

Thursday 17 March 2016

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Comptroller and Auditor General issues latest report

Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) Karen McConnell has today (17 March 2016) published her report on Freedom of Information (Fol).

Freedom of Information (Fol) legislation has been introduced by many governments as a means of promoting transparency and accountability. But the introduction of such legislation - with duties on government to respond to individuals requesting information within specified timetables - requires good records management, appropriate policies, good procedures, systems and guidance and appropriate training of staff involved. Following the coming into force of Fol legislation in Jersey on 1 January 2015, the C&AG undertook a review looking at the effectiveness of the arrangements put in place by the States.

Karen McConnell found the States of Jersey responded well and met the requirements of the legislation. Archiving - so that government departments know what information they retain and where - was improved. However searching out information and responding to Fol requests efficiently is dependent upon good data and records management and more needs to be done in these areas.

The functions of the central Fol Unit have recently transferred to the Communications Unit of the Chief Minister's Department which now includes two members of staff dedicated to Fol. At the time of this review a detailed plan had not been developed that set out where respective roles and responsibilities would lie in the future.

The C&AG concluded that in some areas, such as information systems, training and understanding costs, there is significant work to do. The reduction in the resources for the central Fol team, and therefore the support for departmental staff, means that:

- there is a need for a clear and documented understanding of the split of responsibilities between 'the centre' and the departments;
- clarity in processes, good guidance and effective training are even more important; and
- there is a risk that corporate learning from Fol handling is lost.



Karen McConnell said:

“The weaknesses I have identified in underlying records management reinforce my findings from other reviews on management information and overlap with my report on information security. Although the States have met the requirements of FoI legislation, the common themes of a lack of awareness of cost, poor quality of data and weak records management - linked in part to aged and inadequate systems - are hindering progress.”

The report will be available on the Jersey Audit Office’s website from 0930 on 17 March at (www.jerseyauditoffice.je).

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For further information, please contact:

Rozena Pedley

M: 00 44 7797 733553 / T: 00 44 1534 629800

E: rozena.pedley@jerseyauditoffice.je



Notes to Editors:

- The Office of Comptroller and Auditor General ('C&AG') was established in 2005 and operates under the Comptroller and Auditor General (Jersey) Law 2014
- The remit of the C&AG includes the audit of financial statements and wider consideration of public funds, often expressed as 'value for money'
- Karen McConnell was appointed in 2013 and the term of office was extended in 2014 to December 2019.
- Formerly of the UK Audit Commission ('the Commission'), Karen held a variety of senior positions, including leading the Audit Practice
- The Office of Comptroller & Auditor General is known as the 'Jersey Audit Office'
- Contact details are: Lincoln Chambers (First Floor), 31 Broad Street, St Helier JE2 3RR T:716800 / E: enquiries@jerseyauditoffice.je

Comptroller and Auditor General's Policy regarding issue of reports and contact with the media:

- Press releases will be published by the Jersey Audit Office to accompany the publication of each report
- Embargo times will be set at 0001 hours on day of publication - for both press releases, reports, and all other information pertaining to the publication date
- Other press releases/ statements may be made on an occasional basis, and not necessarily dependent upon the publication of a report. They will be subject to the same embargoes
- With any report issued, the opportunity is available for members of the press to request factual clarification, by email, of points contained therein
- Any comments made additional to any reports, will be included within any press release(s) as issued by the Jersey Audit Office, in the form of a quotation by the C&AG. These comments will be available for publication; but there will not be any supplementary live or pre-recorded interviews offered or undertaken by either Karen McConnell or the employees of the Jersey Audit Office
- The C&AG is prepared, on an occasional basis, to provide articles for publication in the local media, following a specific request and consideration of the relevant topic
- All public information, including press releases and reports, are accessible on the Jersey Audit Office website at www.jerseyauditoffice.je

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