

3.14 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Chief Minister regarding measures to control immigration and population numbers before the population exceeds 100,000:

What measures, if any, will the Chief Minister propose to control immigration and population numbers before the population exceeds 100,000 and, if none, why?

Senator P.F. Routier (Assistant Chief Minister - rapporteur):

The Migration Advisory Group has been pursuing a policy of limiting immigration and supporting local employment and focusing permissions on higher value activities that create and safeguard local employment. This is the right approach for our economy and environment and is wholly consistent with the Strategic Plan. The M.A.G. (Migration Advisory Group) will use the new Control of Housing and Work legislation to continue this work.

3.14.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

But despite this move from non-locally qualified immigrant employees to (j) categories, the numbers have remained stubbornly high and the population is going up by around 1,000 a year still. Does the Minister consider that the demands of (j) categories are somehow less in terms of housing, health need and schools when compared to non-locally qualified immigrants?

Senator P.F. Routier:

The difference between - you call it a (j) person - a licensed person coming to the Island and somebody without skills... we judge there is significance in what they can contribute to the Island. They are less likely to be calling on the services of Social Security Departments, they probably have their high net-worth people. The average salary for somebody on licence is around the £80,000 to £90,000 mark and they will probably have private health insurance. It is that sort of level we are aiming at and certainly that has been the decision making that we have been carrying out. I think as Members should recognise that the process that has been going through in the last couple of years of having that switch around is that immigration levels have halved over that period while we have been doing that.

3.14.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Supplementary from me, Sir. Does the Minister not accept that that is largely due to the recession and will he address the question, does he not consider that (j) categories make a demand on Jersey's resources in terms of demand for housing, demand for health and demand for schools, in particular?

Senator P.F. Routier:

When we are making that decision about the demands that licensed people coming to the Island have we have to balance that with what the services are going to provide. If they are going to be working as perhaps teachers or nurses or doctors we need to ensure that the Island has sufficient skills in the Island. They do have, obviously, a demand on services but we have to balance that on the needs of the rest of the community.

3.14.3 The Connétable of St. John:

Can I congratulate the Assistant Minister on having put in the new legislation and issue of employment cards/housing cards that will hopefully help alleviate some of the problems that the questioner is putting. Having been in this morning and picked up my own registration card, where it says I am entitled, it was a pleasure to walk into a States department, go in, show your identification and walk out with a card within a couple of minutes. It appears things are working well. Can I congratulate him and he may be ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Is there a question in there, Connétable? **[Laughter]** No question then.

The Connétable of St. John:

There was a question. Will he explain to the questioner?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Obviously yes or no, no doubt.

Senator P.F. Routier:

I am grateful for the Connétable's comments this morning and the answer is, yes, I do appreciate that the new legislation is going to be a major step forward for this community.

Senator L.J. Farnham:

Only this, I thought you were meant to pick up one of those cards if you were thinking of changing jobs. [Laughter]

3.14.4 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Can the Assistant Minister confirm that while the rate of increase may be slowing there is no policy to prevent the population exceeding 100,000 and the policy is there for exponential growth, albeit at a slower rate?

Senator P.F. Routier:

The policy we are working to is to slow down immigration, there is no doubt about it, especially as we have so many local people unemployed. We have to ensure we shift the need for people to come into this Island and that is the decision making that we are going through at the present time. If there are skills already in the Island we will do our utmost to ensure that local people do have access to those jobs, rather than anybody being brought in from outside the Island.

3.14.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Assistant Minister believe that the official figure for the population will reach 100,000 before or after the 2014 election?

Senator P.F. Routier:

As of today I would imagine that the population is over that number because, as I have said in an earlier question this morning, the population rises during the summer months ordinarily because of the people who come to work in the hospitality industry and the agricultural industry and that probably has already happened. But if we look at the equivalent numbers in the December time when the Statistics Unit carries out this judgment about what the population is, with natural births over deaths, no doubt we will be near that number, if not over it.

3.14.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:

It appears that the Deputy Chief Minister intends to have a period of extensive consultation very similar to the exercise called Imagine Jersey. Will he assure this House that he will do his utmost to make sure that this consultation is more open and transparent than the last one, in particular, to put the questions to the Stats Department to ensure that questions are open and not leading and do not contain non-exclusive options, which happened last time?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I think lessons can be learned from the previous process that went through and certainly the Deputy's suggestion of ensuring that the Stats Units look at the questions prior to the consultation taking place is a good one.