

**REPLY BY THE PRESIDENT OF
THE COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION, SPORT & CULTURE
TO QUESTIONS ASKED PURSUANT TO RULE 14 OF THE RULES OF
PROCEDURE BY DEPUTY LESTER QUERPEL**

Question 1

We often hear it said within the States, that Deputies shouldn't get involved in the 'operational matters' of States departments, i.e. procedures and processes. So with that in mind, are you able to tell me your committees' approach to that issue please?

Answer 1

The Committee recognises that States Members carry out a variety of roles: in the States of Deliberation they are parliamentarians, governing the island at a strategic policy level on behalf of its residents; many are also members of the committees of the States of Deliberation, forming the government with delegated authority in respect of the fulfilment of their mandates; and they are also People's Deputies, acting on behalf of, and advocating for, islanders on specific issues brought to their attention.

The extent to which it is appropriate to be concerned with 'operational matters' will vary depending on which of the above functions a States Member is carrying out. Some committees or authorities require an involvement in operational matters, such as the Development & Planning Authority, others do not and do not benefit from such involvement.

Amongst the areas of focus for a Deputy, as an island politician, is setting strategic direction to develop policies to address the needs and challenges of islanders. Their job is not to carry out the work to deliver those policies or the actions underlying them. The States of Guernsey employs people who have the requisite knowledge and skills to deliver operational functions and States Members should not be undermining that relationship or the principle of subsidiarity by attempting to do work that they are not qualified, nor employed, to do. As the President of the Committee, I strongly encourage this approach with regards to the work that we do.

Question 2

Do members of your committee get involved in the 'operational matters' of your department?

Answer 2

The Committee *for* Education, Sport & Culture has a large mandate, with many operational components to it. The Committee understands well the general principle of subsidiarity, as set out in the Rules of Procedure for the States of Deliberation and their Committees, which state:

Generally the principle of subsidiarity should apply: as far as possible matters ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest or least centralised competent authority.

Mindful of this, the Committee very much sees its role as being at a strategic policy-setting level and has performed its duties accordingly. It also provides strategic oversight, monitoring the efficacy of its policies and the use of resources via regular reports, including reports on the progress of operational work plans, and those that measure performance. In this way, the Committee challenges and holds its senior leaders to account for the delivery of services, provides strategic direction and explores with them strategic policy revisions as necessary.

In line with the commitments of the Education Strategy, the Committee empowers leaders to lead, and this means affording Headteachers & Principals autonomy over the day-to-day running of their settings. During the pilot phase of the Committee's governance policy proposals, it has necessarily taken an active governance role over each setting, but intends, subject to the States of Deliberation's approval, to step away from this settings-level governance role. This is because it feels strongly that this 'local-level' governance should be carried out by those most invested in the setting, that is to say, its staff, its parents/students and its local and/or business community; with the Committee again playing an holistic strategic oversight and policy-making/monitoring role.

The Committee adopts a consistent approach with regard to its sports, cultural and heritage facilities and assets, where again it takes a strategic policy and oversight role, recognising the expertise of its senior officers in their respective professional leadership roles. Where the Committee has commissioned outside agencies to meet some of its obligations with the support of grant funding, it again takes an 'arms-length' approach, largely monitoring outputs against Service Level Agreements with Key Performance Indicators.

It must be noted that Committee Members cannot and should not ignore operational matters, it is the success or not of these which can demonstrate the impact of the overarching policies that committees make. There are occasions where an operational matter arises which seeks the attention of a Committee Member, treating these as a test of the policy within which it sits or as an isolated issue requiring the attention of the appropriate operational lead, is an approach that is encouraged on, and by, this Committee, as opposed to Member's potentially undermining senior leaders charged with the oversight of these matters, or getting involved with matters they are unqualified or inexperienced to deal with.

Question 3

Do you/would you, and your committee object, whenever/if ever, Deputies do/did try to get involved in the 'operational matters' of your committee?

Answer 3

In all instances, if an issue is identified, the Committee's position is that it should first be addressed at the lowest possible level, and it believes its position in this regard is consistent with the States of Deliberation's general principle of subsidiarity.

For example, it is not logical for the Committee or one of its Members to become involved if approached by a member of the community with a concern over the booking of a squash court at Beau Sejour Leisure Centre, or if a parent disagrees with the application of the uniform policy at their child's school. Such matters must, in the first instance, be referred to, and addressed at, the 'local' level, engaging managers/leaders close to the matter at hand, and following the relevant complaints policy and procedures if necessary.

Should a member of the community feel unable to engage in this way, then a Deputy might support them with that process, and might, ultimately, advocate on their behalf for a policy change.

Some issues arising from operational matters can highlight a failure of policy in some way. It is important therefore to encourage Members to receive reports of operational matters which do not meet the individual needs islanders with an open mind and to seek the appropriate support to assist resolution. This is done by understanding the limitations of an individual's capacity, in terms of knowledge, skill and access to certain resources and having the collegiate and collaborative motivation to sincerely assist by signposting them to the appropriate service area, operational leader or operational process and, if necessary, supporting them to engage in solution-focused dialogue always mindful of the role of a politician.

Date of receipt of the Question: 1st December 2024
Date of Reply: 16th December 2024