
STATES OF JERSEY



STATES ASSEMBLY IN-COMMITTEE DEBATE 24TH MARCH 2021 ANALYSIS

Presented to the States on 7th June 2021
by the Chief Minister

STATES GREFFE

REPORT

States Assembly In-Committee Debate 24th March 2021

Introduction

Assistant Chief Minister Deputy R.E. Huelin of St. Peter introduced the debate on a common population policy, commenting that it was an important debate, not just for the Members of this Assembly, but for all Islanders. The Assembly was reminded that, in advance of the debate, the Chief Minister had lodged report [R.41/2021](#), which would provide Members with relevant background information. In order to meet the requirement to have a debate on a common population policy by the end of 2021 (established by the Assembly's adoption of [P.120/2020](#)) Deputy Huelin stressed the need to move quickly and commented that Members' views at this stage would provide valuable initial input towards achieving this deadline.

The Assembly's views would be sought on the themes that were considered important in formulating a population policy. Thereafter, Members would be asked to consider the tensions that might exist between these themes and how they might be balanced in a common population policy.

Deputy Huelin advised that a content analysis would be conducted following the debate, to highlight the areas considered important and to take these forward into the consultation process.

The full Hansard transcript of the debate, including Deputy Huelin's opening speech can be found [here](#).

Main themes

A number of key issues were repeatedly highlighted by States members during the debate. The most frequently mentioned were as follows:

Theme	No of speakers
Importance of education and skills / growing our own talent	16
Housing / cost of housing	14
Economy and productivity (including technology and artificial intelligence)	12
Communities / quality of life / happiness	10
Data / availability of 2021 Census data	9
Sustainability	9
Not based on a number/limit	8
Urbanisation / pressure on St. Helier	8
Children and Young People	7
Equality and diversity	7
Planning approval process / empty properties	6
Ability to staff essential industry sectors	6
Tax	6

Summary of States Members' comments

Members are listed in the order in which they spoke (for the first time) in the debate.

Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier

- address this issue with thought, to ensure we are taking the correct actions
- getting this right improves lives, if not we do more harm than good
- a lot more to population policy than simple numbers
- Jersey is unique amongst island communities in having an increasing population
- identify the pressures that lead to changes in our population
- we need data, such as the census, to identify pressures on population in order to find a solution
- nature of the society should be modern, with a skilled workforce paid a living wage and where everyone is valued
- education is vital throughout people's lives
- what will be the effects of artificial intelligence on the workforce
- population policy must treat everyone equally and not create tiers within society
- housing is an obvious area of inequality and we need to address standards and rising costs
- we need a fair taxation system and accessible healthcare for all
- public health must be at the centre of the population policy
- sustainability and fairness must be at the heart of any population policy
- currently there is undue housing pressure on St Helier
- we should use the word 'home' instead of 'property'
- risk of talent drain if housing issues are not addressed
- affordability of housing for young people is key to any population debate
- need to end the forced dichotomy between academic and vocational education
- in favour of rent stabilisation
- consider introducing a universal basic income to enable people to retrain if they want to
- effects of climate change worldwide – Jersey needs to take this into account in all future policy development work
- hope for government to be inclusive in development of this policy

Senator S.Y. Mézec

- housing is a fundamental issue for the wellbeing of Islanders and is affected by population policy due to the demand for decent homes placed on a finite land mass
- it is fine to preserve countryside and coastline as long as urban areas also have good facilities and amenity space
- following the financial crash, population, not productivity, has driven economic growth in the last decade
- current growth is unsustainable and will lead to a fall in the basic standard of living

- unlike previous population policies this one must be realistic and acknowledge the types of skills that need to be brought in, such as carers
- a person's value to society should not be defined by how much tax they contribute
- we need to make best use of our resources or it will put a strain on whatever population policies we adopt
- if we leave the housing system unaltered whilst increasing population we risk exacerbating our problems and negatively impacting our standard of living
- would propose taxing empty properties
- Housing Policy Development Board report (*not published at time of debate*) will propose a fairer and more balanced housing market
- consider requiring developers to include a proportion of first time buyer properties / affordable housing in new developments
- penalties for hoarding land or waiting years before seeking permission to develop

Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier

- inconsistencies between work permits and housing qualifications (specifically at the end of a 5-year licence)
- income support for rent is payable after 5 years but those people can't rent qualified accommodation
- population policy must not disadvantage any groups already living here
- important to control the growth of our population

Senator L.J. Farnham

- population should be seen as opportunity rather than something to be fixed
- really important opportunity for future growth and development of the island
- population policy should be a set of flexible measures to modify the way the population changes, and it needs to constantly evolve
- we need to staff essential industry sectors
- a modern infrastructure will attract the best people
- a growing population is not bad if managed correctly, but it needs to be sustainable
- maintain discretion to help people
- productivity can be improved by increasing output with the same resources
- migration controls are our main levers for controlling population
- it is natural that people will come and go, but a shrinking population would be problematic
- Brexit might have slowed inward migration / population growth next year, irrespective of migration controls
- pandemic has forced us to embrace technology – this will help
- challenge is not the number but what those people are doing
- strong vision for economy, and then society and community stays strong
- active, evolving society is important – what we have always been good at

Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade

- many decisions of States Members should be influenced by migration policy
- infrastructure needs are dictated by size of the population
- health needs of an ageing population
- tourism, fishing and finance industries have all contracted – population policy must not exacerbate
- commerce is essential to a vibrant society and must be supported but must have balance
- ageing population will mean insufficient numbers contributing to Social Security
- more support for education, further education and on the job training

Deputy J.H. Young of St. Brelade

- various generations of politicians have sought to put a limit or set a target which have never worked
- previously when States decided to have no job growth, island went into recession quickly
- holistic vision, what sort of society do we want, and what quality of life
- previous growth was not planned, but happened because of our collective economic aspirations
- concern re access to housing for younger generations
- concern re needs of ageing community for health service
- adequacy of education in competitive world
- some tensions internationally as a result of Brexit
- AI will change the nature of work
- we have a broken tax system resulting in inequality
- essential public services are resource constrained
- is it right to do this in the final year of a political term?
- Citizens' Assembly could be formed to hear Islanders' views
- political parties need to form and take firm positions on population
- vision is for sustainability – balance between economy, environment and community needs
- need to live within our means and our resources
- reservations re current timetable to have policies by end of year and end of political cycle
- do not start with numbers and allocating to different industries
- overall you get what you pay for and we must be open to changing our tax system

Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier

- any policy must not be retrospective

- concern that new migration controls coupled with new immigration controls could make Jersey unattractive
- question whether we will have enough people to fill seasonal vacancies and vital lower paid jobs such as those in healthcare
- ageing population is a concern as we need more younger people to contribute to support them
- is our current tax structure right and would people accept a modest increase if it meant a slower population increase?
- new Brexit rules remain untested because of Covid
- population policy should not set a numerical target
- older people should be able to carry on working past pensionable age if they wish on part time or flexible terms
- concentrate on communities, not just on the physical aspect of homes
- provide opportunities for integration of different generations, particularly for those whose families may live in other jurisdictions
- enable inter-generational communities such as those promoted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- utilise more people's skills through flexible working

Deputy G.J. Truscott of St. Brelade

- difficult to plan 20 years ahead during Covid and just after Brexit
- population controls are good, but eventually the dripping tap will fill the bath
- have to be bold and say a number and stick to it
- data – we need to know both incoming and numbers that leave
- take feedback from business, Chamber of Commerce etc
- need for a strong and vibrant economy
- need for attractive salaries for migrant workers
- consider effects of GBP depreciation
- aging demographic needs to be funded
- consider increasing social security contributions for those who can afford more
- young people need housing, but to access housing they need jobs to pay rent/mortgage
- education – need to grow our own
- a very complex issue

Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade

- serious subject
- importance of racial diversity
- Jersey's history has been enriched by immigrants and certain industries continue to rely on a healthy level of inward migration
- everyone perceives it is 'other people' who are the problem
- if we need to build more housing this cannot be achieved with fewer people
- work and accommodation are natural capacity inhibitors for population

- people wish for mutually exclusive things – low population but also workers to do jobs local residents don't want to
- problems with the concept of 'grow your own' care workers etc is that jobs are unattractive if wages/conditions are poor
- doing nothing would be political suicide
- need to value human rights and consider how we look after migrants
- many Members appear to favour a protectionist system
- building more houses will increase population

Senator K.L. Moore

- focusing on a population number is unhelpful and divisive
- population is about skills, raising revenue, community and space
- concern re depopulation
- young people currently unable to access affordable homes
- cost of living and housing driving people away
- need to focus on wages, particularly living wage
- automation will help to maintain skill base
- people need to be treated with respect, not as commodities
- focus on valuing people, connecting community embracing all whatever their contribution
- focus on skills and education
- difficulty to find funding for post-graduate studies
- balance between housing and environment / quality of life
- Assembly should be working together to focus on sustainability and values
- Common themes are appearing in this debate which should aid a sound policy

Connétable R.A. Buchanan of St. Ouen

- a bulge of people nearing retirement age will become non-productive in the near-term
- need to support industries who will need people
- we have not succeeded in growing our own talent to replace those who retire
- Jersey has a chronic shortage of housing leading to ridiculous house prices
- Young families need to be housed or they will leave
- successful industries demand people, which require housing
- without housing will have to reduce industries
- housing sites in town will run out and we will need to develop green spaces
- housing may need to be placed on green field sites in order to provide houses that people want to live in
- strain on St Helier infrastructure risks it becoming a less desirable place to live
- aging population will require carers, which will increase inward migration
- consequences of a lack of a population policy that supports the community may result in key industries and businesses deciding they can do better elsewhere

Deputy K.F. Morel of St. Lawrence

- any population growth, however small, will result in the loss of all green space eventually
- if you do not support total urbanisation, you need to agree to net-zero population growth at some point in the future
- it is 20th Century thinking that you have to keep growing the economy
- we have the power to improve productivity
- it is possible to create prosperity and happiness for people and for them to be content with their quality of life, instead of constantly seeking to increase their personal capital
- our tax system is heavily reliant on personal income tax. so currently you need more younger people coming in to maintain that tax base
- in future, if you want to move to net-zero population growth, you need to overhaul the tax system
- state pension is a ponzi scheme which also does not support a net-zero growth policy
- completely impossible for the government to bring forward a workable population policy by the end of 2021 without overhauling the tax, pension and housing systems
- any policy brought forward in 2021 should focus on putting in place foundations to enable us to move to net-zero growth in future
- population should not be a number
- tie applications for a business licence to the delivery of a productivity plan for that business
- introduce a scheme to enable homeowners to downsize and sell, but remain living in their properties for a period
- create an inventory of unused/unoccupied houses in the Island – 3,000 is too many

Deputy R.J. Renouf of St. Ouen

- net-zero is a chimera
- we should not fear population growth
- we get used to the Island that we have experienced in our lifetimes
- urbanisation is just a perspective based on current situation but perspectives change over generations
- depopulation would be a problem
- growing population means we have to actively manage our services and resources – more actively than jurisdictions with unlimited space
- recognise the value of all migrants we ask to come, who we want to be here
- those doing low-paid jobs should not be treated as an underclass and have to endure substandard housing

- all members of the community, whether economically active or not, should be treated equally
- Government needs to be interventionist to preserve quality of life for all
- Must be prepared to adopt measures that might be seen as overbearing in other places

Connétable J. Le Bailly of St. Mary

- population control is not about keeping people out
- we need people with variable skills
- need semi-skilled workers to service the low paid industries, that local unemployed won't do
- incentivise young to stay in the Island through housing
- housing should be realistically priced, meaning we may need a 2 tier system which includes realistically priced housing or flatpack housing for parish developments
- we need young people to replace those who will be dead in 10 years
- putting a number on population will not work
- we need an open policy but controlled with work permits
- it is a matter of financial survival

Deputy K. Pamplin of St. Saviour

- finding some common ground in the debate
- the pandemic has shown the Island's strengths
- we need to have good data
- there is a lack of detail regarding the reality of poverty and those who are struggling
- census results will be important
- everybody had the right to be heard and we should take time to get this right

Senator T.A Vallois

- how do we define sustainability – anything can be sustainable if you are willing to pay for it
- children's voices need to be heard
- currently giving young people mixed messages regarding education and the need to go off-Island to gain experience
- we do not invest enough currently in education and skills, which impacts population
- tension between economic growth and allowing Islanders to enjoy a good work/life balance
- will probably need to turn the tap on and off – in order to do this we need the correct data
- Migration Policy Development Board report was valuable

- opportunities to share experiences with other jurisdictions, possibly using networks such as Commonwealth Parliamentary Association / British-Irish Council
- for young people it can be a choice whether to buy a house or have a family
- secondments may be useful to develop skills
- we have a Better Life Index and should make better use of the Jersey Performance Framework
- there should be a skills audit
- we should consider how younger people can learn from older generations

Deputy R.D. Johnson of St. Mary

- we are unique amongst Crown Dependencies in having a growing population
- need to be careful not to send a message that Jersey is closed for business
- Construction Council warnings about overheating and unreasonable demands on its members
- better management of States funded capital projects
- Potential water shortage / advocating water catchment tanks

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour

- children should be involved in the process
- we should be measuring happiness – other jurisdictions do this
- data is important but so are qualitative factors such as community, fairness, equality, open spaces, and pressures on services such as roads, schools and hospitals. These should not be an afterthought
- population is about human beings
- do not take too much of a numbers based approach to creating these strategies
- process should include a Child Rights Impact Assessment
- policy should consider how it will impact different genders and policy drafters should be required to consider public sector equality duty
- challenge the notion of increased productivity equating to more staff or more hours worked
- proposed change to a 4-day working week, beginning with the public sector, to bring increased productivity, increased health and wellbeing benefits and less need for healthcare services

Connétable S. Le Sueur-Rennard of St. Saviour

- local people are passed over for jobs in favour of people from outside the Island, for whom accommodation is often provided
- we should encourage skilled local individuals living elsewhere to return by helping with accommodation costs, as we have already invested in their education

Senator S.C Ferguson

- stopping the sale of apartments to non-locals is a good thing
- has any work been done on converting hotels to apartment for those wishing to downsize or are they just for immigrants
- we need more imagination from careers staff
- efforts to teach children computer coding have been delayed
- productivity can be improved by management communicating vertically as well as horizontally
- need to start at home not just get from overseas

Concluding Remarks

In Deputy Huelin's final speech, he thanked States members for their thoughtful contributions to a fascinating debate. He summarised some of the main points made by Members and indicated that the transcript would be thoroughly reviewed in order to identify the common themes, tensions, problems and solutions identified by Members, which would be used in the drafting of a Common Population Policy, to be brought to the States later in the year.