

Statement by Deputy Ian Joseph Gorst of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter made in accordance with Standing Order 115(c)

Strategic Vision

Stability and confidence

I am honoured to have been approached by a number of States Members asking if I would consider standing for the office. As Members are aware, I have served previously as Chief Minister, as well as in a number of other ministerial posts, and I therefore believe I can offer the experience and stability that Jersey needs over the next two-and-a-half years before the next General Election. We need a laser focus to deliver action which will improve the lives of islanders.

I also recognise that States Members, and Islanders, are looking for change. If appointed, I would put forward a new Council of Ministers, with changes aimed at achieving as broad a consensus as possible across the Assembly.

We are living in challenging and turbulent times, both locally and further afield. We face a number of significant economic and societal challenges which we must address if Jersey is to continue to enjoy the prosperity of previous years, and if our success is to be shared across the community. Our challenges are great enough without making life harder for ourselves internally. Jersey's reputation is built on stability, confidence and competitiveness. We will restore and maintain our reputation for all three without delay, and I will work with Members across the Assembly to achieve the change that is necessary to do so. Without doing so, we won't be able to improve the standard of living for all islanders.

We need to meet our challenges together, as a unified States Assembly, working together in the interests of the public. I have listened to, and heard, the feedback from Members on creating greater inclusivity in policy development, and service delivery. A new Government of which I am Chief Minister will work with Scrutiny as a critical friend to ensure we are developing and debating high quality policy and legislation, and we will work with the Connétables so that the Parishes remain at the heart of our community. Whilst the Troy Rule restricts the number of Ministers and Assistant Ministers to a maximum of 21, I will ensure that Members who wish to share in the decision-making process, working with Government, are given an opportunity to do so, including through Ministerial Groups and other relevant forums, such as the Legislation Advisory Panel and States Employment Board.

Challenges

As a small community, the work of the Government impacts on the life of every islander. We will take decisions which improve the lives of individuals and families in Jersey, making their daily lives easier and simpler, and being an enabler for positive change and development.

I wish, at this stage, to recognise the effort and commitment of the outgoing Chief Minister. I have seen Deputy Moore's commitment to Jersey first-hand, and I know how hard she worked as Chief Minister.

The challenges we face as a community have not changed following the vote of no confidence. I will retain a focus on the issues which matter most to the public – to families and to businesses – and to ensuring our long-term strategic competitiveness.

In developing this statement, we must keep in mind that the Government Plan, which Members agreed in December, will still be in place for 2024 and our action must therefore fit within this financial framework.

Cost of living

If I am appointed as Chief Minister by the Assembly, I will ensure that Government continues to support Islanders with the cost-of-living, putting money back in people's pockets. We will work with community and voluntary groups to identify all means by which we can further support islanders with everyday costs, and where assistance can be best and most effectively directed.

The Government will increase competition across all sectors, ensuring that prices can be as low and competitive as possible. This will include work to deliver an amended Competition Law. We will make it easier to do business in Jersey, working with industry to ensure that regulation is balanced appropriately with our ongoing competitiveness.

We will keep taxes low, and thresholds will continue to rise year-on-year. Duty rises will be kept to a minimum, and targeted support enhanced through the social security system to those islanders who need it most.

We will continue to make progress towards the target of bringing the minimum wage up to 2/3 of median earnings by the end of the Government's term of office, and the new Government will engage with the Employment Forum to bring forward viable options for delivering the living wage across economic sectors, working together with business groups, employee representatives and community organisations.

Housing

We will continue to address the housing crisis by building more homes and supporting first-time buyers through an enhanced number of assisted purchase schemes. We will bring forward plans for the re-development of St Saviour's hospital into a village which includes affordable housing and keyworker accommodation. We will eliminate bureaucratic barriers to development and build on the work of the Mckinnon review and consult industry and the public to deliver improvements to the planning service.

The new ministerial team will engage with lenders to ensure that Jersey residents have access to as competitive and fair interest rates as are possible.

The work to introduce a new residential tenancy law – providing greater protections for landlords and tenants – will proceed and the landlord licensing scheme will be implemented.

I will support the use of States investment funds to support first-time buyers with affordable purchases – using our prudence over many years to support Jersey families. I was Chief Minister when we established Andium Homes, and I will continue to support Andium in its work to deliver more and improved social, key worker and first-time buyer housing.

Island workforce and skills

Recruitment is a challenge across the economy, including in the public sector. The Government will seek to negotiate further bi-lateral agreements to encourage seasonal workers to our island, following the success of the agreement with Antigua and Barbuda.

We will continue to invest in education and skills training, focusing on ensuring that islanders are equipped for the jobs of the future. We will promote more learning opportunities in the island, particularly in higher education by developing strategic partnerships with external academic institutions, including UK universities. We will also allow our schools to have more autonomy, putting trust in our educational leaders.

We will identify and address the underlying issues which are impacting the recruitment of health and care sector staff, improving the welcome we offer to new key workers and the quality of their accommodation. We will expand on-island training and development for our future workforce.

A strong, stable and sustainable economy

We will promote, encourage, and support growth and increased productivity across the economy. Building on the foundations of the Future Economy Programme, we will restore and promote confidence for businesses to invest and locate to Jersey.

As Chief Minister, I will maintain the higher level support for the agriculture and fishing industries, and support tourism and hospitality by reviewing the Tourism Law and Licensing Law. We will encourage diversification and support new businesses in the digital and fintech sector.

Financial Services remains Jersey's biggest single employer, and the largest generator of tax receipts – helping to fund our core public services. The Government will work closely with industry and the regulator as we move forward with work following the Moneyval Assessment. I will robustly defend the industry on the international stage where necessary, ensuring our views and interests are represented effectively and clearly in Westminster, the EU and other global forums. As Head of Government, I will support the industry both within the island and in our key global markets – upholding our reputation for being a well-regulated, mature, and competitive place in which to do business. I have a proven track record of achievement in this crucial area.

I am a supporter of the enhanced funding for the arts, culture and heritage, and will seek to ensure that we utilise these assets to promote everything that is good about our island.

Air and sea connectivity will be key to economic growth and diversification. We will work with Ports of Jersey to secure a wider route network, and with Guernsey to secure our long-term sea passenger and freight links with the UK and France.

Health

As Treasury Minister, I have ensured more money has been invested in our health service, including in meeting deficits.

I have been a member of the New Healthcare Facilities Ministerial Group since July 2022 and support the current plans for the new hospital. The existing plan will continue to move forward and be delivered. We cannot delay this project any further. At all times, I will focus on the project delivering improved clinical outcomes for islanders, and ensuring that taxpayers are getting value for money.

We will support the existing work to bring health spending under control, ensuring value for money and improved services, and targeting resources toward the front line where they are needed most. We will target continue to reduce waiting lists, and increase the numbers of permanent staff working in our hospital.

I supported the creation of the Health Board and will support and engage with its work to deliver the further service delivery improvements we need.

We have made excellent progress to improve our adult and children's mental health services, with additional investment which I supported as Treasury Minister, and I am committed to consolidating that progress and further enhancing it. We will also promote, encourage and enable active and healthy living in Jersey.

If I am appointed as Chief Minister, a debate on the legalisation of assisted dying will take place before the next election, in order that the States can debate this crucial issue.

An inclusive community

If appointed to lead a new Government, we will continue our support for vulnerable islanders and raise standards of living for families on low incomes by growing the economy and increasing productivity.

We will support young people in our care to have a loving upbringing and the opportunity of a fulfilling and happy life.

We will value and promote Jersey's diverse community and challenge discrimination in all its forms. We will encourage integration into our community and improved relations between all communities in the island.

I will ensure a close and ongoing dialogue with faith leaders in the island.

Working with the Minister for Social Security, we will continue to work through the Older Persons Forum and with Age Concern to better meet the needs of pensioners.

The public realm

We will continue to invest in our infrastructure – making decisions in the next two years on a site for a new Fire and Ambulance Headquarters, new primary schools in St Helier, and new green space in St Helier. We will find a permanent home for the sea cadets and bring La Folie back into use for the benefit of our community and economy.

We will finalise the purchase of the site of the former seaside café at Greve de Lecq on behalf of the public, delivering a community asset which will benefit islanders.

We will work with the Jersey Development Company and planning to bring forward improved and more acceptable proposals for the Waterfront and South Hill.

Fort Regent has the potential to once again be a gem in Jersey's crown. The new Chief Minister will need to be realistic. At present, there is no funding in place to redevelop Fort Regent. I will work with Members across the Assembly, and with industry groups to move forward with workable and deliverable proposals for the short-term and long-term use of the Fort, which recognise its history as a public asset and a community venue.

Environment

The Government will continue to encourage and enable islanders to be more environmentally friendly and reduce our carbon emissions in a proportionate, incentivised, consensus-based manner.

We will continue to progress work to investigate options for our future energy needs, supporting investment in renewable energy.

The public sector

I have worked closely with public servants in Jersey for nearly 20 years, and greatly admire the work and commitment of our public service. This has particularly been in evidence over the past 12 months.

I will decentralise the Cabinet Office, strengthen links between Ministers and their departments, and improve co-ordination at the heart of Government, both within the executive and with the Assembly. These will be carefully targeted refinements to structures. I will ensure that focus moves onto delivery and implementation.

We will ensure that everyday spending continues to be properly controlled, with increases that are affordable and aimed at front-line services. Pay rises will need to be equitable, affordable, and proportionate. Beyond our existing borrowing and that which is needed for the new hospital at Overdale, I do not support any further public sector debt. Where possible, we need to replenish the Stabilisation Fund to ensure that we have cash reserves readily available in the event of an economic shock. This served us well in 2008.

Islanders recognise that we need more health and care sector workers as we deal with our ageing population, and that we must continue to invest in health services, education and our infrastructure. Any additional resources must be directed to the frontline. Therefore, over the next two Government Plans, any growth will only be directed towards the front line.

Jersey and the world

Jersey must promote itself in the world if we are to protect our prosperity at home, and I would therefore retain the fundamental tenets of the existing External Relations Common Policy. Working with a new External Relations Minister, I will ensure that Jersey's voice is heard where and when it matters for the Island.

We will seek to maintain and build on our close links with the UK Government and Parliamentarians, as Jersey's most important bi-lateral partnership, following the UK General Election. I also support the existing work to enhance our diplomatic, cultural and trading links with France. The new Government will also need to continue developing important bi-lateral relations across Europe, and with the EU institutions.

We will deliver further bi-lateral investment and tax treaties with key global partners, enabling greater business flows between us.

I am a strong proponent of joint Channel Island working across domestic and international policy. On every possible occasion, I will work to ensure that the Channel Islands (and indeed all three Crown Dependencies) speak with one unified voice in the world.

I will also seek closer relations with Members who are serving on the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, so we can work together in Jersey's best interests.

Consensus-based Government

I have always believed in Jersey's consensus-based system, with Members working together to serve our community. This requires co-operation, communication and compromise across the Assembly. I will work equally with independent members, and those who have been elected as part of a party group.

In our first 18 months, we have struggled to build consensus across the Assembly. The atmosphere has been downbeat and too negative. I would like to work with Members to improve our relations. That is not to say that the Assembly should not rigorously hold Ministers to account on policy and delivery. A lively Assembly is a key part of our democracy.

I recognise the need and expectation for change, and have already committed to involving Members in decision making structures should they wish. As Chief Minister, I will offer to attend upon the Comité des Connétables on at least a quarterly basis to discuss matters that are of importance to the Parishes and to ensure we improve our dialogue and co-ordination. I will also meet regularly with the Chair of the Privileges and Procedures Committee. This is in addition to regular engagements with the President of the Scrutiny Liaison Committee, and with Panels in both public and private briefings.

I will form a Chief Minister's consultative panel, to discuss issues of national importance that cut across any political spectrums. I would also welcome the thoughts of Members as to how we can make the best use of the talents of all Members for the benefit of islanders, and improve relations between the Government and non-executive.

Discharging responsibilities as Chief Minister

The Chief Minister is the Head of Government, and a key leader in decision-making in Jersey.

As Members will know, I have served in the role previously. I offer myself at this time to provide stability and confidence for Jersey – politically, economically and within our community. I believe I have the experience to take us through to the next election, and to deliver the key policies and projects that will improve the lives of every islander.

The public need a new leader who can quickly re-establish and re-focus the Government on meeting their priorities on housing, the cost-of-living and other key social issues. We must hit the ground running and make the changes needed if we are to deliver successfully.

I have reflected and learnt from my time in office from 2011-2018. As Chief Minister, I will lead, I will listen, and I will build consensus. These are turbulent times, and we know that we will face significant challenges. I will be inclusive as we drive forward the change we need, and I will work on the basis that we are to tackle the issues we face collectively. I will support my colleagues around the Council of Ministers table, and within the Assembly, as we deliver change.

As Chief Minister, my door will always be open. I will seek to be an effective and trusted representative of the Government and of our Island, both within Jersey, nationally and

internationally. I hope that my commitment to Jersey is unquestionable, as is my passion for creating a more inclusive community, raising standards of living and standing up for vulnerable people.

We have two-and-a-half years to keep the commitments we made to the public in 2022. Moving forward together, we can deliver for the public we serve.