

**THE STATES OF DELIBERATION**  
**of the**  
**ISLAND OF GUERNSEY**

**STATES' ASSEMBLY & CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE**

**DATES OF STATES' MEETINGS – 2018-2019**

The States are asked to decide:-

Whether, after consideration of the attached policy letter, they are of the opinion:-

1. To agree that the dates on which States' Meetings shall be convened in the period from the 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2018 to the 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2019 shall be as follows:

2018

5th September

26th September

17th October

6th November – Budget

7th November

28th November

19th December

2019

23<sup>rd</sup> January

13<sup>th</sup> February

6<sup>th</sup> March

27th March

24<sup>th</sup> April

15<sup>th</sup> May

4th June – Policy & Resource Plan (progress and review)

25th June – Accounts

26th June

The above Propositions have been submitted to Her Majesty's Procureur for advice on any legal or constitutional implications.

**THE STATES OF DELIBERATION**  
**of the**  
**ISLAND OF GUERNSEY**

**STATES' ASSEMBLY & CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE**

**DATES OF STATES' MEETINGS – 2018-2019**

The Presiding Officer,  
States of Guernsey,  
Royal Court House,  
St Peter Port

17<sup>th</sup> August, 2017

Dear Sir,

**1 Executive summary**

- 1.1 Rule 1(1) of the Rules of Procedure of the States of Deliberation and their Committees ("the Rules") requires the States' Assembly & Constitution Committee "*[e]ach year in September... [to] submit a policy letter setting out the dates on which it proposes that States' Meetings should be convened in the period from the 1<sup>st</sup> of September of the following year to the 31<sup>st</sup> of August of the year after that, having first taken into account the dates of school terms and any other information which it considers relevant*". This policy letter explains the reasons why the States' Assembly & Constitution Committee ("the Committee") is proposing the dates of States' Meetings in the period between the 1<sup>st</sup> of September, 2018 and the 31<sup>st</sup> of August, 2019 which are set out in the propositions to which this policy letter is attached.

**2 Reasons for the dates proposed**

- 2.1 The proposed dates comply with Rule 1(2), which states: "*Ordinarily the first day of a Meeting shall be a Wednesday, except for Meetings held to consider the annual Budget of the States which shall begin on the first Tuesday in November, the States' Accounts which shall begin on a Tuesday before a Meeting in June, and a Policy & Resource Plan which shall begin on a Tuesday.*"
- 2.2 The proposed dates differ in one key respect from the schedule of dates covering the 2016/17 parliamentary 'session' which finished a few weeks ago. When, in 2015, the States agreed to change the pattern of their Meeting dates they envisaged Meetings being held generally every three weeks. However, for various reasons, in 2016/17 there were several occasions when the States met fortnightly. The Committee shares the view of many States' Members that this was less than ideal and thanks those Members who have expressed this view to the Committee and thereby helped the Committee to make necessary adjustments. The 2017/18 schedule of dates agreed

last September contains many fewer such fortnightly Meetings. The 2018/19 schedule of dates now being proposed contains no such fortnightly Meetings. Rather, the proposed dates fulfil the original expectation that, save for the summer and Christmas recesses, Meetings should be held generally every three weeks. There is one exception only, in April, 2019, when the interval between Meetings is longer.

- 2.3 The Committee is required to take into account the dates of school terms. The clear implication in the wording of the Rule is that as far as possible the States should meet during school terms. It has been possible to fulfil this objective save in one respect – the Meeting scheduled for the 24<sup>th</sup> of April, 2019 would begin the day before the start of the summer term in the States’ schools. This date has been chosen to avoid a gap between Meetings of longer than four weeks and to allow the normal pattern of meeting every three weeks to be maintained for the remainder of the parliamentary ‘session’.

### **3 Reasons not to return to the pre-May, 2016 arrangements**

- 3.1 For some time prior to May, 2016 States’ Meetings began on the last Wednesday of each month, excluding August when there was no Meeting and December when the Meeting was held earlier in the month to avoid the Christmas holiday period. There were numerous problems with this old pattern of Meetings which became more apparent over the years as the States tended to sit for longer hours and on more days. In the light of this experience the States decided to adopt the current arrangements instead. At the same time substantial changes were made to the procedures for submitting items to the States and for determining what business is going to be considered and when. These were conjunctive reforms with the intent of making the proceedings of the States and their committees more efficient, responsive and open.
- 3.2 In the past year, three deputies – Dr D de G De Lisle, A H Brouard and B J E Paint – separately invited the Committee to propose returning to the pre-May, 2016 arrangements. The Committee believes it would be a retrograde step to return to the old pattern of Meetings which was replaced so recently and for good reasons which remain as relevant today.
- 3.3 Under the old arrangements, as the volume of business before the States increased, occasionally there was a need for the States to convene on the Tuesday immediately before the last Wednesday of the month, but four-day sittings were disliked by many Members and should be avoided if possible. Under the present arrangements they can be avoided completely, save for the provisions of Rule 1(2), because the States are meeting slightly more frequently.
- 3.4 Under the old arrangements, where business was not concluded by the Friday, the Rules provided for the Meeting to be adjourned to the second Wednesday next following. Except for August, September and December, Members were advised to leave themselves available for these standard adjournment days. Increasingly, that did not happen and at relatively short notice Meetings were adjourned to a day other than the Wednesday a fortnight later, or the standard adjournment day was used and

Meetings went ahead when numerous Members were not present. It was often not possible to know if the adjournment days would be needed until towards the end of the monthly Meeting, which made planning ahead more difficult. Under the present arrangements – again because the States are meeting slightly more frequently – adjournment days are unnecessary: the Rules now provide for any business not completed at a Meeting simply to be held over until the next Meeting.

- 3.5 The present arrangements allow the States and their committees to discharge business more efficiently and, where necessary, speedily. Under the old arrangements, generally it took much longer for items submitted by committees to come before the States. For example, in 2015, the calendar of submission dates provided for a policy letter submitted on, say, the 6<sup>th</sup> of January to be published not until the 20<sup>th</sup> of March, ten-and-a-half weeks later, and for it to be considered by the States nearly six weeks after that. As the previous Committee's policy letter pointed out (Billet d'État XXII of 2015): *"A calendar which provides even for committees' relatively minor items not to be considered by the States for very nearly four months after they have been finalised and submitted is hardly likely to instil confidence in the capacity of the States to discharge their business efficiently."* Under the present arrangements, however, most of the time it is possible for a policy letter to be debated by the States five weeks after it has been submitted without States' Members having any less time to consider the content of the policy letter than they had under the old arrangements. This is partly because of the aforementioned changes which were made to the procedures for submitting items to the States and for determining what business is going to be considered and when, but is also because the States are meeting slightly more frequently. This emphasises that these procedural reforms introduced in May, 2016 were conjunctive: the current pattern of States' Meetings supports the 'new' procedures for submitting policy letters, requêtes, etc.
- 3.6 Meeting slightly more frequently, i.e. on a three-weekly rather than monthly cycle, provides an opportunity for the States better to manage the flow of business coming before them. Whether the States choose to make the most of the opportunity is another matter, but it is likely to be of particular use if the volume of business coming before the States increases, as it tends to as a States' term progresses.
- 3.7 As stated in the Executive Summary, when proposing the dates of States' Meetings the Committee must have *"... first taken into account the dates of school terms..."*. Under the old arrangements, when the States met on the last Wednesday of the month ten months of the year, it was not unusual for States' Meetings to clash with school holidays. It was put to the previous Committee that this did nothing to encourage people with children to stand for election to the States. The present Committee would not propose a schedule of States' Meeting dates which caused problems for the flow of business to the States simply to avoid convening during school holidays, but the current 'three-weekly' arrangements make it possible almost always to avoid such clashes, which the Committee considers advantageous.
- 3.8 It is worth noting the arrangements in the other Crown Dependencies. Except during recesses, in the Isle of Man the lower House is usually scheduled to meet weekly and

in Jersey the States' Assembly tends to meet fortnightly. This is not of any great significance except perhaps to offer a useful comparison to counter claims that the current 'three-weekly' arrangements in Guernsey are too onerous or create difficulties for managing diaries.

- 3.9 For all these reasons the Committee reiterates its advice to the States to retain the current pattern of Meetings and not to return to the more problematic pre-May, 2016 arrangements.

#### **4 Recommendation**

- 4.1 For the reasons set out above, the Committee recommends the States to approve the proposition to which this policy letter is attached, namely that the dates on which States' Meetings should be convened in the period from the 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2018 to the 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2019 should be as set out in that Proposition.

#### **5. Compliance with Rule 4**

- 5.1 In accordance with Rule 4(4) of the Rules, the proposition to which this policy letter is attached has the support of all members of the Committee.
- 5.2 In accordance with Rule 4(5) of the Rules, the Committee's duties and powers include advising the States on "*the practical functioning of the States of Deliberation*" and as set out above Rule 1(1) requires the Committee to submit this policy letter. The Committee has consulted the Policy & Resources Committee in respect of the proposed dates of States' Meetings referred to in Rule 1(2).

Yours faithfully,

Deputy M. J. Fallaize  
President

Deputy P. J. Roffey  
Vice-President

Deputy M. H. Dorey  
Deputy M. K. Le Clerc  
Deputy H. L. de Sausmarez