

STATES OF JERSEY



TRAVELLING AND ENTERTAINING COSTS: PROVISION OF INFORMATION (P.51/2004) – COMMENTS

**Presented to the States on 4th May 2004
by the Privileges and Procedures Committee**

STATES GREFFE

COMMENTS

The Privileges and Procedures Committee has considered the proposition of Senator Shenton in the context of its work on freedom of information. The Committee does not believe it would be appropriate for it to recommend whether or not the proposition should be supported but has agreed to present these comments to inform the debate.

The revised provisions on freedom of information that the Committee intends to put in place in the near future will cover how existing information can be accessed. In addition Paragraph 3.1 of the present Code of Practice or Public Access to Official Information already provides that “*an authority shall grant access to all information in its possession*” and ‘information’ in this context would cover the type of financial records Senator Shenton is referring to unless the information was exempt under the provisions of the Code.

Senator Shenton’s proposition is seeking the production of additional information in the form of a quarterly summary. Although, as he points out, the information should already be available, there will inevitably be a need for additional resources to be allocated to collate and summarise it. In deciding whether or not to support the proposition it will be necessary for members to judge whether this additional effort, at a time when the public sector is taking steps to avoid unnecessary duplication, will be outweighed by the usefulness of the information to members and the public every quarter.

The Privileges and Procedures Committee’s view in relation to travelling and entertaining costs is that appropriate safeguards should be in place to ensure that all such expenditure is fully justified and obtained in the most cost-effective manner. The Committee was pleased to learn that greater flexibility is about to be given to Departments to book travel using the cheapest method possible (often on the internet) as the previous requirement to use only one approved agent for all travel did not necessarily always lead to the cheapest prices being obtained. The Audit Commission prepared a report on this matter in 1999 (Report No. 11– Review of Travel, Subsistence, Entertainment and Hospitality within the States of Jersey) and the Committee is pleased to note that the new Shadow Public Accounts Committee will be reviewing progress on the implementation of the recommendations of that report as part of its 2004 work programme. The Committee believes that the Shadow PAC is well placed to investigate any abuse that exists in relation to this type of expenditure.