

## Alex Allinson – Ramsey

### Political Questions (2016)

#### Why do you want to be a member of the House of Keys?

Now is time for change. The Island faces major challenges as well as being presented with unique opportunities to develop its economy and enrich and educate its population. With the future withdrawal of Britain from the EU these changes will intensify. I want to be part of this process of change and bring my experience and talents to government for the good of Ramsey and the Island as a whole. I believe I have a unique background and experience to bring to Tynwald and will campaign for greater equality and justice. Being a practicing doctor, and part of my local community means I will stay in-touch with the people I aim to serve and remain accessible and approachable.

#### If you were elected, what would your priorities be on a national level?

In light of the UK vote to leave the EU the island is going to have to work hard and continue to encourage the growth and diversification of the economy; We need to look for opportunities for trade and commerce and seize them when they appear. We must ensure that we have a truly inclusive society and to invest in health and education. We need to ensure that we protect the frail and vulnerable in our society whilst allowing

their voice to be heard. We also need to invigorate politics, making the whole process more representative by encouraging more women and young people to be part of local and national government. The current cynicism and negative attitude to politicians and the process as a whole is understandable, but the recent very positive responses to the murder of Jo Cox and the BREXIT vote shows that people are still passionate about wanting a better society and are prepared to campaign for it.

**If you were elected, what would your priorities be on a constituency level?**

To be a visible and approachable representative for the whole town. To encourage new jobs in Ramsey; encouraging the growth of existing businesses and the foundation of new ones in the North. To push at a national level for more powers and functions to be given to the local authority. To promote Ramsey and the North on an international stage whilst campaigning for further regeneration of the town through projects such as restoring the Queen's Pier, encouraging more businesses to take on the empty shops on Parliament Street and developing plans to build a marina in the Old Harbour.

**How well do you think the present administration has handled the major challenges of the past five years?**

I think that they have tried desperately to find solutions to the funding problems brought about by changes in the VAT sharing agreement and a range of other threats to the Island's independence. Despite all the negative criticism I feel that they have managed to keep the economy going whilst pushing forward some long overdue progressive legislation such as the Freedom of Information act, the implementation of the Disability Discrimination bill and the Marriage and Civil partnership bill. However, I despair at certain decisions such as the proposed regeneration of Douglas Promenade and the recent purchase of a privately built care home which appear to have been done in spite of any regard to public opinion or clear and affordable strategy.

**What are the main political and social issues facing the Isle of Man in the next five years?**

Since beginning to write this the decision of the UK to leave the EU will obviously dominate politics for the next few years. The IOM needs to build alliances with other counties to ensure we get the best trade deal possible and that our students and workers remain able to study, work and trade in as many counties as possible. The disillusionment with politics in general must be recognised and addressed. We must achieve a greater

representation for women throughout government and business and aim for a more equal society. Affordable housing, living standards and the extension of the living wage, a sustainable health service and proactive social care service will all be essential to keep our society together.

We also need to address some very important legislation issues;

1. Reform the current Abortion law to remove the inequality and discrimination against women that it perpetuates.
2. Reform the judicial system to reduce the number of people jailed at great expense to their families and society. A reduction in prison numbers would allow the skilled prison staff to spend more time educating and rehabilitating repeat offenders.
3. Start a national debate about our out of date drug laws. Look at other jurisdictions that have decriminalised Cannabis and try and reduce the risks to large numbers of our young people.
4. Reform the current prescribing legislation to allow the island's pharmacists to dispense the cheapest prescribed medication whilst retaining the right for a patient to pay the difference for

**How would you deal with the challenges referred to in the previous answer?**

the brand they prefer.

The next Government needs to build on the links already established with a range of other counties to progress and protect our trading links. It will be essential to balance expenditure with a growth of the economy to protect public services whilst reducing the cost of government.

As a society we need to look and involving people more in politics. We should look at models of job-shares for local and national politicians to encourage more women to stand and change legislation to allow on line voting and voter registration.

I will consult with the people of Ramsey and campaign for the best deal for the IOM. On a personal level I believe that elected politicians should always behave honesty and with integrity. I will not claim expenses and am prepared to work with any member of Tynwald for the good of the country regardless of their political views.

**How would you deal with the issue of public sector pension reform and the public sector pension deficit?**

I have a vested interest here as like many people on the Isle of Man I pay a significant part of my salary into the government pension scheme. Recent arguments in Tynwald have been alarmist and negative. A properly

funded scheme is essential for the retention and recruitment of staff. Threats to cut benefits to existing pensioners have produced fear. The recent negotiations with all stake holders have been a positive first step towards making the scheme more affordable. The government will pay reduced contributions whilst staff have accepted that they need to pay more and that this needs to be standardised across government. The MHK pension arrangements should be brought into line with all other schemes straight away. Legacy issues can only be tackled by regular reviews of contribution rates and adjustments as the size and shape of the workforce changes. Urgent consideration should be made to a cap on lump sums and/or tax for those who take out more than £200,000.

**What has changed in the past five years  
for Isle of Man residents for the better?  
(Please give examples)**

The ethnic change to our society has made the Island a more cosmopolitan, diverse and exciting place to live. People from Poland, the Philippines, Eastern Europe and Africa have made a real positive contribution to our society. At the same time the increasing confidence in Manx culture has really given a lot of young people a better view of their place in the world. They are our future and the development of social

media and new technologies allows us to connect as a society like never before. However, it is important that this inclusion is universal and that some at the margins of society are not left out.

**What has changed in the past five years for Isle of Man residents for the worse?  
(Please give examples)**

There is an increasing sense of concern about the economic future for the island and this is damaging our ability to attract new people and businesses to the relocate here. Our young people may increasingly need to travel abroad for work and further education and may be reluctant to return. We need to construct a really progressive set of laws and national values which mark us out as better different at a time of increasing shifts in Europe and the USA towards more regressive right wing and xenophobic political views.

**Is the Isle of Man too reliant on any one sector of its economy?**

Our reliance on the financial and on-line gambling sector was inevitable given the historic decline in tourism, manufacturing and farming. I welcome their continued commitment and investment in the island, especially the charitable contributions from companies like Microgaming and PokerStars. We now have an opportunity to try and rebalance this. We need to look again at our territorial waters and responsible

fishing. We need to balance the growth in the farming sector whilst resisting cheap imports of food from across. We need to encourage an increase in the manufacturing sector to match the increased skills being taught at the IOM College and ensure a greater range of job prospects for our young people. The continued contributions from the finance sector and manufacturing companies such as Swagelok and Strix should be recognised and encouraged.

**If you feel it is, how would you further diversify the Manx economy?**

Changes in trade agreements will create opportunities for our fishing and farming industry especially for high quality bespoke products such as Queenies and Loughton Lamb. The work at the Aerospace cluster has to be protected and nurtured. Increased investment in Bio Tech companies and IT start ups will be facilitated through enterprise schemes. We need to design legislation which will encourage new technologies, allowing them to do things on the Island which they cannot do elsewhere. With the UK leaving the EU now is the time to try to encourage more manufacturing and high skilled engineering businesses to set up on the Island.

Increased television coverage of cycling, the TT and athletics events will drive an increase in tourism, but this has to be

**Are you in favour of increased independence from the United Kingdom?**

exploited whilst not putting visitors off through high travel costs and over-priced accommodation.

**If you are, in which areas?**

After the BREXIT vote we are left in the position of not being able to negotiate directly with the EU but having to ask the UK government to do this on our behalf. We need to be careful that this remains in our best interests.

We also need to annually review the VAT sharing agreement with the UK to ensure it is still the best way of collecting indirect taxation for the IOM people.

**Are you in favour of parliamentary reform in the Isle of Man?**

Yes. I look forward to reading the report from Lord Lisvane when it is published. Many people argue that Tynwald has become more divisive and less

representative of the people and this has to be addressed.

**If you are, which aspects of the parliamentary system would you change?**

We need to ensure a greater representation for women and a directly elected upper chamber which contains MLCs with the right qualities and qualifications to do the job. I'm afraid that too often this is seen as a position for MHKs who are no longer electable.

**Who should have the responsibility of electing the Chief Minister?**

I believe that currently the whole of Tynwald should elect the Chief Minister and also the various ministers. As far as possible Council of Ministers minutes should be made public and the process of government decisions should be as transparent and open as possible. With the increasing use of electronic voting we should look to have a national vote for Chief Minister in the future but we need to be cautious that this doesn't degenerate into the sort of popularity contest we are currently witnessing in the USA and UK.

**Are you in favour of the nationalisation of air and/or sea services to and from the Isle of Man?**

No. I believe that governments in general have a very poor record of running commercial services. I feel that the current use of private companies is essential to provide resilient services at

affordable prices. However, I feel the government needs to be more aggressive with the various user agreements for our ports and airport and has to act on behalf of the consumer to maintain services and realistic prices. The role of the office of fair trading should be very important in holding providers of service to account.

**Are you in favour of renewable energy projects in Manx territorial waters?**

Yes, we have to diversify our economy and seize any new opportunities for business and income. Environmentally we, as a society have to take responsibility for carbon emissions and a greater reliance of renewable energy as well as much better energy conservation and efficiency is vital. We need to make sure that as much as possible, developments off the island's coast create new jobs and new skills on the island as well as new revenue schemes for the government.

**Are you in favour of an increase in means testing for financial support and/or services provided by Government?**

I am a passionate advocate for universal benefits. They are a fairer and much more efficient way of running a welfare system and encourage a belief in greater inclusion and a sense of a more united society. However, we live on an island with the dichotomy of low direct taxation and high welfare spending. I

feel that the current move towards more targeted benefits has to be managed much more carefully to avoid this horrible view of individuals as "scroungers" which discriminates against the poor and those with chronic illness or disabilities.

### If you are, in which areas?

I do think we need to look again at legal aid costs especially for appeals. We need to have a debate about prescription charges and those exempt from paying them at all on the basis of a narrow range of illnesses which is a historical relic and unfair. We also need to examine the way the elderly are treated in terms of social care. Can it be right that families who look after their elderly relatives at home during the last weeks of their life, maintaining their independence and keeping them out of Nobles Hospital are then charged for support with palliative care? Any debate has to be very careful not to exacerbate the growing tensions between young families or pensioners struggling with expensive rents and an increasing cost of living on one hand, and elderly rich retirees expecting the state to finance a comfortable and affluent lifestyle on the other.