

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE CHIEF MINISTER
BY DEPUTY G.P. SOUTHERN OF ST. HELIER**

ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY, 30th JANUARY 2007

Question

Following his statement during the appointment process as Chief Minister that “well-structured scrutiny is vital to the success of ministerial government”, and following the discovery by the Telecoms Review scrutiny sub-panel that certain Treasury meetings with parties contracted to advise on the implications of the sale were not minuted, what steps, if any, will the Chief Minister take to ensure at all Ministers and their Departments make a formal record of all significant meetings on policy matters so that the scrutiny function can have access to full information when undertaking a review?

Answer

Firstly, let me assure members that I remain fully committed to the view I expressed in my speech to the Assembly as candidate for Chief Minister that *‘well-structured and impartial scrutiny is vital to the success of ministerial government’*. To this end, Ministers are fully committed to cooperating with the Scrutiny Panels, and to providing them with the information they need to carry out their reviews. This information includes correspondence to Ministers, minutes of meetings attended by Ministers, and reports to Ministers, as well as the information that is conveyed directly to Scrutiny Panels by Ministers and officers.

The Deputy has asked whether the flow of information can be increased by imposing a requirement to ensure that a formal record is prepared of all significant meetings on policy matters. There would be difficulties associated with such a requirement. Firstly, the question does not appear to take note of the wide range of information that is already available to the Scrutiny Panels, and which is used by the Executive itself as the basis for policy development. Secondly, it is difficult to define what is meant by ‘significant’, and if a broad interpretation were given to this term it could be taken as encompassing a much larger number of meetings, both formal and informal, than are recorded at present. The production of a minute, meeting note, file note, or other formal record can take up a significant amount of officer time, often at a middle or senior management level, and the production of such a record would be difficult to justify in terms of the additional benefit. In any event, it should be noted that the development of a major policy will involve the calling of planning or update meetings which are informal and at which no major decisions are taken. This is part of the normal policy-making process and it would be extremely cumbersome and costly for records to be kept of such meetings. I can assure the Deputy that all meaningful and necessary information is provided to scrutiny as a matter of course, whether in the final reports, in the record of ministerial decisions, or other documents. I am completely satisfied that there is an acceptable and effective audit trail of documents leading to ministerial decisions, and I have no doubt that, combined with meetings with ministers and their officers, this is more than adequate to meet the legitimate interests of Scrutiny Panels.

In view of the above, therefore, I am not willing to introduce a requirement for there to be a formal record of all significant meetings on policy matters. I would however, want to re-emphasise that I and my colleagues remain willing to cooperate with the Scrutiny Panels, and indeed a meeting to discuss this very subject is currently being organised with the Chairmen’s Committee.