

MAKING THE STATES WORK FOR YOU

Your guide to the
Alderney Government

A message from the President

Dear Elector

Here we are approaching another election. Our small community enjoys the huge privilege of having our own Island parliament that would certainly be the envy of many small communities in large countries. Our position in the Bailiwick means that some Government services are managed by Guernsey but we can still have a strong influence on them.

As voters, we all carry a heavy responsibility for understanding how our system of Government works and how we can work together for the good of Alderney as a whole. This guide is designed to inform and clarify so that you can play your part in our representative democracy and help those you elect as your representatives to play theirs.

Stuart Trought
President, States of Alderney

Democracy in Alderney

The voters of Alderney have a wide range of experience of the Island's system of Government and how it works both in good times and in difficult times. Everybody wants effective and efficient Government that listens to your wishes and acts for the overall good of Alderney.

As a voter you can help to oil the wheels of Government by understanding how it works and dealing with your elected representatives and public servants with respect and positive intent. The guide therefore explains

- ▶ who does what in the States
- ▶ how you can influence what goes on in different meetings
- ▶ what level of detail different people in the States should be dealing with
- ▶ why some States business must remain confidential
- ▶ how you should raise a query or complaint about States actions
- ▶ how best to follow what is going on in the States.

Obviously, many of you will know much of this already but the guide is designed to fill some gaps and to help those who are relatively new to the system.

Good reading! – If it does not answer all your questions, just ask rather than making assumptions!



Who does what in the States?

For a member of the public it can be very confusing understanding who in the States is who and what they do. States work depends on a team of people who all do different jobs. If you want to get the best out of the States it pays to understand who is who and what they deal with. Here are some of the key jobs.

- ▶ the President is elected by voters to preside over States meetings and act as an impartial, non-political representative of the Island within the Bailiwick and further afield
- ▶ the Greffier manages the business of the Courts, oversees States meetings procedures and maintains recordkeeping of States debates

- ▶ Alderney States Members are elected by voters as your political representatives to work on and agree policy and broader direction for the Island. They should also keep in as close touch as possible with voters and other members of the public. States Members should leave day to day operational matters to the Civil Servants. Of course Members are right to scrutinise and monitor operations but they must stay within the boundaries of not doing Civil Servants' jobs for them.

- ▶ The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and other Civil Servants are paid employees of the States. They carry out all the operational jobs of States work in line with the policies decided by States Members. While they work closely with States Members as policies are formed and changed, Civil Servants must apply the rules as they are and cannot change those rules on their own. Civil Servants are also a valuable source of confidential advice for States Members when policy is being formed.

- ▶ The two Alderney representatives in the States of Guernsey are elected to be two out of forty in that Assembly with the same debating, Committee membership and voting rights as the thirty-eight Guernsey deputies

But, of course, one of the most important roles in States work is played by you, the voters. Your vote at each election decides who will be States Members. In the periods between elections you can influence future policy by talking to States Members about topical matters. They need to know your views to do their job. They need you to work in partnership with politicians to get the best results for Alderney. You can also help by dealing first with Civil Servants on simply operational matters.



Making your views known

Having your say

One-to-one conversations with States Members

The opinions of States Members and therefore their voting behaviour when decisions are taken are influenced partly by what they hear from voters. Of course, informal conversations in Victoria Street or in the shops are one way for you to have direct contact with their thoughts. Those private conversations have the advantage of you being able to speak frankly and without sharing your views with other voters.

You need to remember that yours is just one voice. However much you believe that others agree with you, you can never be sure. Therefore when you do have the opportunity to have a direct conversation with a States Member make sure you organise your opinions coolly and logically as well as making it quite clear how strongly you hold those opinions.

In Alderney we are privileged to have direct access to our politicians in a way that people in larger communities don't. States Members welcome discussion and exchanges of views. Reasoned argument is always better than simple criticism or abuse. Criticism without practical, constructive alternatives is not helpful.

The People's Meeting and the Open Forum

Any member of the public may attend a People's Meeting that is held before a States meeting. The timing and format of the People's Meeting is defined in law. The purpose of the meeting is to inform people of the States business to be discussed at the States meeting and to answer people's questions. The meeting is chaired by the Convener who is a Member of the States nominated by the President. Only members of the electorate may speak at the meeting. States Members should attend but should speak only if invited to by the Convener.

People's Meetings may become lively when people express strong opinions and the Convener must keep order. He/she has the authority to require people to leave the meeting or even to adjourn the meeting if order is not maintained. The CEO also attends People's Meetings to provide professional support for the Convenor and those States Members who will be proposing items at the States Assembly meeting.

More recently an Open Forum has been established as an informal complement to the People's Meeting. It is held following a short break after the legally defined meeting. It enables you to raise any issues or concerns in a public forum.

Emotion and passion can play a part in both meetings. Human nature means that States Members are more likely to listen to cool and logical argument. Respect for States Members and the difficult job they do will increase the chances of making your point. Resist the temptation to "play to the gallery" because, even if you get popular support, this may be at the expense of losing the support of the Members who have the vote.

The Alderney grapevine and social media

Of course, many political conversations take place in Alderney without the involvement of States Members. The exchanges influence the trend of public opinion. They can also contribute to a significant level of misinformation that in turn damages States efficiency as effort and resources are used up in countering incorrect understanding. If you want to have influence in this kind of conversation as a giver of information and opinion

- ▶ check your facts
- ▶ show respect to those who disagree
- ▶ express your views calmly.

If you want to make sound judgements about what you are hearing in this kind of conversation

- ▶ check the facts you are hearing
- ▶ ask yourself why a speaker may have particular opinions on this topic
- ▶ be prepared to express honest and respectful disagreement when appropriate.

States Assembly meetings

Once the point has been reached when the States are debating and deciding, States Members are "on their own". However, right up to the point where the States meeting or the preceding Policy and Finance Committee meeting is held, they are open to influence.

Often timing is important so if you want to influence the opinion of one of those with a vote you should take care to know when these meetings are taking place so that you know when to talk to your States Members. However, once States Members are actually making their way into the meeting, they are rarely in the right frame of mind to change direction at the last minute.

Dealing with the right person

We all want the States to work as efficiently as possible. After all, it is our taxes that pay for the services. In any democracy it is all too easy for too many people to get involved in sorting things out. It pays therefore to know who in the system should be dealing with what. This is especially important in a small community democracy where we tend to go to the person we know best first. That person may or may not be the most appropriate to deal with your query.

The simple rule is that States Members are elected to decide on policy while States employees are paid to do the operational work. Sounds easy enough! But what really is the difference between policy and operations? Why does it matter?

States services and transferred public services from Guernsey are delivered within a set of rules. Whether deciding about the precise age a child goes to school, what treatments are provided at Alderney hospital or what opening hours the pubs can operate, there are rules. Forming or changing those rules is a matter of policy. Simply applying and enforcing those rules is an operational matter. Policy decisions are made by politicians. Operational decisions are made by paid employees.

In a very few cases the rules allow for some discretion. When that is the case, politicians may or may not be asked their opinion. Generally they become involved if Civil Servants want reassurance that their application of the rules is politically acceptable.

Separating these two areas is important because

- ▶ in a democracy elected representatives should decide on policy
- ▶ if the wrong people become involved it leads to confusion and inefficiency.

So if you want to influence States actions in some way ask yourself this question - am I trying to change the rules or to question how they are applied?

If you are trying to change the rules it is a policy matter and you should talk to a politician. If you are questioning how rules are applied then that is an operational matter and you should deal with a States employee.



Why is so much States business kept secret?

Democratic Government tries to be as open and transparent as possible. There is a strong reason for this in that Government actions are taken on behalf of the people and therefore in most areas it is felt that people have a right to know. That right cannot be absolute – Why? – Because in some situations confidentiality is the correct path to follow.

There are three most common situations in which confidentiality can be defended

- ▶ when an individual person's or organisation's rights to privacy would be overridden by breaking confidentiality
- ▶ when the States could suffer financial or legal penalties if broken confidentiality prevents them from driving the best commercial deal for taxpayers
- ▶ when the reputation of Alderney more broadly could be damaged if certain information is not managed in a controlled manner

Respect these exceptions and recognise that they contribute to effective and efficient government.

Personal and organisational privacy rights

The States as an organisation has many individual relationships with people, commercial companies and other organisations. Each one of those parties can reasonably expect details about themselves and their dealings with the States to remain hidden from the public gaze. Sometimes of course that right is trumped by the need for inappropriate dealings or behaviour to be made public. Generally those situations are covered by law. However, if there is any doubt about whether a matter concerning an individual or organisation should become public it is normally better to assume that it should not unless it can positively be shown that it is in the public interest to do so.

Commercial or legal confidentiality

Using your taxpayers money, the States gets involved in many commercial relationships and deals that form legal relationships with obligations on both parties. If confidentiality is broken in either case it can simply cost the States (and therefore taxpayers) a lot of money. For this reason, however much curiosity there is by the public, some information and especially financial details must remain confidential.

Reputational risk

This is probably the most difficult area of confidentiality. Governments can be accused of "cover-ups" and that is a risk in itself. However, the timing and level of detail in the release of information can have significant effects on the reputation that Alderney enjoys in the outside world and thus on its future prosperity.

The public interest – a permanent balancing act?

There will always be pressure on Governments to be transparent. That pressure increases with the greater influence of social media. At the centre of confidentiality is the saying that "something is of interest to the public is not the same as saying that disclosure must be in the public interest." Accept that confidentiality is right in many situations and that simply because some information remains hidden that does not automatically suggest any wrongdoing.



Keeping in touch

Very often, the famous Alderney grapevine suggests that either “Nothing is happening in the States,” or that “Secret and inappropriate plans are being formed.” The reasons for confidentiality have already been explored but how can you make sure you stay in touch as much as possible?

The most reliable sources of information about the States are

- ▶ official States documents
- ▶ the States of Alderney website
- ▶ one-to-one conversations with people “in the know.”

Official States documents

The main documents in the public domain are

- ▶ the Billet d’Etat published before a States meeting to set the agenda and show the reports backing up the proposals
- ▶ the Hansard report recording the debate held and decisions made by the States
- ▶ the agendas of upcoming Committee meetings that are published on the States Notice Boards at the Island Hall and Court Office as well as on the website together with the resolutions/minutes of meetings once approved by the relevant Committee.

From time to time, the States and Guernsey States Committees providing transferred services also publish information documents that are available from the States Office.

Alderney States website (Alderney.gov.gg)

The website gives access to a wealth of information about the States. For those who are comfortable using the Internet it is probably the first place you should go for information about States matters.

One-to-one conversations with people “in the know”

Democracy in a small community has many advantages. One of those is that your democratic representatives, the Members of the States, should be easily accessible and very willing to share information that is in the public domain and to listen to your views. There are others, especially in the business community, who are well informed and deal with States matters regularly.

You must be the person to judge whose information is informed and reliable. However, in our tight community we all get used to making that judgement. So long as you recognise who is reliable and accept that some information will remain confidential, you should find much information about the States and what is going on is available through everyday conversations with the right people.

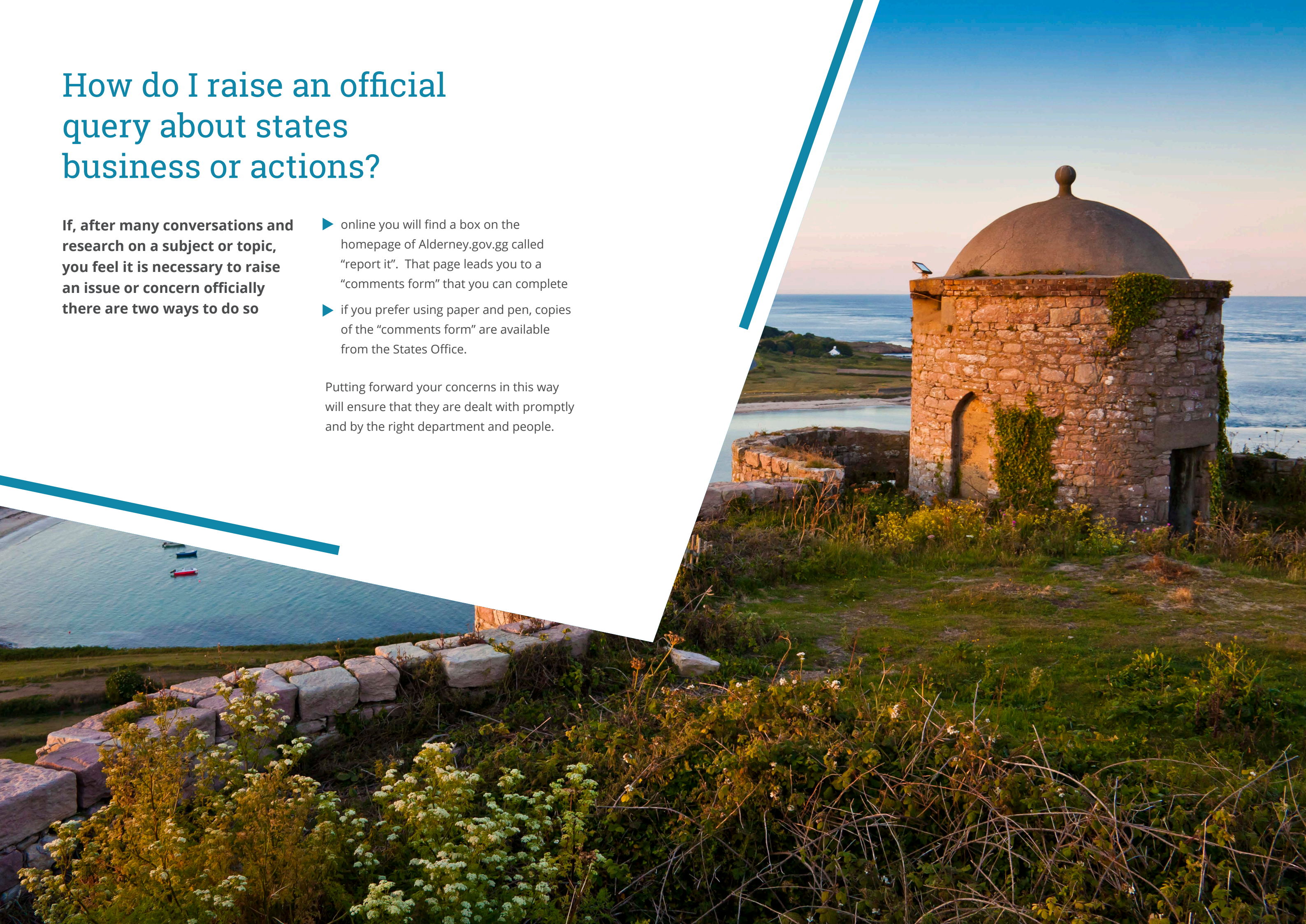


How do I raise an official query about states business or actions?

If, after many conversations and research on a subject or topic, you feel it is necessary to raise an issue or concern officially there are two ways to do so

- ▶ online you will find a box on the homepage of Alderney.gov.gg called "report it". That page leads you to a "comments form" that you can complete
- ▶ if you prefer using paper and pen, copies of the "comments form" are available from the States Office.

Putting forward your concerns in this way will ensure that they are dealt with promptly and by the right department and people.



Alderney States. Working with you. Working for you!

We live in a changing and uncertain world. Alderney, in common with other small independent communities, faces many challenges.

We need the best possible teamwork across all of our population and the States to survive and prosper.

Working together, we can do it.