

3.8 Deputy J.A. Martin of the Chief Minister regarding the replacement of the Interim Population Policy with a permanent population policy: [1(100)]

When will the Interim Population Policy be replaced by a permanent population policy?

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

I would like to ask Senator Routier to answer this one. Thank you.

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

I am pleased to be able to answer this question. As outlined in the answer to the Deputy's written question which Members will find on their desks, our aim is to finalise the long-term plan before the summer recess, including a debate on a long-term population policy. This of course will be subject to the necessary Scrutiny process. It will be a balanced package, including specific aims for all things that underlie a good population policy such as the skills we need, educational standards and things like traffic volumes and housing supply. In the meantime, we are also continuing to tighten our controls including initiatives to remove permissions, new conditions for employers who are not employing enough local people, criminal record checks, increased fees and even more compliance. Our next round of consultation is coming up early next month and I hope all Members will take part.

3.8.1 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Would the Assistant Minister not agree that to tighten a population policy now without having a population policy in place is, to me, sort of presumptuous at least? Secondly, the Minister does talk about consultation in March or April, so has the population policy that will be presented to the House in quarter 3 been agreed by the Council of Ministers? Thank you.

Senator P.F. Routier:

I think there were about 3 questions there. I will go backwards, I think. The consultation is going to be ongoing with all Members over the next few months, so there is nothing come to the Council of Ministers as yet. We need to get that consultation taking place. Members will have seen the *My Jersey* document which was published in November which the public have said to us the sort of Island they want to live in. So we have got to take note of what is in this document and also to understand how we can develop the population policy. Now I am struggling to remember the other parts of the question. Could the Deputy remind me what they were, please?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Well the Minister said he was still tightening up on licences and, to me, I said was that not presumptuous that we are going to tighten up on population? Really, I think he has answered the second part; I thought I only asked 2 questions.

Senator P.F. Routier:

Okay. Yes, certainly, with regard to whether it is being presumptuous to tighten up on controls, Members will have seen the population numbers for 2015 of 1,500 people come to the Island and I have to say that it is more than likely that there will be a similar number for 2016. That is, to my mind, not what our Island needs. Perhaps the business community are looking for that but there is a great number of people who do consider that 1,500 going forward is just too many. We recognise that that is an issue to be addressed and we are doing that on an ongoing basis. We are reviewing permissions from businesses and we believe that the approach we are taking currently is what this Assembly would want us to do.

3.8.2 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

The current policy, so-called, actively prevents established businesses which are not in the finance industry employing off-Island staff who will pay tax. Is M.A.G. (Ministerial Advisory Group) I think it is called, which is a government body, an appropriate body for deciding on which businesses should be supported?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Sorry, was the Senator talking about the H.A.W.A.G. (Housing and Work Advisory Group)?

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

I am talking about whatever the group is called which reviews licences for businesses which is a government body trying to advise businesses who should have extra staff.

Senator P.F. Routier:

That is an excellent question. It is one of the most challenging jobs which any group has to do. The Housing and Work Advisory Group does face that challenge on a regular basis and we have been charged by the legislation which is in place to carry out that function. I have to say that having the Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture, the Assistant Minister for Social Security, the Minister for Housing and myself advised by officers, we do find the challenge of making those decisions extremely difficult.

3.8.3 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Is it an appropriate role for government?

Senator P.F. Routier:

In the early days of establishing the Housing and Work Advisory Group, we did ask the business community if they would be prepared to assist in making those decisions and they declined that offer because they thought they would probably be biased towards their side of it. I think as a community we probably would not want to be too influenced by the business community. It is a balance of what our social needs are and what our business needs are. We need to ensure that we get that good balanced approach.

3.8.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Assistant Minister stood there a minute ago and said the figure for 2016 will likely to be the same, as if nobody was responsible for changing those numbers. What policies does he have under active consideration to ensure that whatever number, whatever working assumption he picks, he meets some of those targets for 2017, 2018 and 2019?

Senator P.F. Routier:

With regard to the years coming forward, that is a debate we are going to have in this Assembly certainly. But with regard to last year, we have been continuing to work to the population remit of how we make judgments about business needs and social needs of our Island and that is what we have been working to. But with regard to future years, we will have that debate in this Assembly.

3.8.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Assistant Minister has not answered the question. The question was, what action is he going to take with whatever number we come to so that you meet those numbers? It is not about deciding the number; that will be debated by this Chamber, but what are you going to do about achieving those numbers in 2017, 2018 and 2019? Is the Assistant Minister completely helpless?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I am not completely helpless at all. Certainly, we are working with the legislation that we have and the legislation we have enables us to control access to housing and access to work and we are working with that. We have seen from the buoyant economy that we currently have been experiencing that this Island is needing to have more people working in our economy and we have been reacting to that and also the social needs of our community. We are needing more nurses, more social workers and that is what we have been reacting to and we will continue to use those mechanisms.

3.8.6 The Deputy of St. John:

Is the Assistant Minister confident that we have the sufficient data set and ability to assess in order to ensure that whatever policy that does come forward is able to be implemented?

Senator P.F. Routier:

We are working with the Statistics Unit. Obviously, they were wanting to have a rolling number which goes forward and they are working to that aim and we are getting to that position. What we currently work with is obviously the manpower returns and the annual figure which the Statistics Unit do produce. We do need more information, there is no doubt about it, to help us make those decisions but as soon as we can get to that position of having a rolling census, e-census, that would make our life a lot easier.

3.8.7 Deputy J.A. Hilton of St. Helier:

The Assistant Minister has just told Members that they are having to work within the legislation that is current. If the legislation is not working, change the legislation. My question to the Assistant Minister is: has any consideration been given, or is there any reason why short-term licences of say 6 to 9 months cannot be used instead for low-paid unskilled workers?

Senator P.F. Routier:

That is exactly what we do, we do issue short-term licences, we issue named licences. Depending on the needs of the business, the current legislation enables us to do that, and that is what we currently do. We do seasonal licences for hospitality industry, for agriculture; that is currently in place.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Yes, this follows on from Deputy Hilton ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

I am sorry, Deputy, if I could explain. There were a number of Members with lights on. I have already allowed more than twice the nominal time for each question to have a reasonable time to get through and so really I have to draw this question to a close. So final supplementary, Deputy Martin.

3.8.8 Deputy J.A. Martin:

I think this follows on nicely from Deputy Hilton and what Deputy Southern was saying. So is the Assistant Minister telling us that the Interim Population Policy which has never been met is going to bring back more of the same in the permanent population policy or are the Council of Ministers thinking outside the box and, as Deputy Hilton says, is legislation going to be changed? Thank you.

[10:45]

Senator P.F. Routier:

When we have completed the work with this whole Assembly to understand what we all want, if the legislation needs to be changed then obviously it will be changed. But population is one of the most difficult things to deal with for any community, it really is, because everybody wants different things. On the one extreme you have got the business community who want people to work in their business and we have got other people who are very comfortable in their lives sitting at home thinking: "We do not want any more people in the Island." They are the 2 extremes and we need to be able to find a middle path through it and it is one of the most difficult things that this Assembly will ever have to deal with. I urge Members that we have got the views of the public to what they want. They want a nice place to live, they want green fields, they want a good economy, they want social services, they want all of these things, and you cannot satisfy either one side or the other. We have got to find a middle way through it and that is what we will do by working together to find a way forward. I urge Members to become involved in this and not be critical of everything that this Government is trying to do. It is something we are trying to be very positive about, to have a shared view of where we can go, and I urge Members to become involved.