

2025.07.08

4.8 Deputy K.M. Wilson of the Chief Minister regarding the trend of more people leaving Jersey than moving to the Island (OQ.177/2025):

Will the Chief Minister advise what measures, if any, are being introduced in the coming months to reverse the continuing trend of more people leaving Jersey than moving to the Island, particularly in relation to 20 to 29 year-olds?

Deputy L.J. Farnham (The Chief Minister):

One of the greatest challenges facing our Island today is ensuring that young people not only see a future for themselves in Jersey but can afford to build that future here. The high cost of housing, both to buy and rent, is a serious concern that directly affects the choices young Islanders make about where they live, where they work and where they raise families. If we are to retain them we must take meaningful sustained action, and that is why this Government is delivering real practical measures and solutions to meet the challenge there. We are continuing to increase the supply of affordable family homes, releasing more land for development and redevelopment, and expanding schemes to help young Islanders take their first step on to the property ladder. We are also working to create a fairer rental market, one that offers better quality, a greater affordability and stronger security for tenants. Stronger security, and that is an important debate we are going to have during this sitting, but it is not just about housing. We must invest in opportunities in jobs, health, in education and leisure and in our community, and that is why we are beginning construction of the new hospital soon and transforming our health service, focusing on prevention, patient care and the modern digital infrastructure. We are investing in our schools, delivering a much-needed new youth facilities and extending nursery care to support young Islanders. We have accelerated the long overdue plans to redevelop Fort Regent, turning it once again into a vibrant community leisure destination. Members will know that these are not issues that will resolve overnight, but with the clear intent of the Government, with some long-term vision and strong collaboration in this Assembly, we can, we will and we absolutely must build an Island where young people not only are able but proud and pleased to stay.

4.8.1 Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Does the Chief Minister believe that those intentions will actually see a reversal in the trends that we have just outlined and when does he expect to see that come forward?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

They are not intentions. They are not intentions, they are actions that are happening now long overdue. Long overdue. I would remind Members that the circumstances around our population have changed significantly over the last 3 to 4 years, where we were looking at ways to dampen down the growth in our population, to now a new set of circumstances where our biggest challenge is working age population, the falling birth rate, and that is what we are starting to address. We are at the early stages of that, I accept that, but it is a key priority, it is a key part of the Common Strategic Policy and it is the focus of the forthcoming States Members workshop that we are due to have, because it is one of the biggest issues and challenges we face.

4.8.2 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

The cost of living will be one of the biggest issues facing young Islanders. Housing and groceries, I believe, being the main 2 costs. What is the Government doing to address these?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Well, Members will also know that we have limited levers to pull when it comes to managing cost of living. Part of the Common Strategic Policy and part of our policy was to keep government charges, fees and duties as low as possible in relation to that. Deputy Morel, the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development, chairs the Inflation Strategy Groups that are working on a further policy that

might bear down on that. I will make no bones about it, it is challenging and difficult but we are committed to doing everything we can to help with the pressure of the cost of living. However, we are quite often at the mercy of geopolitical situations. The biggest impact that we can make is on housing, both to buy and to rent, which is probably at the forefront of our priorities at the moment.

4.8.3 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Another cost is childcare. If young people want to start families, childcare needs to be funded. Will the Minister address the current gap between paid parental leave and paid childcare? What can be done to fill that gap?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

It does need further consideration. Of course, the falling birth rate is of great concern and housing, affordable family housing, and the cost of living, of course, have been cited as partial reasons for that. I am sorry, I have forgotten the actual question, if the Deputy could just confirm?

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

There currently exists a gap between funded parental leave and funded childcare, what will the Chief Minister do to address that gap?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I cannot answer that right off the top of my head but I will undertake to discuss that with the relevant Ministers just to be updated on their current plans on that.

4.8.4 Deputy J. Renouf:

The original question asks about the continuing trend of more people leaving Jersey than moving to the Island, particularly in relation to 29 year-olds. What data does the Government hold on this and how, therefore, will he judge the success of his Government's policies in addressing this problem?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

We have significant data provided by Statistics Jersey, which we review as an essential part of the information we need to develop our policies. Like I said, the focus of the forthcoming States Members workshop will focus on this where we will be sharing some of the statistics that we utilise. But the Deputy is right in the question, the biggest areas of concern is in the 20 to 29 age group where we are seeing over 300 people a year leaving the Island in that bracket now, and we must work urgently and diligently to try and reverse that.

4.8.5 Deputy J. Renouf:

The other part of my question related to how the Minister will know whether he has been successful. What targets, if any, is he setting? How will we be able to judge whether the measures he is introducing successfully solve the problem?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

As we develop policy further, we have put in place a set of key performance indicators that will monitor and manage our success, and we work closely with Statistics Jersey to make sure we have regular updates so we can monitor hopefully how we are succeeding.

4.8.6 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

One Islander has confided in me that their 18 year-old has applied to 31 companies for a traineeship in the trades, and none have resulted in a role. These companies have given feedback to this family and they are citing that it is because of the new minimum wage introduction and getting rid of the trainee wage. What conversations has the Chief Minister had with businesses on this? How will he encourage companies to take on apprenticeships for that age group between 18 and 25?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

We have heard a great deal of conversation, mostly in Government. I know that Jersey Business, Economic Development and some of the arm's-length organisations are responsible for liaising very closely with businesses and that is why we have put the financial support scheme in. I have to be honest, I was disappointed that we removed a training rate but we had a very good and democratic discussion around the Council of Ministers' table and the Council of Ministers were strongly supportive of the position that we find ourselves in now. What we do have is support for apprenticeships but the difference is now businesses will actually have to provide evidence that they are providing an apprenticeship with proper training, rather than taking on a junior person and giving them, if you like, an accredited training on the job, which can be valuable as well. That is the difference. There is support, and the conversations will continue through the Economy Department and Jersey Business, but we are mindful of the challenges businesses are facing now in the move to the living wage over the next 2 years.

[11:15]

4.8.7 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

What will the Chief Minister say to this 18 year-old who is very keen on starting a career in the trades and has been knocked back by at least 31 companies at this stage? What is the message to those youngsters to help them find a job?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

It is difficult to comment on a single case, but it sounds extremely disappointing for the young person. I would urge them to continue. We have, albeit a challenged economy, our economy is still strong and we have good levels of employment. However, this Assembly must also realise that it is challenging, especially for certain sectors of our economy. With the updated employment legislation that we have rightly brought in over the years, it is a much greater commitment for smaller firms to engage staff because of the commitments they have to make. Many of my peer group, my friends who work in construction, who, a number of years ago were employing 20, 30 people are now working on their own again because they find it difficult to meet those commitments. My message to all of the young people, please continue to push. I have strong confidence in the economy and I have confidence in them more than ever. We will do everything we can to help them moving forward.

4.8.8 Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Does the Chief Minister accept that the loss of working-age Islanders in this age group undermines the Island's economic strategy and its stated ambitions for productivity, inclusion and growth? Will he commit to involving young people in any radical rethink of youth policy going forward?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Absolutely. The key to this is really pushing hard new policy through. The most important part of that process is engaging with young people so we know exactly what it is they need that will encourage them, that will give them the confidence to stay here, so it is a strong yes to that. We will engage young people with our policy-making. A small example of that is on the public consultation with Fort Regent where out of the 6,000, approximately 1,000 were young people who were engaged with directly in their schools and provided invaluable responses to that consultation.