

### Overview of the Government of Jamaica

Jamaica is a constitutional monarchy and is a member of the Commonwealth. Therefore, the Queen of England, Elizabeth II is the titular head of the country. She is represented here by a Governor-General.

The Jamaican Parliament is bicameral. This means that it consists of two Houses, the Senate, also called the Upper House, and the House of Representatives, also known as the Lower House.

The members of the House of Representatives are elected under universal adult suffrage, with a maximum of five years between elections. There are 60 constituencies, each represented by one Member of Parliament.

There are 21 members of the Senate who are appointed by the Governor-General; thirteen are appointed on the advice of the Prime Minister; and eight on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition. The Senate functions mainly as a review chamber for legislation passed by the House of Representatives.

The Cabinet is the main instrument of government policy. It consists of the Prime Minister and at least 13 other ministers of Government, whose membership is restricted to one of the two Houses of Parliament. Not more than four members of the Cabinet may be members of the Senate. The Minister of Finance must be an elected member of the House of Representatives.

### Local Government

Local Government is structured on a parish basis, with two parishes, Kingston and St Andrew, amalgamated and administered by the Kingston and St Andrew Corporation (KSAC). The island's 63 constituencies are subdivided into 227 electoral divisions, each of which is represented by a Parish Councillor for Local Government.

### Brief History

Local Government was introduced in Jamaica around 1662-1663, just a few years after the

British capture of Jamaica in 1655.

The early form of Local Government was called the Vestry system, patterned after the form of Local Government that existed in England at the time. This name came about because a body called the Vestry governed local authorities. The Vestry of each parish was drawn from the lay magistrates and the clergy of the particular parish. These Vestries supported the clergy, maintained the churches, offered relief to the poor, maintained the few roads which existed at the time, and maintained public order.

The Vestries operated in the interest of and for the benefit of the planter class. By the 1850s their rule had become corrupt and inefficient. The system was abolished in 1866 following the Morant Bay Rebellion. It had lasted for 200 years.

It was replaced by a system of Municipal and Road Boards, whose membership was nominated by the Governor. The major changes, which took place in the Vestry system, concerned the number of parishes. In 1664 when the system was first introduced, there were seven parishes. By the time the system was abolished this number had increased to a total of 22. Law 22 of 1867 reduced the number of parishes to 14.

Elected representation was restored to Local Government in 1886 with the creation of Parochial Boards, which combined the functions of the Municipal Boards and the Road Boards. During the twenty-year period between the abolition of the Vestries and the establishment of the Parochial Boards, there was a significant increase in the responsibilities of Local Government. Some of the functions that were extended to Local Authorities at that time were: Public Health in 1867; public markets in 1874; fire services in 1875; and water supplies in 1875. Later, abattoirs, building regulations, public beaches, sanitation and public cleansing and street lighting were added.

The parish structure created by Law 20 of 1867, the extension of functions during the period 1866-86, and the creation of parochial boards in 1886, all created the modern Local Government system that exists today.

Some significant developments have taken place in the system over the last 100 years. These are:

- 1923 – the Kingston City Council and St Andrew Parochial Board were amalgamated to form the Kingston and St Andrew Corporation (KSAC).
- 1901 – Port Royal was re-established as a parish. It was re-absorbed by KSAC in 1946.
- 1947 – Universal adult suffrage was extended to Local Government.
- The term of office of the mayors, deputy mayors, chairmen, deputy chairmen was extended from one year to run with the life of the Council.
- 1956 – The Municipal and Parish Councils Services Commissions and a Unified Service for the 12 Parish Councils were established.