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Comments: POPULATION AND MIGRATION - a comment on the Strategic Plan White Paper

Introduction.

In recent times many States of Jersey politicians, and particularly those involved with the development of the finance and banking industries, have promoted the view that the Jersey economy is somehow sheltered from wider global events. Unfortunately the harsh reality on the ground does not conform to this cosy political view. The time to face the facts is well overdue. It takes courage to change course but now is imperative that our government seriously reviews some of their taken for granted assumptions underlying the Strategic Plan White Paper.

The Strategic Plan White Paper seems to be constructed on the assumption that once we come out of this recession, it will be business as usual. It does not adequately address the possibility that the economic future of Jersey is likely, of necessity, to be fundamentally different from what it has been in the recent past.

A changing economy and rising unemployment

In times of recession/depression governments have the tendency to underestimate the extent and the knock-on effects of the downturn. It seems that the extent of the present global economic and financial collapse is a prime example of this.

One of the most serious failings of the White Paper is that it has failed to take into account the impact that the wider global meltdown will have on the local economy, especially with regard to present and future employment levels. Rising unemployment levels in Jersey is a serious concern in the short to medium term. It is utter folly to even contemplate growing the population when unemployment levels are high. Also, it is utter folly to even contemplate calculating a net inward migration figure without factoring in projected unemployment figures. It is glaringly obvious that the ratio of employed to unemployed depends on the numbers of people who are unemployed. It is wrong to merely assume that present and future unemployment figures will be as low as they have been in the past. The population growth policy is seeking to address the problem of the declining dependency ratio. The declining dependency ratio will become more severe as the employed to unemployed ratio declines. This is all very simple analysis which the White Paper fails to properly consider when proposing population growth. There is a real possibility that relatively high unemployment will become the norm in Jersey for many years to come and dealing with this should be one of the focal points of any strategic plan. Projections of unemployment levels must be made before population growth policies are considered.

The White Paper fails miserably in this respect.

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