

MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT: PROPOSED REFORMS (P.122/2001) - FIFTH AMENDMENTS

**Lodged au Greffe on 11th September 2001
by Deputy A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier**



STATES OF JERSEY

STATES GREFFE

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In paragraph (a), sub-paragraph (iv) -

after the words arrangements insert the words , the production of a Hansard-type transcript of States' proceedings, public information services,

REPORT

I fully support the Policy and Resources Committee's proposals to reform our system of government, and recognise that their Proposition focuses on the core issues. As the Committee explains in section 8 of their Report, other recommendations in the Clothier Report can and will be addressed in due course.

However, given the central principles of the proposed reforms, as set out in section 5.2 of the Report, including the wish to make government closer and more responsive to the public, clear and consistent in its decision-making, and more accountable, it is essential, in my view, that the 'particular' aspects of the Assembly's procedure referred to in paragraph (a) (iv) of the proposition should include the requirements for two things: first, the production of a Hansard-type transcript of States' proceedings, and second, the provision of proper public information services.

The production of a 'Hansard' is recommendation 5.9 of the Clothier Report, repeated in stronger terms in 10.9. Whereas answers to Questions are transcribed in States' Minutes - although not the answers to Supplementary Questions, which are often more significant than the written answers themselves - there is no written record of States' proceedings to which members or the public can refer. The current system of tape recordings, or transcripts, being made available on request (though at a charge to members of the Public) is inadequate and must be replaced by an efficient transcription service. If we regard what is said in the Assembly as important, and if members are to be called to account for what they say in the Assembly, then nothing less than a Hansard-type transcript of States' proceedings will suffice.

The States' public information services are extremely poor. Chapter 10 of the Clothier Report, supported by the Mori Poll July 2000, suggests that significant improvements in our communication with the public are as vital as they are urgent. While the States is, in my view, and thanks to the efforts of the Jersey Information Society Commission amongst others, making good progress in the use of the internet to communicate with the public, our reliance on the Island's only newspaper for communicating matters of importance to the public, including the Gazette, is neither comprehensive nor independent. Proper public information services are essential if the Clothier Report's recommendation concerning better consultation is to be implemented; it would reduce the tendency of some Committees to seek the help of PR consultants in their efforts to place information in the public domain without the risk of its being distorted; it would not compel members of the public to buy the only available local newspaper in order to be informed about the activities of their government; and it would provide better value for money for States' departments' advertising.

Financial and manpower implications

The States Greffe already makes a number of staff available to monitor the tape recording of States' meetings, while additional resources are applied to the production of ad hoc tapes and transcripts. However, the production of a 'Hansard' would clearly involve additional resources over and above what are already required by the Greffe.

Some research has been undertaken by a number of bodies into the costs of the States' use of newspaper advertising and into the function of the Jersey Gazette. The cost of providing proper public information services, such as a regular information bulletin to all households, could be offset in part by the savings to be made in advertising costs across States' departments.

As with a number of proposals in P.122/2001, the costs and manpower implications of these proposals will need to be quantified and presented in the implementation plan for the reform of the Machinery of Government if this Amendment is accepted.