

# Give Us a Sensible Government Structure – But Not Yet!

*(Apologies to St Augustine)*

Analysis and Information from GPEG



✉ [info@gpeg.org.gg](mailto:info@gpeg.org.gg)  
🌐 [www.gpeg.org.gg](http://www.gpeg.org.gg)

## Give Us a Sensible Government Structure – But Not Yet! (Apologies to St Augustine)

In another failure of our government to deliver, we recently saw the implosion of the sub-committee set up to define policy suggestions on improving the structure of our government to be made to our central, and senior, Policy and Resources (P & R) Committee. After 3 years where virtually all the members of P & R were engaged at some time, the process closed down.

A masterpiece of can kicking – it will be at least 5 years before a new structure can now be implemented – the members of the committee attribute the failure of the sub-committee to various stated reasons ranging from diverting Heidi from the pursuit of being Chief Minister to a desire by some less confident States members not to face a new system that would not re-elect them!

Aurigny, capital spending overruns, inability to sort out tax and spending issues, IT monster spends, enriching consultants, planning, housing – the list goes on. Whatever your views the outcomes are not symptomatic of an effective government structure.

There is no great panacea to generate perfect governments – horrible structures run by good people can give great results and excellent structures run by crooks or incompetents can be a disaster. Singapore under the effective dictatorship of Lee Kuan Yew prospered mightily; but most dictatorships are not run by nice people.

Afghanistan, Bahrain, Kuwait, Niue (an Alderney sized economy off New Zealand), Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tuvalu, the UAE and the Vatican are all of the globe's jurisdictions that lack political parties (according to Wikipedia). And then there is Guernsey.

It must be said that quite a few other jurisdictions lack competitive party politics – eg Russia and China, but at least there is gesture of party politics.

So, Guernsey is swimming against the global tide by not having party politics. Evolution seems to favour party politics.

Benefits would accrue - electors would have an effective choice of policies to vote for rather than getting a large book of vote-seeking candidates to crawl through – not that many voters do. It's not as if anyone notices if the elected members do not follow their promises. Political parties could make Deputies more accountable in office, as well as setting a clear and cohesive policy platform for voters.

Learning from past attempts to establish political parties is going to be important. It's notable that attempts were made to set up parties prior to the 2016 election and the 2020 election. At both times, parties were formed apparently for election purposes, only for them to collapse miserably shortly after the elections.

The island currently says it has "consensus" government. This simply means that every States' member can vote any way they like on any matter without any sanction. Party politics works on the theory that being a party member will overall get more of what the member wants enacted than he/she would do as an independent member – so you vote with the party even where you would not really think it is doing the right thing on a particular topic.

This is a fundamental change to the consensus system in order to make it a party system. If they are members of political parties, Deputies cannot have the unfettered freedom to vote independently.

Hopefully parties would enforce some basic quality control over candidates – totally lacking in the current system. It is widely agreed that our current States members vary from being pretty good to dire.

The current system greatly benefits minority interests as quite extreme candidates stand an excellent chance of election. Interest groups exert disproportionate power by threatening to get voters not to vote for individuals' re-election.

But above all a party with majority control (if need be, in coalition) can generally act more rapidly - things get done – or not. In Guernsey terms, you do not need endless revisitations of the runway extension issue.

An effective opposition party will likely be quicker and cheaper than a scrutiny system to expose error and hidden issues.

As things are, we have to wait post-election for government committees to be formed and establish a policy agenda – adding another at least 18 months delay (based on past experience). Planning seems to have managed not to generate a clear set of policies in the entirety of the current States.

We need some things in place to see effective parties:

A political party needs to have (this list is not exhaustive):

- sensible policies and political ideologies to attract enough generally like-minded people (whether they stand for office or not) to be a viable party in government and outside

- a leader – the largest party not in Government should nominate a Leader of the Opposition who should have good access to civil servants
- organisation structure
- control of the party, with disciplines to deter wayward members
- appropriate and fair structures to deal with conduct issues of all kinds
- funding

Funding (modest) is going to be needed in order to help parties be more effective at their job. Money would help research so that policy formation could be better performed for the benefit of voters.

Most democracies are run by coalitions of parties arising from proportional representation in some form. The UK is unusual with its constituencies and first past the post system – probably we should be going to some variant of proportional representation if we want effective party politics.

We should give party politics a proper try!

It seems likely that most possible changes to our current government structure would be for the good. Sad.