

**DOUGLAS CENTRAL  
HOUSE OF KEYS GENERAL ELECTION  
23 SEPTEMBER 2021**



 Chris  
**Thomas**

***Policy Agenda 2021:  
Intelligently focusing government on us,  
please spend your vote carefully***

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# POLICY AND MANDATE

Thank you for electing me to serve as our constituency's MHK last time. I am standing again, and am grateful that you are considering my policies, capability, and record when deciding your vote.



*I hope the concept I first mentioned in Tynwald in 2014 will become reality; not party politics, but "... mandate politics ... or manifesto politics or programme politics, or working together politics. We need to have more of an idea of where we are going ... "*

I outlined a programme for government and reform in my previous manifestos; and as a principled politician, that programme has framed my campaigning and activity in Tynwald and Keys since, of course alongside your views.

**Policy still matters. It affects how our taxes are spent, and that affects our everyday lives and those of future generations. So this draft Policy Agenda identifies things we need to change and do now, my 2021 campaign priorities. If you re-elect me, and with your suggestions for it, this agenda would contribute to focusing government on us and our priorities as Government is formed.**

Please continue to get in touch to help me finalise this Policy Agenda. I have already learned so much from talking with people socially distanced on their doorsteps, from emails, texts and social media, and from listening during my meeting at All Saints Church Hall and at lunch time chats at the Finch Hill Bowling and Snooker Club and elsewhere.

Finally I am so grateful to both my family at home and across for adapting admirably to the pressures that come from being a candidate and MHK, and to all those who have been generous with their expertise and effort helping me campaign for intelligent Government more focused on us.

Gura mie eu! Thank you.

**Intelligently focusing government on us**

# CAPABILITY & RECORD

Beyond signposting policy and reform for a better future, an MHK needs to be capable to deliver it, without fear or favour and despite the consequences. My record shows I can provide authentic, listening and learning leadership and work with others to get the right things done, not merely a weather vane blowing in the political wind.

For instance:

- Standing up against misuse of emergency powers which got me dismissed as a Minister;
- Challenging civil servants, for instance when sub-optimal Covid-19 decisions were made;
- Communicating facts to debunk myths, for instance countering the 'Island is going bust' notion which was fostered during the 2016 election and has proven false;
- Picking up public petitions (for instance gas, 'toilet tax', planning and rates);
- Helping wronged individuals in complaints and appeals (recently bus accessibility);
- Making progress with my campaign priorities and other big issues as backbencher and Minister, including championing living incomes and opportunity for all; and
- Forming difficult legislation in Keys, including about Competition and Historic Child Abuse.

Some personal background is that I am married with children and was educated at Millom Comprehensive and Balliol College, Oxford with an internship in EU Commissioner's office. Then I qualified as a financial analyst in UBS, London whilst providing bond advice to central banks.

I first came to the Island in 1979 to play double bass, moving here 20 years later to launch an MSc degree. Alongside university teaching, I was technical specialist in international projects; for instance Chief Technical Advisor for Luxembourg's financial sector project in Vietnam (2009-11) and Project Director for the EU-China Financial Services Co-operation Project in Beijing (2004-7).



*"NEWS FROM THE MANNIN BRANCH CELTIC LEAGUE: How dare Chris Thomas treat the electorate as if they are adult ... he's got this analysis of the NI situation on his web pages and it seems pretty positive ..... I TEND TO BELIEVE HIS ANALYSIS because from watching his work and exchanging emails with him he seems to be one of those unique MHKs who does his homework..... perhaps a job in the Treasury will beckon. After all it would be refreshing to have someone in there putting out unvarnished truths!"*

**please spend your vote carefully**

# ADDRESSING OUR REAL CHALLENGES

I remain 'glass-half-full'. Our Island has relatively low unemployment and diversified growth which benefits many, a huge National Insurance Fund as bedrock for social security and pensions, and good international standing. Generally our community remains prosperous and caring, and our public service is beginning to transform itself.

But we still have major challenges which need addressing in the coming five years despite them looking even tougher than the last five:

- Businesses struggling by in our local economy, with emerging international pressures;
- Fragile public finances needing careful handling to recover strained healthcare, maintain infrastructure, and keep pension promises whilst treating younger people fairly;
- Real poverty and struggle, with social issues including 'mental health concerns, alcoholism, families splitting up, homelessness', as stated recently in a Covid-19 briefing;
- Two thirds of people having lost confidence in Government and Tynwald, with projects like the Promenade and crises like housing frequently mentioned as the cause; and
- Public servants feeling both buffeted from one policy to another by perceived poor public service leadership and battered by persistent assertion of bloat and waste.

**I remain passionate about addressing these challenges, but this will only be possible if the incoming MHKs elect a responsible Government with a collective and prioritised policy, budget and legislative agenda in line with their individual mandates from the people they represent. Only then can consensus be conserved whilst reform takes place and things get done.**

**So my first priority is to make sure that the principles of how the big policy challenges will be tackled are agreed with the public before MHKs elect the next Chief Minister and the next Government is formed. Then a 5 year costed and prioritised Government Programme can be laid down to deliver what has been agreed.**

Other campaign priorities include:

- Focusing Government on us, transforming healthcare and education;
- Rebalancing incomes and prices to make normal living affordable for all;
- Accommodating the housing needs of local people of every generation;
- Re-using brownfields and vacant buildings ahead of green fields;
- Making spending public funds more accountable;
- Settling the vision for fossil fuel use in electricity generation, housing and transport asap and laying out 10 year 'just transition' for people and organisations;
- Concentrating on effective maintenance of infrastructure; and
- Retaining community facilities and open spaces, and reclaiming the streets where we live.

*"It's amazing what you can accomplish when you don't care who gets the credit",  
US President Truman*

**Intelligently focusing government on us**

# FOCUSING GOVERNMENT ON US



The public needs to be at the heart of everything the public service does as it spends and invests public funds; Government focused on US, not itself; with policies and a programme that address the real challenges we face.

**Ministers need to unite around the Government Programme and any major decisions which are agreed by a majority of Ministers as matters of national importance. Only these things should be covered by collective responsibility.**

Then the Council of Ministers should be legally, practically and culturally, one collective body, with joint responsibility for developing better policy, ensuring its successful, efficient and effective delivery and being collectively accountable for Tynwald for doing so. No department should need to be directed by Council of Ministers, as Treasury was an unprecedented five times since 2016.

*“Responsible Government involves detailed analysis and the co-ordination of policies which have been considered, taking account of all factors”,  
Sir Miles Walker, The Development of Policy, 1987*

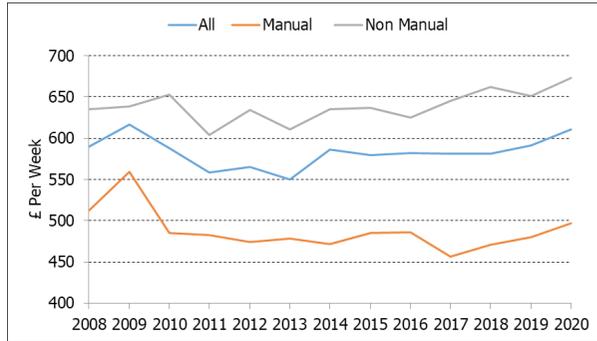
Key features of One Public Service focused on us include:

- Services and budgets aligned to deliver fewer but more widely-agreed policy outcomes;
- Simplified decision-making by Council of Ministers, and the bodies and roles it creates;
- Politicians making policy and overseeing implementation of it by delivery bodies including statutory boards, executive agencies, arms-length companies, local authorities and charities;
- Services accessible online, by phone and in various types of ‘hubs’ in communities;
- Regulators, ombudsman and tribunals operating independently outside Government;
- New Public Services Commission with broader responsibility for developing HR policy and challenging implementation of it as delivery bodies take back more control;
- Refreshed digital strategy following frank internal review published in July 2021;
- Improving capital projects process to meet strategic infrastructure needs efficiently;
- Fully functioning Tynwald Commissioner for Administration and Auditor General with an extended role overseeing the management of public interest whistleblowing;
- Statistics office, law, police and public service broadcaster protected from political pressure;
- Reduced use of consultants, and proper engagement in National Development, Industrial Relations and a new Public Health Forum; and
- Empowered Manx Lottery Trust, sports and cultural bodies managing more public funding.

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# INCREASE EARNINGS

Real median earnings have just started to rise after a decade of stagnation, and the next Government should aim to increase them further and tackle low, uncertain pay. What we need is economic growth that makes normal living affordable for everyone.



Weekly Real Median Earnings, Source: Earnings Survey.

*In January 2015 government confirmed in answer to my Keys questions that the household income and expenditure survey which revealed that on average, one in four households, the island's poorest, don't have enough income to cover their cost of living. Unfortunately this awful finding was confirmed in 2018/19 survey.*

**Government needs to work with the private sector to keep as much economic activity as possible on Island and to make that activity as useful for working people as it is for companies; basically local substance with people, premises and core turnover here. I hope KPMG's 'Big Picture' economic vision and strategy of green, digital and safe is helpful in this. Some specific actions are:**

- Accommodate reasonable requests for regulatory, legislative and training measures so that the 5000 local enterprises paying NI and employee tax, and re-locating export-focused entrepreneurs, employ people in real high earning jobs and invest in apprenticeships;
- Encourage new clusters involving local firms as other clusters mature, aiming to have over 20 sectors with over 500 employees and make our economy more diverse;
- Respect local business and technical people, including by letting Manx Development Corporation and economic agencies build partnerships rather than wasting public money on fees and bad investments as happened with Enterprise and Media Development Funds;
- Support small businesses in sectors like care, retail, hospitality, and cleaning to pay an hourly minimum wage of another £2 by reducing other costs so that owners can earn as much;
- Adopt a 'one stop shop' approach to simpler licensing and regulation;
- Modernise employment and work permit law and arrangements to support parenting and to avoid the potential risks and costs from jobs becoming casual, low paid and precarious; and
- Facilitate cash and financing arrangements, perhaps creating a national bank.

# AND MAKE MONEY GO FURTHER

Some progress has been made tackling the cost of living but the next Government needs to complete already-started projects; basically championing the consumer interest rather than vested interests, and challenging exploitative practices and obstructive officialdom. Specifically:

- Eliminate unfair pricing and practices by upgrading and de-politicising the Office of Fair Trading so it is effective against over-charging and under-serving private companies or public bodies. Initially this involves completion of its inquiry into whether Bus Vannin's dial-a-ride minibus service is anti-competitive, and then reviewing food, housing and telecoms costs;
- Reduce gas prices, and control monopolistic standing charges and tariffs elsewhere following extension of the economic regulation approach from communications to utilities. New gas regulation should ensure gas customers pay cost-oriented prices whilst Manx Gas only earns a reasonable return of about 2/3rd of what it earned under the failed 2015 Voluntary Gas Agreement. Subsidisation of Government's gas usage by the general public should end too. Waste management, electricity and agriculture arrangements need review;



## Communications and Utilities Regulatory Authority

- Reform rates by moving over five years to fair rateable values with discounts which should bring Douglas rates down to the all-Island level adjusted for service level and cost;
- Rebalance the way government raises revenue by stopping the policy of replacing income tax with higher charges and fees which disproportionately affect lower income households;
- Hold down Steam Packet fares and freight costs - and thus Manx inflation more generally - when reviewing pricing during next Sea Services Agreement review; and
- Restrain electricity charges, water and sewerage rates by refreshing MUA pricing strategy following refinancing of the debt at low long-term interest rates after write-off of £100 million debt, ending of gas pipeline construction financing in 2023 and rates reform.

*"Flaws in the voluntary agreement made me decide to resign as OFT vice chair once the gas agreement was effectively signed by CoMin and the OFT board ..... But a new Government could plan a new regulatory regime. I want this to happen, and cross-utility regulation is the way forward."*  
Examiner quoting me in 10/2015. Better gas regulation was introduced in 2021.

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# EVERYONE MATTERS

People are different, but everyone matters; and policy should be aimed to provide life and career opportunities for us all.

The Equality Act is having an impact as it enables more people, including through raising the incomes of lower paid women in public sector roles; but there is still much to do. Another challenge is tackling the relative terms and pension opportunities of private and public sector employees.

A major challenge arises from the growing proportion of older people in the Island since 2001 after thirty years of “population rejuvenation”, as Paul Craine described it. The implications of this were laid out clearly in 2013 in a report on the threats and opportunities of an ageing population, with a 2020 update. For instance state pensions might come under pressure as they are paid from NI which is paid mostly by younger people in work; and younger medics, nurses and care staff are needed to carry out procedures like hip replacements and to look after older people. Thus it matters that young adults are emigrating, with two people in their 20s leaving for each one arriving between 2011 and 2016, and as a consequence there has been a 36% fall since 2010 in the number of babies born here.



Two white papers address these threats and opportunities, Meeting our Population Challenges and Intergenerational Fairness. The first proposed a “plan, monitor and manage” approach to grow the economically active population to change the Island’s age profile. But the consequences of this seem unattractive to people with nearly 2/3rds feeling the population should remain as it is or decrease. The second paper presented local evidence of fewer career, housing and pension opportunities for younger people than “previous generations came to expect.” Earnings progress has stalled for young adults. Millennial families are more likely to rent privately than to own their own home. Defined benefit pension membership has fallen. Young adults spent the same as those approaching retirement in 2000, less now. Household wealth has grown, but some older people have most of it.

**Many of the action and policy proposals in these white papers are in this Policy Agenda, and now is the time to act on them.**



**“Generational thinking” is crucial. This is not about blaming people “because they happened to enjoy certain changes in the economy due to when they were born”. Nor is it about taking anything away from any particular generation. Rather it is being “more mindful” of what proportion of the benefits and costs of public provision each generation can expect, so that fairer decisions are made.**

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# REBALANCING PUBLIC FINANCING

Moody's Aa3 stable Isle of Man credit rating reflects our "very strong public finances" and "prudent approach to managing government finances". But there is still a significant structural financial deficit, and net liability in the Island's balance sheet in 2021 of over £0.5 billion due to an actuarially assumed increase in the public sector pensions liability. So public financing is unbalanced, and rebalancing needs to be fair to us all. For instance:

- **Over 75s need free TV licences, but Government should consider child benefit, childcare allowances and generally supporting parenthood in a similarly universal way;**
- **State pensions are triple locked, originally with a cost of living supplement, and the same principle needs to apply to other social security payments to enable normal living for all;**
- **Extra budget is needed to reduce hospital waiting lists, but employment, housing, and social measures to reduce the emigration of young adults need to be financed too; and**
- **The refinancing of Manx Utilities and Steam Packet debt should not be aimed to create savings products for older generations without reducing costs for future generations.**

The 2021 valuation should show our £1 billion NI fund provides bedrock for social security and pensions for decades, but the current review of which income might be subject to NI and what will need funding from it needs to be fair, especially as £100 million was taken from it during Covid-19.

The future for public sector pensions is much improved since 2016, with the reserve's life extended by 4 years, and the shortfall in 2021-22 reduced by a third. This resulted from reduced benefits, increased contributions and cost sharing inside a cost envelope alongside a defined contribution option. But the "legacy funding gap" - the cost in the future of public sector pensions built up in the past - remains as there is no miraculous fix to get rid of this multi-billion actuarial liability whilst public finances remain strong. Funding this needs to be fair.

Poverty should not exist, with all the social issues it can entail. For instance public finances need to help the quarter of over 65s who have inadequate pensions to cover their cost of living, and the many working people with multiple jobs just to get by. Increasing tax allowances only benefits those who actually pay tax, so it needs to be complemented with more financial support for lower and middle income households.



Rates are unfair to people in Douglas and the towns. This can be fixed with the rates reform laid out in 2019. Telecommunications and agriculture expenditure is also loaded in favour of rural areas.

*"We can and should provide more security for young people, from the jobs they do to the homes they increasingly rent. And we can promote asset ownership for younger generations so that owning a home and access to a decent pension are realities not a distant prospect in 21st century Britain. The ideas we set out are not easy or comfortable..... but we have to tackle substantial long-term problems – they will not fix themselves." Lord Willetts, "A New Generational Contract", 2018*

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# FIXING OUR HOUSING CRISIS

*"I continue to beat the drum for our community and our Island. But why should I always spin and gloss over some realities and justify the continuation of some policies that I believe need changing? ..... I am not boosting the knockers, only knocking the excessive boosting of some Government policies and achievements", my 2016 budget speech*

National housing policy should aim to accommodate the needs of local people of every generation and tackle each dimension of our housing crisis. One dimension is that there are homeless people, whilst at least 1,000 dwellings are vacant and more are under-occupied. Another dimension is that 4% of dwellings are unfit, needing an average of £20,000 spending on them, with another 12% in disrepair needing £10,000. Although most people own their own home without a mortgage, private renting has increased by nearly a third since 2008 and nearly a third of Douglas homes are rented, mainly by younger people as housing prices and deposit requirements are so high relative to their earnings, with the average mortgage being over £100,000. Care, extra care and supported housing are deficient.



Action needs to include:

- Urgent development and introduction of a rental deposit protection and arbitration scheme;
- Put in place emergency housing provision and foster Housing First supported living;
- Launch a Vacant Properties Initiative to bring properties back into use;
- Use planning law "comprehensive treatment" to encourage brownfield housing, and impose a Community Infrastructure Levy and Affordable Housing obligations on greenfield housing;
- Provide financial incentives for housing including i) local authority rate discounts or tax incentives for brownfield and conservation area housing ii) tiered Land Registry rates for first and second time buyers with lower and middle incomes, with reduction in fees for owner occupiers iii) housing improvement grants and loans linked with energy efficiency targets to make housing decent or to replace it, and iv) housing equity release and savings products alongside wider access shared equity, rent to buy and part-guaranteed mortgages;
- Finalise energy efficiency and other standards for all housing and implement efficiently;
- Modify housing adaptation scheme to assist independent living;
- Increase social housing rents only by inflation until means tested rent rebating in place;
- Expand online Deeds Registry services to include all land and property information;
- Consolidate and modernise housing and tenancy law; and
- Introduce residency restrictions and key worker housing.

**Many of these actions could be implemented by an arm's-length, not-for-profit Housing Association, one of which could evolve from the Council which could leverage both the value of its social housing stock and long experience.**

# HEALING HEALTH AND CARE

I hoped that the low point for healthcare here would be in 2013 when Tynwald heard that “patients were continuing to come to serious harm despite concerns being raised within the hospital at all levels” and external reviews told social care that the service had important weaknesses. Heads rolled, frameworks and facilities were rebuilt; but we now know 8 years on that more reform, including a transformation of the working environment for so many, was needed to restore the Island’s comprehensive national health and social care service aimed to prevent, diagnose and treat physical and mental illness.

**But all the staff, management and board of Manx Care, aided by the Transformation Programme for a couple of years, need now to work positively, and respecting each other, to deliver high quality care safely and eliminate inefficiencies in our provision.**

Some challenges that need overcoming include:

- Implementation of plans for on- and off-Island clinical services, including 24/7 air bridge for local stabilisation before move to contracted specialist centres;
- Enhancing GP and community services carefully, adjusting contracting and funding so they are fair to the practices in Douglas, and maintaining in person appointments;
- Recruiting and retaining staff despite an extremely competitive market and difficult working conditions in recent years, with joint working and more local training, thus re-localising employment to reduce huge and wasteful agency staff spending;
- Communicating better with patients and service users through MCALS, the new service aimed to sort problems out, provide advice and signpost people to get help;
- Rebalancing health and care budgets as care-in-the-community is not a cheap option;
- Turning around social care, including picking up the pieces after Abbotswood and Corrin Memorial Home closures, and getting the shelved July 2018 care options down for implementation. These were for a dedicated social insurance levy paid by younger people to provide part of social care free at the point of need eventually, and for capping social care contributions with more assets protected now;
- Encouraging voluntary vaccinations through easy take up, and reasonable and intelligent discussion of benefits and risks of mitigations to live with covid-19; and
- Enhancing healthcare complaints and quality assurance processes.



*“We can deliver the health and care older generations deserve without simply asking younger workers to bear all the costs” Lord Willetts, “A New Generational Contract”*

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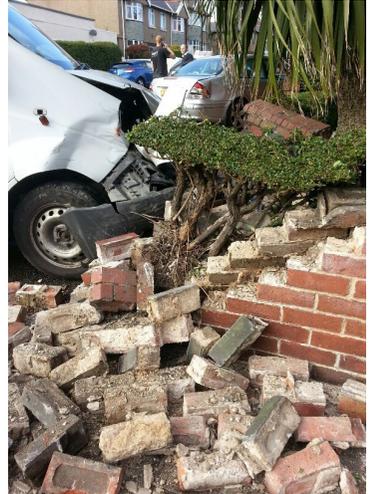
# RESIDENTIAL CALM?

“20mph is plenty” in home zones, and around schools, and makes sense to minimise risks of collisions like this one in Somerset Road and to begin to reclaim residential roads for residents.

**A proposal for traffic calming measures in a zone around Ballakermeen High School is prepared for consultation and then pilot implementation after the election. One objective is to minimise the value of using residential roads as short-cuts.**

**Another focus needs to be the potential dangerous proposals for Tromode Road for which a planning application is expected. These seem contrary to the residents’ interests, and more aligned to developments which are imagined in Braddan.**

A schedule for highways maintenance in Douglas was published in 2016, and various schemes have been carried out since with varying degrees of effectiveness. Much more needs to be done, and a 5-year prioritised plan and budget is needed, including road, kerb and footpath improvements, line painting, and back lane work.



*“A public representative is not qualified to run a department, he has only been given the opportunity to ensure that the department carry out the policies in the best interest of the public as a whole” Dominic Delaney*

The most common concern we seem to have is parking, and area-by-area proposals should be developed, ideally with community proposal of local action. Fixed penalties and new arrangements for wardens and controllers should help. Residents parking permit use needs review and control, particularly around the number issued, continuing validity and how large vehicles are included. On and off street parking and enforcement needs joining up between Government and Council.

Noise and air pollution needs tackling - particularly in Lord Street, around Quarterbridge and near schools - and new regulations and enforcement are in the pipeline. Many back lanes and footpaths need better lighting and the Council intends to address this. Lamp-posts can be used for telecoms infrastructure and potentially electric vehicle charging.

Sports facilities, squares and other open spaces are very much part of the social glue that holds our community together. The wilder spaces across our town are also valuable for wildlife and nature. Both need support, and the recently Tynwald approved grants scheme needs urgent amendment so that it applies to urban, community and existing woodlands and natural environments.

# ENRICHING LIVES

Education, sport and culture should inspire and enable everyone to challenge ourselves and things; and “the measure of a nation is how it uses the big things to allow it to take care of the little things to enrich the lives of its people”, as the Family Library put it recently as it struggles for its future and that of the Island’s library services.

The national development strategies for investment, promotion and activity in arts, culture, language and sport are crucial and need adequate funding, support and Government-provided venues like the NSC, Villa Gaiety, Kensington Road Youth Arts Centre and schools.

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## Family Library

Surely public co-funding of the Family Library, through an all-Island rate or bona vacantia funds, will be found for this charity and all those other wonderful charities and clubs which are at the centre of community life?

Investment in education premises in Douglas has been significant in the last decade, including Henry Bloom Noble Primary School, the refurbishment of St Mary’s School, significant work at both of our High Schools and the new Annie Gill, William Kennish and Baillie Scott wings at our college.

Alongside maintenance, two significant projects remain which I will fight to prioritise. These are a new Scoill Yn Jubilee, probably built at the Park Road site, and re-designing Douglas secondary education to deal with expansion opportunities at Bemahague which are missing at the Ballakermeen High School site. This could involve adjusting central Douglas Ballakermeen catchment, and enhancing sixth form cooperation, perhaps co-locating at St Ninian’s Upper School?

**Other action needed in coming years includes:**

- **Relinking employment of teachers and all support staff, dealing with the recruitment and retention challenges in respect of teachers and improving industrial relations;**
- **Ensuring the adequacy of resources for town schools to reduce class sizes and provide for additional needs however they arise;**
- **Making sure curricula and provision suits learners of all ages and at all stages, including reviewing vocational opportunities and our IGCSE and GCSE arrangements;**
- **Adapting the Vocational Training Assistance and student awards schemes to support more equally part-time, distance and physical study in the UK;**
- **Providing premises for summer school activity, working out a better way to tackle social issues that affect schooling and to enhance early Intervention and pre-school provision;**
- **Modernise school governance in conjunction with the community, heads and staff, probably establishing an Education Board, and extending delegated responsibility to schools; and**
- **Develop a reasonable quality assurance, inspection and tribunal framework.**

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# INFRASTRUCTURE AND LIFELINES

Quite rightly change to our approach to infrastructure has been demanded, so Government has re-established a Capital Projects Unit, changed its capital financing regime and approach to encouraging private investment, and carried out a Strategic Infrastructure Needs Analysis to prioritise capital investment and maintenance. This attention is timely given the huge infrastructure decisions required in the next few years.

**One such is to settle the vision for fossil fuel use in electricity generation, housing and transport as soon as possible, and then to lay out a 10 year 'just transition' for people and organisations. First step should be a new Island interconnector to cleaner and cheaper electricity with an estimated price of over £100 million depending on route, capacity and technology. A decision about for how long the gas will be available is also needed, especially given the gas spur construction costs are paid off in 2023, the potential use of increasing proportions of hydrogen at a modified Pulrose power station, and the significant number of properties with gas.**

Whatever the source of heat, some investment will be needed to support households and businesses repair or renew property, increase energy efficiency and work out a timetable for new heating systems.

Although work has been done to manage flood risk particularly around the Peel Road, much more is needed to implement the 2016 National Strategy on Sea Defences and Flooding recommendations for Douglas Bay, harbour and rivers. This work needs programming in public.

A decision about the future of the Energy from Waste plant is also needed, and this should surely be made after review of how refuse is collected and recycled, and under new public health legislation.

Regarding telecommunications infrastructure, more needs to be done to encourage fibre in Douglas, and to use competition legislation and any other powers to force providers to share masts and other infrastructure. Government should immediately revoke the order which permits mast development without planning approval, and publish the location of all masts that support public residential and business telecoms systems. Thereafter a National Policy Directive could define strategic national need and the process for new infrastructure thereafter. A second matter is evaluation of the £11.5 million National Broadband Plan in operation in the intervention zones outside Douglas.

Continuing cooperation with the Council will be helpful, especially in respect of waste and telecoms.

The pricing of sea services, and whether the Steam Packet employs enough local people, should be considered at the forthcoming Sea Services Agreement review. Air passenger revenue, subsidy and light-touch regulation should be used for the national interest, and a strategic partnership with a locally based airline would seem helpful to encourage younger people to live and work here and for international-facing business.

*"A clear roadmap is required to fully understand how the existing electricity network can be transitioned into a low or zero carbon system", Arup, Future Energy Scenarios, July 2021.*

# REBALANCING PLANNING

The development planning framework for the Island is fine. Since 2006 the Strategic Plan has sought “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. This links explicitly to the overall Government Plan which was “to maintain and build on the high quality of life enjoyed by the Island’s community”, specifically “to ensure that the Manx environment continues to be an asset for future generations”.

There is nothing wrong with the intention of planning law either. It sets out that Government “shall keep under review the matters which may be expected to affect the development of the Island” such as the economy, land use, population, communications, and traffic.

**What’s gone wrong is the lack of respect for planning by politicians, and the fact that planners have often been kept in the dark by other officers. That’s why several draft planning policy statements were never finalised and the area plan for the east timetable slipped by a decade. That’s why a Police Station was built 20 years ago for development that never happened, and why the Bus Station at Banks Circus has doors leading into a hedge and the Tesco car park.**

Things got worse in recent years as Government downgraded its own planning. For instance Government Code “central planning assumptions” regarding national income, population and finances are no longer formally considered by Council of Ministers which has also stopped publication of its quarterly statistical report.



**How can land use be planned without realistic population projections, without a national housing strategy and without an Island transport plan?**

Action to enhance planning now includes:

- Halting Area Plan for North and West process given initial land allocation findings, and immediate preparation of an All-Island Strategic Plan, with some small local area plans;
- Removing limits on Interested Party status & re-introducing reviews;
- Appointing a planning consultative committee of environment, economy and planning organisations, and designating an environmental voluntary body as interested party;
- Using local rates, compulsory purchase and other incentives to stimulate brownfield site development, and re-launch the Un-occupied Sites Register for the whole Island;
- A Community Infrastructure Levy on greenfield housing;
- Revocation of draft Planning Policy Statements, pending National Policy Directives, and enhancing planning for net biodiversity gain, environmental protection, energy efficiency, charging points, solar panels, home working, retailing and the encouragement of conversions of potentially 1000s of vacant properties and windfall opportunities throughout the Island; and
- Completion of the heritage audit with the registration of buildings and the redrawing of conservation areas, relaxing petty controls and re-introducing financial incentives.

*We need to make sure things do not revert to the 2003 Mount Murray Inquiry conclusion that there was failure to “protect the planning system from excessive internal pressure, both political and professional”*

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# REBUILDING CONFIDENCE IN OUR DEMOCRACY

People deserve facts and options presented before the election by MHK candidates and solid debates between potential Ministers and backbenchers after it, so that the incoming MHKs can elect a Government with a collective and prioritised agenda in line with their individual mandates. As I put it this June, “continuity between how voters vote, which Members are elected, the Ministers that arise out of the process and the policies that develop”. If things happen properly during and after this election surely the confidence in our democracy and Government that Social Attitudes surveys show has been lost can be rebuilt?

We don't need Westminster-type politics here, but other reforms to rebuild confidence include:

- Publishing documents on the new Tynwald Business Register for six weeks external scrutiny;
- Reverting to Manx system of Chief/First Minister offering a Ministerial team for approval, and develop system for public voting on alternative Government policy and membership;
- Paying no departmental member uplifts and reduce number of Departmental Members;
- Having threshold of 13 not 16 MHKs for “no confidence” vote in Government;
- Merging roles of President and Speaker, and reducing the number of MLCs to 6;
- Improving referendum legislation just in case, and establishing Electoral Commission; and
- Involving outside independents in members' conduct, with penalties and potential recall.

Given our recent experiences of things like QR code of vaccination status and border control, and post-Brexit trade and international relations, we should reflect on the nature of the country in which we live, work and invest. What sort of people are trying to move here and who is leaving? Twenty one years on since the last consideration of the implications of independence, I think we should re-consider how much autonomy and international representation suits our interests.

**Thank you for reading this Policy Agenda, and please don't hesitate to be in touch to discuss what is and is not in it, or to request any assistance with voting.**

Completed postal votes should be received by Returning Officer before 5pm on 22 September, unless handed in on polling day at your designated polling station. Proxy voting might be possible for those unable to vote in person or by post with application before 5pm on 22 September.



*The rain on a wet Tynwald Day in 2015 was telling us something!*

**Polling stations, open from 8am to 8pm, are:**

**Quay, St George's & Tynwald**

– The Scout Hall, Demesne Road;

**Ballabrooie, Eastfield** – All Saints;

**Albany** – Trinity Methodist Church;

**Garden City, Somerset** – St Andrew's.

**Please vote Chris Thomas**