

Rob Callister – Onchan

Political Questions (2016)

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

On a Local level, I want to ensure that all sections of Onchan's Community are well represented and have a strong voice when key decisions are made over the next five years.

On a National level, the forthcoming General Election is one of the most important elections for a generation, and I want to ensure that the Isle of Man continues to thrive economically, environmentally, politically, culturally and socially despite the major financial concerns facing this island.

On a Political level, if this island is to truly succeed, protect frontline services and create genuine opportunities for us all now, and for future generations then we will certainly need a new generation of MHKs with new ideas, a new approach and who are prepared to work longer, harder and more efficiently than ever, in order help this island overcome the major financial challenges we face.

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

1) With the UK voting to leave the European Union, I would work with the next Government in order to ensure that

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

the Isle of Man positions itself in the coming months and years to open up new markets and opportunities for the island to prosper and succeed

2) Implement a long term strategy to address the pension crisis

3) Ensure that the Island's economic success remains the Government's overarching priority

Ensure delivery of a first class Health Service

4) Address shortages for first time buyers and local authority housing

5) Re-establish a level of trust and confidence with the people of this Island

6) Keep the Manx public fully informed of the challenges we face on a Local and National level

7) Ensure that "NEETs" are given a genuine opportunity to make a positive contribution to the Manx Economy

1) Ensure all sections of Onchan's Community are well represented over the next years and I want to fully ensure that those Constituents (Onchan Ratepayers) placed into Douglas North and Garff Constituencies for the House of Keys General Election do not become a forgotten voice in the coming months and years!

2) Work in partnership with the Local Authority, Board of Commissioners and

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

other local groups to represent the best interests of Onchan going forward.

3) Fully present Onchan's social housing tenants, in order to ensure that rent levels are set fairly

4) Defend Onchan Commissioners right to remain a social housing landlord and ensure decisions relating to the future of the Island's social housing structure are made for the right reasons

5) Defend Onchan's right to remain a local authority for the foreseeable future on behalf of its ratepayers

6) Defend Onchan's right to collect Domestic & Commercial Waste for the foreseeable future

7) Request an urgent review of Onchan's bus service

On the positives, we have seen continued economic and employment growth in the face of a worldwide financial crisis. We have robustly renegotiated the VAT revenue sharing arrangements, which gives the Isle of Man a little more money back.

On the negatives, the Government's overall performance over the last five years has been poor. There has been a clear lack of leadership and direction at times and the Government has failed to engage or involve the people of this

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

island when key decisions are being made.

Far too many Government road shows, presentations and public consultations over the last five years have simply ignored or overlooked strong public opinion when final decisions are being made, and this process needs to change over the next five years in order to fully engage with the Manx people.

CoMin and Government departments are still making poor decisions, wasting valuable Government resources without any accountability to the Manx people.

- 1) The UK leaving the European Union and serious concerns on our VAT arrangements
- 2) Public Sector Pension legacy funding gap
- 3) A further reduction in the island's Retail, Banking, Pension, Insurance and Finance Sectors
- 4) Further International and Regulatory pressures being placed on the Isle of Man as an Offshore Financial Centre
- 5) Delivering a long term sustainable Health Service
- 6) The importation of illegal drugs
- 7) An ageing population
- 8) Future Air Routes and the Steam

Packet User Agreement

9) Immigration / Work Permit System

10) Genuine long employment opportunities

11) Overall morale amongst Government employees and frontline staff

12) Cost of utilities and Standing Charges

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

I have responded to many of the challenges listed above throughout this questionnaire, but the key message is that if the Isle of Man is to deliver a better health service, education, transport, infrastructure in the future then the next Government must continue to push for economic growth and prosperity.

I fully support the Isle of Man continuing to take a strong stance in respect of the importation of illegal drugs onto the island.

I also fully support appointing an independent regulator to monitor the charging structures, profits and the quality of service being undertaken by Isle of Man utility companies.

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

Several options have been presented by the Cabinet Office, including reduced accrued rights and benefits, close all current public sector schemes, capping

the value of public sector pensions, reducing the lump sum commutation factor, reducing the amount of lump sum available, taxation options or move to career averages benefits.

What is clear, is that any new schemes must be fair to the dedicated Government workforce and to the Island's taxpayers. The Government must also address the public sector pension legacy funding gap as a priority as this has been largely ignored for the last 15 years!

I would certainly support reducing the Government Unified Scheme ("GUS") Pension lump sums payouts, which would bring the scheme in line with the Police and Teachers Pension Schemes.

I would also support increasing Employee and Tynwald Members contributions, along with raising the retirement age for new and current GUS members.

Unfortunately, the pain relating to Public Sector Pension crisis has to be shared amongst all stakeholders over the next forty years.

What has changed in the past five years for Isle of Man residents for the better?

Employment levels have fallen over the last five years and Isle of Man has new

(Please give examples)

mental health and education strategies, which is excellent news.

Unfortunately, from reviewing the Government's own quarterly reports, the negatives continue to outstrip any positives at the moment.

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

I think most people would agree that the overall quality of life on the Isle of Man has decreased over the last five years. The value of income has fallen, few people are receiving wage increases despite the overall increase in food and energy costs across the island. Let's also not forget the introduction of several new stealth taxes by the current Government in recent years.

I also feel that the social divide amongst the people of the Isle of Man has widened over the last five years, and it will continue to widen even further unless the Isle of Man votes for major change in both political representation, direction and leadership, in order to restore a level of confidence and to guide this island back to a level prosperity which creates genuine opportunities for us all, not the few.

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

Obviously the Isle of Man has been heavily reliant on the finance sector over the last twenty five years, and in recent years the island has become more reliant on ICT, e-gaming, alongside the yacht and aircraft registers.

The Manx Economy will need to diversify even further in coming years if the Isle of Man is to truly succeed.

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

I fully support the Department of Economic Development in helping new business start-ups, bringing in new businesses or offering support for those businesses wishing to relocate and set up long term in the Isle of Man.

In order to offer a level of service required on the Isle of Man, the Manx Government will have to address the serious concerns in obtaining banking facilities in future, which have reduced year on year.

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

No, it is with a heavy heart that I say I am not in favour of increased independence from the UK at this moment in time.

The UK vote to leave the EU is a major game changer, full of both pitfalls and

opportunities for the Isle of Man.

From reading the Council of Ministers "UK referendum on EU membership Implications for the Isle of Man" (First Interim Report), it is clear that the Isle of Man options will be limited by the UK's eventual position.

As a proud Manxman I would love to see even more independence from the UK, but the reality is that the Isle of Man is not a Sovereign State and it is vitally important in the coming months and years that this island is neither forgotten nor left behind.

Therefore the island will need the support of the UK or an alternative Sovereign State in the coming years, in order to ensure the Isle of Man has continued customs union with the UK, preserve VAT sharing arrangements and to protect and potentially enhance the Island's ability to trade with the EU, and to expand trade with other countries around the world.

What is more important is that the Isle of Man positions itself in the coming years in order to take full advantage of any new emerging markets or opportunities from the Brexit vote.

If you are, in which areas?

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

I am in favour of some parliamentary reform, but I don't believe in change for change's sake!

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

I think the excellent work undertaken by the Legislative Council is overlooked at times, but I would support a review of the role currently undertaken by the Council. The key role of the Council should be one of scrutiny as a revising chamber, and therefore there is genuine argument that MLC's should not sit on Government Departments.

Importantly I would welcome an urgent review of the "Block Vote" and "Collective Responsibility". I fully acknowledge that the Isle of Man needs to keep moving forward but with additional pressure on the island's finances, we need to ensure the right decisions are being made and justified to the Manx people.

Who should have the responsibility of electing the Chief Minister?

At this moment I don't believe the Chief Minister should be publicly elected under a separate ballot paper, as the people of this island elect 24 House of Keys members and it is for them to select the best possible candidate from those

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

Candidates that step forward.

That said, I would fully support further media debates and a schedule of public meetings set well in advance and involving all potential Chief Minister candidates. This would enable the candidates to set out publicly their statement of intention, vision and policy for the Isle of Man.

The air and sea routes remain the gateway to and from the Isle of Man, and their success or failure has a major impact on the business sector and the overall tourism package being offered by the Isle of Man.

They also have major implications on the Isle of Man being able to deliver a diverse and balanced economy.

Therefore we need to ensure that the next "User Agreement" is right for the long term future of this island. We also need to reduce freight costs, in order to give local businesses a fair opportunity to compete with online companies.

So I am not in favour of nationalisation of our sea routes, but it could be in the island's best interests to purchase and build a new land berth in Liverpool.

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

I am also not in favour of nationalisation of our air routes but it is important that the Government works in partnership with the airline companies to secure the key routes required for domestic and business travellers.

Not 100% sure, I certainly remain cautious and question the overall long term benefits, not to mention the impact on our landscape.

That said, I would prefer to see the Isle of Man Government undertake a renewable energy project(s) just inside our own 12 mile border and receive an element of income. The alternative unfortunately is that the UK Government will undertake a project 13 miles off the Isle Man shores, which will contribute nothing towards the Manx Economy.

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

Unfortunately, the call for the introduction of means testing isn't a straight forward simple yes or no answer.

As I highlighted in a speech I gave in November in 2014, it is important, if not vital that future Government funds are channelled into the right places, in order to ensure that the most vulnerable in our

society are protected, and those in need of additional support from time to time receive that support as quickly as possible.

In my opinion this can only be achieved through the introduction of a fair and cost effective means testing system.

The introduction of means testing sounds very simple and straightforward, that is until you realise how difficult it is to break down the term 'means testing' when taking into account the different levels of financial support available, the administrative costs for rolling out such a scheme across all government departments, not to mention the social divide the topic creates every time means testing is discussed or mentioned.

The first social divide that splits public opinion is as to the length of time payments or services are received after means testing, as those receiving any benefit would expect any payment or service to continue until their circumstances change for the better, but those outside the benefit system would expect those individuals to do more to support themselves and their family.

This social divide widens even further when we look at local authority general housing, as most tenants see local authority housing as their long term home, and rightfully so. However those on the waiting list and struggling in the private sector believe that access to affordable housing should be simplified and in some cases tenants are forced to vacate the property once their income or their personal circumstances have reached a certain level of expectation.

In addition to the length of time payments should be made, public opinion is also split on how these payments should be made after receiving any financial support through means testing. Should it be in the form of cash, which can be spent as the recipient wishes or in the form of a voucher or even a card in order to ensure that the funds are spent for the purpose it was given?

If you are, in which areas?

In order to consider which areas, the Government must first define the term "means testing" first!

In my opinion means testing is a form of measurement in which the Government can check if you have the sufficient means to support yourself and other

family members, and what payments and services, if any, you may qualify to receive.

In addition, should applications be based on a single applicant or take into account any additional income or assets from a spouse, civil partner, general partner or even children over the age of 18?

Should other assets such as property, cars or other personal chattels also be taken into account from the main applicant and other household individuals or should certain assets be automatically exempt from any form of means testing?

A number of services and benefits are already subjected to a form of means testing and these include:

General entry for Local Authority Housing
Nursery Care

Student & Tuition Fees


Child Benefit

Job Seekers Allowance

Income Support

The new Shared Equity Arrangement between first-time buyers and central government

As Government funds become even



tighter in the future, further services could become subject to a level of means testing, including:

Winter Fuel Allowance

Bus Passes

Prescriptions

Doctors Appointments

Eye tests