

Richard Halsall (MLP) – Douglas East

Political Questions (2016)

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

I have become increasingly concerned by the lack of compassion shown by the current administration and disappointed that others in government weren't coming forward with the alternative vision of a fair and inclusive society. Delivering this vision is my motivation for standing.

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

Following the UK's 'Brexit' we need to ensure the economy remains stable. But I also believe that our current government has focused on the economy to the exclusion of all else and have lost sight of the fact that it is supposed to serve society not the other way round. As a result more and more of us feel neglected by a government we pay for. To counter this, the next administration needs to put democracy and equality front and centre of its next program of government.

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

There is considerable overlap between constituency and national issues but those of greatest concern are affordable housing; the ongoing problems with the state of the promenade - including the seemingly abandoned Castle Mona; the

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

uncertainty surrounding the future of the horse trams and its impact on our vital tourism accommodation sector.

There has been continuing economic growth and increasing employment which is a positive. But on the single biggest challenge - rebalancing the budget the government has performed very poorly. Although the deficit has been reduced this has not been achieved fairly. It has raised extra revenue by directly charging the public for some government services and reduced expenditure by cuts and restrictions to others. Both these approaches have had the greatest impact on the poorest in our society and left them even worse off.

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

Growing inequality; not only is it grossly unfair and a cause of social tension it will also directly harm our islands economic performance. As the Chief Minister recently pointed out the falling incomes of many island residents is already being felt in the retail and hospitality sectors. We have become an island of two economies, with one section of society forging ahead and another struggling to even stay where they are. In a small community like ours this cannot be

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

allowed to continue; a fair society isn't just nice to have it is essential for our islands future.

There is no one simple solution but a main contributor to the islands growing inequality is the use of GDP as the only measure of the islands performance. As a society we seek to improve what we measure therefore in addition to economic performance government needs to give equal focus on social measures of wellbeing. The *Social Progress Index for example* highlights the negative impacts of government policy on all strata of society and therefore provides vital information on how to improve it.

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

All though a far from perfect the solution recently endorsed by Tynwald is affordable. Prolonging the debate surrounding PSP, as several Members have tried to do is already damaging our society. The ongoing uncertainty surrounding pensions has led to difficulties in the recruitment and retention of healthcare professionals and other vital public sector workers. To remain attractive to doctors, nurses, teachers etc. our PSP will need to at least offer parity with those available in the UK.

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

I think that this very much depends on where you are on the socioeconomic scale. I am sure that there are some people who have benefited from economic growth with better jobs and an increased income, but I am concerned for those who have seen very little, if any improvement in their daily lives.

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

As stated above the standard of living for many people has fallen considerably; this is a result of wage stagnation, inflation and the introduction of charges for and restrictions to government services. And, as mentioned earlier uncertainty surrounding PSP has led to difficulties in recruitment of personnel in both healthcare and education, as a result in increased waiting times for medical appointments and increased school class sizes.

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

The island has done better than its competitors in diversifying its economy but this is an ongoing project and we must remain constantly vigilant for threats to our existing industries and opportunities opening for new ones.

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

The areas already identified in the Vision 2020 strategy are appropriate and the progress made on some of these is encouraging. However, of all the industries that takes place on the Isle of Man it is tourism and travel spending that is capable of providing the greatest financial multiplier and because this sector remains labour intensive it is also capable of providing further employment opportunities. I strongly believe that this is an area deserving of greater support.

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

Although I am not in favour of greater political independence from the UK I do feel we need to distance ourselves from much of the influence of their political ideology.

If you are, in which areas?

Our government routinely adopts ideas and practises directly from the UK without looking to see if other countries have taken an alternative and better approach to the same problems, for example the Netherlands approach to addressing long-term disability not only takes into account an individual's impairment it takes into consideration personal factors such as age, education, qualifications and work experience.

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

Yes, I am in favour of parliamentary reform.

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

I believe that all MLCs should be popularly elected and any constitutional reforms offered as a referendum.

Who should have the responsibility of electing the Chief Minister?

If all members were popularly elected, Tynwald, but failing this just 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 would favour the nationalisation of sea services but they should be operated as a State Owned Enterprise rather than run directly by government. SOE would be managed along the same lines as private company but as the sole share holder all profits would return to the Isle of Man Government to benefit the islands population.

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

Yes, provided they directly benefit the Manx economy.

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

This is a complicated issue and I could not support testing for the vast majority of government services, including some of those already subjected to it. Means testing generally results in a lot more

If you are, in which areas?

bureaucracy and this is likely to eat up any of the savings that its introduction would make possible, and even with dedicated IT systems any savings would be at best marginal. One of the great strengths of universal benefits is that they create a sense of solidarity and shared understanding. Means tested benefits have lead to the opposite, divisions and a growing resentment of their recipients. However, the possible exception would be social housing.

In recent years social housing rents have increased at a rate well above inflation and this is causing some residents financial hardship. But at the same time there is a perception, whether unfounded or not that some tenants are 'exploiting' the system by living in social housing when they could easily afford a private sector rent. Means testing this one area would address this by helping to ensure that those in difficulty received assistance and those who could afford it paid a reasonable rent.