

# STATES OF JERSEY



## STATES STRATEGIC PLAN 2009 – 2014 (P.52/2009): COMMENTS

---

Presented to the States on 28th May 2009  
by the Chairmen's Committee

---

STATES GREFFE

## COMMENTS

### Introduction

Article (18)(2)(e) of the States of Jersey Law 2005 indicates that the Strategic Plan of the Council of Ministers will be lodged “for referral to one or more Scrutiny Panels”.

### Scrutiny of the States Strategic Plan 2009 – 2014

It will be noticeable to the States Assembly that no amendments to or comments on the draft Strategic Plan have been brought to the States by any of the individual Scrutiny Panels. This is not due to the fact that Scrutiny members are fully supportive of the draft Plan nor to the fact that the Panels have not considered it; indeed all Panels have taken time to look at the Plan in an endeavour to fulfil their responsibilities.

Work has been undertaken on the draft Plan where it has been felt that some detail was apparent or available to scrutinize, however, the Chairmen’s Committee believes that the draft Plan is written in such general terms and at such a high level that it does not lend itself to the purpose of scrutiny.

This is evidenced in particular by the work of the Corporate Affairs Scrutiny Panel. Notwithstanding apparent difficulties, reviews have been undertaken into the Economic Stimulus Plan which relates to Priority 1 of the Plan “to support the Island community through the economic downturn”. Priority 5 to “promote sustainable population levels” has also been covered by the work of the Corporate Services Migration and Population Sub-Panel. Both these reviews will be covered by separate reports which will be presented to the States. However, it was apparent from Hearings that much detail remains to be decided or released, making scrutiny impracticable and impossible. This is not surprising given the indication from the Chief Minister that this Strategic Plan was intended to be broader and at a higher level than the previous Plan.

The Economic Affairs Scrutiny Panel also concurs with this view, and the Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel has communicated much the same opinion to the Chief Minister, commenting that due to the Plan being written in general terms, it lacks a cutting edge and detail which is needed to be able to scrutinize. The Panel believes that the critical role for Scrutiny should be at the Business Planning stage.

The Environment Panel believes that the best way to proceed would be to involve continuing consultation on plans which are well advanced, such as the Energy Policy and Liquid Waste Strategy, while avoiding setting down guidelines for new policies that are too rigid and lack the flexibility to respond to developing financial pressures. If Departments continue on their present spending trajectories, it seems that there is a serious danger of building structural deficit into States budgets.

There is also a deep concern that, given the current unstable economic climate, setting high level vision across the board may not be appropriate. The Chief Minister, in a submission to the Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel, referred to the Strategic Plan being seen as a “live” document. However, once the Plan has been approved by the Assembly, there would seem to be little opportunity for change. Given the most frequently used word in recent reports of the Fiscal Policy Panel is “uncertainty”, the Chairmen’s Committee believes that the draft Plan does not take the changing world into account. If approved by the States, this Plan will be “set in stone” and not permit the Council of Ministers to respond in the way it should to real and changing world

pressures, in a timely and imaginative manner and through the demonstration of leadership qualities. The obligation to follow the Plan, if approved, will mean that there will be no ability to “think outside the box” in responding creatively to new challenges to help the Island weather the worst effects of global recession.

### **Conclusion**

Ultimately, Scrutiny can offer no view as to whether the Plan itself should be rejected or approved, as this would not be feasible given the lack of detail available to scrutinize.

It does, however, look forward to the Annual Business Plans in which it is explained how each Department’s work fits in with each priority and how progress will be made and monitored. Maybe in that way, Panels’ involvement in the Strategic Plan will come at a point when more detailed and verifiable evidence is available for Panels and the public to assess delivery of the Strategic Plan.

Given these issues, the Committee believes that expectations for Panels’ involvement in scrutinizing the draft Strategic Plan should be reduced, given the lack of information available to scrutinize. Indeed, it may well be preferable that the Strategic Plan is the Council of Ministers’ “manifesto” for its future work and should be presented to the States rather than debated.