

4.12 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Chief Minister regarding net immigration and growth in the population:

When will the Chief Minister present the States with a long-term population policy to replace the interim measures and will he explain to the Assembly how the figure of 325 net immigration was chosen and whether he is concerned that this figure could lead to growth in the population to 110,000 plus by 2035 breaching the limit set in the Strategic Plan 2009-2014?

Senator I.J. Gorst (The Chief Minister):

The interim population policy relates to 2014 and 2015 and will be succeeded in 2016 by a long-term plan inclusive of a long-term population policy. This will be considered by the Assembly in 2015. In the meantime, net immigration of plus 325 is a policy of stability. It upholds the planning assumptions underlying our existing long-term policies and maintains the size of our workforce as our population ages. As to the level of population in 20 years' time, that will be for the long-term plan to determine. I would stress, however, that our long-term debate should not focus simply on the size of our population but on the range of policies we develop to secure a sustainable balance between the needs of our community, our environment and our economy.

4.12.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

If I may. I thank the Chief Minister for his answer and that it will be a full proper policy by 2015 presented to this House. That is an appropriate timescale but does he recognise that there are only marginal differences in dependency ratio as we look at the range of scenarios for net immigration presented in the population figures produced by the Statistics Department and does he not accept that starting with 325 is not about stability, it is about growth?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I do not accept that. It is quite clear, as I said, that that is what the current policy is and in the period that we need to develop the long-term plan, it seems to me absolutely reasonable that we maintain our workforce level and that seems quite straightforward and appropriate.

4.12.2 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Given that the Chief Minister has said that a long-term population policy should be coming forward in 2016, given that we were supposed to be debating a proper population policy last year but only getting an interim one recently and we cannot bind whatever the next Assembly is going to do, how can the Chief Minister expect this Assembly to believe that - no aspersions on him - by the way of process, how can we possibly accept that?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Because we are totally transforming the way that we plan for the future and I do not think any Member in this Assembly believes - and I say that with authority because every time this Assembly has stood up and debated a Strategic Plan there have been moans and groans from across the Assembly that it is not long-term enough - that it is not really looking at the strategic issues, it is simply looking at policy decisions over the next 3 years. We need to almost lift up our heads, develop a long-term policy, look at the balance that we need to deliver between the environment, the economy and the community, look at the Jersey we want to see in 20 or 30 years' time and then from that, do the piece of work that needs to take place over the next 2 years. It would be nice if we could have done it sooner but it is important that we get that proper strategic long-term direction in place first.

4.12.3 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I must say I have to laugh every time I hear Ministers talk about long-term planning and policies. I have been in this Assembly now almost 6 years and in 2007, you had “Imagine Jersey” and the Chief Minister and other Ministers have been in office for over 6 years and had 6 years to get a strategy and a plan and to co-ordinate population growth in this Island and have failed. How can the Chief Minister give us any confidence that this is not just a ploy before the election to put off the debate about population and really, the Chief Minister is just stalling for time because he failed in the past?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

There I was thinking that the Deputy had turned over a new leaf this morning but unfortunately it appears that that may not be the case. If I could remind the Deputy that I have only been in this position working in the way that I have for the last 2 years and we have done a lot of work. No piece of work looking at long-term planning like this has been undertaken previously. Members go back and talk about “Imagine Jersey” but that really was to deal with the Strategic Plan. Yes, it was trying to look at the long term but it was about delivering a policy for the short-term Strategic Plan. It has got to be absolutely right. Everywhere else in the world, major cities and communities are looking about the type of community they want in 20 and 30 years’ time. We have got to do the same. It would be wrong of us not to. We cannot keep going on in the same way that we have been. We have got to think about the type of Jersey that we want and then Ministers will be able to be held appropriately to account by this Assembly to see whether the delivery strategy for the 3 or 4-year period is delivered.

4.12.4 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Supplementary. Can I ask the Chief Minister then why are we making major decisions about the hospital and other things without population figures and a population policy? The Council of Ministers are already making decisions about the future of this Island based on figures that we do not know and I honestly believe that Ministers - I cannot use the word “dishonest” - but I do believe that it is putting off the inevitable. They do not want the people to know what they are planning for the population of this Island. Is that not the case?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Absolutely not. The Health Department have been clear about the projections when it comes to a new hospital and the inward migration level is but one small component of what is happening in our community. Would the Deputy... that we did not have a new hospital, that we carried on saying we do not want to invest in healthcare services, we do not want to invest in the housing stock and we do not want to develop strategies for the future? I think the answer is absolutely he would not. We are making progress on all these big important issues and planning for the future is part of that. We committed to doing that in the Strategic Plan. This Assembly approved that. The policies that we have brought forward around redesigning our healthcare, around the new hospital, around housing, have all been agreed by this Assembly.

4.12.5 Deputy T.A. Vallois of St. Saviour:

The Chief Minister stated that the interim population policy was based on stability. Could he therefore advise why it is only being addressed in the last year of his term and not his first when engagement and appropriate public debate could have been had?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Quite clearly because we are now in a position that we have got the Control of Work and Housing (Jersey) Law which is what my department and Ministers were working on to

deliver to get mechanisms to be able to for the first time deliver on a number like we are proposing albeit it is a target, albeit we have recognised it is going to be difficult but we have now got some legislation in place that is going to help us to deliver on that. The delivering of the law was the first part of being able to deliver a strategy in due course.

4.12.6 Deputy M. Tadier:

Will the Chief Minister admit that this talk about limiting to 325 increase per year is simply a fantasy and political posturing in an election year and that when push comes to shove, apart from a few very ineffectual and draconian housing and work requirements, that there is nothing that this Assembly can do to stop migrants coming into Jersey because we are part of the common travel area and we are not an independent State which has work permits and visa requirements that it can issue?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I do not agree with that at all. As I have said, the policy brought forward is one of stability. It is the right thing to do while we develop the long-term Strategic Plan and I think it is an appropriate policy. It seems that those who want to close the door are criticising us because the number is too great. Those who want to open the door wide without any control are criticising us because the number is too small. That tells me one thing. It tells me that we have probably got it about right albeit that it has been difficult to deliver on it. We want to see economic growth. Even the Deputy has admitted that we will probably see it in the next couple of years but at the same time, we want to make sure that jobs in our economy are for those who are entitled and entitled to work.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Can I ask a supplementary? Sir, as a point of order ...

The Bailiff:

I am sorry, I am going to have to bring it to an end.

Deputy M. Tadier:

I think the Chief Minister is misleading the Assembly and he does not agree at all. Does he not agree that we are part of a common travel area and that we are not independent? Can the Chief Minister at least agree to those 2 points?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I think the thrust of his question was that this was political posturing and that was what I did not agree to. Of course I agree that we are part of the common travel area because I answered a question about it at the last States sitting.

4.12.7 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I fear the Chief Minister rewrites history when he says "Imagine Jersey 2035" was not a long-term plan but does he not accept that continuing with a policy of plus 325 in net immigration is just extending the failure of his and previous Council of Ministers to control population at all because the reality is for the past decade, we have had an average of 600 net immigrants when the target has always been 325.

[11:15]

Senator I.J. Gorst:

That is why when I answered Deputy Vallois' question that this has been a process delivering the law in which it is going to help us to act more upon delivering this number was the

important first step for this Council of Ministers. That is what we have done. Some of the Members who are criticising me for bringing forward a population model and bringing forward this particular number are Members who in other guises go to my department and say that employees should be given more non-local licences. Perhaps it is about time they joined this debate in an appropriate manner and recognise it is about delivering balance. It is about delivering economic growth and it is about delivering jobs for those who are already in our community

The Bailiff:

I will bring you to a close, Chief Minister. We are running short of time on questions.