

2.14 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Chief Minister regarding the use of information provided by the “Imagine Jersey” survey to resolve immigration issues:

Will the Chief Minister explain how the Imagine Jersey survey provides sufficient information on potential impacts of non-mutually exclusive alternatives to allow any member of the public to make a reasoned preference between them, particularly when it comes to the issue of population growth and housing in the last couple of pages and gives limited alternatives to resolve immigration issues?

Senator F.H. Walker (The Chief Minister):

The Deputy has chosen to focus on only question 7 in the survey. Questions 5 and 6 clearly spell out all the alternatives facing us in the light of the ageing population of which population growth is but one of a number of options. The other options clearly spelt out in the survey are growing the economy, working longer, or paying more in tax or social security. The Deputy will also know that as part of the consultation process a great deal of information covering all these possible solutions has been published and was available to those who wish to complete the survey. I believe that the survey represents a constructive initial step in the consultation process, which in the context of changes to the makeup of the Island’s population, which are inescapable, will lead to the development of policies to protect the future prosperity and quality of life of the people of Jersey.

2.14.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Chief Minister not accept that there are very limited alternatives proposed where it considers the alternative of paying extra in taxation to cover the issues concerned and that a great deal of emphasis is placed on the issue of growing the population in way to one extent or another?

Senator F.H. Walker:

No, Sir. All the options, as I have already said, are clearly spelt out. Of course it is for any member of the public who wishes or who has responded to the survey to use the information provided and to clearly indicate their wishes. That is what the survey is all about. It is to enable the public to clearly state what their wishes are. The public have done that in considerable numbers.

2.14.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Minister not accept that by building to a final set of questions as to how we will live in the future - which pose only the proposition that we will have to build more houses, where would you like them to be built? - the survey is badly designed and is leading to a biased conclusion?

Senator F.H. Walker:

Absolutely not. Again, the Deputy has chosen - no doubt for his own reasons - to totally ignore the questions raised in 5 and 6 of the survey which, for example, under 6 asks the question: “Please rank these 4 options in your order of preference: growing the economy, working longer, the resident population pays more through taxes or social security, or should we allow more people to come and live and work in Jersey.” If the Deputy has any other alternatives I would be very pleased to hear from him in that respect.

2.14.3 The Deputy of St. John:

Does the Chief Minister agree that it is an important debate that is vital for the success for planning for the future? The public needs to understand the consequences of no growth as well as the consequences of controlled growth. Does the Minister agree?

Senator F.H. Walker:

Absolutely, Sir. That is what the consultation process is all about; it is to have an informed debate. Of course there is the Imagine Jersey event on Saturday which I urge all Members to attend. I think, at the moment, attendance by Members is not looking that promising. I hope that as many Members as possible will come along on Saturday because it is vital that we and the public do have

an informed debate on all the options and that we fully understand the consequences of each of those options to the future of us all.

2.14.4 Deputy C.J. Scott Warren of St. Saviour:

Does the Chief Minister agree that this issue, being under discussion in Imagine 2035, is of paramount importance and that a decision should not be rushed?

Senator F.H. Walker:

Absolutely. It is in that spirit that I have agreed with the President of the Chairmen's Committee that the consultation process will be extended. I absolutely agree it should not be rushed. At the same time it cannot be ducked and we have to face up to the issue, and we will sooner or later have to come forward with proposals and this House will have to take what will no doubt be a difficult or a number of difficult decisions.

2.14.5 Deputy J.A. Martin:

I was looking at the 4 questions. I too have real concern, Sir, with the, I would say, leading nature of the Imagine Jersey 2035. The 4 questions the Chief Minister has just mentioned do have a small explanation against the first 3, except for the last one, allowing more people to come and live and work in Jersey. It is not a secret and we have all been presented with the different scenarios, between 80,000 up to 130,000, and given how much more we will need, how much more public services? This is missing from the public consultation. That is why I think myself and Deputy Southern, Sir, have a problem. I am pleased to hear that the Chief Minister is going to extend the consultation. Also, could he inform me how many members of the public have decided to attend on Saturday? I know there is a limit of 200, but as far as I think, we have not even captured the imagination and the public do not fully understand what we are asking.

Senator F.H. Walker:

I will take that last bit first. I believe that we will be very close, if not up to, to the 200 limit that we have had to put on the conference, so I do not think the Deputy's observation that the public are not interested holds any water. I think that is further borne out by the fact that we have had something in the region of 1,300 responses to the survey. Again, I do not think the Deputy's observation is well-founded. Sir, I cannot agree with the Deputy, I am afraid. I do believe all the options have been spelt out. They need to continue to be spelt out, as do the consequences of all or any of them, and that is absolutely our intention. Can I confirm, because there seems to be a suggestion that some sort of decision or semi-decision has already been made here, that that is absolutely, positively not the case. No decisions have been reached. No conclusions have been arrived at. The issue is open for genuine consultation and I very much hope that we will indeed have a full and very fruitful day on Saturday, which is another important step - but not the concluding step - in the whole consultation process. This is, as Deputy Scott Warren said, a hugely important issue, the public need to be listened to, but we all need to be aware of the consequences of whatever decisions are arrived at.

2.14.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Returning at last to questions 5 and 6, does the Minister not accept that by including options that are not mutually exclusive the survey breaches one of the fundamental laws of survey design and is, in fact, not as useful as it ought to be? Does he not consider that money spent on his new advisers on this survey was money wasted?

Senator F.H. Walker:

No, Sir.