

**MAINS DRAIN - CONNECTION TO ALL PROPERTIES:  
PETITION (P.108/97) - REPORT**

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**Presented to the States on 19th May 1998  
by the Policy and Resources Committee**

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**STATES OF JERSEY**

**STATES GREFFE**

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## **REPORT**

The Policy and Resources Committee has considered the petition presented to the States regarding the connection of all properties to the mains drains and the proposition lodged by Deputy Hill in this connection, from the standpoint of -

1. the States' population policy;
2. the funding of capital expenditure in terms of 'value for money' in relation to other capital requests;
3. the strategic policy objectives on the environment and quality of life.

### **Population policy**

The Public Services Department has informed the Committee that with current staff it can undertake around eight schemes each year at a total cost of £4,000,000 or so. If the programme was increased above the figure of £4,000,000 this would result in more United Kingdom based contractors having to be employed with consequent need for additional manpower in the Island. The Department's estimated cost of connecting all properties to mains drains is around £70 million at current prices.

In the view of the Committee a decision to connect all properties to the mains drains over a limited period would be in conflict with the States' population policy unless the programme of sewer extensions was at the expense of other capital projects with an equivalent manpower requirement.

### **Funding of capital expenditure**

The capital programme would not be able to accommodate the cost of connecting all properties to mains drains over a short time period unless all or almost all of the funds available for capital expenditure were allocated to the sewer extension programme. It has been suggested that the strategic reserve be used to fund a programme of sewer extensions but if the proposers have in mind that the Island would accommodate the existing capital programme plus a programme of sewer extensions then this would be in direct conflict with the States population policy.

In addition the Committee has considered whether the expenditure proposed of some £70 million is best value for money. The Committee has asked the Public Services Department whether the properties yet to be connected to mains drains could be split into those that could be connected relatively easily and those that could only be connected with difficulty and at considerable expense. The Committee asked whether it was possible to allocate the properties yet to be connected to the mains drains to ranges of cost per dwelling. The Department's response is that the current policy of the Department for prioritising areas for a connection to mains drains already attempts to take this point into account.

The Public Services Committee in its report on the petition (P.179/97) has indicated that it works to a five year programme of foul sewer extensions, derived by the Sewer Working Party which is composed of representatives of the Public Health, Planning and Environment, Tourism and Public Services Committees, and the Jersey New Waterworks Company. The Working Party considers areas of the Island which have had serious drainage problems identified, and decides the priority of those areas in terms of identified public health problems, pollution risks, and related problems. A five year programme is determined by the Working Party and is reviewed annually. The practical limit for the programme is considered by the Public Services Committee to be five years as it is necessary to maintain flexibility, to allow for changes to the programme, due to funding or changes of priorities.

The Committee also asked the Public Services Department what alternative ways there are for dealing with sewage disposal in respect of isolated properties which might be a better use of funds. Alternatives to connecting to the mains drains would be tight tanks (i.e. septic tanks without soakaways which operate as a sealed system), private sewage treatment works and somewhat more innovative methods such as 'dry toilets'. Of these options tight tanks are considered to be the most acceptable as private sewage treatment works are considered to cause problems unless properly maintained. Where a tight tank is installed the complete contents of the tank have to be removed by tanker. This results in high costs for emptying and places a very frequent demand on the Public Services Committees tanker service. The current policy of the Public Services Committee is not to encourage the use of the tight

tanks systems except in extreme cases as this would require a considerable expansion of the tanker service.

The cost of alternative ways of dealing with sewage disposal should be compared with the cost of connecting all properties to the mains drains both generally and in respect of specific properties, and the Public Services Department has indicated that this cost comparison would need to be done on an individual case basis rather than as a general statement. Although it would be desirable to connect every property to the mains drains, the Public Services Committee in its report P.179/97 states that it is currently considered that this would not be practical. Some individual properties are a considerable distance from the nearest sewer system, and it would be extremely expensive to connect them as most of these would require pumping stations.

The Committee considers that such an exercise should be undertaken so that the States can know what the options are in respect of isolated properties where the cost of the connection to the mains drains would be extremely high in relation to the number of persons served. This information is required not only to make comparisons between the alternative ways of dealing with sewage disposal. It is also an important exercise so that States members and the Island generally can see what other projects would be forgone as a result of funding the sewerage extension programme to all properties in the Island and an assessment made as to whether the Island would be getting best value for money from adopting the course of action proposed by the petitioners.

### **The environment/quality of life**

The Committee recognises that the environmental policy objectives of the States and the quality of life of those affected benefit from the effective disposal of sewage in respect of all properties on the Island. However, having regard to the position in other countries where isolated properties are not connected to mains drains but where there is equivalent concern for the environment and quality of life, the Committee is not convinced that the only or best way of dealing with sewage disposal is for every property in the Island to be connected to the main sewer.

The Planning and Environment Department has expressed the view that it would not be practicable or cost effective to connect all properties to the public sewerage system. It is accepted that where a sewer extension cannot be justified the only acceptable alternative is a tight tank. This alternative, if it is suggested, should be looked at where the cost of providing main sewers is high in relation to the number of persons served.

In terms of the quality of life of Island residents, the Committee has asked the Public Services Department to what extent adding to the present sewer extension programme would have implications for the movement of traffic on the Island, and whether there is a limit to the number of roads that could be closed at any one time. The Department has responded that there is a limit to the number of roads that can be closed at any one time and that this does concentrate working to the months of the year that exclude the summer tourist season. This inevitably would place a limit on the amount of sewer extension work that could be undertaken.

### **Conclusion**

The Public Services Committee policy on the extension of the foul sewers as stated in P.179/97 is that work will continue on the extension of the foul sewer system to as many areas of the Island as can practicably be connected, subject to the availability of funds.

The Policy and Resources Committee is of the view that the States' capital programme should not be increased beyond that supported by the funds presently made available in the budget and that the allocation of those funds should continue to be determined by the present prioritisation process which takes account of all of the strategic policy objectives of the States, and the population policy objective in particular.

The Policy and Resources Committee is also of the opinion that, where the unit cost of connecting existing properties to the mains drains would be high, consideration should be given to alternative more cost effective means of sewage disposal.