

Stuart Langhorn – 2nd September 2019

I wish to make the following general comments about the Government Plan for consideration by the Scrutiny Panel. My background as Chair of Scrutiny and former leader of an authority in England provides me with the experience of having put together and scrutinised plans of this nature.

1. That the Government has put together a plan to link its spending proposals and its plans should be welcomed - this is a step in the right direction.
2. The plan itself has not been well prepared. It does not contain any baseline information on which progress can be judged. Or indeed whether action needs to be taken at all. In this sense this is not a targeted plan of where money needs to be spent in order to be most effective - but a list of desires from individual ministers. The States has the information needed to provide such a baseline - but has not provided it in the plan. For example, in the Putting Children First section it states that Jersey does not meet the highest international standards (p33) yet this year's A Level and GCSE results outperformed most English and Welsh Authorities. On p 40 no baseline statistics have been provided - nor have a target of where Jersey wishes to be. Without a target there can be no way of judging whether the proposed amount of funds is appropriate. If, for example, Jersey wished to be at the top of the PISA league table (given the comment on p33) this may take a massive change in its education investment (currently one of the lowest when judged by GDP in the western world).
3. The Government Plan presents itself as a 'efficiency budget'. It is in fact a growth budget. With no measure of whether the money is being targeted appropriately (as I have highlighted above). The efficiencies amount to £25 million per year and are actually a small percentage of the budget. They are unambitious and, more importantly, untargeted. Scrutiny must press the executive to be clear on where they are being targeted and where they are being delivered. I would recommend the introduction of a quarterly Budget and performance report on these targets. A traffic light report system - where you can scrutinise the negative or red lights works well.
4. The Chief Minister states the Government Plan has 5 Priorities (p6). It does not - it has 6. If he cannot get the number of priorities correct - then he will struggle to manage to deliver it. In fact the largest amount of money is being spent on modernising government - an area he is responsible for - an one he fails to mention in his own introduction. This needs questioning.
5. Common Themes/ Ongoing initiative - the common themes do not include climate change or environment (p190). They should after the Assembly declared a Climate Change Emergency.
6. Ministerial Responsibility - the ministerial responsibilities do not align with the Department responsibilities (p190/191). There is no clear political line of responsibility for a department in the Chief Executive's reorganisation. Nor is there a clear line or responsibility for actions in the plan. Some ministers have lots to do - others very little as a consequence. As there are no political party manifestos has the plan been written to keep ministers voting for the Chief Minister - rather than upon evidence of what is a priority for the island?

7. Clarity of Pictograms - p193-196 It would be useful if the document consistently used graphs and pictograms to present information. For example, on these pages you could see which departments are getting the growth in their budgets. It is in fact the Chief Minister - for building a new HQ. This would make your scrutiny easier.

To summarise: The plan is a welcome step forward. In its current state it is not ready for use. It needs baseline evidence for why these are priorities, ministers need to explain why they are allocating the spending they are, targets needs setting and an explanation of how they will be reached, the sixth priority needs to be agreed, a system of monitoring the plan needs to be in place.

I include my letter to the JEP:

Dear Editor,

Islanders should welcome the new Government Plan as a step in the right direction. It is good to see Jersey catch up with the twentieth century. The link between the Government's spending plans and its priorities should be obvious to anyone who must set a budget; be that business or householder. It is a surprise that the States has not produced such a document before.

The headline of £100 million of efficiencies sounds dramatic. It is, I suspect, a clever distraction so that Islanders do not look too closely at the Government Plan. Far from a budget of cuts, this is in fact a growth budget. Efficiencies will be found of around 4.5% a year. Hardly a great ambition. This is less than the £30 million deficit that we were all warned about less than two months ago. Apparently, this can be achieved by better procurement, better IT systems and by the retirement of staff. So that will be easy then! A note of caution. If your strategy is a freeze on recruitment when staff retire then this is not a strategic approach to reducing your budget. Its rather like firing a shotgun at a fence and then wondering why it loses its structural integrity. If you lose all your staff in one area you can no longer provide a service.

The document gives Islanders an indication of what to expect under the heading of each of the Government's 5 priorities over the next four years. These are: Put Children First, Improve Islander's Well Being, Create a Sustainable, Vibrant Economy, Reduce Income inequality, Protect the environment. Many of the plans have already been announced and most are laudable; if a little bland. For many of the big projects are things that other organisations wish to do – such as capital projects being built , or are things that must be done like the hospital, or a strategy that must be written – like the Population Policy. What then is the vision of this Council of Ministers?

Now we get a sixth priority – to modernise government. This was not in the 5 priorities agreed by the States Assembly and does not feature on p29 as one of the 5 Government Priorities. However, it is going to feature heavily in the Government Plan. It involves Government spending money on itself. For example, on building a new headquarters, on reforming the electoral system, to reform the public sector workforce. In other words, the Government plan is being used to introduce a plan for Government to spend more of tax payer's money on itself and introduce this as a priority – without asking the public about it.

It is a truth that if you want to know where someone's heart is then look where they put their money. Buried at the back of the Government Plan are tables that tell Islanders where the investment of increased budget will be. The Infrastructure Minister will receive no revenue increase to their budget in the plan. Home Affairs £12 million. The Environment Minister receives £14.5 million. Economic Development £29 million. Housing and Children receives £51.5 and Education £48 million. Health £95 million. These were the original Government priorities. The Chief Minister receives £105 million.

Where is the heart of the Council of Ministers? Where will the tax increases be going? What will be the £100 million of efficiencies be paying for? According to their own plan their priority is to modernise government. What is the Chief Minister responsible for in the plan? To build a new headquarters for the government. To provide a digital structure for the finance industry, offices in London and New York and Cannes. To find efficiencies in Government. To set up more government boards. To set up a new electoral system.

It will now be up to all Islanders and the States Assembly to decide whether we think that it really deserves a whole new Council of Ministers Priority and £105 million invested in this – or should the money be spent elsewhere?