

STATES OF JERSEY



PUBLIC ELECTIONS: POLLING CARDS AND ACCESSIBILITY OF POLLING STATIONS

Lodged au Greffe on 22nd September 2016
by Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

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

- (a) that each registered voter should be issued a ‘polling card’ in advance of an election;
- (b) that voters should be able to vote at any polling station;
- (c) that the location of polling stations should be reviewed by the Privileges and Procedures Committee to ensure that the polling stations are at the most convenient locations within each constituency; and

to request the Privileges and Procedures Committee to bring forward the necessary legislative amendments to implement these changes in time for the May 2018 general election.

DEPUTY S.Y. MÉZEC OF ST. HELIER

REPORT

Following my experience of the September 2016 Senatorial By-election, I wish to call for changes to be made to our electoral process for the next election, in the hope that breaking down the barriers that can make going out to vote inconvenient for some may have a small effect in increasing voter turnout.

The States has adopted Reform Jersey's proposition ([P.10/2016](#) – 'Public Elections: electronic voting' lodged by Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier) to introduce online voting; however, it is generally accepted that it is not feasible to make this a reality in time for the 2018 general election. In my view, it is therefore right to introduce changes which are feasible to make voting easier and more convenient for voters, in the absence of being able to vote from the comfort of their own homes.

I am not suggesting that these propositions are a panacea which will turn Jersey into a beacon of democratic engagement overnight. I accept that the problems with democratic engagement in Jersey are rooted in issues which run far deeper than those I have brought up in this proposition.

Even if these measures only have a small effect in increasing turnout, I believe they will still be worth it.

Each proposal is independent of the others and can be taken separately if required.

(a) that each registered voter should be issued a 'polling card' in advance of an election.

It is abundantly clear that the vast majority of the Public of Jersey have not got the faintest clue whether or not they are definitely registered to vote.

Many people are under the false impression that they are automatically on the electoral roll if they pay Parish Rates. Few can remember when the last time they filled in a voter registration form was, and whether it is still valid. Many households have several residents who are eligible to vote, but only one resident who has filled in the form.

Of those who are unsure if they are registered or not, only a tiny proportion of them will take the initiative to contact candidates or their Parish Hall to find out if they are registered.

In St. Helier, St. Brelade and St. Saviour, many potential voters are not sure which district they live in, and therefore which polling station they should attend, or who they can vote for.

In elections in some other parts of the British Isles, every registered elector receives a personalised 'polling card' in the post in advance of an election (see example from the Isle of Man attached as the **Appendix** to this Report).

This card confirms that the person is registered to vote, what elections they can vote in and where their polling station is. It is stated on the card that it is not essential to bring that card to the polling station to vote, but can make the process quicker if it is brought.

The Vote.je booklet which is now sent to each household is an excellent way of getting important information out to all potential voters; however, there is no way that it can be personalised for each individual voter to put them beyond any doubt how they can vote.

It is not necessary for these cards to be printed on expensive card, with elaborate designs and colour images. The cost of producing them should be minimal, with the cost of distributing the cards to be met in the same way as the election booklet.

Obviously it would not be practical to produce polling cards for those who sign up to the supplementary electoral register after the initial deadline. However, more people may be encouraged to sign up to the supplementary roll if they witness others in their households receiving their polling cards when they do not.

(b) that voters should be able to vote at any polling station.

Irrespective of whether or not part (c) of this proposition is accepted, it will be impossible to find suitable locations for polling stations which will be convenient for every single voter. But one way of making it easier would be to allow voters to be able to vote at any polling station, rather than just one.

There is no reason why it is not possible to use technology which has existed for decades to create a secure way of allowing voters to vote at any polling station.

It would mean a move away from paper systems, onto a computer-based system where information on who has already voted is updated on an interactive database in real-time to ensure that voters are not able to vote at one polling station, then walk to another station and vote again.

Such a system would not need to be online, but instead on a secure intranet which would be unhackable.

Residents of Hue Court (in St. Helier No. 2) live just metres away from the Town Hall, the polling station for St. Helier No. 1, yet have to travel all the way to Springfield Stadium to vote, despite the fact they actually live closer to the polling station for St. Helier No. 1 than virtually everyone who lives in St. Helier No. 1. This problem also exists in St. Saviour, where many residents of St. Saviour No. 3 live much closer to the Parish Hall (polling station for St. Saviour No. 2) than they do to their own station in Maufant.

Likewise, many residents of St. Helier No. 2 district will drop their children off at Rouge Bouillon School, the polling station for St. Helier No. 3, but not be able to vote there, having instead to go out of their way to the other side of the district to vote.

The provision of pre-poll voting at St. Paul's Centre has demonstrated that it is possible to have a polling station open for voters of any district. To make it feasible for every polling station to allow for this though, it will be necessary to use a computer system.

One potential drawback is the possibility of one particular polling station attracting large numbers of voters from across the Island at a particular time, when there are not enough volunteers there to hand them ballot papers quickly. However, it will be possible to predict that the busiest polling station is likely to be the Town Hall, as people may choose to vote during their lunchbreak from work. It will not be difficult to arrange contingencies for this.

In Guernsey, whilst voters do not have the ability to vote in any polling station across the Island, each constituency does have multiple polling stations where any voter in that constituency can go to vote. If they can manage that, we can surely start moving in that direction here.

(c) that the location of polling stations should be reviewed by the Privileges and Procedures Committee to ensure that the polling stations are at the most convenient locations within each constituency.

It seems that elections come and go without much discussion on whether we have the optimum arrangement with the venues for polling stations.

I am proposing that PPC looks at the current arrangement and, if necessary, makes recommendations for alternative arrangements which could be more convenient for voters.

We should consider the venues which are most accessible for people who may not be able to drive, which are located in the most densely populated areas of the constituencies and which have adequate parking provisions. We should consider the venues which many voters may be passing by or attending during the ordinary course of their day. We should also consider the possibility of having more than one polling station in a constituency if it would be helpful for voters.

In some Parishes (particularly some of the northern country Parishes) there is almost certainly no better arrangement possible than what currently exists with the Parish Halls in the centre of the villages being used as the polling station. However, for many other constituencies this is not the case.

For example, the Parish Hall in St. Clement is in a location towards the east of the most densely populated part of the Parish, which the majority of Parishioners will not go anywhere near during the course of their day. Many Parishioners who work in Town may choose to walk or get the bus, and will not easily be able to get to the Parish Hall. If a venue such as Samarès Primary School or the Good Companions' Club were used instead of (or as well as) the Parish Hall, it would be much more convenient for many voters.

That is just a suggestion, but PPC may discover even better options which I propose that we should be open to and have the discussion.

Financial and manpower implications

Paragraph (a) will cost a nominal amount to get the cards printed, but will certainly be a drop in the ocean compared to the rest of the election spend, with the full manifesto booklet being produced in colour and sent to every household.

Paragraph (b) will require the e-Government team to create the software to enable it to happen, which I am told by the Assistant Minister with responsibility for e-Government is something which they want to do anyway. There may, however, be law drafting changes necessary to allow it to take place.

Paragraph (c) has no financial or manpower implications other than taking up time at PPC meetings to discuss options for potential change.

APPENDIX

Isle of Man election polling card front (name and address covered)

Under Regulation 30 (3) of the Representation of the People Regulations 2015

OFFICIAL POLL CARD

GENERAL ELECTION TO THE HOUSE OF KEYS 2016
Douglas North

POLLING DISTRICT:
CDGN2

POLLING DAY:
Thursday 22 September 2016

POLLING STATION:
Cronk Y Berry School (Youth Wing)
Hallwood Avenue
Governors Hill
Douglas
Isle of Man

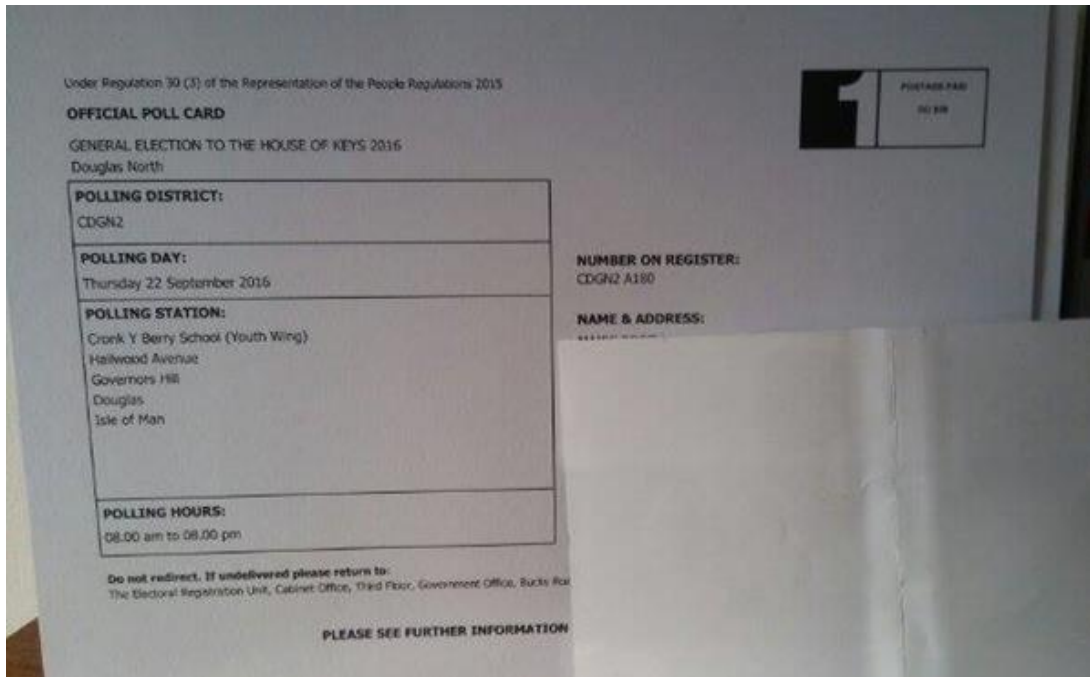
POLLING HOURS:
08.00 am to 08.00 pm

NUMBER ON REGISTER:
CDGN2 A180

NAME & ADDRESS:
[REDACTED]

Do not redirect. If undelivered please return to:
The Electoral Registration Unit, Cabinet Office, Third Floor, Government Office, Bucks Rd.

PLEASE SEE FURTHER INFORMATION



Polling card back

GENERAL ELECTION TO THE HOUSE OF KEYS

The poll will be open from 8.00 am to 8.00 pm.

The address of your polling station is shown on the front of this card.

When you go to the polling station, tell the clerk your number and name and address as shown on the front of this card. The presiding officer will give you a ballot paper stamped with the official mark.

Mark your vote on the ballot paper secretly in one of the voting compartments. Put one X in the space to the right opposite the name of the candidate or candidates you wish to vote for. You may vote for not more than two candidates. If you put any other mark on the ballot paper, your vote may not be counted.

Then fold the ballot paper in two to conceal your vote, show the official mark on the back to the presiding officer and put the paper into the ballot box.

If you spoil the ballot paper by mistake do not destroy it; give it back to the presiding officer and ask for another.

Please disregard this Poll Card if you have applied for an Advance Vote.

ISSUED BY THE CABINET OFFICE

