



12th November 2020

Dear Senator Moore,

Thank you for your invitation for Unite the Union to submit to your review of the Government Plan 2021-24. Unite the Union has written to members working for the Government of Jersey to solicit their feedback prior to making this submission. I write now on behalf of public sector workers that Unite represents in Civil Service, manual workers, nursing and uniformed services, as well as our broader membership in the private sector.

We support the overarching ambitions of the plan, and acknowledge that government services need to be provided in an efficient manner that provides value to the public. Having said that, the lack of clarity provided by the plan around fair pay awards for public sector workers remains a key concern.

Of further concern is that some of our members working in the public sector are currently employed on "zero hours" contracts. These contracts do not offer financial or social security for those bound by them. Studies show that working on a zero hours contracts negatively impacts on the mental health of the worker, yet the contract fails to provide adequate protection for workers who become ill, exacerbating the problem. Given the current climate with COVID-19, this could have damaging impacts on the health of these colleagues, and potentially their co-workers, too.

Measures to improve the standard of living are warmly welcomed, including the proposals to modernise the tax treatment of women, and people in same-sex relationships. Unite particularly welcomes the proposal to review the way the minimum wage is agreed, although note that the plan is lacking in detail as to how this will be achieved, and hence the impact of any likely outcomes of such a review.

Unite also notes the plan contains no commitments to Government policies about aligning the minimum wage to a living wage. At present, the differential between the minimum wage and living wage sits at £2.23 per hour. Different studies show variable statistics regarding the percentage of Jersey's population living in poverty, but there can be no doubting that this epidemic blights Jersey as it does other European countries. By only ensuring employers pay the minimum wage, the Government Plan forces many to live below the poverty line, once housing costs are factored in. The benefits of paying a fair, equitable "living wage" go further than to the employees, with lower absenteeism, lower staff turnover, and improved customer satisfaction all benefits to employers.

The increase in tax allowances will have a negligible impact on the money in workers' pockets. Unite feels a broader review of tax and social security is required to ensure that low and middle earners do not bear the brunt of increased spending and any decreased revenue due to Covid-19.

With organisational changes within States of Jersey continuing apace into 2021 and beyond, Unite would encourage Ministers to engage with us to develop a better understanding of how the proposed efficiency measures will impact on the people working within their portfolios. We would also welcome the engagement of the States Employment Board and Scrutiny. Should the Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel wish to meet with representatives of Unite to discuss their concerns in more detail, Unite would be happy to do so.

Yours sincerely,

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