

## Keith Fitton – Douglas South

### Political Questions (2016)

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

I intend to be a voice for the more vulnerable people in our society while positively influencing the direction of government so that it is fairer and more reasonable while living within our means.

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

1. I would oppose any further attempts to introduce indirect taxation because this disproportionately impacts upon the people least able to afford it.
2. We must address the changing demographic, where young people leave the Island and don't return.
3. My career has been spent in Health & Social Care, working in the NHS, private & charity sectors. I passionately believe in the NHS but it faces huge challenges, in particular due to recruitment issues and the cost of agency staff.

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

I would like to see a proper, all encompassing review of how rates are managed on the Isle of Man as this certainly appears to be an unresolved issue within the constituency.

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

Also, the state of the pavements is something that needs to be resolved. Already I've been made aware that due to their uneven nature, some elderly people have fallen.

They have made some difficult decisions. Had they not done so, the outcome for the Island could have been much worse. However, those fiscally responsible policies have placed too much of the burden upon the people least able to face those restraints, such as retired people, disabled people etc. They have continued to refuse the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act or invest in ways to support people who have disabilities into employment, while demonising them for being unemployed. I'm not convinced that the Tax Cap is fair or even beneficial to the Island.

And they've side stepped the major issues, such as public sector pensions.

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

Young adults leaving the Island and not returning, leading to a top heavy society in terms of age. I believe this is already leading to a low rate of unemployment, which is distorting the 'success' of our economy. We have huge numbers of

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

Health & Social Care professionals nearing retirement age, who are not being replaced quickly enough. This is almost certainly reflected in other areas, such as teaching.

One of the biggest problems we face at a political level is that there isn't a 'flow through' of issues. Too often an issue is viewed from a single department or entity rather than the global implications. For example, we have up to 40% of Registered Nurses in Mental Health retiring within five years. But we are not training anywhere near enough young people to become nurses. Those who do go away to train often decide to remain in the UK, becoming part of the exodus problem. We're not making it easy financially for people to train. If we change public sector pensions too much, then potentially essential government workers will decide not to come here in the first place.

One possible answer may be [for example] student loans for 'key professionals', which, if the person returns to work on the Isle of Man, would be paid for by government over a five year period. The cost of this is likely to be less than the cost of agency staff and after five years, the individual is more likely to

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

remain here. If they don't return, then they have a loan to repay to our government, therefore the cost is minimal.

We also need to attract and develop other industries that would attract younger people here in the future and offer alternative employment for those people who never left.

This is probably the most interesting and difficult challenge that we face. At the risk of sounding like I'm 'passing the buck', I would like to see a Select Committee to thoroughly examine this issue and report back, because the consequences (and potentially '*unexpected consequences*') are far reaching.

For example, if we simply close the public final salary pension, we are likely to be storing up a huge problem in twenty or thirty years time, because the number of people paying in will fall off a cliff edge, so there won't be money being paid in, to pay for current pensions being paid out. But if we keep tinkering, as we have been, then people lose confidence in the schemes. Get it wrong and it impacts upon the recruitment of teachers, doctors and other essential professionals, who we are already

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

struggling to attract to the Island. Ignore it and the hole gets deeper. There are alternatives that would enable a 'soft landing', but we really need to examine these very carefully to ensure we get it right.

Despite the numbers being huge, and the challenge being one that can no longer be ignored, a decision can be deferred while we look at all options, developing a policy that works for everyone.

So while this is rightly an election issue, my response would be to take some time to develop a well rounded policy that is evidenced based and after a thorough examination of the options and their knock-on effects.

I'm pleased that same sex marriage has been legalised and that Mr Bell felt comfortable to publicly discuss his own sexuality. That is in itself a mark of the tolerant society that we now live in.

Crime continues to fall and for all the problems, the Isle of Man remains a great place to live for the vast majority of people.

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

“Protecting the Vulnerable” has been a hollow cliché. Pensioners living in fuel poverty, ATOS & Dependability being tasked with taking benefits off disabled people, the increased requirement for food banks on the Island.

The 'Toilet Tax'... when a government acknowledges that a tax is unfair for the people in society least able to afford it, but go ahead anyway, they lose legitimacy in my opinion.

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

Two sectors, gaming & finance. Both of which are potentially quite transient and neither are likely to expand further.

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

We have a number of factors that make diversification difficult.

Firstly, the cost of transport, which makes import/export costs very expensive.

The second problem is the cost of power.

The MUA has huge loans that need servicing. As a result, not only do they need to keep selling electricity at a greatly increased price, but this acts as a deterrent to the production of electricity through renewable sources. If the cost of gas increases, then the debts could

become unsustainable.

Both of these factors are massive disincentives for manufacturing industries ever relocating here.

I would not want to renew the 'End User Agreement' and I would look at returning the Steam Packet in to public ownership but with the existing board managing the company. Publicly owned but not publicly run.

It is a hugely profitable service, in excess of half a million pounds per month. Even allowing for depreciation & future investment, a significant amount of profit could be used to invest elsewhere on the Island.

With regards to power, I would like to aggressively pursue the potential of extracting shale gas. I know this has been tentatively examined, but perhaps because it is so contentious, it has probably been shied away from. But I would introduce a 'twist'. A fixed amount (for example, in the region of 60%) of the tax take from any shale gas extraction, would be used for the investment in renewable energy. This could include research & development or set up costs for new companies. It could also include grants for home production (solar panels

etc). A further amount, in the region of 20% would be used to directly re-pay some of the huge MUA loans. If the gas can be extracted in significant enough quantities, we can reduce the cost of power for individuals and industries and be at the forefront of developing renewable energy. This would bring inward investment and jobs. If developed in this manner, we could become a net exporter of both gas & electricity while becoming increasingly 'green'.

I also like the irony of getting one industry to fund the development of the industry that will replace it.

Obviously, these figures are indicative of my thinking, as it would be dependent entirely on the amounts and ease with which the gas can be recovered. However, if such a proposal was able to be implemented, then we could see the Isle of Man developing a new short-term industry of gas extraction, that leads to the long term diversification in renewable energy. It may well be that none of this is geologically feasible, but I'm including it as an example of trying to look for long term solutions in an imaginative way.



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

I'm in favour of a 'wait & see' at the moment. Any decisions regarding increased independence must be for the long term benefit of the people on the Isle of Man.

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

'Brexit' has thrown up particular challenges. But this may also be an opportunity too. We must consider as many different options as is reasonably foreseeable, then move rapidly. If that means stepping away from the UK and towards Europe, then that should be considered.

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

Yes, absolutely.

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

I have to admit that I thought Lord Lisvane would turn out an establishment report, promoting the status quo, so I am delighted that I was wrong in this regard. I think it could go further in some areas and I'm concerned that the proposed 'nominations commission' to select potential future Legislative Council members would, in itself become a 'jobs for the boys', but in general I entirely support his report and I would push for it to be implemented as swiftly as possible.

In particular, I find it goes against democracy to have Ministers & Members of departments who are not elected by and accountable to the people. I'm also firmly against the system of collective responsibility, which effectively 'buys' a block vote. I think that collective responsibility should only exist within a department, so the Member would vote with the Minister who they are working with. In evidence to Lord Lisvane, it was stated that collective responsibility does not work in this manner, but the perception is certainly that this is the case.

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

MHK's

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

I would like to see the Steam Packet in public ownership but professionally run, without political interference. The profits would then be used for future investment (depreciation) and government spending, for example in support of the tourist industry etc.

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

Yes, I believe this is potentially an important area for diversification of our economy.

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

Yes.

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

I think that government paid benefits should all be focussed upon 'need'. For example, a current 'hot topic', TV Licences for people over 75 years of age. There are people over the age of seventy-five who have substantial income, far more than many low paid working people. Why shouldn't they pay for their own license fee? However, there are other retired people on very modest incomes who rely upon the (until recently) free licenses, which I think should be provided.

I don't agree with charges for health check-ups (for example eye tests) regardless of ability to pay, as I believe there is great value in early detection of certain conditions, which actually save money in the long run.