GREFFE

## COMMENTS

The new Council of Ministers strongly supports openness, transparency and accountability in government, and has an agenda to secure improvement in this area. To demonstrate this commitment –

- The level of information on the States website, [www.gov.je](http://www.gov.je), which includes Ministerial Decisions, Reports, Accounts and Budgets, as well as information to inform public decisions, such as the planning application register, will continue to expand.
- This is supported by the introduction of the Freedom of Information (Jersey) Law 2011 on 1st January 2015, providing a statutory right to information with an independent Commissioner, strengthening public access to information.
- Further, the new Council of Ministers intends to introduce a range of measures to support access to Ministers, including –
  - **Community meetings:** Ministers providing presentations on topical issues, followed by questions from the audience. The idea will be to explain the reasons for decisions that have been made and to answer questions and listen to views from the audience. People attending the meetings will be able to ask their questions in person, or they can submit them in writing on the night, using forms and a collection box provided. These meetings will be held in parish venues.
  - **Ministerial “drop-ins”:** This will allow people to drop into a public venue between set times to speak personally to the Chief Minister and other ministers about any issues that concern them.
  - **Online “Ask the Minister” sessions:** Question and Answer questions offered by Ministers online. These will be held monthly, with each minister taking their turn to answer questions online for an hour.
  - **Regular sessions with States Members:** The Council of Ministers is committed to providing additional and regular opportunities for States members to contribute to the formulation of policy throughout the process.

In advance of this, the Council of Ministers is collectively responsible, and must be able to have full and frank discussions on a range of matters as it comes to a decision, with that decision then being published and explained, and with Ministers being held to account.

This approach is consistent with that taken by all other governments throughout the British Isles (United Kingdom, Scottish Cabinet, Welsh Cabinet, Isle of Man Council of Ministers, and the Guernsey Policy Counsel) and governments elsewhere in the world. This is also consistent with the decision of States members when this proposition was last debated in 2011.

Accordingly, the Council of Ministers cannot support the proposal made for it to hold meetings in public, believing it would impede the effectiveness of decision-making, and otherwise having limited value (and some costs) as most of its business by nature falls under collective responsibility.

Instead, the Council of Ministers believes it should focus on the implementation of the new Freedom of Information Law, the use of technology to provide increasing levels of information, and on taking democracy into the community.