

3.4 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Chief Minister regarding the sustainable targets for growth in inward migration and population that would allow the longer-term objectives of ‘Future Jersey 2017-2037’ to be achieved: [1(451)]

Talking of the failed policies of yesterday: will the Chief Minister state what he regards as a sustainable target for growth in net inward migration, and hence population, to enable the longer-term objectives outlined (and subject to consultation) in the document *Future Jersey 2017 -2037*, to be achieved?

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

Future Jersey proposes that net migration should be lower than it has been in recent years. This is what I expect our migration policy to say. We need to achieve this without undermining our economic performance or ability to pay for our ageing society and, therefore, this means productivity growth. We cannot set a precise target for net migration in isolation; we need to consider what level of migration Jersey needs and what level it can sustain and we need to let Future Jersey establish targets for indicators like productivity, greenspace, and housing supply.

3.4.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

When the Minister says the level of migration seen in 2015 is unsustainable does he accept that if we continue growth at the current rate - which is 1,000 a year over the past decade - we are going to see a population of 130,000 on this Island by 2037? Does he accept that that 130,000 potential population is also unsustainable?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I accept the figures that the independent Statistics Unit has produced and if that is what the Deputy is indicating they have produced then of course I accept it. But I stand by my comment that the growth that we have seen over the last 2 years in the medium term is not sustainable. I agree with him.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

The average growth over the decade, which was the question, 1,000 a year, is that unsustainable as well? Please answer.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

It would appear to be so but of course there are lots of details and lots of other policy areas that need to be considered. We have managed that level of growth over the past decade, from a housing perspective, from a preservation of greenspace perspective. Some areas where we have not managed that infrastructure implication quite so well - and I have to be careful here because I do not want to upset colleagues - is with regard to transport and ease of flow around the Island. But they are more difficult areas to manage. We have continued to have pressure on the health service which is why we are investing another £40 million over the period of the M.T.F.P. (Medium Term Financial Plan) and we have continued to need to invest in education, all of which we have set aside to invest in.

3.4.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Chief Minister really take the public for such fools when he yet again is having a consultation - and in this particular case we are talking about population policy - it was only in the last term already where the Government brought forward an interim population policy, or a non-policy as many people know it, saying: “This is going to be a temporary thing.” Yet again there has been no leadership, no policy coming forward on population from this Council of Ministers. They have exceeded their ceiling again by 3 or 4 times. When will the Minister

be bringing forward a proper population policy and a way that effectively manages net inward migration?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The Deputy knows the answer to his question before he made his rambling statement, and that is that it is being drawn up now and will be lodged by I think the end of July.

3.4.3 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

I take it there will be yet another non-population policy. However, a lot of the strategy in the population policy seems to be relying on the Future Jersey document, which is a lovely warm and fluffy wish list, but where is the fiscal dimension?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The Senator knows it is not a lovely, warm wish list, it has got independently assessed facts and figures, it shows where we are today, it shows what the community thinks of where we are today, warts and all, and it will then lead to action plans to deliver changes in those really important areas for the community into the future. All of which policies will have to be delivered within a balanced budget approach. So the Senator knows that the area for dealing with the finances will be Treasury and Resources bringing forward an M.T.F.P. to deliver those action plans within budgets that this Assembly approves.

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

A supplementary, sir?

The Bailiff:

No, I am sorry. Senator Ozouf?

3.4.4 Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Understanding the sensitivity of which rising population has among members in our society, and the concern which is effectively immigration, does the Chief Minister not agree that it is important for him and his Communications Unit to describe and explain clearly to members of the Jersey public what the trade-offs and - as economists say - counterfactuals are? Does he agree that it is important to clearly explain what the consequences of not having a rising population would have been and would continue to be in the next few years, albeit that it has to be capped and needs to be the right form of immigration?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The Senator is absolutely right. As much as the Assembly and some of the public feel uncomfortable with the levels of inward migration that we have had over the last number of years, I for one am pleased that I am not leading a Government of a community where population levels are falling, where investment in health and education and infrastructure is not affordable, and where one is on a downward spiral. There are counterfactual issues which need to be addressed, but already the issue that we see in Future Jersey; Members are yet again wanting to pick one element and not recognising their connection with all of the other elements about what makes Jersey special and the sort of community that we want into the future. We cannot fall into that trap because these are issues are related.

[10:30]

We know, do we not, from the work that the Minister for Social Security is doing around the Social Security Fund that we have not had to increase rates of social security because of the levels of inward migration. When I was Minister for Social Security ... Members are shaking

their heads, it is absolutely true. When I was Minister for Social Security I expected and had planned for an increase in social security contributions by now were it not for the levels of inward migration that has meant that that has been deferred and has meant that the Minister has also got time to consider how she can appropriately do some of those changes into the future.

The Bailiff:

Chief Minister, you are breaking the 90 second rule. Final supplementary.

3.4.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Minister, in addition to agreeing the figures produced by the Statistics Department, accept that one of the infrastructure demands, that of housing in 2037, would be that we would need the equivalent of 230 Le Marais to accommodate our population. Imagine 230 Le Marais high rise blocks in Grouville, in St. Clement, in St. John, in St. Ouen, scattered all over the Island. Is that realistically what he expects to see? What measures is he going to take specifically to control net inward migration below 1,000?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The Deputy makes my case for me. We take one element and say: "We cannot possibly manage that element so we have got to make a policy decision based on one single statistical fact" rather than balancing all of the issues together and helping members of the public and Members of this Assembly understand, we might call it trade-offs in everyday language or the counterfactual for economists. It is that, we need to do. So the Deputy I have got no reason to question, again the information provided by the independent Statistical Unit, but he knows too that is not just the simple statistic upon which we need to decide what sort of community we will want into the future, and part of that is the levels of migration. But equally as importantly it is the areas into which migrants come and contribute into our community, and that is a much more difficult and complex question.

The Bailiff:

We have taken some 50 minutes to get through 4 questions, there are 13 on the list. We are going to go rather faster. I am sorry to those Members who feel upset that they are not given the opportunity to get on with secondary or third questions but that is the way it is, and particularly with the Chief Minister who is up for questions without notice, those questions can be put later.