

STATES OF JERSEY



CENSUS 2006: PROVISION

**Lodged au Greffe on 21st June 2005
by the Connétable of St. Helier**

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

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

to refer to the Statement made by the President of the Policy and Resources Committee on 1st February 2005, and to charge that Committee to carry out a Census as originally planned in 2006.

CONNÉTABLE OF ST. HELIER

REPORT

Few would disagree with the contention that Jersey is in a period of significant change that is unprecedented in recent decades. Recently approved changes to our taxation structure, the Economic Growth Plan, proposed changes to income support and migration policy, imminent changes to our political system, and so on – there are all sorts of far-reaching decisions being made, all of which will play a part in how our Island develops in the future. Now is not the time, in my view, to abandon the main tool of gathering evidence about the effects of change on the Island's demographic structure, the census which has been carried out at approximately 5-year intervals since 1971.

Censuses have served the Island well over the years, thanks to the capability of our Economic Advisers and Assistant Economic Advisers. The last census was an impressive and extremely useful piece of research, and a creditable swansong of the then Etat Civil Committee. In his Statement on 1st February this year, the President of The Policy and Resources Committee said that “through the recent work of the Statistics Unit we have much fuller and more timely information on which to base our decisions.” How can this be?

Ambitious targets for economic growth have been set, and for good reason. But in the present circumstances we need much better information about the educational and employment profiles, in particular, of our community than can be provided by annual ‘Population Updates’. The ‘Update’ on 2004 claims that “To produce an updated estimate of the population it is only the change since the last census that needs to be measured. This change can be calculated from the numbers of births and deaths and from education, health and employment information ... thus producing an annual estimate of the resident population.”

But while the Statistics Unit can monitor the total population size, it will have no information save from a census about the flow in and out of the Island, or the age structure of the population, or economic activity rates. These are absolutely crucial indicators.

Indeed, it is all too easy to focus too much on the size of the Island's population, just as the President of the Policy and Resources Committee did in his Statement at the beginning of the year: “To begin with I would like to reassure members that we will continue to have an accurate measure of our population, which has in the past often been the key driver for undertaking frequent Censuses. During 2004 the Statistics Unit developed a methodology to provide an annual estimate of the population, now published in June of each year. So whilst 10-yearly censuses will still provide an actual count of the population, we no longer need to rely solely on them to enable us to accurately calculate it.”

What population count does not indicate is whether the anecdotal evidence one hears is to be believed, that many people in their 30s and 40s appear to be leaving the Island. If there is truth in the rumour, who is to replace them? If they are not replaced, or are replaced by persons who are not economically active, then the Economic Growth plan is going to be difficult if not impossible to implement. We may find ourselves being influenced in our decision-making, especially over whether to welcome or not certain types of labour into the Island, whether to licence or not certain types of undertaking, whether to build or not certain types of housing, and so on. And how can planned delivery of social services take place without robust baseline data being collected?

Jersey's population flows are so unusually dynamic (i.e. in 2001, 20,000 people in the census had not been in the Island in 1996) that the States will be shooting itself in the foot if it did cease to update important data regularly, and especially in advance of key decisions on ‘population registration’ etc.

The Policy and Resources Committee President also said in his statement: “And of course moving to 10-yearly censuses does not mean we lose any data, the results of the 2001 and subsequent censuses will still be available to all.” This is misleading, given that unless this Proposition is approved, there will not be any ‘subsequent’ census until 2011, while the advantage of being “in line with most other developed countries who will be having a census in 2011” seems to me to be no advantage at all if we are to be ‘flying blind’ about our changing demographic structure for a decade.

The last census showed that in the late 1990s, despite all the concern about immigration, the net flow was only 55 per annum. The flow each way was about 2,500 each year excluding 4,000 seasonal workers. It is evident that the

flow continues, and it is so big relative to the population that it is probably having a significant impact on age structure. Not knowing anything more about this until 2011/12 would be a serious mistake in my view.

Moreover, the proposals in Migration: Monitoring and Regulation (P.25/2005) assume a 5-year lead time to get the proposed new population registration system up and running. Unless there is a further census in the meantime, the baseline data for first decisions about 'quotas' etc. would be 2001, i.e. 10 years out of date.

The Shadow Scrutiny Panel's report on the proposed registration system comments that "the systems ... are in effect untested in practice. There are considerable practical issues to be resolved before a registration system can be brought into effect." (p.43) The Panel continues, "the range and complexity of the data protection issues cited by the Registrar indicate that the registration system is a long way from becoming a reality." (p.44)

The other arguments made in the statement of the President of the Policy and Resources Committee and in the Committee Paper of 20th January focus in particular on the cost of running the census, estimated at £500,000, and the consequences in terms of the other priorities of the Statistics Unit if the census is run in the near future. However, given the sums expended by the Committee on economic advice, public relations and other exercises in recent years, it is surely unconvincing to argue that the gathering of the most reliable data available to us is a lower priority for the Committee.

Financial and manpower considerations

The Policy and Resources Committee have approved financial resources (£510,000) for the undertaking of a census in 2006. The Committee's Paper of 20th January this year identifies "savings of around £315,000 over the next 5 years, after reallocation of some of the original funding to other statistics priorities." Therefore, the financial and manpower considerations if this proposition is approved would appear to be that £315,000 will not be spent from the Committee's budget, and that the staff in the Statistics Unit would be engaged on the next census rather than on other activities.