

Chief Minister Howard Quayle MHK

Programme for Government speech

Mr President

In moving the motion in my name, I am asking Tynwald to debate, and hopefully support, the Council of Minister's initial high level strategic objectives and guiding principles, as contained in the report in front of you.

The guiding principles and strategic objectives set out the initial direction for Government and will allow us to build the rest of our Programme based on these core elements.

Council will return to this Honourable Court in January, with a more detailed programme, including circa twenty priorities which we hope to address by 2020.

Honourable Members will also note that the document contains a number of outcomes, linked to our guiding principles.

We are not asking Members to agree the outcomes during this session.

Honourable Members will also note that we intend to return each October, to report on progress and revisit our priorities thus ensuring that our plan is still valid.

Mr President,

Our programme for Government is laid on strong foundations.

The bedrock on which we build a new future for our Island is solid.

Last quarter, over 450 new jobs were created, compared to 371 for the same quarter last year.

At the end of October, our external reserves stood at just under £1.5 billion.

Two weeks ago, UNESCO told the world, what we in the Isle of Man already know. They recognised that our unique environment, heritage and culture, combine to create an exceptional place to live and work. As a result, our Island was designated with Biosphere reserve status.

If we are to keep this place, we call home special, we must act now, and we must act with purpose.

In setting our priorities, the Council of Ministers is looking to the future.

The world around us is changing at a speed which is unprecedented. Developments in technology, in global politics,

and in society, are happening at a pace that few of us had anticipated.

In the last year we have seen Brexit, the election of Donald Trump and the ever increasing level of external scrutiny.

We must be ready to respond to these changes, and seize the opportunities that they bring.

Fundamental to all that we do is sustaining an economy which brings opportunity for everyone.

We want innovation and enterprise to thrive, bringing jobs and wealth for the people of this Island.

We have benefited from many years of economic growth, but we must continue to evolve.

The Council of Ministers believe it is our role to set the environment, in which new and existing sectors can flourish. We owe it to the young people of this Island to make sure we succeed.

THE FUTURE ENVIRONMENT

Mr President

While I know that many Members of this honourable Court are new in post, if you were to look at the job centre website, you would see there are over eight hundred jobs advertised.

Business people here are telling us that finding candidates with the right skills is becoming a constant challenge.

There are vacancies in hospitality and catering, in technology and in manufacturing. In fact, almost every sector across the Island has vacancies.

We have listened to these concerns, and we will act to ensure we are not restricting growth.

In the first part of a long term plan to grow the working population, my colleague, the Minister for Economic Development, will return as a priority, with proposals to expand the number of exemptions to the current work permit system.

This system should protect Manx workers, but it should not hinder the ability of growing businesses to recruit a skilled workforce where there are clear shortages.

This is not an optional step if we are to remain competitive now and in the future.

However remaining competitive is not just about employment though.

I know that there are concerns about some of the costs of running a business here and the cost of living here.

We want to give confidence to people that their costs will not rise. That is why Council has agreed with the Manx Utilities Authority, that there will be no further increases to the sewerage rate for this year, except for an inflationary increase which I expect to be brought to Tynwald next month.

I would like to work together with the Chairman and Board of the MUA to consider how we can take a similar approach for water and electricity costs.

Linked to this will be the review of the rating system which needs to be largely completed by the end of next year.

Business and the general public will then have more certainty about their future costs.

The cost of high speed internet access for business has also been raised as a concern by many in industry. This concern has been echoed in a recent report examining our telecoms infrastructure.

The report makes a number of recommendations to improve the provision of our telecoms infrastructure. I have asked the National Strategy Group to take these recommendations forward.

This will include a more active role for the communications commission, in monitoring the pricing and quality of our telecoms provision.

There are areas though, where we must create change, if we are to create the environment for our Island to flourish.

During our first workshop with Tynwald Members, one of the themes that emerged as a priority, from almost everyone in attendance was reform of the planning system.

Everyone believes that our planning system should support growth, but we are also clear that this should not be at any cost.

It is not an easy balance, but the consensus is, that the system we have at present is not responsive enough.

The Minister for Policy and Reform will lead the reform of the planning system.

I have been clear that this will be a priority for this administration. I want to start reform immediately and aim to achieve substantial progress within the next 18 months.

Another policy priority for Council must be off-Island transport and freight. One of the realities of living on an Island is that we are dependent on our transport links.

Without safe, reliable and cost-effective transport, our society and economy will not thrive.

Like planning, this is a difficult balancing act to achieve.

Our size and scale means we will never be as attractive to larger providers, so we must ensure we have a bespoke solution that meets our needs. And this will inevitably result in compromise. Above all though, we need certainty.

The Minister for Infrastructure will bring a strategic sea services policy to this court for consideration by February.

I must stress to Members that doing nothing is not an option. Sea and air services are our lifeline and we must act to ensure we are best served for the future.

We are also planning for the future in other areas. On 14th April this year, the European Union approved the new General Data Protection Regulations. Although there is uncertainty about our future relationship with Europe, the EU is, and will continue to be, a key market for us.

Therefore we must ensure that we continue to operate to the standards and practices expected of us in this area. We are committed to retaining our existing adequacy ruling in relation to data protection. We will take whatever steps are necessary in the future to ensure adequacy in relation to the GDPR.

Mr President,

Last year we spent almost £100m on education for the people of the Isle of Man. We should be proud of what our young people have achieved. It may be a cliché, but it seems we punch above our weight in the world.

So many of our young people go on to do amazing things. The Duchess of Cambridge wears clothes designed by a Manx couple. The genome data of the Manx Cat has been decoded by a young scientist from the Isle of Man, and one of the top west end stars is proud to call the Island home. We have gold medallists and athletes at the top of their sport who wear the Manx flag with pride.

Our education system has served us well, but it must continue to evolve.

We can choose to react to the world around us, or we can set a course for the future which others will follow. We need learning that is relevant, and young people who are ready to join the workforce.

We are not constrained by the politics of other Governments in the way our education system works. I want the Minister for Education to bring forward a new strategy for lifelong learning, which will ensure our people are able to get the skills they need, when they need them, ready for the workplace of the future.

INCLUSIVE AND CARING

Mr President

The Council of Ministers has been clear that we want a society that is inclusive and caring. We want the Island to be a place where everyone has the opportunity to succeed.

It is also important though, to make sure that we have a support structure in place to help people when they need it most.

I do not believe our current benefits system works.

It is not flexible enough to respond to the needs of individuals. Nor does it join up well with other support available across Government.

I want to see a benefits system that provides a truly tailored package of care for those who need it most.

I must state though, that this will not be an expansion of cost. But a better use of existing resources.

Although reform of the benefits system is progressing, I am not convinced it is happening quickly enough.

So today I am tasking the Social Policy and Children's committee and the Treasury, co-ordinated by the Minister for policy and reform, to intensify the focus of the current benefits reform programme, completing the policy work on needs and means testing in the first year of this administration.

We need a policy that is flexible enough to provide more individual support for people when they need it, which focuses on helping more people back into work.

There is a further area of Government policy which needs an urgent overhaul. Pre-school provision. The current policy is not working. There is inconsistent provision across the Island.

I want to ensure that all our children are receiving the best start in life. That is why the Minister for Education and Children will work together with the Treasury to find the best way to address this issue.

We want a clear plan of action to make sure our most valuable asset – our children – are supported to grow and thrive.

One of our strategic objectives is to be financially responsible. A fundamental part of this is making sure our services are provided in the most effective and value for money way.

The Digital Strategy, approved by this Court in June 2015, will continue. The first major pieces of work in Health and Policing are now well underway.

These projects will not only make the services better for the people using them, but they, along with other programmes in the strategy, will deliver £7m of cash savings by 2021. And a further £21m of non-cashable efficiency savings.

We have a further five programmes identified which are expected to deliver an additional £5m of cash savings.

I want to be clear to Departments, Boards and Offices too. If we are able to deliver our services more effectively outside of

Government, then we should not shy away from making the decision because of political ideology.

If it is the right thing to do, and we can maintain service levels, while offering a better deal to the taxpayer, then we should get on and do it.

The Treasury will work with the Cabinet Office to support Departments in exploring the best way to deliver their services.

Linked to this is Local Government reform. This is something which has been talked about often. It will not be easy, but it seems there is now a desire in Tynwald to really make this happen.

When looking at national and local services, the priority has to be what is best for the public.

Members of the public are the customers of these services and they also pay for them through their taxes and rates.

They want us to make the best possible use of public funds and to avoid waste.

Because the people are both the owners and customers of government, we must in turn be open and accountable to the people.

In this respect I am pleased to confirm the agreement of the Council of Ministers, that the Freedom of Information Act should be extended across all the Departments of Government, from January next year.

We also hope to bring a proposal for establishing a Tynwald Commissioner for Administration in the New Year.

There are still those out there who would preserve the status quo, who resist change because of vested interests and a fear of the future.

To you I would say – join us in making change happen, or you will be left behind.

There is a new sense of purpose in this Honourable Court, and we will succeed where others have not.

Our five year strategy for health and social care, approved by Tynwald during my time as Health Minister is well underway. Its aims are still valid. We want people to be healthier and able to access care in their own communities.

But this cannot come at any cost. We need to ensure our health and care services are provided in the most value for money and effective way possible. This is a challenging task, but I am

confident that the Minister for Health and Social Care will rise to that challenge. It is in all our interests.

In my manifesto for Chief Minister, I promised to work to make the public service pension scheme sustainable.

To those who think this is a simple or quick fix, you are mistaken. It is not. But that does not mean we cannot solve the problem, just that it will take time, effort and determination.

The PSPA, whose Vice Chair is my colleague, the Minister for Policy and Reform, will bring the proposed detailed scheme changes proposals, built around the new cost envelope to Tynwald in February. Further proposals for managing the legacy funding issue in the longer term will follow.

I have been clear that we will not fudge this issue, or kick the can down the road.

We owe it to future generations to leave them with sustainable and affordable policies.

Mr President

I am grateful to Tynwald Members who have contributed openly and honestly, to our policy development to date. I hope we are

able to continue this spirit of collaboration and partnership, because I believe we all share common goals for our Island.

I am proud of my Manx heritage and roots. But there is also a sense of identity, which is not defined by how far back you can trace your ancestors.

It is about a sense of common purpose which is shared by us all. I have seen it in farmers whose families have worked the land since the time of the Vikings. But I have also seen it in the people who have come here and who have embraced this Island. They have become a part of the community. Our community.

They will tell you that they feel the same sense of belonging, that sense of place. That same sense of coming home as the lights of Douglas bay appear on the horizon, from the deck of the Ben my Chree.

Our home is an inclusive, tolerant and welcoming place that means different things to all of us. We cannot preserve it in time though. We must continue to move forward together, to create a future in which all of us want to live on our cherished Island

That is why the Council of Ministers ask this Honourable Court to not only approve our Framework for developing the Programme for Government, but to actively take part in making it happen.

Because it is only by working together that we can meet our promise, of Our Island : a special place to live and work.

Mr President, I beg to move.