

STATES OF JERSEY



STATES ASSEMBLY: STREAMING AND ONLINE ARCHIVE OF AUDIO (P.74/2015) – COMMENTS

Presented to the States on 14th July 2015
by the Privileges and Procedures Committee

STATES GREFFE

COMMENTS

The Privileges and Procedures Committee does not consider Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré of St. Lawrence's proposition to be an alternative to filming and broadcasting Sittings of the States Assembly.

Islanders are already able to listen to the proceedings of the States Assembly online via the local media. They are also able to access complete transcripts of the proceedings of the States on the States Assembly website. They are not, however, able to *see* the workings of States Assembly. It is for this reason that the Committee believes that the States should allow cameras into the States Chamber. Islanders should be able to see decisions being made. They should be able to watch debates and understand the arguments being made in the Assembly. The media should be able to use clips of those debates to provide immediacy and context to their media coverage.

Members are requested to consider Deputy Le Fondré's proposal to introduce audio playback entirely separately to the Committee's proposal to film and broadcast the proceedings of the States. The proposal to provide audio is simply a proposal to provide an audio archive alongside the Official Report. The proposal to introduce film is a proposal to re-engage with the Public and improve our dialogue with the people we represent.

The Committee's proposition is not about "filming ourselves". It is about opening the States Chamber to the Public. It is about allowing people, who are unable to attend debates because they are at work, to watch States Sittings at their own convenience. It is about providing those with disabilities who are currently unable to access the Public Gallery to watch those debates they are interested in. The Committee's proposal is intended to improve our engagement with members of the Public and the transparency of the decision-making process.

The Committee's proposal to film and broadcast our proceedings supports a culture of openness, transparency and accountability to the Public. Broadcasters will be able to use clips of debates in their news programmes and, for the first time, members of the Public will have easy access to the States Chamber. An online archive of footage of States Sittings will also be available. In an age where online newspapers have film clips on their news pages and it is possible to watch radio broadcasters as they broadcast from their studios, audio is no longer sufficient. The Public expects pictures, and information needs to be provided in a visual format.

Deputy Le Fondré argues that the Committee's proposal to introduce the filming and broadcast of States Sittings demonstrates a "complete lack of recognition by the Assembly of the very serious financial pressures that we face". The Committee is well aware of the financial pressures being faced and the difficult decisions that the States Assembly is being asked to take in the light of those pressures. It believes that the Public has a right to see those decisions being made.

Placing the audio of debates online will not serve to provide better access by the Public to States Sittings, nor will it serve to enhance the media coverage of States debates. The Scrutiny podcasts that are currently online receive very low listener levels, and the Committee is of the view that Islanders are not likely to log on to listen to archived audio of debates when the searchable text of the Official Report ('Hansard') is available. At present, the audio of States Sittings is archived by the States Greffe, and States Members are able to request a copy of the audio of a States

Sitting if they wish to. In addition, there is software available that can enable users to 'read' the text in Hansard and give an audio rendition of it.

After the Committee's presentation to States members regarding filming the proceedings of the States on 16th June 2015, the Committee asked Information Services to carry out an assessment of the work required to make recordings of the States Assembly Sittings available on the website on an on-demand basis.

Costings have been estimated for a facility that would enable members of the Public to visit the States Assembly website's Hansard page and access the audio recording relating to a Sitting as an alternative to reading the Hansard. If a Sitting had taken place, but the Hansard was not yet available, this would be indicated. If the audio for the Sitting was available in advance of the Hansard, the user would be able to play back the audio.

The cost to convert the audio files into the necessary format, to store them, and to provide the Internet bandwidth used in the playback of the audio has been estimated at £85 to £100 per month. The playback facility should be compatible with, but would not be optimised for, use on smartphones and tablets. The one-off cost of introducing audio playback was estimated at £11,000. An optional extra would be to enable the user to jump to a particular start position in the audio, based on an index of which member was speaking at the time. Subject to this being possible, the cost would be a further £5,000.

The estimated costings have been based on integrating software components and cloud services that the States of Jersey has access to, to create a bespoke system. It is harder to accurately estimate the cost on this basis, compared to buying an off-the-shelf, purpose-built service, which would then have to be integrated into the States Assembly website. A further contingency may therefore need to be added above the estimate as provision for any requirements that have not been anticipated in the analysis work.

It would be possible to retrospectively add audio to the site for previous Sittings. The cost would mainly be in the manpower from the States Greffe, though there would be a modest cost for the cloud storage. The purchase of a programme to enable live audio-streaming has been provisionally costed at £600. The programme would connect to the same audio feed that is used by the BBC to broadcast States Sittings.

The Scrutiny website currently includes podcasts of Scrutiny hearings. The number of 'hits' received for each hearing is negligible. Users download the podcast to their device, and their ability to play it back depends on the software held on their device. With streaming audio, the player would be built into the States Assembly website. Given the volume of output involved, due to the number of hours that the States Assembly sits for, Information Services does not consider that podcasting would be suitable for the provision of audio of States Sittings.