

HOUSE OF KEYS ELECTION  
CHIEF MINISTER NOMINATION  
5 OCTOBER 2026



Chris  
**Thomas**

***Smaller, Smarter, Smoother Government  
Fair, Firm, Free Island***



I can be the Chief Minister who works with and leads a group of similarly minded MHKs to deliver what voters want, reconnecting “how voters vote...the Ministers that arise out of the process and the policies that develop”, as I put it in 2021.

*“mandate politics...manifesto politics...working together politics”*

# ADDRESSING OUR REAL CHALLENGES

I remain 'glass-half-full', like most of us.

Our community cares.

The Island's Aa3 stable Moody's rating acknowledges **pragmatic policy making, prudent fiscal policy, low debt and substantial reserves** as well as Transparency and Exchange of Tax Information compliance.

Our £1.2 billion National Insurance Fund is bedrock for social security and state pensions, with £800 million additional reserves.

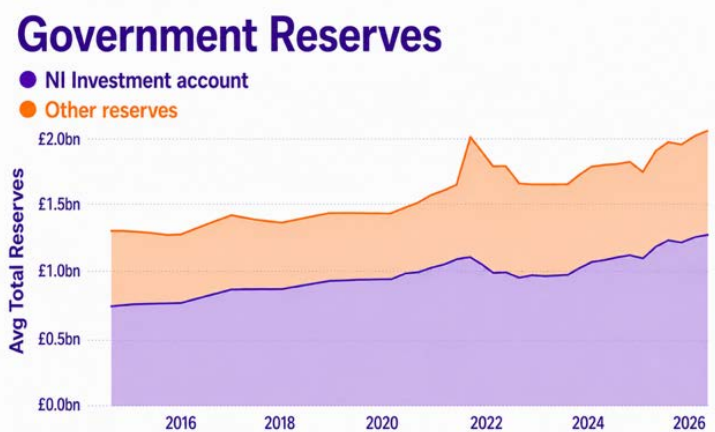
But the public want us to **acknowledge and address the real challenges** we face including:

- Struggling local businesses, with different pressures on export sectors;
- So many with housing and day-to-day living situations way below their expectations;
- Diminished opportunity for those starting in or returning for Island careers;
- Fragile public finances which need careful handling to recover strained healthcare, maintain infrastructure, restore deteriorated air and sea services and keep pension promises whilst treating younger people fairly;
- Many public servants feeling buffeted from one policy to another by perceived poor leadership, and the public seeing persistent poor public service productivity;
- Strong feelings around flawed migration and visa arrangements; and
- Confusion around future use of gas and wind, and energy transition in general.

**This policy statement proposes solutions for these challenges.**

Priorities currently include:

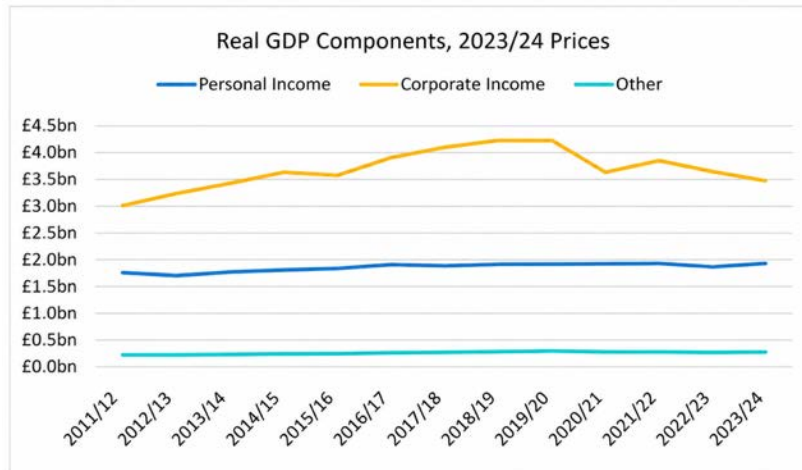
- Remaking the Island economy as a place 'where you can', and MONEYVAL evaluation used to refresh our financial and professional services;
- More productive, accountable public service and priority-based budgeting;
- Replacing any increased population target with targeted demographic policies including more local skills training and better migration policy;
- Accommodating the housing needs of local people of every generation;
- Settling energy transition and inviting interest to develop our gas field; and
- Maintaining ageing strategic infrastructure unless replacement is more effective.



# THE ISLAND WHERE YOU CAN

**Economic growth provides career and life opportunities enabling us to flourish on our Island and others to come home.**

Unfortunately, non-manual earnings and company income have fallen in recent years causing real GDP to decline following decades of growth. Middling income households are squeezed most.



To address this we need to get back what our Island lost - **an Isle of Man, where you can - remembering the Island's 3legs and Manannan spirit of adaptation and resilience.**

My 2026 budget provided the largest ever personal tax allowance rise for nearly everyone and was an important first step to rebuild "confidence to secure jobs, confidence to increase private investment and confidence to export and grow the economy".

**We should refresh our Economic Strategy this November.**

Specific initiatives should include:

- Better apprenticeships and training, enabling opportunity;
- Measures like the 2026 Life Insurance Business Scheme and regulatory sandboxing to maintain and build our financial services following MONEYVAL evaluation;
- Enticing entrepreneurs here to export using digital assets and other regimes;
- Setting the minimum wage having regard to employment and competitiveness in lower paying sectors, and the interaction between it and the tax and benefit systems;
- Simplifying licensing, reducing regulatory friction and improving payments systems;
- Developing our land and territorial seas sustainably;
- Establishing a long-term agricultural strategy;
- Designating our Uplands as a National Park;
- Reusing brownfield sites and derelict buildings to reinvigorate our community; and
- Cherishing our fantastic sports, cultural and other events, continuing the Isle of Man buzz which is bound to result from the *Isle of Man TT film*. the Island Games homecoming in 2029, and the 1979 Millennium Golden Anniversary.

# SMALLER, SMARTER, SMOOTHER GOVERNMENT

## Smaller Government

Public money needs a) **spending on aligned outcomes**, rather than rolling over budget line items each year, b) allocating using the **priority-based budgeting tool prepared for Treasury**, and c) **focusing front-line**.

## Smarter Government

**Public service productivity is key as we need more for less.** Delivery is underway and should include:

- Recruitment controls and removing redundant roles, with a workforce plan focused on retention, fairer terms and conditions, and multi-year pay agreement;
- Savings from procurement and contracts whilst treating local suppliers fairly;
- Public property owned to optimise management and maintenance, finalising Government Estate project implementation, including unusable property disposal;
- Completing evaluation of the Enterprise Department and Executive Agencies;
- Better delivered 'digital first' services alongside moving to "tell us once" and community hubs; and
- Empowerment of local expertise, and elimination of generalised off-Island consultancy.

## Smoother Government

Council of Ministers and **Government should be practically and culturally one body** which is able to make decisions and assign responsibility more quickly, with Council of Ministers responsible collectively only for budget and nationally important policy decisions.

**Services should be joined up rather than shared** and delivered smoothly rather than in silos.

State-owned companies, statutory boards and regional bodies should be used and governed appropriately.

## Better communication

The next Government needs to communicate better by making policy choices clear and obvious, with more detailed Council of Ministers minutes published, and by completing the Fol regime. **Journalists should be able to communicate directly with Ministers.**

## Law and Regulation

**A legislative programme should be brought to Tynwald before Christmas**, recognizing we need better not necessarily more law. Audit, budget, insolvency and public office misconduct bills are promised. Reviewing how legislation is scrutinized and referendum/citizens jury arrangements could be helpful.

Regulatory friction needs tackling. Climate change and farming are examples of over reporting required in regulations which need change.



*Tynwald Hill in sunshine 2026*

# MIGRATION AND BORDER CHALLENGES

**An update on Migration and Border policy should be brought to Tynwald for debate in January, including a review of how policy and practice developed since the 2018/19 Meeting Our Population Challenges** white paper framework outlined measures aimed to ensure local opportunity and sufficient infrastructure.

**Merely loosening work permit and immigration controls to grow our population was wrong.**

It was already clear by 2021 that this approach was failing with 2/3rds of us stating in surveys that the population should remain what it was; but Government continued planning for an estimated population of 100,000 by 2037.

Many were deeply disappointed by the fallout including insufficient local training and recruitment, housing affordability worsened by off-Island purchase, and immigration non-compliance.

Government's response to migration and border challenges changed in July 2025 when **Tynwald approved recommendations to invest in upskilling Island workers, to support residents in to work, and to welcome appropriate inward migration when employers need skills which cannot be found on Island.**

Work permits, immigration visa routes, maintaining border security and the integrity of the Common Travel Area were recognised as top priorities.

Some specific initiatives in train, and for further development before Christmas, include:

- Electronic travel authorization for visitors, digital visas, and detection of abuse;
- **Stricter worker migrant visa controls** (local recruitment tests, higher skill/salary thresholds, dependent and job mobility restrictions) and intra company attention;
- **Introducing immigration health surcharge this winter;** and
- **Enhanced border security through intelligence-led checks and enforcement.**



# REBALANCING PUBLIC FINANCES

Public finances are solid but need attention.

## Reserves

Reserves are forecast to rise to £2.22 billion by 2030, but their real value is declining as interest is used to finance the structural deficit. This cannot continue.

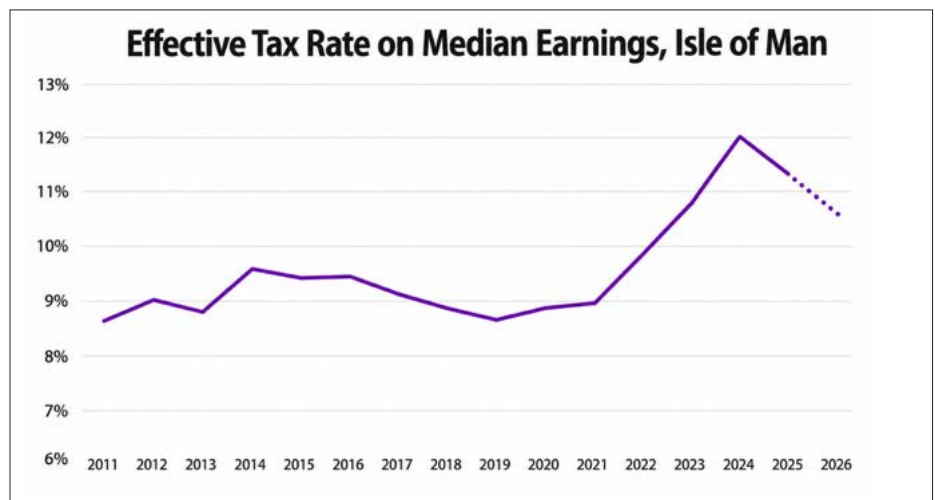
## Tax and budgets

Our tax strategy is wise - to raise sufficient taxes and comply with international standards - but **the proportion of income paid as tax by those in the middle has increased too much**, rising to peak at 12% in 2024.

Broadening the tax base within traditional Island tax limits helps, for instance Pillar 2 tax is contributing £30 million+ from large companies.

**But the personal allowance rise this year should be the first of several changes to reduce the effective tax and NI rate paid when possible.**

Making hard budget decisions will take place alongside audit and budget reform.



## Financing strategic infrastructure

Government, state-owned companies and housing authorities should use their assets and Government's credit rating to **finance the substantial infrastructure investment the Island needs**, as sea services and utilities were financed with part of the £400 million 1 5/8% coupon bond.

## Pensions and benefits

**State pensions and benefits will rise with at least inflation, and I welcome the 2027 NI and social security reviews.**

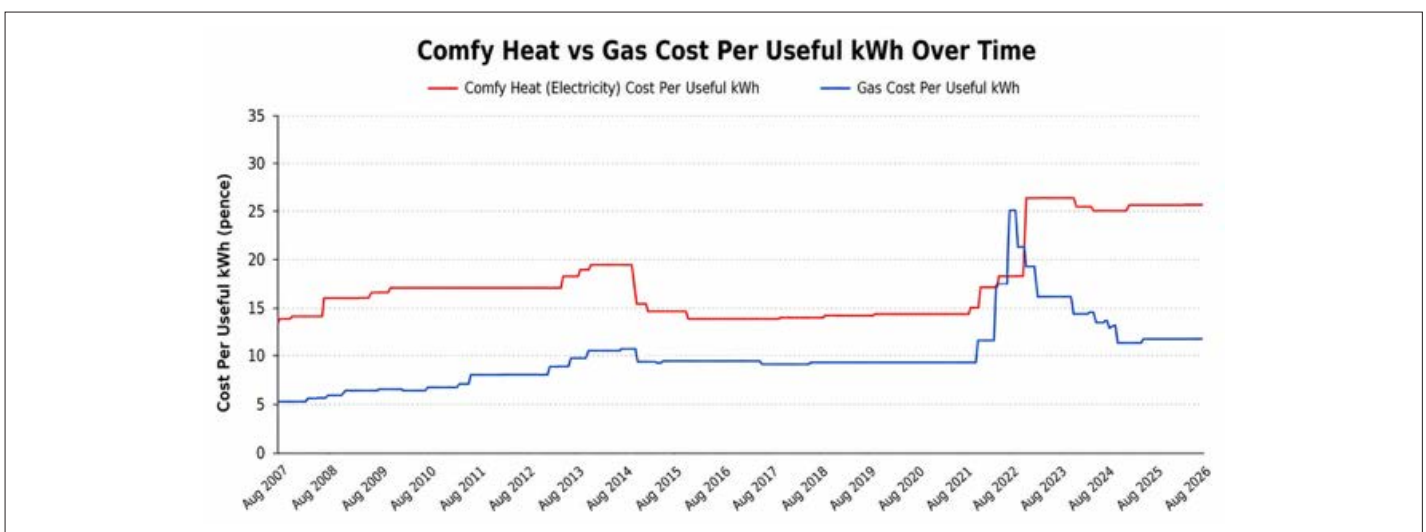
Enabling saving and financial planning schemes, including occupational pensions, is important.

Reduced benefits, increased contributions and cost sharing inside an envelope are improving the public sector pensions situation, but the £3 billion+ 'legacy funding gap' actuarial liability remains. I welcome the cost sharing review and increase to occupational pension minimum retirement age across.

# MAKE MONEY GO FURTHER

We cannot reduce world oil prices, inflation or interest rates, but we can **champion local consumers and reduce living costs particularly where we spend most - housing, transport, power, and food**. Specifically:

- Encourage building and refurbishment of more affordable flats and houses for local buyers and renters, using tax and other levers to rein in exploitative investment, for instance only raising non-resident registration fees;
- **Introduce rent-to-buy support and improve conveyancing and shared equity schemes;**
- Restrain i) electricity charges ii) Steam Packet fares and freight charges and iii) waste costs, **extending economic regulation to services provided in markets without the possibility of competition**. This approach reduced gas prices relative to electricity prices by ensuring gas customers pay cost-oriented prices, by reducing gas company earnings to 2/3rd of what they were and by preventing over-investment;



- **Use powers in Competition Act against unfair pricing by private and public bodies;**
- Consider moving public spending from processors to farmers and producers to limit food prices, and encourage investment in food storage;
- **Work with airlines to increase service frequency and reliability, and reduce fares;**
- **Reform rates incrementally by reintroducing in Keys the Rates and Valuation (Amendment) Bill which provides for discounts and rating of many currently zero-rated properties,** and then considering moving over 5-years to both fairer rateable values and non-domestic rate use; and
- Reduce charging for Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment disposal, and forthcoming drinks Deposit Return Scheme.

Making money go further goes alongside making sure people have 'living incomes' so employment, social security and tax policies need to be directed to reduce poverty as income and expenditure statistics show that many households cannot afford 'normal' living.

# ENERGY RESILIENCE AND TRANSITION

Our transition to 2050 must aim to **reduce energy costs, increase resilience and focus on adaptation** to climate change.

**A cost-effective, pragmatic and funded Energy Strategy is needed for Manx Utilities and private sector.** That's equally the case now as it was in 2021 when Arup stated in Future Energy Scenarios that, "a clear roadmap is required to fully understand how the existing electricity network can be transitioned into a low or zero carbon system",

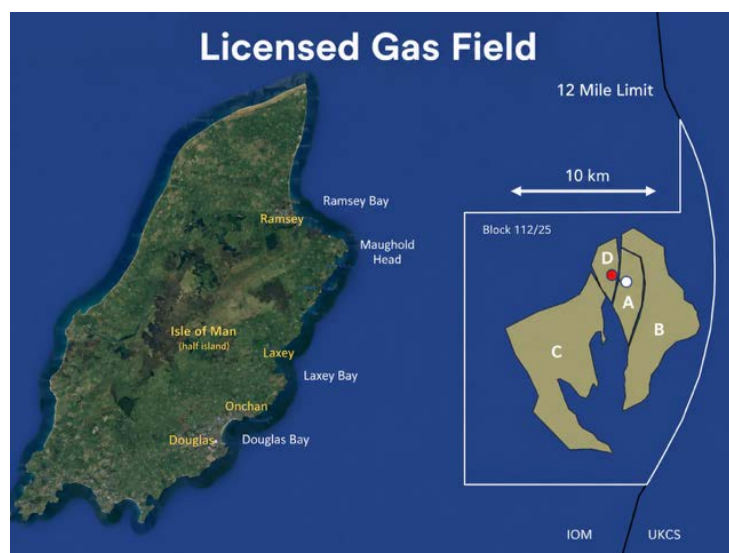
**The Development and Marine Plans must be completed as they are important to balance economic, environmental and social elements including decommissioning.**

Offshore wind, gas and tidal leases resulted from the Government's *Vision 2020 economic strategy* in 2014 and were agreed following Tynwald's approval of the *Offshore Energy Production Strategy* that year.

My vote against that strategy - "given the absence of both the details of the legal framework and the lack of a fully developed Marine Spatial Plan...whatever the merits of the various offshore energy options" - has proven right.

It is clear that:

- Pulrose gas power station will operate for many years pending commissioning of an alternative, the electricity network needs investment, and any new electricity interconnector is expensive and years away;
- Government should invite applications for gas exploration and production in previously licensed block 112/25, including seismic data options, and should complete stewardship and operatorship arrangements for all marine infrastructure including co-location;



- **Offshore wind assumes unsecured UK market access, and the consenting and parallel taxation processes need lawful and publicly acceptable completion. The Agreement for Lease should be published;**
- 2026 Heat Wise Home scheme needs reworking, with other housing measures; and
- **Vehicle duty rates need rebalancing** so that highways are maintained more fairly.

# TRANSPORT CONNECTIONS

**Reliable, frequent and affordable transport is vital.**

Off-Island travel cost and convenience have been described as the worst thing about living here for decades, for instance in the 1991, 2002 and 2017 Quality of Life surveys.

## Air

But air services have got worse and fallen behind other places.

This requires **immediate attention including review of alternative ways to work with airlines, the use of public funds, levying of air passenger duty and charges.**

A strategic partnership with a locally based airline seems helpful for international facing business and should be helpful to encourage residents and visitors.

**Our airport is receiving special attention** and requires £6 million+ subsidy and investment. Air traffic control is improving. Other priorities include airport governance and regulation, security and baggage, and how to develop around the airport perimeter.

## Sea

An opportunity to reset the 25-year Sea Services Agreement regarding **Steam Packet fleet, sailing schedules, fares and charges and employment** was missed in 2024/5, despite Tynwald resolving in November 2023 this would be considered.

Matters include **urgent dredging of Douglas Harbour, and maintenance plans for linkspans, berthing approaches and terminals.**

Other matters are the Manannan replacement vessel, fuel price hedging and surcharge, schedules, fares and freight pricing and resident discounts.

**This reset is needed and a call for evidence about air and sea services should be launched urgently, and proposals should be brought to Tynwald as soon as possible.**

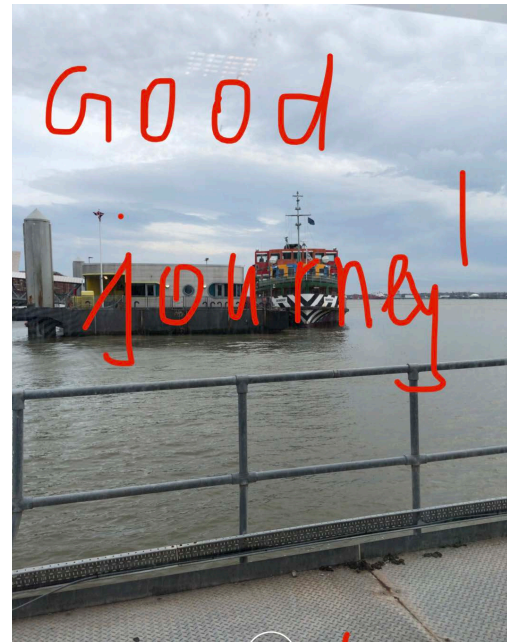
## Bus

Our bus service is good, and plans for a new timetable based on national and feeder routes is an opportunity to improve bus provision in urban areas as well as for commuters and other users. Fares should be reviewed taking into account the £2 cap pilot scheme.

**A bus strategy should come to Tynwald by Christmas.**

## Taxi

Taxi services are currently subject to policy development and taxi users, operators and drivers need to engage in this.



# FIXING HOUSING

Evidence about housing need should inform the “identification and commitment of appropriate funding”, and the availability of “development sites and construction industry assets” should be assessed to plan implementation of the Tynwald commitment to “build, provide or facilitate up to 1000 affordable homes over 10 years commencing from April 2025.”

**A Housing and Planning Policy Minister should be appointed** to lead implementation of this costed and prioritised national plan to house local people.

**Housing affordability needs fixing, particularly for younger people.** Higher earnings would improve it, as years of steady house prices would.



Specific initiatives to support local ownership of flats and houses include:

- Introduce rent-to-buy and improve shared equity schemes, and use mortgage interest relief, section 13 agreements, land registration fees, and other levers;
- Encourage saving for home deposits, and mechanisms for people to downsize;
- Introduce a rental deposit protection and arbitration scheme for private rentals;
- Launch a Vacant Properties Initiative to bring several hundred properties back into use with grants, rates and planning mechanisms, and sell plots for self-build;
- Improve online property information to aid conveyancing and leasing; and
- Consolidate and modernise housing. letting, property and tenancy law.

**Public housing rents should only be increased by inflation until means tested rent rebating is in place.** Housing Deficiency Fund expenditure to supplement rents to cover social housing costs is currently £8.5 million+ annually.

The increase in income thresholds for public housing has increased eligibility, although allocation depends on need and availability, so additional spending or longer waiting lists could result.

**Emergency housing pathways are in place, alongside enhanced budgeting loans. Responsibility for homelessness policy implementation needs allocation.**

**Housing policy should be separated from housing authority operations,** as soon as standards of performance and financing mechanisms are agreed with regional housing bodies which already operate sheltered housing.

# REVISITING PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

## Planning

Good planning matters, with examples of bad planning around the Island, like the Lord Street Police Station built for development that never happened and a bus depot with doors leading into a hedge and Tesco car park.

**One priority is following up the Strategic Plan 2021-41 consultation and launching an All-Island Area Plan to have a full Development Plan in place as early as possible.**

An important consultation finding is that many are rightly concerned about infrastructure capacity to cope with future development.

There is also scepticism about net projected residential housing need, so population projections need reducing.



Concerns about renewable energy and support for built heritage are obvious.

## Development

**Around £50 million is spent or committed on Manx Development Corporation and Island Infrastructure Scheme brownfield site initiatives,** making them the most important tools for the last Government.

I announced a review of both this February and published an interim report this July which examined the impact of rising costs on construction.

Challenges to both include construction costs rising here at a faster rate than across, significant delays in planning, and a shortage of skilled construction professionals.

Mechanisms recommended include deferred land payment and overage, and equity participation within joint ventures including land contributions.

The report also stated the need for a credible multi-year capital programme to deliver needed infrastructure and housing as well as to retain and grow the capacity of the local construction sector.

**The recommendation this July was for “the establishment of a stable project pipeline, targeted financial support mechanisms, investment in skills and labour capacity, and more flexible approaches to land and partnership structures”.**

**Tynwald should debate development viability and policy matters arising from it before Christmas.**



# HEALING HEALTHCARE

**We can deliver the physical and mental health and care we all need and deserve again.**

Priorities include:

- Continuing to localise employment reducing wasteful agency spending and helping local people build careers;
- Adjusting GP and dentist contracting so it is fairer, with in person appointments within a wider primary care system;
- Improving patient records;
- Maintaining safe healthcare on Island with appropriate transfer to specialist centres;
- Emphasis on prevention and early intervention in the community;
- Supporting carers;
- Communicating better, and learning from mistakes and complaints; and
- **Development of ring-fenced social insurance fund for younger people to fund nursing, residential and home care, finalising work underway for many years.**

**But healthcare delivery needs turning around, reworking how the public, professionals, and politicians are involved.**

However heads rolling and another new governance framework will not stop 'patients coming to serious harm despite concerns being raised within the hospital at all levels', as I first heard in 2013, nor will they stop mushrooming healthcare demand and unacceptable waiting lists.

**The Healthcare Governance Review should be debated in Tynwald before Christmas.**

Healthcare annual expenditure now exceeds £400 million and is an increasing proportion of public spending, so healthcare must be smarter and smoother for Government to be smaller.

That means **staying within budget by completing transformation, cost improvement and financial recovery projects** and considering how private diagnostics and treatment are provided on Island, including private insurance funded ones.

**It means everyone working in healthcare respecting each other and working together.**

Achievements to date include wellbeing partnerships, mental health first contact practitioners and talk service, intermediate care and frailty services, with plans in train for advocacy, adult autism pathways, moving Douglas ambulance station and improving patient transfer on- and off-Island.



“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 Family Library put it in 2021.

## Skills

Fuller labour market and skills gaps knowledge should help employability and inform work placements and modernise vocational training including apprenticeships. Funding of these needs to be fairer given rising numbers of people studying on Island.

## Schools

School funding should increase with need and deprivation, and education is smoother when joined up with social care and timely access to mental and physical health provision.

I welcome higher childcare credit, more additional needs support and the primary literacy scheme.

Reducing class sizes and additional school resourcing in our schools is aided by responsible technology use and could be by rationalizing primary provision elsewhere.

There has been significant investment in schools and University College Isle of Man in recent decades; but **a huge school investment programme remains necessary** with QE2 STEM block, CRHS school, new Scoill yn Jubilee and HBN modular extension projects high priority.

School governance, staff morale and relationships between schools and those outside remain important.

Quality assurance and tribunal frameworks are developing.

Education law and arrangements need amending for children in care, for those studying outside schools, and for those with additional needs.

**The Education (Amendment) Bill should be reintroduced into Keys immediately.**

## Sports, culture and heritage

Continuing investment in youth activity, outdoor learning, sport, arts, heritage and culture enriches lives.

Villa Gaiety sound system is improved, and I look forward to **National Sports Centre improvements in the next two years and maintained and additional regional sports facilities.**

I propose that our **sports, arts, cultural and heritage bodies are empowered with grants, lottery and similar funds to achieve even more.**



*Horse Tram re-opening April 2023*

# MAINTAINING INFRASTRUCTURE

Government's £80 million or so annual capital programme is currently focused to maintain ageing infrastructure unless replacement is more effective.

But the Island's 2017 National Infrastructure Strategy itself has not been maintained.

**Government needs to bring costed, and prioritised strategic needs assessments to Tynwald for phased funding as a National Infrastructure Plan, including sub-plans for airport, education and health facilities, energy generation and supply, flood and coastal defences, harbours, heritage, highways, home affairs, sewerage and water, telecoms and transport.**

A funded multi-year project pipeline will also help the Island's construction sector.



The handling in Government and Tynwald of investment follows design and feasibility study in the Project Development Fund process which was introduced in 2023 when infrastructure policy became overshadowed by the Ferry Terminal in Liverpool.

This process includes taking more time over feasibility, design, how tenders are drawn up and bids assessed. The Major Projects Board was set up to challenge project management and report on performance.

Contingency funds are held centrally.

The Public Accounts Committee wrote in 2023 that the assumed cost now at outset would have been "a far harder political ask for the DOI, even in light of the strategic link and public popularity of the Liverpool link." This committee concluded this project went wrong in 2016, before it started:

*"The imminent expiry of the existing landing stage lease, along with the public preference for Liverpool as a destination, were significant factors which limited the Department's options and affected the decisions being made during this early stage of the project."*

**I launched a review of project management and funding this year and a report should be brought to Tynwald in January.**

Law and arrangements are being developed to strengthen cybersecurity and resilience of critical national infrastructure.

## Maintenance

Highways maintenance and investment schedules should be published as there is a huge backlog of work to roads, kerbs, pavements, crossings, and lines, including parking markings. This will require additional funding.

Further work is needed to work out with local authorities how to deliver and fund things like gully and other highways maintenance.

## Parking

Parking needs addressing, and it was disappointing that the specific H zone residents parking permit review around the proposed Westmoreland Village was replaced in Tynwald by a national review that has not yet started.

**Local parking zones need and will get immediate attention and action, particularly around the number of discs issued, continuing validity and how large vehicles are included.**

Fixed penalties and new arrangements for wardens and controllers should help.

## Speeding

It makes sense to minimise risks of collisions like this one in Douglas, but the 2021 proposal for traffic calming measures around Ballakermeen High School resulted eventually in a sign-only 20mph scheme, with limited evidence of either compliance or enforcement.

An important objective is to minimise the use of residential roads as commuting short-cuts, and to avoid potentially dangerous proposals for residents.

Department of Infrastructure fed back on public calls in Living Streets engagement for new pedestrian crossings, better pavements and on-street parking arrangements, poor visibility at junctions, use of residential roads as a cut-through and speeding in 2023.

**A highways report including sections on maintenance, parking and speeding should come to Tynwald before Christmas.**

## Community Facilities

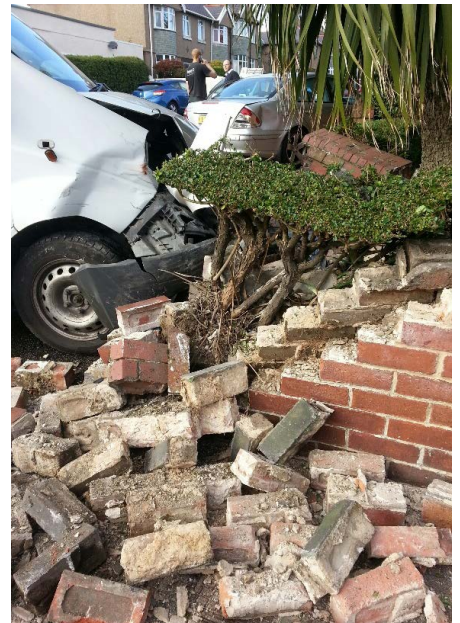
Sports facilities, squares and other open spaces need investment, and I welcome local authority and charity engagement on how to use and maintain them.

The wilder places we have are also valuable for wildlife and nature.

Things like rates discounts should be considered for conservation areas.

Pollution needs monitoring and tackling when necessary.

Lighting needs to be adequate.



# DELIVERING WHAT THE PUBLIC WANT

MHKs with a mandate from voters are **discussing how the big policy challenges will be tackled before the Chief Minister election and Council of Ministers formation.**

This is just as it should be.

These debates are drawing out common ground and policy differences between potential Ministers, backbenchers and people outside Keys so that the Chief Minister we elect can then lead a team to deliver coherent and focused action and policy to address our real challenges in the right way.

Our approach is much better than that after the 2021 General Election when an obvious policy fudge emerged only after the Chief Minister had been elected.

That is why I voted for neither Chief Minister candidate, declined to join the Council of Ministers and voted against the Island Plan.

**Consensus is desirable, compromise acceptable, but an unworkable fudge is not.**

Ineffective action and contradictory policies ultimately led to the no confidence motion in October 2024, which I seconded.

Later, after the Chief Minister and I agreed together the decisive 2026 Budget change that allowed nearly everyone to keep more of their money, I accepted his offer to serve as Treasury Minister this January.

**Voters want a focused Government that delivers efficiently** rather than a bigger Government paid for by other people's money through more taxation.

Our National Anthem values chime with voters:

- **fair**, equal opportunity and access;
- **firm**, so the Island punches above its weight; and
- **free**, and respect for private activity.

This Chief Minister policy statement outlines proposals for how we can work together for **smaller, smarter and smoother government in our fair, firm and free Island.**

We can bring prioritized 2016-2031 economic and legislative programmes, and a delivery plan for costing and funding, to Tynwald before Christmas.

**We certainly cannot afford a fudged Letter to Father Christmas this time!**

**Let's just do it together.**

