

**REPLY BY THE CHIEF MINISTER TO QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO QUESTIONS
ASKED PURSUANT TO RULE 6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
BY DEPUTY HEIDI SOULSBY**

Preamble

As you will recall, I wrote to you on 11 May 2014 requesting that the Policy Council consider the possibility of the States of Guernsey explicitly demonstrating its commitment to the Commonwealth Charter, which was agreed by all Heads of Government on 14 December 2012 and signed by Her Majesty the Queen, as Head of the Commonwealth, on 11 March 2013.

It sets out the values of the Commonwealth of Nations and commits the member states to the following: democracy; human rights; peace and security; tolerance, respect and understanding; freedom of expression; separation of powers; rule of law; good governance; sustainable development; environmental protection; access to health, education, food and shelter; gender equality; and the importance of young people and civil society.

The Commonwealth Charter, and more particularly the Parliamentary response to it, was the subject of the final plenary session of the CPA Conference in Johannesburg in 2013. At the end of the debate the following resolutions were passed;

‘CPA Member Parliaments must integrate the provisions of the Charter in their work. Parliaments should popularise, monitor and exercise oversight on the Executive for compliance.’

‘Commonwealth Parliamentarians and Parliaments have a duty to hold their governments to account if they fail to uphold the values of the Charter.’

‘Parliaments are at the heart of the democratic society and indispensable for popularising, implementing and enhancing the fundamental principles and values of the Commonwealth Charter’.

Further to my letter, you may be aware that Guernsey will be hosting the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians’ conference for the British Isles and Mediterranean Region in February next year. I am sure you will agree that it would be highly desirable that Guernsey expresses its commitment to the Charter before that conference takes place.

Question 1:

In light of your speech to the Royal Commonwealth Society in November last year stating it was your intention that Guernsey formally adopt the Commonwealth Charter this year, can you advise what work has been done to date to enable the necessary report to be submitted for approval by the States of Deliberation by the end of 2015?

Answer:

The Commonwealth Charter was signed by Her Majesty the Queen, as Head of the Commonwealth, on 11 March 2013; it is not signed by any other Head of State or Head of Government, although it

was agreed by all Commonwealth Heads of Government. The Charter does not introduce new commitments or obligations, but rather it consolidates the fundamental principles contained in a series of formal Declarations made by the Commonwealth over the last 65 years. The Charter has been laid before the UK Parliament and is recognised by them in a motion to take note of the Charter.

The Charter is aspirational in nature and not legally binding. What the Charter does do is set a benchmark of values and aspirations against which Commonwealth governments need to be making progress and is an important part of the Commonwealth modernisation process. The External Relations Group has considered this matter in March 2015 and is of the view that Guernsey will be judged against the commitments set out in the Charter whether it makes any express declaration in respect of the Charter or not. The Group agreed this matter should be placed before the Policy Council for consideration with a draft States report recommending that the Charter, and the principles contained therein, should be recognised by the States of Deliberation.

Question 2:

Can you also confirm when the report will be submitted for approval to the States of Deliberation?

Answer:

Subject to staff resources and approval from the Policy Council, I would anticipate a States Report on this matter to be laid before the States of Deliberation in quarter three of this year.

Date of Receipt of the Question: 9th March, 2015

Date of Reply: 23rd March, 2015