

STATES OF JERSEY



POPULATION POLICY (S.R.3/2009): RESPONSE OF THE CHIEF MINISTER

Presented to the States on 27th July 2009
by the Chief Minister

STATES GREFFE

**POPULATION POLICY (S.R.3/2009):
RESPONSE OF THE CHIEF MINISTER**

Introduction

As the Sub-Panel's report was published shortly before the States debate on the States Strategic Plan, the main issues it identified have now been commented upon by myself and other Members of the Council of Ministers and fully debated by the States Assembly. In this context, whilst it is entirely correct that the Chief Minister should provide a formal response, the recommendations of the Sub-Panel have already been considered through this process.

Having completed the States debate on population as part of the States Strategic Plan, it will be unsurprising to the Sub-Panel that I do not share its view on some of its findings and have rejected a number of its recommendations. The reasons for this are set out below.

Key Findings

- 2.1 The methodologies used by the Statistics Unit are robust. However, questions remain as to the data used in these methodologies as projections accompanying the Population Policy were not based on the most recent data: 2005 figures were used to provide the base line for projections even though there had been high economic growth in 2006, 2007 and 2008. If those years were incorporated in the base line, current population projections could be out by 2000 people.

The choice of base year is the decision of the Head of the Statistics Unit and the rationale for this has been explained to the Panel's expert advisor and is included within the advisor's report in Appendix 1. The rationale for the 2005 base is that the net inward migration over the intervening period has been driven by the strong economic growth experienced by the Island in 2006 and 2007. In light of the anticipated economic downturn over the next few years and its potential effect on the direction of net migration, it was decided to base the long-term projections on the population figures at the point just before the period of strong economic growth commenced, i.e. 2005.

It is therefore not the case that the choice of base year means that the overall long-term projections are out by 2,000 people, rather that the long-term projections take into consideration the cyclical nature of population growth within the Island.

It is important to note that the population model does not just address the level of the population. Indeed, the fundamental issue that population model clearly identifies is the change in the makeup of the Island's population that must be addressed in the future.

- 2.2 The introduction of effective mechanisms to monitor and control the Island's population is of paramount importance to the debate on population policy; a decision regarding specific limits to net inward migration or regarding a target population size or mix should not be taken prior to the introduction of those mechanisms.

Mechanisms to control the population already exist through the Regulation of Undertakings and Housing Laws. These have been strengthened in recent years through the creation of the Population Office and formation of the Migration Advisory Group to provide political oversight to the work of this office. The information collected from both these Laws, along with that from other sources, is also used by the Statistics Unit to provide a robust and accurate annual measure of the level of the Island's population.

The new mechanisms currently being proposed will further strengthen these existing arrangements.

The Council of Ministers' Population Policy is designed to address the inescapable changes in the makeup of the Island's population over time and ensure that the Island can properly plan for the future. New mechanisms for managing migration will not address this fundamental issue but are required to ensure that an overall population level can be maintained. There is therefore no reason why both should be debated at the same time.

- 2.3 The other aspects of the policy 'package' mentioned by the Council of Ministers to address the effects of an 'ageing society' have not to date been sufficiently researched, analysed or documented.

The Population Policy makes clear the other policy measures required to address the ageing society, including the likely balance of these policies, and States Strategic Plan identifies the work to be undertaken in each area. The Scrutiny Panel is correct that the development of the entire package of policy measures would involve considerable effort and resources, which is why they form part of the Strategic plan.

The agreement of the Population Policy sets a base of inward immigration, which can be reviewed alongside other policy developments as they are formulated as part of the review process. The Council of Ministers has made it clear that its inward migration proposal is the minimum level required to maintain the working age population and deliver the other policy options it identifies.

- 2.4 The consultation and work undertaken to date by the Council of Ministers has not provided sufficient opportunity for a debate on the various principles and philosophies that inform population policy.

This policy proposal has been made in the light of unprecedented public consultation which began in 2007 with the Imagine Jersey 2035 exercise, which included a survey, extensive media coverage, a public event and a youth event. This consultation exercise was overseen by an organisation specialising in public engagement. In July 2008, the Council of Ministers

published 'Keeping Jersey Special' which had at its very heart the need to balance social, economic and environmental factors in addressing the ageing population. The Strategic Plan consultation process which took place in the early part of 2009, was well covered by the media and provided further opportunity for consultation on the issue of the ageing population.

These consultation exercises have provided considerable opportunity for the Public, States Members and the Council of Ministers to discuss, debate and consider matters of principle and philosophy.

In addition, the Strategic Plan debate itself enabled the States Assembly to debate matters of principle and philosophy surrounding the Population Policy.

Recommendations

- 2.5 Population projections should be established on the basis of the most recent data. The debate on a population policy should not be held until such revised projections are available.

Rejected

For the reasons identified above. The Jersey Population Model is a long-term planning tool which shows the changing makeup of the overall population and must look across a number of economic cycles. Revised projections were not required to hold the debate on population policy.

- 2.6 The proposed Migration legislation should be brought forward without delay for debate by the States. The Chief Minister should commit to the States Assembly a clear timetable of when the legislation will be lodged.

Accepted

Part 2 of the Migration Policy consultation was agreed by the Council of Ministers on 11th June 2009 and published on 17th June 2009. As part of this exercise, a clear timetable has been made available to States Members.

- 2.7 The Chief Minister should clarify why the Population Policy would be reviewed every three years and how it would be reviewed and reset.

Though a long-term policy, it is important that the population policy is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that it is still appropriate in meeting the needs of the Island.

It is not envisaged that 'Imagine Jersey' should be run every three years. The review process will include reviewing inward migration over the previous period, along with the progress against the other policy initiatives within the Strategic Plan required to address the ageing population. In addition, the process of developing the Strategic Plan would naturally include an evaluation of the social, economic and environmental issues that prevail at the time. It is only natural therefore, that such a review should take place every three years alongside the States Strategic Plan debate.

- 2.8 The other parts of the policy ‘package’ need to be clearly researched and analysed by the Council of Ministers. The Population Policy should not be debated until a clearer picture of the entire ‘package’ is provided.

Rejected

For the reasons identified above. The Strategic Plan clearly identifies the balance of other policies required and identifies the work required to develop these policy areas over the next 3 years.

- 2.9 Further work should be undertaken by the Council of Ministers to stimulate debate on the principles underlying population policy in order that a starting point and direction for population policy can be agreed.

Rejected

For the reasons identified above. The issue of the ageing population, including matters of principle and philosophy, has been the subject of extensive consultation since November 2007. In addition, the States debate on the States Strategic Plan policy allowed States Members to debate these very issues.

Conclusion

The Chief Minister is grateful for the work of the Sub-Panel and appreciates the efforts of the Sub-Panel in publishing its report shortly before the States Strategic Plan debate. It is recognised that the issues identified by the Sub-Panel were identified and covered by the States Strategic Plan debate and it will therefore be unsurprising to the panel that a number of its recommendations have been rejected.

In summary, the Chief Minister believes that there was enough information on which to hold a debate on population policy, that sufficient consultation was undertaken and that a control mechanism is in place to ensure the policy can be implemented. In addition, the States Assembly had a good and full debate on the subject, including the underlying principles behind it.