

STATES OF JERSEY



CODE OF PRACTICE ON PUBLIC ACCESS TO OFFICIAL INFORMATION: REGISTER OF REPORTS

Lodged au Greffe on 23rd December 2003
by Deputy P.N. Troy of St. Brelade

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

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

to agree that, with effect from 1st March 2004 –

- (a) a central list be maintained at the States Bookshop of all reports prepared by States' departments which are capable of release to the public under the Code of Practice on Public Access to Official Information;
- (b)
 - (i) a central list be maintained at the States Bookshop of all third party reports or consultancy documents, either complete or in the course of preparation, which have been commissioned by departments and where costs have or will exceed the sum of £2,000 (two thousand pounds), together with their current status of availability;
 - (ii) the cost of items listed in (b)(i) be included on the list, and updated, as necessary, until the final cost is available;
 - (iii) any third-party reports or consultancy documents not published after a 5 year period from the date of the report, shall be automatically listed as publicly available, subject to the exemptions of the above Code;
- (c) the Privileges and Procedures Committee be charged to introduce the above initiative and to monitor its progress.

DEPUTY P.N. TROY OF ST. BRELADE

REPORT

On so many occasions we speak of more open government, and I bring this proposition to achieve an advance toward that noble concept.

A considerable number of internal and external reports are being produced by the States of Jersey. Any member of the Public interested in reviewing reports issued by Committees whether it be because of an interest in the affairs of the States of Jersey, or for research purposes, must find it extraordinarily difficult to obtain relevant documents because of the lack of a properly constituted list or index. In my opinion it would assist the public if a central list of reports and similar documents available to the Public were available for inspection at the States Bookshop and that it be updated regularly. The information could at a later date be placed on the States of Jersey website if so desired.

There is currently a list of "R.C.s" available, but that is inadequate as a reference source. Part (a) of the proposition would allow departments to list internal reports that they are content to release to the public on request, together with any official reports generally released to the media and public. This would, in my opinion, assist in provision of information, and further, several years after a report or study document has been issued it will remain listed as available to the Public. A situation that is totally contrary to the present – where it is extremely difficult to establish what reports are available to one as a member of the Public.

Part (a) is drafted so as to allow departments to consider which internal reports they consider suitable to be listed as available to the Public.

With the creation of a scrutiny process, it is also probable that the central list that I propose would be useful in the scrutiny function.

Part (b) of my amendment concerns third-party reports or consultancy documents costing in excess of £2,000. I propose that there is a requirement to publish the title of any report, the cost of such report and its "current status". This action would allow the Public to be aware of what issues are under review or investigation by States Departments even if they may not have access while reports are in preparation, or even when completed, because of privacy issues. Recently, we have seen States Committees being more open by publicly making reference to items under discussion or review, and in some instances, e.g. tax policy, we have seen consultation documents being issued (they of course would appear on the central list that I propose).

In defining "current status" I envisage that the department might use such terms as "In preparation", "For later publication", or "Confidential".

Publishing the costs of third-party reports commissioned would also make departments strict in their controls over consultants' costs.

Financial and manpower implications

The manpower implications are negligible for departments as they should already have internal records of reports being produced. The existing personnel at the States Bookshop should cope with any mirror increase in workload. Any other manpower effort required by the States Greffe should be minimal.

Assuming that existing personnel can perform all tasks, there are no financial implications.