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5.8 Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour of the Chief Minister regarding a migration and population policy:

When will the Council of Ministers be producing its migration and population policy and how will it ensure that it meets the timetable it sets?

Senator I.J. Gorst (The Chief Minister):

Could I ask Senator Routier to answer this please?

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

Population and migration are important. They affect almost everything we do. The ability of businesses to prosper, the state of our public finances, the environment and - as we have heard just now - housing. Our population is ageing placing more demand on services, especially our health service, we need a strong economy to afford this. This is why population policy is not just a number, it is part of a long-term plan. We outlined this last November to Members and we will be providing the same briefing to a range of stakeholders later this month and we will be launching a public consultation in March. We will then report back to the Assembly in September and I would like us to have a debate before the end of this year. We can achieve this if we all work together, but I need to be clear that there are not going to be any easy answers.

5.8.1 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

In the last term the Senator will be aware I put a very similar question to the Council of Ministers resulting in a 6-month to a year's delay on the initial timetable that was outlined. What confidence can the Senator give to me that that will not occur again?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Members will be aware that the Council of Ministers have been dealing with some major issues over the last few months and we are now ... over the last year in fact, with the Medium Term Financial Plan and the Strategic Plan and all of those things that go along with that. We now have the bandwidth within the department to progress this and we will be ensuring that we have this as one of our top priorities.

5.8.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I am impressed with the management speak: "We now have the bandwidth to progress this." But the Minister mentioned that he had a long-term plan. Would he indicate to Members what that long-term plan might contain and whether it requires a population of 100,000, 110,000, 120,000 or even greater?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Unfortunately I do not think the Deputy was able to be at the presentation we gave to Members last year. There were a number of presentations which I do not think the Deputy was at all of them. But that obviously identified that our Island has many things we need to consider. There is the environment, the community and our economy, and we have to look at all of those issues in the round to see how each of those areas will be affected, and then as part of that we would then be able to develop a sustainable population policy.

5.8.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Minister accept that numbers like 120,000 or 130,000 will inevitably damage the environment?

Senator P.F. Routier:

That is the sort of discussion we want to have with everybody about what sort of Island they want to live in, whether they want to protect our environment above the economy or whether they want to ... it is a balance we have to strike. Obviously if we do have a really high number of population that will affect the environment. We have to balance those things out. But, as I said, it is no easy task.

5.8.4 Deputy T.A. Vallois of St. John:

Could the Assistant Minister confirm that a number of people in or out of the Island confirmed for a policy is pointless considering that we do not count people out?

Senator P.F. Routier:

The way we gauge the number of people who are in our Island is obviously something which the Statistics Unit do on an annual basis. They do that through looking at the social security returns and the I.T.I.S. (income tax instalment system) returns, and they have to make a judgment about that. You are right, there is no actual counting of people leaving the Island as they leave the ports, but certainly the way we do make a judgment, and the Statistics Unit are very confident that what they provide us on a regular basis gives us a true enough picture for us to calculate what services we need on our Island.

5.8.5 Deputy T.A. Vallois:

Surely the Assistant Minister would agree that numbers are meaningless if people are feeling squeezed within an Island of this size and they feel that there are more and more people, more and more cars on the road, and more and more pressure on the public service, especially with an ageing population?

Senator P.F. Routier:

That is a view which is held by some people certainly. But there are varying views across our community. If you speak to other people they might consider that we need more people in our community to have a prosperous economy. It is not a one size fits all, I am afraid. We need to take everybody's views across our Island community to try and get a balance that suits us all. It is no easy task to suit everybody's needs but we have to get a balance for our community.

5.8.6 Deputy M. Tadier:

Can the Minister give us an idea of how accurate the current names and address register is?

Senator P.F. Routier:

The last feedback I had about the names and address register is that it is now settling to a good level but it has taken a long time for it to build up to ensure that we have good accurate information within it, but I am told now that it is becoming more reliable and the Statistics Unit will be able to, in the future, rely on it as a good source of information.

5.8.7 Deputy M. Tadier:

Just to fish for more detail on how well populated, I guess, you could say the population register is. Is it full, is it half-full or do we not know how many people that live in Jersey are on that names and address register?

Senator P.F. Routier:

When the names and address register was populated it got to ... because it is made up of various bits of information, some from Social Security, some from Tax, and also the people who have gone and got their cards. At one stage the names did include a lot of people who had not been cleaned out from the Social Security so there is a cleaning process of the names and address register, which needs to happen. But it is getting more and more robust as months go by.

5.8.8 Deputy C.F. Labey of Grouville:

Would the Assistant Minister not agree that this is a very inefficient, woolly way of measuring the population? It was suggested to him some years ago by the Migration Scrutiny Panel a far more robust way of measuring people at least leaving the Island.

[10:30]

Surely he appreciates this is fundamental to every decision this Assembly makes, including the size of a hospital. Can he not confirm when he will be bringing forward a robust mechanism of measuring our population?

Senator P.F. Routier:

The measuring of our population is something which is carried out by the Statistics Unit on a regular basis. It is better now than what it used to be. We used to just have a 10-yearly census. But now we have a more regular basis which the Stats Unit will be able to give us more information on a regular basis. But I do appreciate this is a vitally important matter for our community, but we need to understand what sort of Island our community wants to live in, and that is the piece of work that is going to carry on during this year. We will be coming back with a long-term plan towards the end of the year and hopefully debate it and be able to come to some consensus. Part of that will be a population and migration policy.

5.8.9 The Deputy of Grouville:

In the meantime can he bring in the suggested mechanisms of putting a far more robust way of measuring the population that was suggested to him 5 years ago by the Migration Scrutiny Panel?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I do not believe at this stage it would be an appropriate thing to do, but we are certainly working to the best of our abilities with the tools that this Assembly has given us. The Control of Housing and Work Law is working because we have seen from the figures that have been produced at the last sitting the amount of refusals that are being made. Some people are complaining about that. It is trying to get the economy buoyant. We are trying to ensure that we do not have too many people come to the Island, but we have to get the right people. We must have targeted migration because what we do know is there is going to be a lot less people. If we had no people coming to the Island there would be less people in the community to support our ageing population.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Another question, Deputy Lewis, and then we will come on to the final.

5.8.10 Deputy A.D. Lewis:

Would the Assistant Minister agree that we should also be considering guarding against the real possibility of depopulation in the future which is a scourge of many other small island states? We should be alive to that and in your consultation process we should be very much considering that as a possibility in the future, which is a serious concern to many, many small island states.

Senator P.F. Routier:

The Deputy is right that we need to be concerned about that. Certainly during the consultation that is one of the matters we will obviously be taking into consideration. It is the balance that we need to strike.

5.8.11 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Does the Assistant Minister like me suspect that after this review all that will occur is pretty much the same target except with a grand total to be increased?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I cannot confirm that one way or the other because really I want to have this discussion with States Members and the community to find out where we would get to towards the end of this year with an informed debate.