

2.3 Deputy J.A. Martin of the Chief Minister regarding estimate of working population:

Given that at the time of the Strategic Plan 2005/2010, it was estimated that one per cent of the working population equated to approximately 500 jobs, would the Minister advise whether that figure has risen?

Senator F.H. Walker (The Chief Minister):

The first States' Strategic Plan was agreed in 2004 and set against the position in 2003. It was always expected that changes in working population would vary from year to year and the target of one per cent was set as an annual average over the period of the plan. At the time the Strategic Plan was presented to the States, one per cent of the workforce corresponded to an average increase of approximately 500 workers per annum. The Statistics Unit informed me that more precisely one per cent of the workforce at that time was, in fact, 515 workers. From figures presented in the labour market for December 2006 report, published by the Statistics Unit earlier this year, one per cent of the workforce in 2006 corresponded to 525 workers. Over the period from 2003 to 2006 the workforce has increased at an average annual rate of about 0.44 per cent which is below the rate - well below the rate - specified by the Strategic Plan.

2.3.1 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Would the Chief Minister give an indication as to whether or not the current policy then of allowing up to one per cent is more than adequate and is something that we have been right to set and indeed it is the correct figure that we do not need to exceed in the future?

Senator F.H. Walker:

I see no reason to change the figure at this point as I have made clear, not only today but at other recent sittings. The figure does vary of course over the period of the plan and it was not that long ago that the figure was decreasing, and the average over the 5-year period is what is important. But I see no reason to change the ceiling figure at this juncture.

2.3.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Chief Minister not accept that actual growth in the job market amounted to over 1,500 jobs in 2006 or 3 per cent of the market and that he is not, in fact, in control of the economy and job growth but it is racing out of control? In particular, would he state what figures he expects to see in 2007 and 2008? Is it of the order of 3 per cent or one per cent?

Senator F.H. Walker:

I confirm the Deputy's arithmetic, that there was indeed, as has been previously reported, an increase of 1,540 on the previous December which is a 3 per cent rise. But I do not in any way agree with him that the economy is out of control. The whole basis of the Strategic Plan in order to minimise taxation increases, or any form of new taxation, was to achieve economic growth and that is exactly, to the benefit of all Islanders, exactly what we are achieving.

2.3.3 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Yes, I fully understand what the Chief Minister is saying - economic growth. Is he also discussing the growth of the dependents? I am reading here a written question by Deputy Southern from the Chief Minister and it says of the 200 "j" categories that were awarded last year, and 40 per cent were not time limited so basically permanent, there are 170 children under the age of 15 years. Well, to me, Sir, if that continues would not the Chief Minister agree that he should be in very urgent talks with the Education Minister and maybe other social services, because I do not know if this was planned for in the Strategic Plan?

Senator F.H. Walker:

I go back to my overall point, that the average over the period of the plan is well below target and that is the important figure. Of course the Education Minister is well aware of all the figures as are

all Ministers and indeed as are all Members of the States because they have been put very clearly in the public arena.

2.3.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

For clarification, could the Chief Minister indicate what average he expects to occur over the coming 2 or 3 years?

Senator F.H. Walker:

No, I cannot do that. The States have agreed a target in the Strategic Plan and that will obviously be continuously reviewed as it is and I would remind the Deputy, and indeed the House, that a major report - and it will be the most major report ever published - on population will be presented in September followed by a lengthy period of consultation, followed of course by a States' debate where the House will be able to take the most informed decisions ever possible on the population make up of Jersey. Of course it is not just migrant workers, there are other issues relating to aging population, the need to maintain a percentage of the population who are active and contributing to our tax revenues.