

STATES OF JERSEY



OPEN BORDERS ARRANGEMENTS

Lodged au Greffe on 7th July 2020
by Deputy J.H. Young of St. Brelade

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

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

- (1) to request the Ministers for Home Affairs and Health and Social Services to ensure that the arrangements and processes now in operation to open our borders to persons from outside the Bailiwick of Jersey are made as safe and effective as possible in protecting our community from the importation of the Covid-19 infection, and, in order to achieve this aim, to request that the following additional measures are introduced with immediate effect –
 - (a) all persons should receive a PCR test on entry to our borders and in the event of the capacity of our testing facility being exceeded by the number of persons arriving at any one-time, untested persons should be held in isolation until tested;
 - (b) that persons entering our borders should be required to self-isolate in the accommodation which they declared in their travel pre- registration, until they have received notification of a negative PCR test result;
 - (c) during the period of self-isolation required under paragraph (b) –
 - (i) persons should be required to travel directly to their accommodation and not break their journey, and
 - (ii) persons should be advised to travel to their accommodation by private vehicle if possible or otherwise travel by public transport;
- (2) to request the Minister for Infrastructure to arrange with the bus and other private operators to make available appropriate transport arrangements for persons requiring to self-isolate, when arriving at the airport or harbour, to limit infection risks;
- (3) to request the Minister for Health and Social Services to issue guidance to operators of registered tourist accommodation to manage the accommodation provided for those persons required to self-isolate to limit the risk of the infection entering the community; and
- (4) that these arrangements should remain in place for a minimum of 6 weeks and, after that point, may be renewed by a decision of the Minister for Health and Social Services; and the Minister may introduce additional measures at any point if he considers that the risk of infection require it.

DEPUTY J.H. YOUNG OF ST. BRELADE

REPORT

The opening of our borders after 3 months of severe restrictions of our individual freedoms, is very welcome. It will enable us to meet family members and friends out of the Island and begin to resume business and personal commitments elsewhere. Restoration of travel links permits people to visit the Island from the UK for similar reasons, at the same allow our tourism industry to begin to function albeit at low volumes. It is expected that this will be a slow build up as the UK has a much higher level of infection than Jersey.

We have accepted that the advice that this could be done safely minimising the risk of the infection re-entering our community and encouraged by the success of the pilot testing during the essential travel only period, hence the “Safe Travel” policy. States members were given only 5 days to consider the details of the proposed arrangements to implement this policy, an urgent scrutiny review took place which identified gaps in the safeguards resulting in an amendment to rectify them. It is of great regret that amendment was treated so dismissively by those promoting the policy in an emotional and highly charged debate; compounded by exaggerated claims of losing our air links.

The rejection of this amendment has resulted in deep division in our community. I personally received many angry comments from people who considered those entering our borders should be required to self-isolate until they receive a negative test result. People thought this simply “common sense”. This has especially affected many people who only recently have started to gain confidence to re-engage within our community and return to normal life, shopping, restaurants and even staycations.

The surprising news that we have identified 2 infected people in the first 2 days of safe travel has deepened the division in our community, as has the knowledge that the arrangements would have permitted these 2 infected persons to roam freely in our community for the 37 and 27 hours respectively before tests results. We have been so lucky that both these people were responsible, acted sensibly and remained in the residences where they are staying. They might not have been, they could have visited restaurants or even visited a care home or the hospital.

We are told by our health advisers this is a low risk. This may be true, but the impact of the risk occurring is potentially very great. At its worst it could result in the death of a vulnerable person, closedown of business premises, many other people being required to isolate and economic damage. This is too great to allow the risk to go unmanaged, to do so is gambling.

The proposition simply puts in place the additional safeguards in the procedure to close the gap and manages this risk. Its details draw upon those applied in other island communities. They are proportionate, and practical to operate. I have proposed they are introduced immediately and last for a short period only, unless they need to be renewed in 6 weeks or strengthened if the risks increase.

To those that argue the inconvenience is too great, my response is this is a small price to pay for the benefits of reopening our borders. We can reduce the time required for self-isolation before providing test results and cope with a higher volume of tests, when we acquire the planned local testing capability.

Financial and manpower statement

There will be additional financial and manpower implications arising from this proposition but it has not proved possible to quantify them at this stage. However, these measures are required for the protection of public health and funds can be provided from the additional resources identified for combating Covid-19 over the last 4 months.