Royal Court of Jersey
Viscount's Department

2 November 2026

Deputy Victoria Li
Chair
Children Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel
States Assembly

BY EMAIL

c/o k.camera2@gov.je

Dear Deputy Li

Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel, Proposed Budget 2027 – 2030 Review

Thank you for your letter of 15 October requesting views on the funding proposed for the Viscount's Department.

Proposed Budget 2027 – 2030

The additional funding proposed in the 2027 Budget relates directly and solely to the new Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWAG) legislation approved by the States Assembly. This legislation is expected to result in an uplift in the number of criminal cases within the Jersey Court Service. The anticipated impact on the Viscount's Department was calculated based on the number of new offences the States of Jersey Police estimated would result from the new legislation and the number of additional criminal cases per annum that the Law Officers' Department predicted it would need to manage. Given that these are estimated forecasts, there is an unavoidable level of uncertainty about the exact impact of the VAWAG legislation on the Viscount's Department and, if the number of VAWAG court cases pursued in the courts is significantly higher than anticipated, additional resource would be required.

The proposed funding for the Viscount's Department will provide for one additional court officer, one additional court services officer and some additional expenses related to running more jury trials (for example providing subsistence for jurors).

The Viscount's Department currently employs two dedicated court officers. These are Viscount Substitutes who attend sittings of all courts where required (the Royal Court, Magistrate's Court, Youth Court and the Court of Appeal) and who undertake all the related procedures, including jury custodianship.

The Viscount's Department also administers the jury selection process, ensuring that there are sufficient jurors to sit at each jury trial. This is handled on a day-to-day basis by court services officers who form part of the small Coroner and Court Services Team.

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Both these workstreams are already operating at full capacity. The two new posts proposed will allow the Department to absorb the predicted increase in workload associated with the VAWAG legislation as currently forecast.

I have set out below responses to some of the other areas about which you have requested feedback.

Are there areas experiencing significant growth?

All of the various and diverse workstreams of the Viscount's Department have experienced significant growth in recent years.

Coronial Service
The number of inquests is increasing year on year. In 2021, 51 inquests were completed and 33 cases were carried forward. In 2025, 100 inquests were completed and 65 cases carried forward. This year to-date, 72 inquests have been completed, with approximately 60 cases currently scheduled to be carried over to next year. This does not include any potential inquests related to the review of rheumatology treatment, nor the inquests to be scheduled following the completion of criminal proceedings in relation to the Haut du Mont explosion.

The greater complexity of deaths in Jersey in recent years means that a larger number require detailed investigation and oversight resulting in longer inquests with more taking place over several days.

To help manage this increase in the number and complexity of inquests and to build additional resilience within the Department, the Viscount appointed an Assistant Viscount/Coroner in August 2025. This part-time post has proven crucial to allowing the Department to respond to the rising workloads in the coronial field.

Insolvencies, Delegates and Saisies Judiciaire
Over the last few years, the Department has taken on more statutory responsibilities relating to Insolvency and Delegates.

From 2022, the Viscount assumed responsibility for investigating concerns and complaints raised in respect of attorneys and delegates acting under Lasting Powers of Attorney and Delegate appointments. To-date, approximately 75 such concerns have been received and have been or are currently being investigated.

In March 2022, the Viscount was tasked with administering and making decisions on the suitability of accountants and insolvency professionals applying on an annual basis to be approved liquidators and insolvency administrators. The Viscount also has a supervisory / regulatory function in this regard. To-date, there are 58 insolvency professionals certified as approved liquidators and insolvency administrators.

In October 2023, the Viscount took on responsibility for administering small estates where a deceased person was domiciled in Jersey and where the gross value of their worldwide movable estate does not exceed £30,000.

There has also been an increase in the workload of long-standing areas of responsibility and complexity of cases. For example:

- The Viscount can be appointed by the court as delegate of last resort for property and affairs. The number of delegates administered by the Viscount is growing. At the end of 2021, the Viscount was administering 38 delegate clients. The Viscount is currently administering 90 delegate clients and dealing with five deceased estates.

- The Department carries out insolvency checks on entities at the request of law firms. We are seeing an increase in the number of insolvency searches carried out on a daily basis. In 2022, the insolvency team conducted 18,556 searches. We anticipate that the final figure for 2026 will be in the region of 22,000 searches.

- At 31 December 2021, the Viscount was administering 10 Saisies Judiciaire and 7 other proceeds of crime court and civil orders involving seized asset management totalling approximately £43.2 million. Over the subsequent five-year period, there has been a substantial increase in the number of Saisies Judiciaire and the value of assets seized and managed. At 31 December 2025, the total value of assets held by the Viscount under seizure had risen to approximately £7.9 billion, with 26 active Saisies Judiciaire and 9 other proceeds of crime court orders.

Enforcement

The workload of the Department's Enforcement team is also increasing. In particular, the number of court judgments to be enforced and Service of Process requests are rising, with 595 judgments in 2021 compared to 714 in 2025 and 462 process served in 2021 compared to 502 last year.

In addition to these 'business as usual' activities, there have been several unexpected and exceptional matters affecting the work of the Department in recent years: the largest ever empanelment of a jury in Jersey for the recent Haut Du Mont gas explosion trial; disaster victim identification process and the mass fatality co-ordination group emergency response chaired by me as coroner in relation to the Haut Du Mont gas explosion; the largest ever seizure of assets (in monetary terms) related to the Roman Abramovich Saisie Judiciaire; and the investigation of 30+ reported deaths relating to rheumatology treatment.

<u>Does the Department have sufficient resources to undertake enforcement functions effectively?</u>

As it stands, the Department has sufficient resources to undertake enforcement functions effectively. We have recently restructured the enforcement and insolvency teams to create greater resilience and have ongoing programmes in place to improve processes and knowledge management across the Department.

However, the Department is working to maximum capacity in most areas and if there were to be significant changes that affected the workload of the Department, there is a clear risk that additional resource would be required. We continue to carefully monitor the likely impact of developments so that we can plan our resourcing needs accordingly.

As an Accountable Officer I have a duty to ensure that the public resources under my control are used economically, efficiently and effectively. The need to consider value for money while delivering a high standard of service is particularly crucial at a time when the public purse is under pressure. At the request of the Treasury Minister, I identified a proposed saving of £40,000 for the 2027 budget. However, as evidenced above, the Viscount's Department continues to manage a growing workload, and it is unfeasible that it would be able to deliver further cost savings to the core budget while providing the current level of service.

<u>How closely does the Department work with States of Jersey Police, the Viscount's Department and the Court Service to manage increasing demand?</u>

As your letter identifies, good communication across the judicial system is vital and the Viscount's Department works closely with the Judicial Greffe to manage increasing demand. The two departments form the Jersey Court Service and share a Chief Operating Officer, a Head of Finance and an Operations Manager which enables us to benefit from cross-working and shared resource and skills. The Non-

Ministerial Departments liaise regularly at the Non-Ministerial Forum, the Non-Ministerial Strategy Group and the Criminal Justice Working Group. These fora are particularly useful for identifying cross-cutting risks, issues and solutions.

The Department also has a good working relationship with the States of Jeresy Police across a number of operational workstreams on a day-to-day basis. For example, the States of Jersey Police provides Coroners' Officers who investigate sudden and unexpected deaths, with Crime Scene Investigators in support if needed, it carries out criminal records checks for prospective jurors and assists with some enforcement activities when required. There is also a good level of engagement with the States of Jersey Police in respect of strategic matters such as in relation the Criminal Justice Working Group and Emergency Response Planning.

In your letter, you also request comment on other areas including family proceedings and court administration. These fall under the auspices of the Judicial Greffier who would be best placed to provide feedback.

Please let me know if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely

Advocate Mark Harris
Viscount