

Information law now being drafted

Freedom of information legislation could be introduced in Bermuda as soon as next year, the Premier told the House of Assembly on Friday. Alex Scott said the drafting of a Public Access to Information (PATI) law was expected to be completed by the end of the summer for introduction in 2007. "The plan for implementation is nearly completed but must first be vetted through relevant parties within the Civil Service," he said. "It is also important that legislation be introduced alongside a plan for implementation that is ready to be executed. "Many jurisdictions in the past have introduced legislation without knowing how they would comply with it. This will not be the case in Bermuda." The Premier said the PATI legislation, which would allow public access Government information, was a "huge undertaking" but one to which the PLP was committed. He told MPs that the Island's Central Policy Unit had recently met with visitors from the Cayman Islands' government to discuss their plans regarding freedom of information. "Discussions with the Cayman Islands are extremely important to Bermuda, as Cayman is another jurisdiction of similar size and character working towards PATI legislation," he said. "Further discussions are planned to determine if resources can be shared and to ensure that we can both learn from our similar approaches."

The Premier said Charles Brown, the civil servant spearheading the introduction of the legislation in Bermuda, had attended a freedom of information study programme in London and a conference on the topic in Manchester. "Confirmation was received that Bermuda's discussion paper on PATI and thus Bermuda's intended way forward is appropriate and consistent with the direction chosen by other members of the Commonwealth," said Mr. Scott. He said consultation with Jamaica, which introduced freedom of information legislation two years ago, had also been fruitful. "The success of consultation is knowing that Bermuda is on the right path," he said.

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