

**STATEMENT TO BE MADE BY THE CHIEF MINISTER
ON MONDAY 14th DECEMBER 2020**

Government Plan 2021–2024 (P.130/2020)

Today, this Assembly will begin debating its second Government Plan. Before the Treasury Minister begins that debate, I want to remind us all of the significance of this plan and give Members the opportunity to pose questions to me, as Chief Minister.

This year has brought unprecedented challenges, both for our Island community and for the world at large. No one could have known while we were voting on last year's Government Plan, in December 2019, that more than five and a half thousand miles away, in Wuhan China, the first people infected with COVID-19 were beginning to show symptoms. Last year, it would have been difficult to predict the immense global impact the COVID-19 pandemic would have. I do not need to remind Members of its very real, personal impact here in Jersey.

The Government has been well placed to meet this challenge thanks to the prudent financial management our Island has long enjoyed and the significant resources we have therefore been able to marshal. The flexibility built into the Government Plan process has made this easier as has the recent One Gov modernisation of our Government. These improvements have ensured the agility needed to rapidly redeploy staff, facilitated greater home working and have allowed us to continue delivering on our priorities alongside our COVID-19 response.

Whilst we have focused much of our efforts on COVID-19 and will continue to do so, we have maintained our investment and work towards our longstanding commitments to the people of Jersey. We have approved a developer and a site for our new Hospital. The Council of Ministers has agreed a new Migration Control Policy, and this is now before the Assembly. We have undertaken significant work in the fields of education, housing, and our future investment in St. Helier. And we have approved the roadmap for the future of healthcare in our Island thanks to the Jersey Care Model.

Above all, our Island has been best served, throughout this pandemic, by the resilience of the people of Jersey themselves, and I would like to thank all Islanders for their efforts, throughout this crisis. Together we have implemented the most important public health campaign in our Island's history. We have one of the highest rates of testing in the world, we have developed an excellent track-and-trace regime and an internationally recognised border-testing programme. We have mobilised, with the support of this Assembly, an unprecedented level of financial support and developed a fiscal stimulus package that will assist local businesses not only throughout the most challenging months but also into our recovery phase. Initiatives such as the Co-Funded Payroll and Visitor Accommodation Support Schemes have given vital support to local businesses and our Spend Local Card – developed with MasterCard and PFS – injected more than ten million pounds directly into our local economy. More recently, Northern Ireland has sought to emulate our success, and they will soon be launching their own card. Perhaps most important of all, we have secured the necessary medical supplies, including PPE, to keep Islanders safe, and more recently the Pfizer vaccine which has provided us a beacon of light to guide us through the final few months of darkness. I am proud to say that our dedicated doctors and nurses in our vaccine taskforce have already begun their visits to local care homes. Having launched our vaccine rollout a day early, we have already begun giving the first doses of this vital vaccine to residents, beginning to immunise some of those who are most high-risk in our Island. An important, and significant step forward on this long road.

The Council of Ministers has developed this Government Plan to meet the needs of our Island, not only in the immediate future but also looking ahead, to the months and years to come. This Plan is founded on the five strategic priorities endorsed by this Assembly. It is informed by our experience of COVID-19 and it is mindful of the challenges we will face as we work to meet our commitments to Islanders in a more challenging world.

This Plan sets out how we will pay for the additional spending incurred during our response to COVID-19 and how we will account for the loss of revenue. This is a financially prudent and responsible plan that will protect our reserves and ensure that this Assembly's priorities continue to receive the investments they need.

We will continue to Put Children First, with a number of new projects including an ambitious education reform programme and a school catch-up initiative to ensure that the disruption to our children's education due to COVID-19 does not become a permanent detriment.

We will continue to safeguard our public health with our response to the COVID-19 pandemic and we will invest in the long-term wellbeing of Islanders by implementing the Jersey Care Model. We will support the provision of on-Island education programmes for nursing qualifications which will ensure our Health Service continues to have the talented and professional staff it needs for the future.

This has been a challenging year for Jersey businesses and their dedicated staff. That is why we will be funding a range of initiatives via our Economic Recovery Programme which will invest more than fifteen million pounds into rebuilding our local economy in 2021 alone, this is on top of the £50 million allocated via our Fiscal Stimulus Fund which was recently approved by this Assembly. We recognise that as we rebuild our economy, we have a unique opportunity to strengthen our sustainability and economic resilience which is why the Economic Recovery initiatives will be complemented by our Future Economy Programme. Similarly, the implementation of our Migration Control Policy will ensure we have a workforce with the skills necessary for us to compete on the world stage. But our commitment is not only material, it also extends to the great wealth of talent and heritage that Jersey already enjoys, and this Plan will increase funding for our Island's arts and heritage and will celebrate Jersey's unique culture through the Island Identity Programme.

This Plan sets out in clear terms our commitment to support Islanders' livelihoods in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic with £11.3 million pounds being pledged to the third phase of the Co-Funded Payroll scheme in 2021. This scheme has already supported Islanders' incomes during 2020 and mitigated the sort of dramatic increases in income inequality which we have seen in other jurisdictions. In April of this year, the Co-Funded Payroll scheme supported more than 1 in 4 Islanders in work which amounted to 17,000 people. I know many Islanders are passionate about improving the affordability and quality of local housing, which is why, along with a review of the recommendations of the Housing Policy Development Board, this Plan commits to the implementation of a new Housing Advisory Service and continuing to improve the support and protection for tenants.

Our natural environment will also be enhanced by this Plan. Earlier this year, this Assembly committed to supporting our Carbon Neutral Strategy and Sustainable Transport Policies. The Government Plan protects the Climate Emergency Fund and provides the resources for Jersey's Climate Conversation, including a major citizens' assembly, in early 2021. This work is an opportunity to put Jersey on a path to becoming a world leading environmentally sustainable jurisdiction and we urge everyone to take part.

The Government Plan contains these initiatives and many, many more. Officers have worked tirelessly alongside Ministers and Assistant Ministers, to develop this Plan in line with our ambition for Jersey. Scrutiny Panels and Members have carefully considered its proposals and the public have had their opportunity to pose questions and judge the Plan for themselves. I appreciate the shortened lodging period necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic has put Scrutiny Panels under additional pressure and I would like to thank them for working to accommodate the time constraints. I would also like to thank all Members for their considered amendments to this Plan. I am sure that as we progress through the amendments, we will hear a number of heartfelt and passionate speeches on some really important issues. Members will appreciate that, for a variety of reasons we cannot accept all amendments. We have tried, where possible, to suggest small alterations and I hope Members will view these in the honest spirit in which they have been made.

Before I close and take questions, I would like to thank all Members, scrutiny officers, stakeholders and Islanders for their engagement throughout the Government Plan process. Around 55,000 Islanders viewed the 5 live-streamed public sessions held last month and more than 100,000 minutes of footage had been watched overall by the end of the week. I'd also like to pay tribute to you Sir, the Greffier, Deputy Greffier and Assistant Greffiers and all the staff at the States Greffe. Not only for accommodating this requisitioned sitting but also for continuing the smooth running of this Assembly throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, you utilised our early rollout of Office 365 to make this the first parliament in the Commonwealth to sit entirely online and this historic achievement is testament to the hard work, behind the scenes, that the Greffe staff do to facilitate our democracy.

This has been an incredible year of change across our society and our government and this will undoubtedly continue into 2021 and beyond. I'd like to close by thanking everybody in the Government who have helped through what has been an exhausting year. Whether it is our frontline healthcare workers, teachers, manual or public sector workers. Everyone has done their part, talented IT teams who have built a comprehensive and versatile track and trace system; the teams who set up and continue to run the testing at the Airport and the Harbour, overcoming numerous challenges and adapting swiftly along the way; our enforcement officers who have ensured the healthcare guidance has been followed; or our dedicated officers who have gone above and beyond this year, not only in our pandemic response but also in their day-to-day business, helping Ministers to continue the good work of this Government. More and more has been expected of us all as the demands have grown. Sometimes this has been a thankless task. I applaud how so many have been doing their absolute best and that is all anyone can expect. To everyone, I say thank you.