

Quintin Gill – Douglas East

Political Questions (2016)

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

The Isle of Man needs experienced and principled politicians to address the serious issues left by the current administration. I have over a decade of political experience and a track record as an independent, fair and consistent representative. I want to use my experience, knowledge and skills to assist the next Government and parliament to make the necessary decisions and actions to achieve a sustainable future for us all.

I am under no illusions that this will be challenging and unpalatable decisions will have to be made. The Isle of Man need politicians who will seek respect above short term popularity gained by prevarication or indecisiveness. The next term is crucial to our shared well-being.

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

Our financial situation is critical. Of course there are no easy answers; but the avoidance of dealing with reality - by prevarication or adopting fanciful avoiding techniques - mean our priorities must focus on seriously considering the scope of government's activities and achieving a sustainable budget. This has to be our priority and needs to happen quickly after the election.

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

A M.H.K. has a duty to his or her constituents but the role is primarily a national one and Members of the House of Keys have a poor record of thinking they know best for what they seem to regard as 'their constituency' . I would work with local authority representatives and officers, local businesses and other interested parties to agree necessary priorities. I would certainly want to resolve the pressing issue of sea route security and stop the haemorrhage of public money over the Promenade scheme.

As an experienced MHK, Probation Officer & Social Worker I am acutely aware of the varied problems and challenges many constituents face. I will continue to use my professional knowledge, skills and understanding of public administration to assist all of them wherever I can.

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

Generally they have not handled issues well. This administration seems addicted to spending. Despite our VAT share being cut significantly in 2008 the size and cost of the public sector has grown. Millions of pounds have been spent on what the public sometimes regard as 'vanity projects' or administrative wastefulness –

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

or the perennially expensive practice of engaging consultants to tell us what we often already know. Decision making has been put off for fear of unpopularity – not just by Government but Tynwald generally. However, the overdue and pressing decisions still need to be made and sooner or later the Government and all elected members have to address their duties.

There is so much uncertainty in the world. The U.S. Presidential elections will – at best – elect an unpopular and divisive President. Meanwhile across Europe the E.U. is facing challenges it seems ill-equipped to manage and the U.K.BREXIT vote may well be a catalyst for further disintegration of the E.U. as a political and financial model. Nationalism – wherever it rears its head - is divisive and dangerous but nonetheless it is a challenge that is growing.

At the same time terrorism – or the threat of terrorism - will, I believe, continue to impact on a daily basis. These and other matters will all have significant - if hopefully secondary risks to the Isle of Man and other small jurisdictions. It is foolish to think we are in some way immune to these issues and their consequences. I therefore believe we need to maintain and improve our

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

relationship with the United Kingdom whilst maintaining as much flexibility and manoeuvrability to promote our immediate and longer term interests.

I commend the past two administrations for the decision to send delegations to the UK Party Political Conferences. However, more must be done to promote understanding of our cause in Westminster and Whitehall and the next Government should address this. There are successful models we can easily emulate to achieve this quickly. A true partnership is more powerful and useful than pretending we can manage alone. If Tynwald is genuine in wanting to be a truly national parliament- and our Government is to lead us towards a sustainable fiscal and socially equitable future – then we need to be much less beauracratc and adopt a lightest possible control over both the public and private sectors. This will need a culture change which I have no evidence will be welcomed by vested interests. It is for the newly elected politicians therefore to consider, adopt and ensure compliance with their new policies to achieve these aims. I fear some candidates do not understand this stark challenge – and possibly many of them do not or will not want to face up to it. If

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

those candidates are elected / re-elected then the Isle of Man will have to live as best we can with the continued consequences of such systematic failure to address our challenges – and the chance of addressing the challenges will be lost.

I do not pretend to be an expert on this matter. In fact I do not claim to be an expert in any particular area. However, as a former Chairman of the Public Accounts I clearly recall some of the spectacular ineptitude and assertions from others who do claim such expertise. Sadly their claimed expertise does not seem to have worked out too well. Clearly the Public Sector pension schemes need urgent and fundamental changes. Yet the rush by this administration to push the matter through Tynwald is unhelpful. As a public servant I fully recognise that my pension will almost certainly be diminished if it is to become sustainable – not just for me but for future workers also. Of course I am not happy about that – and I wouldn't expect others to feel differently - but there does not seem to be any alternative. We all need to accept that the high expectations and demands which have come to characterise much of Manx society will need to be tailored

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

to meet the inescapable realities we must all face up to. Facing up to these challenges is going to be easier – if still painful - if the next administration presents a clear and factually based case for their actions.

The Isle of Man remains a truly lovely place to live, work and raise a family. We have a sense of community which promotes a caring society and I know from my active involvement in many charities that the work of the third sector has increased benefits to many in need but outside statutory support networks (but, see the question below too). Our public services are filled with committed professionals who work hard for the benefit of their clients and I am proud to be part of such a team in Nobles Hospital.

Initiatives in education to include young people previously on the margins of our society have led to a more inclusive community and the general levels of tolerance and acceptance of diversity have led to us having the most cosmopolitan society ever. The island has become a much more socially tolerant place and I commend our young people for leading this.

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

Despite claims about 'All in this together' we have seen the less well-off consistently hit hardest in many of the schemes introduced to address our fiscal challenges. Charges, fees and penalties all impact on most on those least able to suffer them. The need for the introduction of a food bank and the necessity for a Credit Union (which I entirely commend in principle and practice) are telling criticisms of the flaws in current social policies. However, I do believe these trends can be reversed with strong political leadership and administrative determination.

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

The private sector generally makes the money the Government likes to spend. Economies with fair and open competition wherever possible and in the public interests represent the best model for growth. Because we are a small jurisdiction we can be responsive and user –friendly. Government officials however, are not the best placed or most naturally inclined to promote business and should have a supportive rather than leading role in developing a more open market. If the Government is to encourage growth it needs to be in the private sector primarily – currently the over reliance in our economy is on our

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

public rather than any individual business sector. Government needs to re-double its 'efforts in working closer with the private sector.

The overdue and necessary review of the Scope and Structure of Government MUST take place as a matter of urgency in the next parliamentary session. Tynwald members MUST start to show real leadership in this matter. Previous administrations have avoided this for too long to our shared detriment. There is no magical answer to our problems but continuing in the same failed and unsustainable manner will only lead us all to inevitable shared national bankruptcy. This is not overstating the risks we face.

To diversify the Manx economy we need to find a sustainable balance between a (generally spending) public sector and a successful (and generally earning) private sector.

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

Nationalism is invariably based on a toxic balance of jingoism and animosity of some outside group. As a Manxman I am proud to have served in the Royal Navy and the British Army, and I am confident I understand the difference between nationalism and patriotism. I believe we

benefit from a relationship with our most powerful and oldest allies in the United Kingdom and this gives us the best of both worlds: we have a very high degree of autonomy balanced with the stability and support we get from our relationship with the UK. I believe our community is generally harmonious and inclusive and I would not want to see this harmed or eroded.

If you are, in which areas?

I believe we can all be Manx 'nationalists' in the sense of having pride and commitment to our national culture, history and interests – while still retaining a sense of British identity. I certainly don't see the two as contradictory and I hope that our new residents will share in this sense of identity. That, I believe will represent a secure and peaceful foundation for our community.

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

Yes. I have come to the conclusion that the role of the Legislative Council as a check and balance on the possible excess of Government or the House of Keys has been overtaken by the practice of MHKs electing one another to the upper chamber. To achieve this they need the support of a majority of the Keys. This, in practice of course means the majority of the Government.

This represents a debt to be repaid and the consequence of that is to effectively forfeit one's independent opposition to that government. This has sadly led to a Legislative Council which is unable or unwilling to challenge or oppose government. This is not good for anyone including the government as they do not need to ensure the robustness of their arguments if they are largely unchallenged. There have been honourable exceptions to this of course; Clare Christian, Eddie Lowey and Dudley Butt and some others have all fulfilled their varied duties honourably and courageously. If Legislative Council was publicly elected or serving MHKs were unable to stand for election to LegCo. and the public elected independently minded politicians then the worthwhile purpose of an Upper Chamber would be reinstated and their worth would become both clear and valuable.

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

As a former Deputy Speaker of the House of Keys I absolutely believe in the value of parliamentary analysis and genuine debate. It is disappointing therefore to see how legislation is regularly passed through the branches of Tynwald with limited – and sometimes no meaningful scrutiny. Whoever is elected at this General Election must apply themselves

to their parliamentary duties as keenly as to their government and constituency duties.

However, I would firstly like to hear other views following consideration of Lord Lisvane's recommendations in order that I can make a best informed view before reaching a definite conclusion about the many other aspects of proposed reform.

Who should have the responsibility of electing the Chief Minister?

Members of Tynwald are elected as Representatives. It should be their responsibility – answerable to their electorate – to make an informed and sensible choice of who is best placed to be Chief Minister.

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

No

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

Yes wherever such schemes are proven, economical and add to the security of supply. Having served as Chairman of the then Manx Electricity Authority I recognise the importance of maintaining reliable, diverse and economical methods of generating and supplying electricity as we move towards an increasingly low carbon economy.

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

This has to be one method of ensuring access to finite services is provided on a fair and equitable manner. However it must be balanced with a clear undertaking that universal access is the cornerstone of our welfare state.

If you are, in which areas?

This will be determined as an informed outcome of the overdue debate and actions following the review of the Scope and Structure of Government (see above).