



Media Release

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A Policy Letter to preserve our language

The States have one final opportunity to maintain and promote the Island's indigenous language – Guernésiais – or decide that it should be allowed to fade into obscurity very soon.

The Committee *for* Education, Sport & Culture is today submitting a Policy Letter to the States – for debate in August – which will propose an additional grant of £300,000 over the next three years to a reformed Guernsey Langue Commission. The Commission would work to sustain and develop Guernésiais as a unique aspect of the Island's culture, heritage and identity. The Committee says that if the States do not agree the proposed investment the Island will have to accept the terminal decline of Guernésiais as anything more than an artefact of history.

Guernésiais is unique to Guernsey with its roots set deep in the history of the Island. It remained as the everyday tongue of the majority of those living in Guernsey from the time of the Normans up until the nineteenth century.

Last year, as part of its submission to the Policy & Resource Plan, the Committee announced its commitment to providing limited additional funding for the language through the presentation of “a plan to support the local language (Guernésiais) to the States”.

Deputy Matt Fallaize, President of the Committee *for* Education, Sport & Culture, said:

“Guernésiais has been a unique feature of the Island's history and culture for hundreds of years, but the language is now facing the possibility of extinction in just the next few years. We have come to a crossroads on the language: we need to provide this limited additional funding to maintain and develop its use or it will become extinct on our watch. That is putting it bluntly but accurately but that is how it needs to be put so that the States can come to an informed decision knowing the consequences of the vote which we hope will take place in August.

“Our Committee currently has a budget of just £26,000 for the language, which we will continue to invest in initiatives, but the additional grant now proposed is the only way of giving the new Commission a real chance of success in its goals. Realistically this is the last opportunity for the States to demonstrate its commitment to the survival of its Island’s language. We will of course accept the outcome, which will be either to get behind the language and give the community a fighting chance of retaining it or accept that it is going to become extinct very soon.”

The reformed Guernsey Language Commission will be formed as an umbrella body to help the work of existing institutions and groups and it will have four core objectives:

1. Raise awareness of Guernésiais and encourage participation, giving it a relevance to the present-day population and economy of the Island.
2. Facilitate the effective teaching of Guernésiais.
3. Research, record and archive Guernésiais, ensuring that this vital piece of our heritage is not lost.
4. Raise funding to enable the Commission to deliver its mandate.

Its first task will be to consult with the community to develop a business plan with short, medium and long term goals.

The grant funding would allow a full time Development Officer to be appointed to the Commission.

Deputy Fallaize said:

“It will be a considerable challenge first to halt and then reverse the decline in the use of Guernésiais, but the rewards to be gained in terms of the preservation of our unique identity and wider benefits are such that the process should be allowed to begin without delay.”

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