

# STATES OF JERSEY



## STRATEGY FOR DEALING WITH YOUNG OFFENDERS: ESTABLISHMENT OF WORKING GROUP

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Lodged au Greffe on 27th November 2009  
by Deputy T.M. Pitman of St. Helier

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STATES GREFFE

## **PROPOSITION**

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

- (a) to request the Chief Minister to set up a working group comprising the Ministers (or Assistant Ministers) for Education, Sport and Culture, Home Affairs and Health and Social Services, and 3 non-executive members drawn from the Education and Home Affairs and the Health, Social Security and Housing Scrutiny Panels, to research and draw up a targeted joint strategy for dealing with young offenders and youth crime;
- (b) to request the working group, within 12 months, to present its report to the States through the Chief Minister, setting out a proposed joint policy.

DEPUTY T.M. PITMAN OF ST. HELIER

## REPORT

I lodge this proposition having tried, unsuccessfully, to add the establishment of a working group – crucially a working group drawn from both sides of government – as an amendment to my proposition P.148/2009 on the naming of youth offenders. I did this because I felt strongly that this would have allowed the Assembly to do two important things. Firstly, hold the necessary depth of debate regarding the matter of youth offending and thus exploring what issues underlie this – without the (sadly) likely occurrence of a Member not supporting the naming issue itself seeking to curtail the wider debate because of this. Secondly, because it would have ensured that the Assembly could have had just the one debate rather than the two. This seemed wholly logical to me; yet in accepting the interpretation of Standing Orders, to use a cliché I hoped I would never utter: ‘we are where we are’.

Thus, in further briefly outlining my reasons for what is now a standalone proposition, I would primarily refer Members to much of the observations and questions raised in the report attached to P.148/2009. However, having finally received a copy of the ‘comments’ of the Minister for Health and Social Services, I really feel that I need to add a little more. I will, of course, be referring to these ‘comments’ at significant length within the debate on P.148/2009; such is my concern at the stark lack of understanding evident in a number of the arguments put forward; further still, within the conclusions reached. As a consequence, these will obviously have been debated a good month or more prior to this intended amendment coming to the Assembly, so I will make no further observations here.

However, as we approach the debate on P.148/2009, it must be noted that we have unfortunately seen the attempt by one or two politicians to try and avoid debating these serious issues at all. One of the reasons for this has been expressed as being due to a degree of preparation having apparently been begun in order to lay some ‘groundwork’ for a review of the Youth Justice system. I obviously fully support such a review. Unfortunately, such a possible review – because that is all it is in truth at this stage – does not go nearly far enough, as any professional who has any real length of experience working with young people – and as a consequence, experience of young offenders and the plethora of reasons that can and do contribute to this – could point out.

Whatever one’s position on the issue of naming it is, in my view, an inarguable fact that there are (as I identify in P.148/2009) many issues that need both exploration and action if we are to begin to resolve the growing public concern of youth crime within the Island. Though under usual circumstances I am rarely one for the creation of working groups – this being purely because all too often they appear to end up as excuses for appearing to do something constructive but actually doing very little – I believe that in this instance such a group could contribute hugely to we, as government, getting to grips with this problem. An essential rider to this, of course, is that the group is drawn from and includes all those who are relevantly skilled and willing to contribute. Drawing a working group from within the relevant Executive and Scrutiny as a basis can, I believe, ensure the success of the group: it is surely both the only way to ensure genuine joined-up thinking and a functioning joint strategy.

Having now discussed the proposal with a number of people, it appears quite clear to us that unless the much-touted claim of ‘inclusive’ government is, as many of us believe, nothing more than spin, then there really should be no logical objection to setting up a group in this way. Youth crime is, after all, a community-wide problem

that demands utilising expertise and initiatives wherever they may be found in order that we can achieve the very best solutions to a complex problem.

I have set the timeframe for the working group to complete and report back with its report at 12 months for two specific but inter-related reasons. Firstly, I believe that the urgency of confronting the many issues underlying this growing problem of youth crime demands that it is carried out as quickly as is practically possible. I believe that 12 months is an achievable and appropriate length of time to ensure both quality and focus. Secondly, by sticking to this deadline, the working group can further ensure that any recommendations arising from the report retain the potential to be acted upon within the lifespan of the same Assembly.

### **Financial and manpower implications**

I believe that there are no financial or manpower implications specifically arising from this proposition. This is due to the reality that in the light of the now well-established failure of the previous 'corporate parent', this work should already be a high priority for each of the departments. Further still, that such a report can be achieved within existing departmental budgets and staffing. For my own part, I would also add to this by stating that I, for one, am willing to give and make whatever time is necessary to help the working group (should it be established) to come up with initiatives to make tangible constructive inroads into the current youth crime problem.