

Clare Bettison – Douglas East

Political Questions (2016)

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

I feel I can bring a fresh viewpoint to politics on the Isle of Man, with a focus on transparency and accountability. I have become increasingly frustrated commenting from the side-lines, and decided that the best way to make a difference is to get involved.

As a nurse working in the health service I have had a unique opportunity to see first-hand the strengths and weaknesses we have, and identify areas for improvement. I believe the House of Keys would benefit from someone with a nursing background, especially at a time when the health service is under such scrutiny.

I believe my broader awareness of, and interest in, issues that affect Douglas East and the Isle of Man will allow me to be a clear voice for the constituency.

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

I believe that at the forefront of all social policy is a strong economic policy to ensure sustainability and affordability of services, while enabling ease of access to those in greatest need. As an Island we need a robust economic policy that doesn't rely too heavily on any one area for income. We are vulnerable to the decisions of the UK and we must prepare

for eventualities such as Brexit to ensure we have a firm position. In view of the UK's decision to withdraw from the European Union, it is vital that we focus on strengthening our links with our European and international partners – I believe this is a perfect opportunity for us and we must not sit by and miss it. With a strengthened economic position we must focus on improving our healthcare provision, to include inpatient, social and mental health care. We face very specific challenges related to our geographic position, but we are missing many opportunities. The first step would be an open acknowledgement of where we are failing; I believe this can best be achieved by appointing an inspection agency to scrutinise our health services and make recommendations in line with comparable services in the UK and abroad. These inspections should be regular and unannounced with responsibility for action being suitably placed.

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

We are failing many constituents simply by failing in engaging them in the political process. The questionable removal of large numbers of the electorate in the past certainly did not assist in restoring faith in the system. I

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

would like to see all members of our fabulously diverse community engaged with the local political process and able to voice their concerns. On a straightforward note, the priorities that I feel need addressing urgently in Douglas East are the promenade regeneration and residential parking provision.

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

I think they should be congratulated for the steady economic growth we have experienced, however, we have continued to dig into our reserves each year, showing that we are not living within our means. They have also failed to effectively engage with the public at all levels.


How would you deal with the challenges

- Ensuring sustainable economic growth and restoring our reserve funds.
- Preventing a worsening gap between the richest and poorest in our society.
- Ensuring a health service that is fit for purpose.
- Ensuring the Public Service Pension Scheme is sustainable.
- Diversifying our economy by

referred to in the previous answer?

prompt identification of areas for investment – tourism is a prime example, yet it currently seems to focus primarily on the TT. Our Island has much to offer and we must market it for the unique place it is. We cannot compete with the sunshine in Turkey, but we can offer rolling countryside, a wide variety of niche leisure pursuits, fresh, local food, quirky and unique history, excellent diving and fishing, all within a safe environment for all the family.

- We must ensure that those on the lowest incomes are protected and prevent further taxes being imposed by the back door. We must support people who are unemployed back into the work system with training that is directly related to the job vacancies we have. We must ensure all members of society feel valued and part of our community.
- Introduction of compulsory education modules that deal with practical financial and social matters. Junior Achievement have worked very hard to implement this but it does not go far enough. When young people leave school they are often ill-equipped to make informed



decisions regarding pensions, loans and mortgages that could impact upon the majority of their adult life.

- We need an urgent appointment of an independent health regulator to conduct unannounced inspections across all aspects of our care services. We need to identify where we are struggling to provide the best service and arrange for those services to be provided elsewhere. We must also identify the areas at which we excel and look at ways of developing these to become a centre for excellence. We need to look at a long-term plan for staff recruitment and retention to ensure our service provision is sustainable.
- We must engage with all members of the Public Service Pension Scheme to prevent people 'opting out' of the scheme, whereupon we further reduce contributions. It is vital we do not allow the pensions fiasco to deter people from working within the public sector, which could potentially lead to a loss of skills and expertise at a time where these are much sought after. We

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

need honest, frank discussions about the future of the pensions to ensure we are no longer reliant on reserves to 'muddle through'.

The handling of the Public Sector Pensions has shown the lack of faith people have in the ability of the Government to act fairly – and this distrust in the Government has led some people to opt for early retirement further compounding the problem. Those within the scheme (including myself) fully understand that a system where people take out for longer than they put in is unsustainable. It is frustrating, however, that large lump sums continued to be paid out, contributions remained unprotected and this was not addressed sooner. I believe that the reforms recently agreed have allowed for a degree of certainty for those within the scheme. It was entirely appropriate to make amendments for those joining the scheme and those with over 10 years to go in the scheme, however, we must avoid scaring people out of the pension system entirely. I believe that any changes to the pensions of those within 10 years of retirement must be carefully measured to avoid people retiring earlier than they had planned to 'lock in' their

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

pensions. This can then lead to shortages of skilled staff and increased recruitment costs.

I believe this also highlights the need for practical education within the schooling system surrounding financial services and pensions.

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

There has been an increased focus on Island events and cottage industries, and while many of those are down to the entrepreneurial spirit of local residents, schemes such as the small business grant have certainly made these possible. I am delighted to see support for initiatives such as IsleExpo and Isle of Architecture as I feel these are certainly positive ways to market our Island as a great place to do business.

The risk of losing many of our heritage attractions. Whether people like or loathe the horse trams it is a slippery slope when we start simply getting rid of things without looking at cost-efficient work rounds. I have always said that the ideal solution for many of these heritage attractions (which I do not feel should be run by the Government), is to identify a group of interested parties to continue running them in a manner similar to that of Groudle Glen Railway, while retaining

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

the assets in Government ownership to protect them for future generations.

I believe we should be cautious as our finance sector, while flourishing over the past decades, is truly a case of having all our eggs in one basket. If the threatened restrictions to online gaming were to be imposed across the United States we could see a reduction in the size of the online gaming market. This would, in turn, lead to a substantial decrease in our Island revenues.

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

As previously stated I believe we must look at expanding our tourist industry. We need to effectively market the Island to those in the UK and further afield. It is still surprising how many people in the UK confuse the Isle of Man with the Isle of Wight.

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

I believe that we should put ourselves in a position, wherever possible, that we are less reliant on the UK, while recognising those areas where we are simply unable to survive alone (health, defence etc..). However, on a whole I think we have the balance right. I do believe we need to forge stronger links with the UK, while retaining

independence, to ensure our voice is heard in Westminster and our best interests served by UK politicians. We cannot afford to be surprised by decisions that inextricably affect us.

If you are, in which areas?

As above.

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

Yes. I believe we should always strive to improve our systems of governance and the Lisvane enquiry was long overdue. It would be churlish of us to ignore the recommendations made.

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

I believe that Lord Lisvane's report offers some excellent solutions to reform and the suggestions regarding the Legislative Council are excellent. I feel that direct election would simply create additional MHKs by another name, while the current system allows for a biased house owing to the small pool of candidates from which the MLCs are currently drawn. I feel a selection committee would allow a set of candidates to be presented who could represent the broader community with additional representation for groups that are currently underrepresented.

Who should have the responsibility of

Once the above amendments are

electing the Chief Minister?

made to the election of MLCs then the Court of Tynwald. With the current system I believe the Chief Minister should be elected by the Members of the House of Keys.

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

I believe the air services to/from the Island now show a good degree of competition with a range of carriers offering varied routes/times at competitive prices. The same cannot be said for our sea services. Access to our Island is fundamental if we wish to continue to attract businesses/services. I feel that we have a prime opportunity to review the Sea Services User Agreement to ensure it is fit for purpose, and I would not rule out partial nationalisation of the services to ensure the needs of the Manx people are met.

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

I am fully in favour of projects that are sympathetic to our landscapes, do not negatively impact upon our marine wildlife, and are at a minimum cost neutral. I believe this is achievable and something that we should research further. There is no question we have plenty of wind and wave power, and on some days even sunshine to harness!!

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

Any consideration of means testing must be appropriately reviewed and sensitively managed. It is also vital to ensure the cost of administering the means testing, is never greater than any benefit to be gained. It must be remembered, however, there is a fine line over which it is very easy to push those of modest means onto the poverty line and this must be avoided at all costs.

If you are, in which areas?

As above.