

STATES OF JERSEY



E-PETITIONS: INTRODUCTION

Lodged au Greffe on 8th December 2017
by the Privileges and Procedures Committee

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

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

to refer to their Act of 2nd May 2017, in which they agreed in principle that a system for enabling people to petition the Assembly by electronic means should be introduced, and –

- (a) to agree that an e-petitioning system should be introduced after the election in May 2018 in line with the detailed specification set out in the report accompanying this proposition;
- (b) that, as part of the new system, e-petitions attracting over 1,000 signatories should automatically be referred to the relevant department for a response, which must be made public, and that the Chairman of PPC should draw the Assembly's attention to e-petitions attracting over 5,000 signatories, with a view to those e-petitions being debated in committee, unless the Assembly decides that there is a reason not to do so;
- (c) to request the Privileges and Procedures Committee to take the steps necessary to introduce an e-petitioning system.

PRIVILEGES AND PROCEDURES COMMITTEE

REPORT

On 2nd May 2017, the Assembly approved a proposition lodged by Deputy S.M. Wickenden of St. Helier ([P.14/2017 – ‘E-Petitions’](#)), which sought in-principle agreement to an electronic system for petitioning the Assembly. The Privileges and Procedures Committee (“PPC”) was charged with bringing forward detailed proposals for implementing Deputy Wickenden’s proposition. It set up a sub-committee to consider this matter, chaired by the Connétable of St. Lawrence, and also comprising Deputy Wickenden and Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour. The sub-committee’s work was assisted by Messrs. Ian Webb and Marcus Ferbrache from the States’ I.S. Department; and also benefited from continuing advice from Ms. Anne-Marie Griffiths, Clerk of the UK House of Commons Petitions Committee.

The sub-committee’s proposal, which has been endorsed by PPC, is as follows –

- There should be a specific e-petition page on, or linked from, the States Assembly website, through which e-petitions can be submitted to the Assembly. The page should include guidance on the rules (including a sample e-petition), a contact phone number for assistance, and a video ‘how to’ guide.
- Petitioners should confirm that they are over 16 and resident in Jersey – applications from IP addresses outside Jersey should be rejected. Attachments to the petition should not be permitted. Mirroring the rules for paper petitions, e-petitions should be submitted in English or French, or if submitted in a different language, an English translation should be provided, which the States Greffe will verify.
- All applications for e-petitions should be moderated by the States Greffe to ensure that they comply with the rules which apply to the content of paper petitions. Therefore –
 - An e-petition must state the action or remedy which the petitioner seeks and that action or remedy must be one for which the States are responsible;
 - An e-petition must contain a statement of the reasons for, or the background to, the petition; and
 - An e-petition must be respectful and temperate in its language.
- The Greffe will offer advice and assistance to help bring applications within the rules of order.
- Once an application has been accepted, the petitioner should find 5 additional ‘signatories’ (i.e. by e-mail) in order for the e-petition to go live and be published on the e-petitions web-page (the petitioners should receive e-mail notice of ‘go live’). The page should list all of the live e-petitions and show the number of signatories. E-petitions should remain live for 6 months and then be closed down. There should be a weekly e-mail to Members informing them of the live petitions, the numbers of signatories, and new e-petitions.
- As with applications for petitions, signatories should only be permitted from Jersey IP addresses. For security reasons there should be a two-stage process for signing e-petitions where the signatory submits an e-mail address and then receives a link to verify the address and sign. There should be other ways of

upholding the integrity of the e-petitions system, such as ways of identifying and investigating unusual activity (e.g. multiple signatories at the same time from the same IP address).

- The Greffe should be able to e-mail signatories with information about the Assembly's work relating to an e-petition (e.g. a new Proposition or a Scrutiny Report), but signatories should have the option to opt out of such communications.
- An e-petition attracting 1,000 signatures should automatically be referred to the relevant department and receive a response, which would be published on the e-petitions web-page.
- An e-petition attracting 5,000 signatures should be drawn to the attention of Members by the Greffe. At the time for the arrangement of public business at the end of each States Sitting, the Chairman of PPC should offer the States the option of debating the e-petition in committee (although a debate may not always be appropriate – for example, if the subject of the e-petition has very recently been debated or is about to be debated).
- As all e-petitions shall be in the public domain, they shall be available to Scrutiny Panels, should they wish to inquire into the issues they raise.
- The e-petition system should include suitable analytics, such as the ability to analyse numbers of petitions and signatures by parish, although without significant additional expenditure being incurred in this area.

Development of the new system is estimated to take around 18 days, with some additional time required for testing and to create support materials such as the guidance. There would be no need at this stage for legislation or Standing Order changes. Subject to the wishes of the Assembly, PPC's intention would be to launch e-petitioning immediately after the election in May. It would be prudent to review e-petitioning after 12 months to see if the system was meeting the needs of the Public and if the procedures were operating smoothly.

It is likely to be desirable to link e-petitioning to a States digital ID, if and when one becomes available; and to connect e-petitioning with automatic electoral registration, which PPC hopes will be in place in the next couple of years. This would make it easier to ensure that petitioners and signatories were eligible to vote (or had a close connection with the Island), avoiding some of the disadvantages in terms of cost and security of relying on analysis of the IP addresses from which e-mailed applications and signatories are sent. PPC will seek to improve e-petitioning by taking advantage of these new opportunities as and when they arise.

Financial and manpower implications

Preliminary discussions about the feasibility and costs of creating an e-petitions system for Jersey have taken place with the firm responsible for the UK House of Commons' e-petitions system. On that basis, a budget of £25,000 is proposed for developing the new system, and it would be prudent to estimate a running cost of £15,000 per annum (covering, for example, hosting, licensing of software to analyse where signatories come from, and maintenance). These costs could be absorbed by the States Greffe during the remainder of the MTFP period. There may be a modest additional cost for project management during the development of the new system, although it is hoped that the work can be undertaken by existing staff. No additional staff are required to operate the e-petitions system.