



States of
Alderney

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Alderney opens its decision-making process to the public for a trial period

From next month, Alderney's residents will be able to attend meetings of the Policy & Finance and General Services Committees which until now have been held behind closed doors.

Currently only the Building & Development Control Committee and the full States meetings are open to the public.

But as part of the open government objectives outlined in the recently approved Island Plan, all full committees will be open to the public and media for a trial period of six months. This enables decision making to be clear for the public to see and is similar to the UK which has long held open committee meetings.

Committee agendas will be divided into Part A, open to the public for observation only, and Part B dealing with confidential matters of commercial or personal sensitivity for which the public will be asked to leave.

In a further move towards greater public scrutiny, decisions at these committees will be by 'named votes' so that the electorate knows how Members have voted where there is a split vote on specific issues. The exception would be when a committee decides a named vote is unnecessary, for example when the decision is unanimous.

The proposals brought by Ian Carter, P&F Deputy Chairman, required amendments to the Rules of Procedure which were unanimously agreed at the full States meeting on May 18. That means GSC and P&F will be open to the public on June 7th (9.30 am) and 27th (9 am) respectively.

Public attendance will follow the same guidelines as the full States and BDCC meetings for observation without participation, where good order and decorum are expected and maintained.

Arrangements for the venue and public seating are currently being worked on by the Civil Service and will be announced in due course.

Mr Carter told the States meeting the move was an important aspect of the Island Plan, a document to which many Islanders contributed and who justifiably expect delivery. He added:

“A consequence of this proposal is that the agenda for a meeting does have to be split in two as there are areas of sensitivity which would not be appropriate in the public domain. For example, the commercial tendering or procurement exercises that go on from time to time regarding services for the public. The rationale for putting an item into the confidential part of the meeting is exactly as it is currently where confidential items are not discussed or minuted in the public domain. It should be emphasised that placing an item into the confidential part of the meeting would be the exception rather than the rule.

“It will initially feel different and there will need to be some reflection as we go but I feel that by bringing the other major committees into the public domain just like BDCC and the Full States that this is a step forward for the public benefit. Likewise, by formally recording votes of members by name. It is a move towards greater transparency of decision making and local democracy.”

GSC Chairman Boyd Kelly commented:

“I strongly support the proposals as hopefully these issues will in some way assist to inform [the public], sharpen the pencils of Members and allow the people of Alderney to hear what their elected members discuss. I do accept there are guaranteed to be items at each meeting that are confidential and not suitable for open debate. This is not a way of hiding anything but for protecting personnel and commercial information, as we do at the moment with confidential annexures. I equally accept that particularly in the early stages it won't be easy and mistakes may be made, as they are at present, but I honestly and fervently believe as we all apparently espouse open government this pilot scheme must be trialled.”

Answering a question from fellow Member Alex Snowdon, Bill Abel, Chairman of P&F, said the move would allow prospective States members who might be considering standing for election in November to understand some of the 'nitty gritty' processes required and the nature of the many issues that these committees need to consider.

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