

Richard FALK

for Douglas Central

Newsletter, August 2016

From Douglas East to Douglas Central

In November 2015, I stood for the Douglas East constituency in a by-election and missed out on becoming an MHK by 14 votes. Those of you who live in Tynwald ward will very likely have met me then, and now that Tynwald has been included in the new Douglas Central constituency will probably meet me again before the General Election.

Since losing the by-election, I've been keeping busy and politically active, including a very successful online campaign to retain the horse trams. This newsletter aims to bring you up to date with what's been happening and with my thinking ahead of the General Election.

You will of course receive a detailed manifesto from me before the election, and I will be canvassing intensively until election day, so there's a good chance we'll get to meet. However, if you have an issue you'd like to discuss with me in the meantime, please feel free to call me at any time on 614877 or 489257.

Are we about to become an insolvent island?

The main theme of my 2016 campaign will be the island's dire finances and what I believe is a very real risk of effective bankruptcy. Having used more than half our reserves in the seven years since the UK renegotiated the VAT sharing agreement, we face a deficit of £117 million in the present year. At this rate of overspending, our reserves will run out in four years' time, at which point we will face potential disaster.

Whilst the Government has overspent wildly across a number of departments, one of the largest contributors to the deficit is the public sector pension scheme. As a final salary scheme, this relies on taxpayers' money to make up deficits in the investment fund – and those deficits are huge. In fact, total liabilities on the scheme stand at more than £3 billion, whilst following the Government's recent botched intervention the annual cost to the revenue account is expected to reach £100 million by 2022.

This is no way to manage public finances, and things must change before the Government bankrupts the island and we have to go cap in hand to the UK for a bailout – which will probably result in demands for the island to surrender its independence and become part of the United Kingdom. I will be campaigning to end the final salary scheme – freezing accrued benefits at their present level and switching future contributions to an affordable money purchase scheme – before it ends us.



Why Douglas Central?



The by-election campaign last November was intense, exhausting – and above all, great fun. I thoroughly enjoyed canvassing in the five wards that made up Douglas East, but was particularly struck by the warmth and hospitality of people in Tynwald ward, which now makes up part of Douglas Central. (I must emphasise that my decision was not swayed by the kindness of a lady who offered me tea and chocolate biscuits. The rumour that I am anybody's for a chocolate biscuit must be quashed before it gains traction.)

Another factor was that most of the candidates from the by-election are standing again in Douglas East. Whilst I'm friends with all of them, facing the same candidates in the same constituency just ten months later would have felt a little like Groundhog Day.

VOTE FALK OR BUST

Saving the IOM Horse Tram

My love of vintage transport was a major factor in moving to the Isle of Man back in 2005. Our magnificent railway network is one of the things that makes the island such a remarkable and magical place, and I was distraught when Douglas Council announced its intention to terminate the horse trams in their 140th year.

With no intention of taking the decision lying down, I quickly formed a Facebook group, Save the IOM Horse Tram, and started lobbying Councillors and MHKs. Through regular discussions with Infrastructure Minister Phil Gawne, it became clear that the Council's claim of an annual loss of £263,000 was far from the real position – they had been allocating centralised costs, such as HR, to the horse trams to produce such a figure. In fact, the real operating deficit was around £100,000 a year and Mr Gawne was confident that by transferring the trams to the Government this could be halved.

Meanwhile, Save the IOM Horse Tram attracted thousands of supporters and readers with its regular updates, including detailed information on costs, arguments from commercial and aesthetic standpoints, and photographs and trivia. In particular, I emphasised that the deficit in running the service is an investment, not a loss – railway enthusiasts spend £11 million a year on the island, so we reduce our rail network at our peril. Furthermore,

Number Crunch

The Government is ending free TV licences for the over 75s to save £700,000 a year. However, the public sector pension scheme will be costing taxpayers 143 times as much – that's £100 million a year – by 2011/22. The real irony? We don't need to pay the licence fee at all. Tynwald could simply cancel it, and all that would happen is that the BBC would turn off its transmitters facing the island and end its desultory coverage of the island's news. And let's be honest: who still watches terrestrial TV, rather than Freeview or Sky, these days?

Number Crunch

With the removal of the Manx Pension Supplement in order to fund the Government's final salary pension scheme, you will receive a maximum of £170 a week when you retire. A senior civil servant took early retirement this year with a lump sum of £653,000, tax free – paid for by you.



the horse trams are loved and photographed by almost every tourist, and in their own way are as iconic as the Blackpool Tower.

In the face of such strong opposition, the Government chose to do the right thing and took over the horse tram for 2016. Early indications suggest that passenger numbers and revenues have increased substantially as locals and visitors alike realised the vulnerability of the service. Now the Department of Infrastructure has announced that it plans to run the service in 2017 and 2018 before making a final decision on its viability – a huge triumph for people power.

If you'd like to get involved and ensure that we win the war as well as the battle, please visit facebook.com/Saveourtram or get in touch with me directly.

Number Crunch

There's big government and there's big government. The Isle of Man has 24 MHKs, nine salaried MLCs and 20 councils employing 150 councillors – to represent 85,000 people.

Let's talk

Having started canvassing a couple of weeks ago, I'm aiming to speak to every voter on the doorstep between now and polling day. However, even though I'll be covering the complete constituency at least twice, there will inevitably be some people who are out every time I call.

If you'd like to discuss your concerns with me, please feel free to contact me any time.

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