

DOUGLAS EAST

GERALDINE

O'NEILL



**House of Keys General Election
Thursday 12th November 2015**

Secure the Future

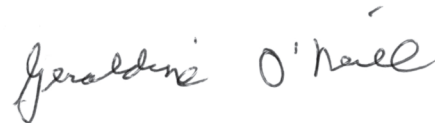
Dear voters

My name is Geraldine O'Neill I am standing for election in Douglas East. I have chosen to stand in Douglas East because I am originally from here and I still have family connections in the area. I live and work in Douglas. As a teacher in Douglas I have many past and present pupils and their families living in the constituency, therefore I am aware of the needs, aspirations and concerns of the community in Douglas East.

I believe I possess the personal skills to be effective and successful in Government. From my professional background, as a teacher, I work as part of a team to motivate, analyse and assess information. I have successful business experience as a Recruitment Consultant, I am a linguist, I have been involved in International Trade Negotiations I organised and led the first international trade mission from Turkey to Ireland.

Currently, I am also the Branch Secretary of the NASUWT Teachers Union, I am involved in regular meetings and negotiations both with the Department of Education and Children and other Teaching Unions. Together we work co-operatively to devise and agree policy and protect and represent the concerns of our Island teaching staff.

Throughout my varied career I have successfully networked with many different organisations. I am a problem solver and although we face difficult economic challenges, if elected I can work positively and constructively in Government. In my opinion, we need candidates with varied skills and abilities in order to tackle these demanding issues. As a Manx person I want to safeguard and promote our unique language, culture and identity for future generation.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Geraldine O'Neill". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small mark above the 'i' in "O'Neill".

Priorities if Elected for this short term

The constituents of Douglas East will get a committed, pragmatic and honest MHK who will not be afraid to object and say no to any policies that conflict with the fundamental needs of those that elect me.

I will table appropriate questions on the issues I have outlined.

I will analyse the day to day workings of Government in order to present the Douglas East electorate with in depth knowledge before the 2016 General Election.

As I will be living within the new Douglas East constituency for the 2016 General Election (due to the boundary changes) this will further enhance my ability to contribute to both the local and national issues.

Constituency

On a constituency level, if elected I will give a commitment to holding regular constituency surgeries to advise, help and resolve issues of importance for constituents such as vandalism, parking, speed limits and the bus service. I will liaise and network with local government bodies, the Douglas Borough Council, Neighbourhood Police, Age Concern, the Chamber of Commerce and Youth Services. In my view, this is essential to provide an overview for all sections of the community living and working in Douglas East. The problem of derelict housing is one of my main priorities, to combat this growing issue we need tougher penalties for owners and landlords, rent restrictions, less bureaucracy and compulsory purchase legislation to back this up.

The completion of the Douglas and Promenade Regeneration Project is essential to make Douglas a more attractive place to live and work. We cannot expect to attract either tourists or new businesses to the Island if our capital does not reflect the infrastructure and prosperity of a successful town. Therefore, as Douglas promenade is an important gateway to the Isle of Man, this needs prioritising to finish the project within a realistic time frame. The proposed costs currently being discussed are in the region of £20 million; £3.5 million for the walkways and £16 million to complete the road works. Considering this substantial investment we need to ensure that this project is phased so as not to completely disrupt the use of the promenade for the public, in particular the residents and businesses.

We must have proper maintenance of the IRIS sewage system as there are currently environmental health concerns regarding its operation.

In the current economic climate more empty retail units do nothing for the capital instead providing more amenities for visitors, local residents and young people would be a far more useful strategy.

Both the Castle Mona site and the Summerland site continue to require feasible solutions and plans for possible regeneration and future use. Parking in Douglas still continues to be a major problem both for residents and businesses. Initiatives between local and central government must help to form the basis to endeavour to tackle this.


Economy

In order to balance the budget we need to reduce Government expenditure by analysing the priorities for spending in each department. We need an overview carried out by the Civil Service and the relevant ministers to cut down our administration sector, in order to continue to deliver frontline services in Health, Education and Social Services. This can be achieved by examining the staffing structure to achieve economies through more efficient running of departments. This may lead to retraining and re-skilling of public sector staff; however with cooperation from the Chamber of Commerce, private enterprise and the Trade Unions, it should be possible to offset or limit job losses.

Although government has done reasonably well to date on savings within the economy we will still have challenges to sustain our economy for future generations. Even though we continue to look for niche markets and new industries to develop the economy we also need to develop long-term strategies to fund our essential services.

The main challenges to government expenditure are pensions and health. The government's target of reducing expenditure by £75 million over the next six years, which equates to 2.4% savings per department based on a 3% growth rate per annum, would be very difficult to achieve solely by cuts. Therefore, in my view a review of our income tax system is essential to ensure the sustainability of funding of our essential services. In particular corporate/offshore taxation needs to be reviewed as our economy is no longer solely reliant on financial services, as unlike Jersey and Guernsey, we have diversified our economy.

I agree that the Public Sector Pensions Scheme is a major drain on our Island reserves. It is unsustainable in its current form, therefore proposals to close it to new entrants should be carefully considered and analysed because we do not want to create a two-tier system in the pension scheme. The relevant Trade Unions should be involved in all aspects of any alternative solutions to this problem. The major issues for the Government United Scheme (GUS) are that there is an erosion of public trust in its viability for the future. Public servants who have paid high pension contributions



cannot be expected to fill the gap for those, to date, whose pension contributions are considerably lower. Although the employer contribution is set to increase substantially in the coming years it is not clear if this will be enough to off-set the current pension liability. Personally, from working closely with the Public Sector Pensions Authority (PSPA) regarding changes to the Teachers Pension Scheme, it is apparent that long term solutions must be negotiated. This may offset any unfairness to future generations for all Isle of Man potential pension contributors.

New initiatives like the Enterprise Development Scheme are the first steps to helping develop start-up businesses in the local economy but whether this will be sufficient will depend on how the scheme operates. It is obvious that the local economy is struggling, especially the retail sector, the construction industry and all its associated industries.

It is important to acknowledge however, that the local economy is equally as important as the national economy because without local job creation and job security the local residents do not have the income to generate spending within our society. A proven strategy to aid the distribution of money within the local economy is the setting up of Credit Unions. Each member of the Credit Union has shares and equity therefore it encourages long term saving which would encourage a saving ethos in our government departments. The establishment of a Credit Union would enable savers to borrow according to their means therefore individuals could borrow to help towards deposits for mortgages, university fees and other such expenses.

In conclusion, we know we have limited budgets in all aspects of Government and have to work within budgetary constraints, but the pressing issue is how we chose to prioritise spending in the long-term.

Health

The Government's Health Policy needs to be proactive with well-funded preventative health strategies. For a community of our size, with the levels of healthcare professionals employed in this sector, we should not have the current waiting lists. We should instead be striving to reduce the waiting lists in medical care but particularly concerning early diagnosis in potentially terminal diseases. Here ensuring proper follow up procedures after operations is essential and this will equate to substantial long-term savings. Through effective examination of working practices we should be able to reduce the 'administration trail' and offer a more efficient and customer friendly service to all patients. Due to our increasingly older population more money needs to be spent on research to tackle the growing levels of dementia. If we do not address this problem we will have increased expenditure on medication and nursing homes and other associated costs. We need better strategies to help those with mental health issues in order to avoid discrimination and inequality.

As a result of the recent West Midlands Quality Review of the Manx health system the issues that have arisen that need substantial investment and reform must be financed if we are to secure a safe and trusted service. I would hope that the new Health and Social Welfare strategy recently introduced in Tynwald will strenuously start to tackle some of these issues. Particularly, the spiralling costs of funding agency nurses, plans such as increasing our on Island nursing training programme are to be welcomed. However, this needs sustained and increased investment in order to radically solve this growing budgetary crisis.

Our dental care provision requires the same examination as our General Health Policy. The difficulties encountered by patients seeking dental treatment and finding availability in a dental practice should be more efficiently addressed as the Isle of Man has an unacceptable level of poor dental hygiene. A more efficient central dental strategy needs to be adopted to deal with this.

We know that the health budget is the most draining department for the Manx Exchequer, yet nevertheless we must be careful not simply to make short-term savings but to make effective savings for the long-term that will not damage the health of the population.

Social Welfare

We must continue to deliver the best quality social services possible to help the vulnerable sections of our society; the unemployed, pensioners, the disabled, single parents, the homeless etc. Although the Isle of Man is still a wealthy economy despite the current world economic situation, we have the dual responsibility not only to ensure increased economic prosperity but to develop our long-term social legislation policy.

The reform of the Welfare system must be fair and equitable, not penalising the vulnerable to save very small sums of money. Our welfare and tax system should reflect the ability and income of all its citizens to contribute according to their means. With the small number of unemployed, which equates presently to 1.7%, will the planned cuts in benefits really contribute to long-term savings in the economy?

We can look at best practice in other jurisdictions as to how the unemployed can contribute to society as well as receiving benefits, such as schemes in place in Nordic countries where unemployed citizens contribute to looking after the elderly in their societies. Are we utilising the skills and talents of the current unemployed population? In effect, to tackle long-term unemployment we need to look at better ways of utilising and supporting the vulnerable that are in this position.


We must be careful to protect susceptible sections of society by not inflicting cuts which would create an underclass. Government social policy must continually safeguard the lower echelons of society. Elected representatives, as the custodians of our society, have a remit to represent all of society.

Education

It is imperative that there is continued and sustained investment in education. This needs to be an integral part of future Government strategies in order to combat unemployment. We must strive to provide all of our young people with the necessary qualifications to compete in an ever increasingly difficult job market. Our current education policy is very strong in this respect as our education system is striving to provide our young people with the necessary skills and flexibility so that they will be prepared for work, not just for one job but for multiple jobs in their lifetime.

The Department of Education is also striving to increase our degree capacity on the Island by cooperating with relevant universities in the UK. The object of this is to offer our students the opportunity to study on Island for one year of their degree which has the dual benefits of less cost for the government and families. The value-added effect on the economy is that the students are studying and living on the Isle of Man and spending money in the local economy. This doesn't offset the necessity of continued Government grants and finance for University education off Island as this is fundamental for the future competitiveness of our society.

Other aspects of the department's plans are to increase the variety of courses, apprenticeships and BTEC qualifications that are available Island-wide in order to alleviate shortages in skilled areas in the local economy. In my view, these are the appropriate strategies that are needed to face the challenges in education and the market-place for the future.



To avoid a growing NEETs problem (not in education, employment or training) we need to support and cooperate with the Third Sector, Government Agencies or private enterprise. To engage these young people in training and education schemes we must continue to finance youth services to allow them to operate effectively. Vulnerable young people need the positive participation of Government agencies such as counselling and accommodation services, to give them the productive basis to be involved in education or training programmes. With the participation and cooperation of private enterprise we can involve these young people (who are often on the fringes of society) in Work Experience Schemes which could lead to employment. Through continued constructive engagement we can tackle this growing problem. As youth services receive a very small percentage of Department of Education and Children's budget, we may need to reassess this spending curtailment.

The current major challenges facing the Department of Education and Children are the recruitment and retention of key teaching staff and the maintaining of the budget for education. The necessary finance for education must be prioritised in future Government budgets to keep us competitive in employment markets.

Housing, Energy and Environment

Affordable housing should be a priority for our Government. We need to extend and develop the first time buyer scheme and investigate other financial schemes to tackle this growing problem. Government mortgages with shared equity provision could be financially viable; the Government could offer a cheaper mortgage rate than the banking sector. We also need to consider provisions for second time house buyers. Financing the required deposit to obtain a mortgage is often the most difficult hurdle for house purchasers. Introducing Credit Unions to the Isle of Man could help alleviate this burden as Credit Unions are a cooperative community banking service.

Our allocation process of Social Housing also needs to be re-examined carefully, so we deliver a fair and equitable service to all. Making affordable housing available to a greater proportion of our population would decrease the reliance on rented properties and have a positive knock on effect on our economy in general.

Our energy policy for the future must focus on achieving best value for money for the consumer. The Government needs to devise a long-term strategic plan to reduce and contain our energy budget. We have already invested substantially in our electricity power station and natural gas projects. We are also exploring wind power as a back-up to electricity and gas providers with future possibilities for development. Another initiative is exploring how the Isle of Man, as it owns its offshore sea beds, could allow developers to lease and research these at their own cost. This has the potential to offer a substantial boost to the economy.

The new Biodiversity Strategy and Delivery Plan for the next five years focuses on managing biodiversity changes to minimise loss of species and habitats, maintaining, restoring and enhancing native biodiversity where necessary and involving society in understanding, appreciating and safeguarding biodiversity. In my opinion, these policies offer many opportunities to protect our environment and further develop our energy requirements for the future.



Industrial Relations Policy and Social Legislation

In view of the current world economic crisis, the lack of Trade Union legislation leaves workers without statutory protection. The IOM TUC recognises the value of the voluntary resolution of issues between employers and employees and the emphasis put on the encouragement of each party to be prepared to consult and negotiate in good faith about trade union recognition. This is an ideal situation, however, we know that life is not 'ideal' and there are employers who would rather take advantage of their employees and not take note of concerns or issues or even provide a forum for these to be aired with impunity. Self-regulation has been shown to be lacking in so many areas and may have had a part to play in the financial difficulties that the world and banking industry has experienced recently. If elected, a priority task would be to examine the effects of zero hour and short-term contracts on the Manx working population.

Relationships with the UK/EU

The investigation of potential agreements with other nations needs to be part of our future planning. Exploring bilateral agreements with other nations within the EU and other fast growing economies worldwide could help sustain our financial future. Stronger alliances with other members of the British/Irish Council could be potentially beneficial on both an economic and political level. As we are currently meeting several times a year with Jersey and Guernsey with the Departments of Health and Education we could further develop this cooperation into other areas of mutual concern and benefit.

Despite the world financial crisis the Isle of Man is still in a strong economic position. The position and influence of our small Island has a considerable stabilising effect on economies surrounding us. Therefore, although a small nation, we must continue to forge links with other nations in order to network for economic development. By allying ourselves with other nations we need to show we have the skills and experience to enhance our standing in the international community.

Reform of Tynwald and Government

As a democratic nation we must constantly strive to represent and govern the nation in the best interests of all of its citizens. In view of the continued economic crisis we need to review our Government structures. This should include both MHKs and the members of the Legislative Council. Perhaps we need to consider reducing our number of MHKs and increasing salaries to attract a better calibre of individual. In relation to the Legislative Council, numerous efforts have been made to reform how members are elected to it. A possible feasible compromise solution for the future could be to nominate candidates from the existing MHKs and then allow the public to vote on those nominees. In regard to the Co-Min collective responsibility issues, again, a workable solution to achieve a better democratic representation of voters' election choices, could entail the elected Chief Minister choosing his Council of Ministers then the Council of Ministers deciding key strategic policies and outside of that, each Minister could have a free vote on other Government policy issues.

In resolving the public service pensions issue Tynwald members should most definitely contribute to their pension scheme on a pro rata basis in line with all other public servants.

The on-going Government policy of achieving small, smarter Government 'fit for purpose' is now being discussed with the emphasis on a 'single legal entity Government'. The object of this consultation and its strategy for the future is to consider how we reduce our bureaucratic system and still provide the necessary infrastructure of Government and be more administratively efficient. Under the present departmental system it is said there is no coherent strategy as each independent department follows its own direction. There is merit in establishing Government as a single legal entity as long as Government can afford the associated costs, particularly those in relation to pay and conditions. In Sir John Elvidge's report he has stated that such costs are likely to be significant and this risk will be further increased if the proposed Equality Bill should be progressed due to the introduction of equal pay for work of equal value. In conclusion, should a single legal entity Government be established, the organisational structure needs to be such that it guards against a small number of individuals holding a great deal of power.

Tourism and New Markets

We need to protect the diversity of our economy by exploring possible 'niche markets' and building on the Island's natural resources. Our work force needs to be trained to adapt to the needs of employers. This can be achieved through greater employer input into vocational and business programmes. There is a need for more working partnerships between Government Educational Organisations, such as the Isle of Man College, and public and private sector unions and employers. I believe we can successfully adapt and retrain our workforce in order to retain flexibility in the market place.

We must offset the economic challenges facing us, by creating wealth and seeking to market the Island successfully. This could be done through expanding the niche markets such as High Tech Industries and Tourism, and by trying to develop Research and Development projects which the Isle of Man could benefit from financially. I am in favour of initiatives designed to support such sectors within the economy.

In relation to niche markets, we need to be focusing on attracting Manx graduates back to the Island as they have the potential to expand the financial rewards of developing such nice markets.

I am personally interested in Government initiatives which will support cultural tourism, as I am a founding member and Director of the Archibald Knox Society, which aims to promote the legacy of Archibald Knox nationally and internationally. In my opinion, through cultural tourism we can promote and attract both businesses and tourists to the Isle of Man for short stay cultural visits. Cultural tourism is a growing international market; however, we need greater Government focus and cooperation on how to capitalise on this form of tourism. In order to market Archibald Knox and the Island internationally a fit for purpose Island Art Gallery is essential. Last year the late Chairman of the Society Liam O'Neill organised an international exhibition of Knox's metalwork in the Olympia in London as part of the antiques fair. The exhibition was funded by Culture Vannin and it would have travelled back

to the Island funded by the Arts Council but it was unable to do so because a suitable location fulfilling the requirements of the exhibitors could not be found. Therefore the Island lost a fantastic opportunity to showcase our most famous artist/designer in his own homeland. The exhibition was internationally acclaimed and the lecture programme had to be extended due to the unprecedented demand. An Art Gallery does not have to rely on already restricted government budgets it could be achieved through partnerships between Governments bodies, cultural charities, the Isle of Man College, academic institutions and businesses. This gallery would add to the Island's international standing and add a much needed cultural attraction.

Final Thoughts

We often hear the concept of 'Isle of Man PLC' being quoted and in my view this means we are all shareholders in the company, from the smallest stakeholder to the largest. Therefore, it's our Island, our company, our taxes, our future and its benefits have to be shared accordingly between all its citizens.

WHERE TO VOTE

If you are in need of transport on Election day
please contact Geraldine at 665459 mobile 430209

Email: gaoneill77@gmail.com

Tynwald	Polling Station	at First Douglas Scout Hall, Demesne Road.
Crescent	Polling Station	at Promenade Methodist, Church Loch Prom.
Strand	Polling Station	at Douglas Town Hall, Ridgeway Street
Windsor	Polling Station	at Promenade Methodist Church, Loch Prom.
Derby	Polling Station	at Youth Arts Centre, Kensington Road.

Vote **GERALDINE**
O'NEILL 