



HOUSE OF KEYS OFFICIAL REPORT

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PROCEEDINGS

DAALTYN

HANSARD

Douglas, Tuesday, 30th November 2021

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Present:

The Speaker (Hon. J P Watterson) (Rushen);
The Chief Minister (Hon. A L Cannan) (Ayre and Michael);
Mr J R Moorhouse and Mr T S Glover (Arbory, Castletown and Malew);
Mr T D Johnston (Ayre and Michael);
Mrs C A Corlett and Mr C C Thomas (Douglas Central);
Ms J L Faragher and Hon. C L Barber (Douglas East);
Hon. D J Ashford MBE and Mr J C Wannenburgh (Douglas North);
Mrs S L Maltby and Mrs C S B Christian (Douglas South);
Mrs D H P Caine and Mr A J Smith (Garff);
Hon. K A Lord-Brennan and Hon. T M Crookall (Glenfaba and Peel);
Hon. J P Poole-Wilson and Mr S G Peters (Middle);
Mr R E Callister and Hon. J M Edge (Onchan);
Hon. L L Hooper and Hon. A J Allinson (Ramsey);
Dr M E K Haywood (Rushen)
with Mr J D C King, Secretary of the House.

Business transacted

Leave to attend the sitting virtually granted.....	109
Question of Urgent Public Importance.....	109
UQ1. Recent developments relating to COVID-19 – Statement	109
Questions for Oral Answer	118
1.1. Tynwald Member and Ministerial conduct standards – Application and addressing breaches.....	118
1.2. Treasury-Manx Utilities loan agreement – Summer 2020 modifications	120
1.3. Bus Vannin’s demand-responsive transport service – Publication of report	122
1.4. Natural gas extraction – Government policy	124
1.5. Defence and international relations – Contributions made to the UK	129
1.6. COVID-19 – Winter support packages.....	131
1.7. Retired people in the south – Isolation and loneliness prevention	134
1.8. Voter registration promotion – Online portal.....	137
Standing Order 3.5.1(2) suspended to take the remaining Question	138
1.9. COVID-19 economic impact – Engagement with customer-facing businesses.....	139
<i>The House adjourned at 11.47 a.m.</i>	142

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House of Keys

The House met at 10 a.m.

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

The Speaker: Moghrey mie, good morning, Hon. Members.

Members: Moghrey mie, good morning, Mr Speaker.

5

The Speaker: I shall lead us in prayer.

PRAYERS

Mr Speaker

Leave to attend the sitting virtually granted

The Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Members.

I notice that this morning we have attending virtually Mr Wannenburg, Mr Crookall, Mr Glover and Ms Faragher.

Question of Urgent Public Importance

CHIEF MINISTER

UQ1. Recent developments relating to COVID-19 – Statement

The Hon. Member for Arbory, Castletown and Malew (Mr Moorhouse) to ask the Chief Minister:

If he will make a statement on recent developments relating to COVID-19?

10 **The Speaker:** We now turn to the Urgent Question you have all had notice of and I call on Mr Moorhouse to ask the Question.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

15 I would like to ask the Chief Minister if he will make a statement on recent developments relating to COVID-19?

The Speaker: I call on the Chief Minister.

The Chief Minister (Mr Cannan): Mr Speaker, Hon. Members, the living in a world with COVID-19 winter plan, which we released some weeks ago, highlighted the emergence of variants of concern as one of the key factors that would dictate a possible change in response level to COVID-19.

As you will be aware, over the past few days the Omicron variant has been widely discussed by clinicians, academics and the media following identification in South Africa last week. There is still much to learn about this new variant and it may be several weeks before scientists have the answers about what threat this variant poses and in particular how effective the current vaccines are in offering protection against the variant.

In response to the emerging threat and the measures introduced in the UK, the National COVID Response Group met on Sunday morning followed by a full meeting of the Council of Ministers. We noted that the UK government announced a range of measures to be implemented from today, including a requirement for all international travellers to isolate upon arrival; increased community measures surrounding the use of face coverings on public transport and in retail settings; and a need for close contacts of suspected Omicron cases to isolate for 10 days when contacted by Track and Trace.

The Council of Ministers determined that some new measures needed to be introduced here on our Island whilst the proper assessments of Omicron are able to be made, some of which closely align to that in the UK and some of which slightly differ.

I can confirm we have adopted the same 48-hour approach within which travellers who have been outside the Common Travel Area in the last 10 days will need to isolate and undertake a PCR test. In addition, however, recognising that our border between the Island and the rest of the world continues to be a major part of our defence, the Council of Ministers determined additional measures should apply. For all travellers over the age of 12, they are now required to commit to undertaking a lateral flow test within 12 hours of arrival on the Island, and to inform the Government of the results thereafter. Free lateral flow devices will be provided to all travellers upon arrival.

These two measures should help act as a further barrier to the entry of COVID, and particularly Omicron. But we must also take further measures as a community to help mitigate against unwarranted effects, as it remains likely that Omicron will arrive on the Island sooner rather than later.

As a consequence, I announced to the public on Sunday evening that we were moving our alert level to Level 2 of the Winter Framework, with face coverings to be required on public transport and in health and care settings. In other indoor public settings, where personal choice to distance may be difficult, such as retail and lifestyle businesses, including hair and beauty salons, our advice has been to enhance the level of face coverings to be worn to 'expected'.

In addition, as part of Level 2, the increased use of self-testing is encouraged, including before people enter a social setting. 'Know before you go' can be highly effective in helping to reduce transmission and help everyone have a safer festive period.

We are not legislating more generally, however, than in public transport and health and care settings, and know that the vast majority of the public will apply common sense in these various settings and adjust their approach accordingly.

And finally, in terms of making changes, the Council of Ministers decided that given the unknown impact of the new variant, as and when it may be detected, all household contacts should be required to isolate as a precaution, until the case is confirmed one way or the other.

Whilst it is certainly hoped that these measures will be successful, thanks to the support and understanding of our Island's public, we are prepared to go further and harder with legally enforceable measures if they are needed. That applies to all these areas.

My message to you and to your constituents that we serve is to please do everything possible to reduce the level of cases and transmission and in doing so to help avoid the need for further legal interventions.

70 This means taking up the COVID vaccination and boosters when you are offered them, it means taking a lateral flow test twice a week or before you are due to spend time in big crowds or social settings, it means wearing a face covering to help protect those around you and it means following isolation advice when it is provided.

Our colleagues in Public Health and the Department of Health and Social Care will be reviewing the advice from the JCVI in due course and aligning our vaccination programme accordingly over the next few weeks. This has been separately announced yesterday.

75 Whilst this guidance may seem like small steps to take on an individual basis, I am very conscious that they can have a big impact when considered on a larger scale. This can be positive as we start to see the impact of our individual behaviours and decrease transmission levels. But we also know from experience that it can have negative implications, particularly upon small businesses.

80 Our economy is vital to keep the Island running and many of our hard-working businesses rely on our support and trade at this time of year. There is no need to stop enjoying the lifestyle and leisure facilities that our Island offers but we want people to be able to do this safely.

I believe that the measures introduced today allow Island life to function as close to normal as possible, for people to continue to enjoy themselves and our Island, whilst proportionately increasing our collective protection.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr Moorhouse.

90 **Mr Moorhouse:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, and thank you, Chief Minister, for that detailed answer.

Today in England, Scotland and Wales masks are now mandatory in shops. Why are we merely 'encouraging' at the same time as mandating them in schools? How and where is the current usage being monitored and what is the tipping point for any upgrades here?

The Speaker: Chief Minister.

100 **The Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, as I said on Sunday night, we are going to continue to work with our community to try and mitigate against the spread, particularly, of Omicron.

I think the critical factor here is that we have taken positive steps in terms of the changes to our borders now to put in more barriers to prevent COVID reaching the Island and *vis-à-vis*, we hope, Omicron reaching the Island. We have said to the community that we are raising our level of mask wearing to 'expected' and we are enforcing that on public transport and in health and care settings.

105 I think the point of moving a stage further is one that the Council of Ministers will consider in the event that we either get more detail about Omicron, or that we find that transmission levels of the virus have reached such proportions that they are causing significant problems to our Health and Care Service, and/or potentially increasing the danger or threat to risk of life. We are going to closely monitor the situation in that respect.

It was pleasing to note today, at least from what I saw on my way into work, the numbers of people on public transport wearing masks. That *is* mandated. I noticed yesterday, Mr Speaker, that there were significant numbers in our retail premises.

115 I am urging our community to take the sensible precautions necessary, to understand that the Council of Ministers is bringing forward these precautions for the greater protection of public health, and to work together as a community whilst we try to understand what the potential impacts of Omicron are.

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr Callister.

120 **Mr Callister:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Can I thank the Chief Minister for his statement this morning and over the weekend as well, which was reassuring.

125 Can I ask the Chief Minister just to clarify two points for me, if possible? Under the Regulations that were published yesterday, under Regulation 7(6)(b), the requirement to wear a face mask, under section (2)(a) it does say a child under 12 is not required to wear a mask. But our Education Minister was on Manx Radio on Monday saying it is 'expected' to wear a mask. Can I ask the Chief Minister just to clarify the position with regard to primary school students, if possible, just so the message is very clear to teachers and to parents?

130 Can I also just ask the Chief Minister, if possible, in respect of Regulation 9, which is under 11B, persons arriving from within the Common Travel Area? It says that a self-administered lateral flow test for coronavirus must be undertaken within 12 hours of arrival. Can I ask the Chief Minister how this will be followed up; how that submission will be made; and what are the penalties if somebody does not take a lateral flow test within 12 hours?

135 Thank you, Mr Speaker, and thank you, Chief Minister.

The Speaker: Chief Minister.

140 **The Chief Minister:** So dealing with the last point of that first. In terms of the declaration, this is going to be available as an electronic declaration and everybody arriving at the Airport will be informed as to how they can make that submission. I will give you full details on that, they are still coming through at the moment.

145 As it stands at the moment, in terms of arrivals, on the landing card the statement will read along the lines that the individual must confirm their understanding that they must undertake a lateral flow test within 12 hours and before they enter into an indoor public setting. The relevant fines will be as currently exist for anybody who makes a false statement or false declaration on those landing forms and fines can be applied by a court of law in that respect, were we to establish that somebody made a statement about taking a lateral flow test and then failed to do so.

150 So that is the first point, and some of that detail, Mr Speaker, will be given in greater clarity as soon as I have it.

In terms of the schools, we remain at a level where we are expecting our schools to wear face masks in their school settings and that also applies, I understand, across the educational spectrum. There is, of course, a difference between 'required' and 'expected' and within the law as it currently stands those who are under-12 do not have to undertake the legal requirements that we have set out.

155 So, Mr Speaker, I do understand that there remains some consternation in the educational arena but I know that the Education Minister is working to ensure that as much clarity and as much reasonableness is applied within those settings as possible.

160 **The Speaker:** Supplementary question, Mr Glover.

Mr Glover: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

165 The Chief Minister is saying that we are encouraging people to test with an LFT two times a week. Currently our list of symptoms is still narrow with high temperature, a new cough and loss of taste and smell. Guernsey and Jersey have added fatigue, headache, sore throat, diarrhoea, muscle aches and runny nose. Certainly, from my case and others I have heard of, many others, it is that new list that is more relevant. If we are testing two times a week, people need to be aware why they are testing and what symptoms they are looking out for.

170 So, are we going to review the symptoms list, rather than just blindly following the UK and England in particular?

The Speaker: Chief Minister, did you hear that?

The Chief Minister: That remains a matter for Public Health, Mr Speaker.

Obviously, it is good to hear feedback in these instances, and I will ensure that Public Health are made aware of the Hon. Member's feedback from his own circumstances.

175 But, yes, any decision about widening symptoms lists will be a matter for Public Health.

The Speaker: Mrs Christian, supplementary.

Mrs Christian: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

180 For the purposes of *Hansard* and the Hon. Members here today, would the Chief Minister confirm when was the first time the EAG advised to increase the current maximum levels for PCR testing and how many times have they repeated this request?

And, does the Chief Minister believe that we have sufficient capacity to deal with the extra testing that will come from positive LFTs through travel or COVID symptoms, which may be a consequence of the Omicron variant?

185 Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Chief Minister.

190 **The Chief Minister:** I will have to find out about what advice has been given and when, to the Council of Ministers from the Emergency Advisory Group. But, yes, I do believe that we have the capacity to undertake this.

We are getting about a thousand entries a day through our ports and a hundred or so of those are coming in from international travel. I believe that we do have the capacity with the current levels of COVID that are on the Island, and the numbers of people who have reported for PCR tests, to be able to undertake that satisfactorily. Of course, it remains to be seen what level of enhanced PCR testing will be required on the back of the lateral flow devices.

195 But the Hon. Member seems to be moving to a position where she is asking us to adopt PCR testing for everybody. That would cause significant issues from an administration perspective –

200

Mrs Christian: Sorry, would the Hon. Member give way?

The Chief Minister: – and a personnel perspective, and I think that what we have done at the moment with the lateral flow device testing is the right proportional measure and will ensure that arrivals on our Island can get on with whatever business they have here, or whether they are returning, in a very quick, effective and speedy time frame. And the lateral flow devices have so far proved to be extremely effective.

205 Of course given, Mr Speaker, they are only as effective as the process the individual is taking when they actually test themselves.

210

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

215 Have all the people been identified in the original press release, except for the three who moved on? Have they received the negative test results? Also, have any additional people been identified as visiting the areas of concern?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Chief Minister.

220

The Chief Minister (Mr Cannan): Yes, thank you, Mr Speaker.

Yes, *all* those individuals that I mentioned as having returned from the African and South African continent and who remained on the Island have been tested and, as I understand it, all have reported negative tests.

225

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr Thomas.

Mr Thomas: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

230

The first question is in respect of a definition or an intention behind a word in the regulations that is to do with mask wearing, and it says that the requirement to wear face-coverings is provided under the heading 'Reasonable excuse'. Basically, numerous exemptions are provided for that. The explanatory note then goes on to say that the list of exemptions is, however, not exhaustive.

235

What criteria will be used to determine which exceptions basis is actually to be included inside the exhaustive or not-exhaustive process?

The second legal worry I have is that the phrase 'suspect' is used in the regulations. How will the enforcement authorities determine whether they 'suspect' something?

240

The Speaker: Chief Minister to reply.

The Chief Minister: So just in terms of 'suspect', because you have heard us use that word a number of times, that primarily would be around the return of a PCR test which identified a variant that was not Delta.

245

Now, I understand, Mr Speaker, that we will *very* shortly have the facility – if we do not have it already, today – to be able to identify on Island whether or not the variant is the new strain Omicron, or whether it is the Delta strain, or whether it is another. But effectively that piece of regulation adds protection to the fact that if a PCR test identifies a strain, which is not Delta, then it gives the Government the ability to ask that individual to isolate until further information has been acquired.

250

I hope that provides an explanation around that word 'suspected' in greater detail; but and/or would give flexibility, I would suggest, were there to be an arrival on the Island from a country where we had concerns should that situation develop.

255

In terms of face coverings what I would suggest to the Hon. Member, without getting into the legalese, is that in all these circumstances ... First of all, a face covering does not *necessarily* have to be a mask, there are visors available which are reasonably accepted as a face covering; and also within the regulations there is this sense of reasonableness, and a reasonableness test which I think, Mr Speaker, would apply for individuals who believe that they should have some form of alternative covering.

260

The Speaker: Thank you.

Supplementary question, Mrs Christian.

Mrs Christian: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

265

Would the Chief Minister please confirm what data we are using in relationship to: we are not mirroring the UK? For example, the UK require close contacts of a positive Omicron case to isolate for 10 days, when we are asking them only to be vigilant.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

270

The Speaker: Chief Minister to reply.

The Chief Minister: Well, that is correct, Mr Speaker.

I think, again, the Council of Ministers wish to react proportionately. We are not aware of Omicron on the Island at the moment. All our measures are designed to buy time to allow

275 scientists and others to work out what the impacts of this variant may be. We think it is a sensible, measured approach at the moment to suggest that if somebody were to be identified, or suspected of having Omicron, that the whole household isolate.

Many of us who have been through this crisis over the last 18 months or so, Mr Speaker, will be aware of how quickly requiring others to isolate can cause significant impacts on our social and economic infrastructure. At the moment, we are not operating on the Island with such a high level of concern. We can clearly see that the Omicron variant is present in the UK at the moment.

As I say, we are working on the basis that we are trying to buy enough time, in a balanced manner, to ensure that the Island's economy and social infrastructure remains intact before we move to bring in any further measures that may have further implications for our Island.

285 **The Speaker:** I now have five people left on my list, and then I will close the list and we will move on to the Order Paper.

The next up is Mr Wannenburg.

Mr Wannenburg: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

290 Could the Chief Minister tell us, as he recognises the impact on small business, what will he be doing to work with the community as he said he will? And, given that the next month is crucial for entertainment, hospitality and retail, exactly how would he be helping them; and will there be further support given to those sectors?

Thank you.

295

The Speaker: Chief Minister, have you caught that?

The Chief Minister: Yes, I did, Mr Speaker.

300 The first thing I would say to the Hon. Member is that we are not telling people to stop undertaking their normal lives. We are simply asking people to carry an enhanced level of awareness and to undertake precautions in a number of settings.

The issue around hospitality, Mr Speaker, is that actually the community can work together on this. We have already encouraged people, multiple times now, to use the lateral flow tests or devices – which are free and are available on our Island – to test themselves before they go out. Indeed, I would suggest, Mr Speaker, that organisations that are having larger parties, or groups that are having larger parties could work amongst themselves to ensure that individuals attending those parties undertake a lateral flow device test before they go out. Indeed, that general recommendation now for people to undertake regular lateral flow testing, *particularly* if they are mixing in large groups or in environments with lots of people that they do not know must, I would suggest, be a strong message that is coming through.

310

In terms of our more broad conversations that are being undertaken, I can confirm that the Economic Response Group met last week, on Friday. I know the Minister for the Treasury and the Minister for Enterprise did liaise directly with business organisations and individuals at that point, and I believe they are going to continue to do so over this period.

315

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr Glover.

Mr Glover: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

320 Just a couple of points. All through this pandemic, we have said that the main priority is to protect our Health Service and Hospital. The Hospital recently moved to in-patients doing an LFT beforehand, whereas it was previously PCR test and isolation. Is that going to revert back now in order with this new threat?

And, what moves are being made to protect our other key components here – Education and moves for ventilation? Should we have done more, earlier? For example, in Castle Rushen, I know 17 staff approximately were off yesterday. Thank you.

325

The Speaker: Chief Minister to reply.

330 **The Chief Minister:** Setting aside the Omicron variant, we continue to deal with COVID on this Island and to live with COVID – if that is indeed the right expression – as best we can. We are obviously carefully monitoring the situation at the Hospital and indeed we have now increased the mandatory requirements in Health and Care settings.

Mr Speaker, the Health Service will continue to be clear in its communications of the requirements that they will put on individuals who are visiting that setting; and, indeed, as we move through this winter we are going to continue to do our very best to try and mitigate the impact of COVID. A lot of the recommendations that we had prior to this weekend's events remain in force.

We clearly recognise there are areas of heightened risk, particularly larger spreads, particularly amongst our children in educational environments; and it is important that we continue with the messaging and work out what are successful measures that help mitigate the impact of COVID.

340 I think the important thing as well, Mr Speaker, to recognise, is that this situation may well go on throughout this winter, which we have clearly outlined in our winter plan, but may well be with us for some years to come. I think we *have* to learn what works and what does not work, and we have to carry on undertaking those types of measures and investigations to understand matters. We may well have to carry those on for some considerable time.

345 It is important we work together as a community, as groups, as schools, as businesses both in the public sector and in the private sector to get the Island through mitigating the impacts of COVID. And of course reinforcing the critical messages, which are around individuals having their vaccines, having their boosters and now adhering to the requirements that we are putting on around the border controls.

350

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

355 Is any additional support being given to schools and businesses to help implement the new recommendations and requirements?

The Speaker: Chief Minister.

360 **The Chief Minister:** I think the critical thing is, Mr Speaker – and I am sort of emphasising this – is that we continue to work together. The Government does not want to legally enforce measures; the Government wants to work with our community in a variety of settings. We have raised the alert level to Level 2 now; we have set out in the Winter Framework what the implications of that are. We are communicating that as much as we possibly can and, where possible, we are communicating that with individuals and the parties who are concerned and connected with their various bodies, and representing the various bodies.

365 That, Mr Speaker, is as good as we can get. Of course, if there are areas where we can provide some more direct communication and/or try to provide any further advice then we are willing to do so, and we will listen as much as possible to where individuals have got further concerns and try and address those.

370

The Speaker: Mr Thomas.

Mr Thomas: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

375 I am sure the Chief Minister agrees with me that it is best to provide clarity about what the resident traveller outside the CTA can expect when they return to the Island in terms of the test. So, can the Chief Minister advise whether 'within 48 hours' needing to take a test means, in effect,

that is not a Day-2 test? If you are very efficient and very organised you could do it one minute after arrival on the Isle of Man.

380 Secondly, can the Chief Minister provide an estimate about how long he thinks it will be before the test results will come back? Because at one point when part of this was being done in Liverpool, we were waiting for a week, but the expectation has been that that is within a day.

385 Thirdly, have the Chief Minister and the Council of Ministers considered recognising non-Isle of Man PCR tests that are of equivalent or better standard (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) than the ones that are in the Island? Because that might be very helpful for people who are already doing PCR tests everywhere they travel and might have some in their pocket or on their computer already.

390 The final legalistic question is, I believe the regulations were published yesterday evening, but when in practical terms do they come into force in terms of enforcement? Obviously, they come into force legally at four o'clock, but there have been accidents in the past in terms of enforcement. So when, in practical terms, does the enforcement commence?

The Speaker: The Chief Minister.

The Chief Minister: The enforcement commences at the time and date that the regulations come into force, Mr Speaker. Let me be clear that there is no ambiguity about that.

395 In terms of PCR testing, the Council of Ministers remains open to taking official advice, but we are extremely confident in the current arrangements that we have. We find that they have proved to be extremely reliable but of course we continue to have an open mind if there are better ways of doing things.

400 In terms of the test results, Mr Speaker, we still aim to have those results back within 24 hours. The question about somebody having a PCR test if they are organised enough, one minute after arrival, it is true within 48 hours is the current requirement.

The Speaker: Final supplementary question, Mr Callister.

405 **Mr Callister:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Can I just ask the Chief Minister, I think he may have already given some of the answer, but I will ask it anyway, with regard to persons arriving outside the Common Travel Area, I was wondering if he can give some more clarity about do they take a PCR test in the UK and wait for the results? Or can they travel straight through and then take the PCR test in the Isle of Man?

410 If they are coming straight back, straight through to the Isle of Man, what mitigations are we taking to safeguard other people that may be travelling on that aircraft or on the boat?

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

415 **The Chief Minister:** So the rules are very clear. If you are arriving from outside the Common Travel Area then, when you arrive back on the Isle of Man, you must self-isolate and take a PCR test within 48 hours of arrival. There are no ifs, no buts.

420 Whether you have had a PCR test in the UK, if you have arrived back from an international jurisdiction and have spent less than 10 days in the Common Travel Area, you will have to abide by the rules, which are self-isolation and a test within 48 hours. On receipt of that test, providing that it is negative, you will be free to move.

In terms of travel, the travel arrangements remain. We have now made it mandatory for masks on public transport and that includes the Isle of Man Steam Packet. Of course, as we all know for anybody who has been on a plane in any case, the airlines themselves are enforcing mask wearing on Isle of Man aircraft.

425

The Speaker: That concludes the deliberation of the Urgent Question.

Questions for Oral Answer

CHIEF MINISTER

1.1. Tynwald Member and Ministerial conduct standards – Application and addressing breaches

The Hon. Member for Rushen (Dr Haywood) to ask the Chief Minister:

What standards of conduct apply to Members of Tynwald and to Ministers; how any alleged breach would be addressed; and if he will make a statement?

The Speaker: We turn to our Order Paper and Questions for Oral Answer. Question 1, I call on the Hon. Member for Rushen, Dr Haywood.

430 **Dr Haywood:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I would like to ask the Chief Minister what standards of conduct apply to Members of Tynwald and to Ministers; how any alleged breach would be addressed; and if he will make a statement?

Thank you.

435

The Speaker: I call on the Chief Minister to reply.

The Chief Minister (Mr Cannan): Mr Speaker, the standard of conduct for Members of Tynwald are included in the Standing Orders of Tynwald Court, at Annex 4, Required Standards of Conduct, and at Annex 6, Code of Conduct for Members of Tynwald.

Standards of Conduct for Ministers are contained within the Ministerial Code at Part 2 of the Government Code.

As per paragraph 17 of the Code of Conduct for Tynwald Members, the application of the Code is a matter for Tynwald, its Branches, and the Tynwald Committee on Members' Standards and Interests. An alleged breach of the Ministerial Code would be considered on a case-by-case basis. Where an allegation concerning a potential breach of the Code is made and if, having consulted with the Chief Secretary, I am of the opinion that the allegation requires further investigation, I may request that the Chief Secretary instigates an independent external investigation by a suitably qualified person.

450 The current version of the Government Code is being revised, with the Ministerial Code having been redrafted as a stand-alone document on the basis that provisions in respect of procedures and standards should, as far as practicable, be distinct.

The Council of Ministers will be considering this document in due course and, once agreed, will be circulated to Tynwald Members and subsequently published.

455

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Dr Haywood.

Dr Haywood: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

460 I wonder if he would like to take this opportunity to reassure the Manx public that the Nolan principles are very much ingrained in this administration and that their application is going to be completely supported by the measures you have detailed.

Perhaps he could elucidate on those changes that you are bringing forward, if you have identified gaps within the current Code of Conduct.

Thank you.

465 **The Speaker:** Chief Minister to reply.

The Chief Minister: Yes, Mr Speaker, the Nolan principles, which we are all well aware of, should be ingrained throughout all of us when it comes to our public duties.

470 In terms of timescale for consideration of the Ministerial Code, I would anticipate the Council of Ministers will be considering a redraft within the next few weeks, and I will advise Hon. Members when that has been completed.

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr Moorhouse.

475 **Mr Moorhouse:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Is the Chief Minister happy with the current Code? Has he any thoughts about the requirements on the general conduct of Tynwald Members when off-duty in a small jurisdiction, and would the revised edition extend to cover such areas?

480 **The Speaker:** Chief Minister to reply.

The Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, I think the Hon. Member will find that all these codes, whether they are the Standing Orders in Tynwald or the Government Code, apply to individuals who are undertaking their public duties and their requirements for undertaking in that respect.
485 It is up to individual Members to interpret how they should distinguish and behave in their private lives, that is not for me to comment.

And apologies for the second part of that question, would he mind –?

Mr Moorhouse: It was just in terms of would the amendment include reference to that, but I
490 think you have answered that in some respects.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary question, Mr Thomas.

495 **Mr Thomas:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Would the Chief Minister advise whether the current version of the Nolan principles are encapsulated in the Ministerial Code inside the Government Code, which is dated 2017, in his mind? Because there have been some quite significant changes since 2017. Tynwald Court had a similar issue two or three years back that Mr Speaker addressed by going back and updating the Nolan principles at that stage.
500

Secondly, would the Chief Minister agree with me that both Government, the Chief Minister himself in fact and Tynwald Court should consider putting independent members into the process and also introducing suitable mechanisms to allow for the fact that this can be seen as being *quasi-judicial* in many senses?
505

The Speaker: Chief Minister.

The Chief Minister: Well, I am not sure whether the Hon. Member is referring to the Ministerial Code or whether he is referring to the Code of Conduct for Tynwald Members. In
510 either case, I would suggest that is a matter primarily for parliament obviously, when it comes to the Code of Conduct for individual Members, whether they wish some independent assessment to take place.

As I said, as far as the Ministerial Code goes or the Government Code, I will be discussing that with the Council of Ministers.

515 But, yes, Mr Speaker, I think that is more a matter for Hon. Members.

MANX UTILITIES AUTHORITY

**1.2. Treasury-Manx Utilities loan agreement –
Summer 2020 modifications**

The Hon. Member for Douglas Central (Mr Thomas) to ask the Chairman of the Manx Utilities Authority:

How the loan agreement between Treasury and Manx Utilities was modified in summer 2020; how this modification affected monies received from Manx Gas; and if he will make a statement?

The Speaker: Question 2 and I call on the Hon. Member for Douglas Central, Mr Thomas.

Mr Thomas: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I beg leave to ask the Chair of the Manx Utilities Authority how the loan agreement between
520 Treasury and Manx Utilities was modified in summer 2020; how this modification affected monies
received from Manx Gas; and if he will make a statement?

The Speaker: I call on the Chairman of the Manx Utilities Authority to reply.

525 **The Chairman of the Manx Utilities Authority (Mr Callister):** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Can I
start by thanking Mr Thomas for his Question this morning.

As part of the voluntary regulatory agreement negotiated last year with Manx Gas, it was
proposed that Treasury would reduce loan charges to Manx Utilities in respect of *its* loan for the
natural gas network extension, which would form part of the rebates to Manx Gas customers.
530 Hon. Members will recall that it was not possible to reach a voluntary regulatory agreement with
Manx Gas. Therefore, there was no change made to the loan agreement in 2020.

Members will also recall that, in February 2021, the Council of Ministers advised Manx Gas that
it no longer wished to pursue a voluntary regulatory agreement, but it was still committed to
ensuring that the Government's part of the rebate to Manx Gas customers was still honoured.
535 This reduction in loan charge was only agreed on condition that Manx Gas enters into a
contractual agreement with Manx Utilities, which includes an obligation on Manx Gas to ensure
that 100% of the savings will be passed on to Manx Gas customers.

Negotiations on the reduction broke down in May this year due to a position adopted by Manx
Gas. However, following the change of management of Manx Gas, I am pleased to advise this
540 House that a constructive meeting was recently held with Manx Gas and with officers from the
Cabinet Office, Treasury and Manx Utilities. It is hoped that an agreement can be reached with
Manx Gas to allow Manx Gas customers to benefit *in full* from any loan reduction agreed by the
Treasury Department.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

545 **The Speaker:** Supplementary question, Mr Thomas.

Mr Thomas: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Obviously, the Chair cannot speak for Council of Ministers, but in the extract of proceedings of
550 July 2020, which were published recently – this is the extract of the Council of Ministers'
proceedings – it is recorded that the existing loan agreement between Manx Utilities and the
Treasury *be* modified. So do I understand correctly, then, that it was not modified subsequent to
that Council of Ministers' *quasi*-direction?

555 **The Speaker:** Chairman to reply.

The Chairman: Yes, thank you, Mr Speaker.

I know my friend and colleague from Douglas Central, Mr Thomas, is referring to the minutes dated June 2020, and I am very grateful he passed a copy on to me.

560 The repayment on the consolidated loan funds were made at the end of 31st March each year and the repayment amount was reduced by Treasury in March 2021. Manx Utilities has not adjusted any charge to Manx Gas as a result of that agreement just yet, and that is because we are not in agreement with Manx Gas to do so. It is hoped, as I have mentioned in my original statement, that agreement can be reached and we can actually pass those funds back on to Manx Gas who can then forward them on to Manx Gas customers as quickly as possible.

565

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

570 Have some updates been completed between the Treasury and Manx Utilities following the issue of the £400 million bond this summer?

The Speaker: Sorry, even I did not catch that!

575 **Mr Moorhouse:** Have similar updates been completed between the Treasury and the Manx Utilities following the issue of the £400 million bond this summer?

Mr Callister: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

580 I think that is slightly outside the scope of the Question because it related to the natural gas extension agreement, not relating to the two Government Treasury bonds, one for £75 million and one for £185 million.

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr Thomas.

Mr Thomas: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I also appreciate the Chair's helpful answers.

585 On 30th June 2020, Minister Harmer confirmed to me that £700,000 approximately a year would result from a reduction in the 6% lease interest rate to the consolidated loans fund rate. Can the Chair confirm then that, by now, Manx Utilities is sitting on nearly a million pounds, which can go to Manx Gas customers? And is he confirming today that he is in discussions with Manx Gas about how that will be paid to Manx Gas customers?

590 Secondly, can the Chair advise that, as recently as 6th May 2021 when I was sent a report of a meeting between Minister Harmer and Mr Murphy, that the expectation at that point was that £70 – £35 each year – would be repaid to each Manx Gas customer as a result of that reduction? Is that what Manx Gas customers can now expect given that this money is now held, it seems, by Manx Utilities?

595

The Speaker: Chairman to reply.

The Chairman: Yes, thank you, Mr Speaker, and again I thank Mr Thomas for his question.

600 I have not been party to those discussions between the Cabinet Office, Treasury, MUA and Manx Gas, but we are hopeful that agreement can be reached. He is absolutely right. I can advise this House that we are holding approximately £700,000 per year on behalf of Manx Gas customers and, once a satisfactory agreement is reached with Manx Gas, to ensure that 100% of those refunds is given back to Manx Gas customers ... That is the key here. We do not want to see Manx Gas keeping £20,000 or £25,000 dealing with this refund – 100% has to go back to Manx Gas customers.

605

You are absolutely right, and it is only a rough estimate on the figures. If we actually can implement this as soon as possible, going back to January 2020, then you are correct that it is

610 around £31 per Manx Gas customer per year refund. If we go back to January 2020 then at the moment approximately – and it is only approximately – Manx Gas customers can expect around £63 refund to their accounts. But we want to make sure this is administered correctly, and we want to make sure that 100% of that refund goes back to the customers where it is due.

The Speaker: Final supplementary, Mr Thomas.

615 **Mr Thomas:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Does the Chair agree with me that simplicity is always best in these things? And, essentially, the reason the negotiations broke down in May 2021 is that Manx Gas were being asked to means test to actually analyse lots of figures?

620 Does the Chair agree with me that the simple thing to do would be to pay that single payment to every tariff customer in a simple payment – and it is sorted, done. History finishes and the future with better gas regulation starts.

The Speaker: Chairman to reply.

625 **The Chairman:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I am not aware of any of the comments that the Member has just made. But what I can say is that we have a duty and I think that is from the Cabinet Office, I think from the Council of Ministers, from the MUA and on behalf of Manx Gas customers to ensure that, as I have said previously, 100% of any refund that Treasury gives back to Manx Gas customers goes back into the pockets of the people that deserve it.

630 Thank you.

OFFICE OF FAIR TRADING

1.3. Bus Vannin's demand-responsive transport service – Publication of report

The Hon. Member for Douglas Central (Mr Thomas) to ask the Chairman of the Office of Fair Trading:

When he will publish the Office of Fair Trading report into Bus Vannin's demand-responsive transport service; and if he will make a statement?

The Speaker: Question 3. I call the Hon. Member for Douglas Central, Mr Thomas.

Mr Thomas: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

635 I beg leave to ask the Chair of the Office of Fair Trading when he will publish the Office of Fair Trading report into Bus Vannin's demand-responsive transport service; and if he will make a statement?

The Speaker: I call on the Chairman of the Office of Fair Trading, Mr Wannenburgh, to reply.

640

The Chairman of the Office of Fair Trading (Mr Wannenburgh): I believe that Mr Peters will be giving that reply, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: I will go to the Vice-Chair of the Office of Fair Trading, Mr Peters.

645 **The Vice-Chairman of the Office of Fair Trading (Mr Peters):** Thank you very much, Mr Speaker; and thank you for your Question, Member for Douglas Central.

I can confirm that the draft report of the investigation into Bus Vannin's demand-responsive service has been completed. This is a preliminary report produced under section 9 of the 1996 Fair Trading Act and has been sent to the noticed parties for their comments. The feedback from the noticed parties may be included as an appendix at the end of the Report. The final report will then be submitted to the OFT Board for approval, most likely in early December and will be presented to the Council of Ministers at the next meeting in accordance with Schedule 3, clause 4(2) of the Fair Trading Act.

655 If it appears to the Council of Ministers that the publication of any matter in the report would be against the public interest, then the Council may exclude the relevant information from the report.

Schedule 3 goes on to state that in accordance with paragraph 4(1) the report should be laid before Tynwald. Furthermore, the Chief Secretary shall publish a notice in the newspapers with copies of the report available to download from the OFT website, with paper copies available from the Tynwald Library. For clarity, the report will be available publicly after it has been presented to the Council of Ministers. I am limited in my response, as the report has to be made available to the Council of Ministers before I can make a statement on the findings.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

665 **The Speaker:** Supplementary question, Mr Thomas.

Mr Thomas: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I congratulate the Vice-Chair on that excellent presentation of the law inside section 9 and Schedule 3.

670 Just a brief supplementary, because everything is on *Hansard* now. Has the Office of Fair Trading any reason to believe that the Council of Ministers will not allow the publication of the report in its entirety? Has that been considered at any meeting? If the Vice-Chair has not got that information to hand, perhaps that could be circulated to Members afterwards.

675 Secondly, has the Office of Fair Trading considered in any way whether the principles inside the new Competition Act will be applied to that decision by the Council of Ministers, as they probably should be, given that the Competition Act has improved this area of law and has been discussed and consulted on since 2013?

680 **The Speaker:** I think the first part of that question might be to speculate into the minds of the Council of Ministers, which might be dangerous territory for the Hon. Member! (*Laughter*) Mr Peters.

The Vice-Chairman: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

685 Yes, I cannot give an answer to the first question. I really do not know whether or not there would be anything in there that might cause any concern, but that is up for the Council of Ministers to look at.

In terms of the Competition Act, under the FTA there are no sanctions that may be imposed by the OFT, and it has been well documented that the OFT does not have the same powers and sanctions available to other competition authorities. This is precisely why the Isle of Man Government introduced the 2020 Competition Act to replace Part 2 of the 1996 FTA.

690 Under the new Competition Act the OFT will have various powers available including the issuing of public censure; the ability to impose financial penalties based on turnover; to order restitution to the affected parties; and to provide recommendations to the FSA considering the disqualification of directors or other officers. That is obviously something that is in progress at the moment.

695 Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr Thomas.

Mr Thomas: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and that is a very helpful answer with additional information about the Competition Act aspect.

700 I think, Mr Speaker, unfortunately you misadvised the answer to the question because I merely asked whether the *Board* of the Office of Fair Trading had considered – whether it had had any discussions with the Council of Ministers. I did not ask the responder to get into the minds of the Council of Ministers.

705 So can the Vice-Chair, or the Chair, circulate to Members any minutes of the independent Office of Fair Trading in respect of its consideration of what it believes should happen to this Report?

The Speaker: I call on the Vice-Chairman to reply.

710 **The Vice-Chairman:** My understanding, Mr Speaker, is that this needs to go to the Council of Ministers next, and it will come through to Members in due course. I do not believe that there is any reason to have any concerns about that in the interim, from my *one* meeting at the Office of Fair Trading, so far. *(Laughter)*

CHIEF MINISTER

1.4. Natural gas extraction – Government policy

The Hon. Member for Arbory, Castletown and Malew (Mr Moorhouse) to ask the Chief Minister:

What the Government's policy is on the extraction of natural gas from beneath the seabed; and if he will make a statement?

715 **The Speaker:** I turn to Question 4. I call on the Hon. Member for Arbory, Castletown and Malew, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

720 I would like to ask the Chief Minister what the Government's policy is on the extraction of natural gas from beneath the seabed; and if he will make a statement?

The Speaker: I call on the Chief Minister to reply.

725 **The Chief Minister (Mr Cannan):** Mr Speaker, the Government is committed to maintaining security of energy supply at an affordable cost, whilst minimising the impact of energy use on the environment.

730 In 2014, Tynwald approved the Strategy for Offshore Energy Production, which includes the development of hydrocarbon energy sources in our territorial sea. Earlier this month, the draft Island Plan was approved, reaffirming our commitment to actively consider and protect our energy security and also identify clear and acceptable ways of transitioning to carbon neutrality and meet our climate change plan objectives.

Natural gas is the cleanest of the fossil fuels with the lowest greenhouse gas emissions. The natural gas supplied to the Isle of Man is the same mix of gas sources as in the UK gas network. Production of gas in the UK has been declining and around 50% of the UK gas demand is met with imports. National Grid modelling for how the UK will achieve their net-zero emissions reduction

735 target by 2050 indicates that, in most scenarios, the role of natural gas fundamentally changes, but it will remain crucial to energy supply for the next 30 years. It is therefore likely that natural gas will also continue to have a role to play in the Isle of Man's transition to a low carbon economy and any further production of natural gas in the Irish Sea, including the Isle of Man territorial sea, would assist in providing energy security in the British Isles.

740 The Isle of Man has made a commitment to net-zero emissions by 2050, and will be setting interim targets in line with the Paris Agreement to achieve rapid progress in reducing emissions. Any future extraction of natural gas would result in increased greenhouse gas emissions, including fugitive emissions of methane, which will occur regardless of where the gas is used and how it is extracted.

745 We will therefore require a robust methodology for how gas production emissions will be mitigated against in parallel to the extraction phase, so as not to have a negative impact upon the Isle of Man's climate change commitments and its attainment of current and future interim emissions targets.

750 These policy goals and positions provide the context in which we will judge any future prospective fossil fuel extraction from Manx territorial waters.

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr Speaker; and thank you, Chief Minister.

755 Given the possible income stream for the Manx Government and the way it could fuel the transformation of the Island into a green leader of technology and usage, does the Government welcome this possibility because recently the messaging has been mixed?

The Speaker: Chief Minister to reply.

760

The Chief Minister: I think it is important to clarify that if there were gas in this field, then there is potentially an income stream for the Manx Government.

765 The Government, of course, Mr Speaker, would welcome additional income to assist with the funding of our transition to net-zero emissions. In the last parliament we created a Government fund to assist with the Climate Change Transformation. From this fund, we have allocated £7.2 million to the recently launched Green Living Grants Scheme, which provides grants to homeowners for energy efficiency improvements. This is only the start of the significant funding that will be required to decarbonise our power, homes and transport sectors.

770 **The Speaker:** Supplementary question, Mr Peters.

Mr Peters: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

775 Does the Chief Minister regret that there are people both inside and outside Government who are choosing to mislead the public with unfounded and untrue allegations to support their own agenda as far as this gas field is concerned?

780 Can the Chief Minister confirm that the company is merely asking for an extension to their already granted and existing licence, due to the challenges presented worldwide by the COVID pandemic – an excuse frequently used by Government over the last 18 months? And that no taxpayer money is required to carry out the seismic investigation to confirm how much gas exists in the field?

The Speaker: Chief Minister to reply.

785 **The Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, I acknowledge there are many different views around this whole area. It is the job of the Government and the Council of Ministers to cut through the noise,

so to speak, and to make balanced and informed judgements and decisions – which I hope will be the mantra that this Government pursues whilst it remains in its current form and in power.

790 There are no taxpayer funds being requested, as far as I know, and I have yet to see the formal paper from the Department of Infrastructure for any licence extension. But, as I understand it at the moment, this is for an extension of the licence to explore for natural gas in Manx territorial waters.

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mrs Caine.

795 **Mrs Caine:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I am grateful for the Chief Minister giving a response to this Question. Can I ask him, does he have any figures in terms of the increase in emissions that would be generated by both exploitation of any gas field off the Island; and, indeed, if any of the gas was brought to the Island for cleaning or refinement on Island how significant would those emissions be?

800 Also, would it be possible for the Isle of Man to have any kind of interim target for 2030 or to meet net zero by 2050?

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

805 **The Speaker:** Before I call on the Chief Minister to reply, I just want to make it clear to all Members that we need to make sure that we are not prejudging any one specific application in this House, or being seen to do so. So I just put that out there as a general caution to Members.

Chief Minister to reply.

810 **The Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, I could not possibly give you those sorts of figures. Indeed, one would obviously have to understand what processes were being employed and exactly how much gas – were a licence to be given, and were there to be drilling for such. But, as I explained in my Answer, Mr Speaker, I expect that the Council of Ministers would require in any business case a robust methodology for how gas production emissions will be mitigated against in parallel to the extraction phase so as not to have a negative impact on the Isle of Man climate change commitments.

815

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

820 Have the Chief Minister and CoMin been briefed directly by Crogga? The email sent to Tynwald Members regarding a Council presentation does potentially imply that open dialogue in this area is being prevented. Could that be the case?

The Speaker: Given my caution earlier, Chief Minister.

825

The Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, I can only say at this stage that the Council of Ministers has yet to formally consider any paper from any Government Department in this particular area and that we have not communicated as a Council directly with Crogga. But should the company concerned wish, for whatever reason, to present to any Member of Tynwald, that would be presumably their prerogative and the requirement of Tynwald to react accordingly.

830

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr Glover.

Mr Glover: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

835 It is more of a follow-on from the last supplementary there, but should not the Council of Ministers be taking the lead here and discussing all options so that it has a full knowledge of what the options are? And is it looking at options as well to fund the green agenda without using gas

from our territorial waters, because we are talking of many billions? Shouldn't the Council of Ministers be really taking a lead here and exploring all options?

840

The Speaker: The Question is about the policy on extraction of natural gas but, Chief Minister.

The Chief Minister: I think I have already said, Mr Speaker, that the Council of Ministers, I hope, will reach a balanced and considered decision on these matters.

845

It is not a perfect science; there are so many unanswered questions. I have already committed in the draft Island Plan that we would, I hope, have our road map to achieving our net-zero goals laid out clearly in the spring. I look forward to that being received, and I look forward to receiving appropriate papers as and when they come through and arrive at the Council of Ministers.

850

The Speaker: Miss Faragher, supplementary question.

Miss Faragher: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

855

Does the Chief Minister not agree with me that the time for *starting* new gas extraction projects as a transition to renewables is over, and that we should be focusing our resources upon gaining energy security by renewable energy projects at this stage?

The Speaker: Chief Minister.

860

The Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, I have to take considered advice on these matters. I think that I am not in a position to make such bold statements in that direction. My primary interest is ensuring that the Island's energy security is maintained and, of course, that we do achieve our climate change objectives, acknowledging that along the way there is a potential requirement for substantial funding needed to do so, and acknowledging that along the way we will continue to need to use gas.

865

I think all the papers that I have seen so far indicate that gas is a transition fuel and will be needed for some significant time into the future, and there still remain very open questions as to how the Isle of Man will have its energy security requirements met. On that basis, Mr Speaker, we are going to continue to consider as appropriate our response. Indeed, when we are looking at issues such as gas exploration clearly we will have to do so in light of any climate change commitments that we expect in light of energy security policies and, of course, in light of the financial commitments that this Island may need to have when it is undertaking such a significant transition.

870

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr Peters.

875

Mr Peters: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

Will the Chief Minister agree that the potential upside of any gas field to the north of the Island outweighs any consideration of things like the Paris Agreement or COP26, or whatever? There is simply too much at stake here for the Island to ignore the potential of this gas field.

880

The Speaker: Chief Minister to reply.

885

The Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, we have previously modelled the potential value for a range of scenarios for a small gas field, which has a 20% probability of 90 billion cubic feet up to a large gas field, which has a 6% probability and where you would be expecting 760 billion cubic feet.

The value of any gas produced depends on the commodity price at the time of sale. However, our scenarios suggest potential gross income from £240 million to over £2 billion and the Isle of Man Government, in these types of scenarios, would receive a royalty share for extracted gas, which ranges from a minimum of 5% up to a maximum of 40% – somewhere from £10.5 million

890 to over £795 million. Additional economic benefits include rental income and potential corporate
Income Tax.

But of course one has to balance in the bigger international commitments – our commitments
and our view on our energy policy – and we have three key policy aims: maintaining the security
of energy supply; securing the efficient use of affordable energy; minimising the impact of our
895 energy use on the environment. I have already alluded to the substantial cost attached to those
objectives as well.

So there is a raft of indicators around this that we need to consider when making such a
decision; not one item alone. This is not a black-and-white decision; there are many factors that
will need to be considered.

900

The Speaker: The last two questions on my list for this one, Mr Thomas and then Mrs Caine.

Mr Thomas: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Can the Chief Minister advise whether the only person who has a licence to extract natural gas
905 from beneath the seabed in the Isle of Man has carried out any surveys and whether there is any
additional information which has already arisen from the agreement or the contract that is in
place?

Secondly, can the Chief Minister confirm what he seems to have said today, which is that the
licence was not taken away at any time during 2021, it is just there is a long extended process
910 about extending the licence in the light of COVID?

Thirdly, did I hear the Chief Minister correctly when he said that this matter, in terms of cutting
through the noise, would be decided by Government and the Council of Ministers as a sort of
administrative issue; it would not be coming to Tynwald as a policy decision because the policy
decisions were already made when this licence was awarded?

915

The Speaker: Chief Minister to reply.

The Chief Minister: The third part first, Mr Speaker.

Yes, as it currently stands, this would be a Council of Ministers' decision – unless the Council
920 of Ministers were to determine otherwise. I am not aware of any additional information around
exploration of gas at this particular time, or what lies on our seabed.

Just for clarity, in terms of the current status, the DoI awarded a licence to Crogga in October
2018 to search for oil and gas beginning 1st January 2019. The licence commenced at phase B of
the potential three phases within a licence, allowing them three years to complete the seismic
925 survey associated with this phase. This survey will characterise the nature of the potential gas
reserve.

So just to be clear, all we are being asked at the moment, as I understand it, is whether to
extend the existing licence.

930 **The Speaker:** Final supplementary, Mrs Caine.

Mrs Caine: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Can I check with the Chief Minister that he said the policy currently on the extraction of energy
or gas from our waters was confirmed by Tynwald, approved by Tynwald, in 2014? So does he not
935 feel that any amendment, revision or addition to that should come back to Tynwald, following on
from Mr Thomas's point, that *Tynwald* should be the body that confirms or supports such a policy,
which crosses over so much of the other policies that we are promoting?

Can I just confirm also with the Chief Minister: does he believe that if the gas field is found to
be at the 6% chance being at the larger volume, does he think that the cost to residents of
940 offsetting against that will actually exceed any possible income from gas? So, by giving a company

permission to continue exploration, will the Government then be committed to enabling them to go to the next stage of licence?

Why would they permit a company to do the seismic surveys, confirming the size of the gas field, if they are going to pull the plug on exploitation of the gas field ultimately in the future?

945 Does the Chief Minister feel that our commitment to have the Paris Agreement extended to the Island is a significant one? And that our international reputation has to be a consideration in any decision that CoMin makes in connection with this matter; and also in terms of the reduction of our reliance on a gas-fired power station and, in fact, the drive to have more renewable energy on the Island?

950 Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Chief Minister to reply.

The Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, the policy remains.

955 As I have said now, multiple times, I will bring this ... Not I will bring it, but the relevant *Department* will bring this to Council of Ministers when and if it is appropriate to do so, and I expect the Council of Ministers will have a robust discussion around the requirements that they are being asked to fulfil. I expect those to include what the current existing policies are in this respect. Although I have pointed out that the current Tynwald-approved strategy is for the development of hydrocarbon energy sources and was approved in 2014.

960 The Hon. Member asks me technical questions about the cost of development and potential further implications. Until I have seen a full analysis, Mr Speaker, I am not in a position to be able to answer that type of question; and, again, I would expect that the financial implications would be a question that the Council of Ministers would wish to properly understand in the event that it did wish to pursue this matter.

965 Of course, Mr Speaker, again I have said multiple times, we have to consider a number of factors within this. If this were to be approved, particularly if it comes to extraction, then one has to understand what the most robust methodology is for emissions to be mitigated in line with any climate change and gas emission targets that the Isle of Man has committed to.

TREASURY

1.5. Defence and international relations – Contributions made to the UK

The Hon. Member for Arbory, Castletown and Malew (Mr Moorhouse) to ask the Minister for the Treasury:

What contribution has been paid to the UK government in each of the last three years for defence and international relations; and if he will make a statement?

970 **The Speaker:** We turn to Question 5 and I call on the Hon. Member for Arbory, Castletown and Malew, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

975 I would like to ask the Treasury Minister what contribution has been paid to the UK government in each of the last three years for defence and international relations; and if he will make a statement?

The Speaker: I call on the Treasury Minister to reply.

The Minister for the Treasury (Mr Ashford): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

980 The Isle of Man Government pays the United Kingdom government an annual sum in recognition of defence and other common services provided on its behalf by the United Kingdom government. This annual amount payable is determined through a written agreement known as the Isle of Man Contribution Agreement 1994.

985 The amounts paid in the last three years are as follows: 2018-19 – £3,121,881 and 25 pence; 2019-20 – £3,177,762 and 25 pence; and in 2020-21 – £3,236,233 and 76p.

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr Moorhouse.

990 **Mr Moorhouse:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, and thank you, Treasury Minister, for that detailed Answer.

Does the Minister believe this is value for money? How it does so – assuming it does – could he provide some supporting evidence, please?

995 **The Speaker:** Treasury Minister to reply.

The Minister: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

1000 Personally, I do believe it is value for money, it allows and guarantees that Isle of Man residents can access consular assistance wherever they are in the world; and, in the event of the need for them to be repatriated or evacuated from countries, they will be treated the same as any British citizen would.

So I do believe it offers value for money and, I believe, having that written agreement in place provides reassurance both from the Isle of Man side but also from the UK side as well.

1005 **The Speaker:** Further supplementary, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr Speaker; and thank you, Minister.

Is there an annual review of the sum paid, or is it done in an automated manner? And, given the formal nature of this Agreement, does the Island receive any advantages that the other Crown Dependencies do not?

1010 Thank you.

The Speaker: Treasury Minister to reply.

The Minister: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

1015 The amount paid is dictated by section 3.3 of the Agreement and it increases each year based upon the percentage figure of the Gross Domestic Product deflator that is included within the UK Budget each year.

1020 In relation to advantages over other Crown Dependencies, we have a written agreement whereas the other Crown Dependencies do not. That gives us an advantage in the fact that the Agreement lays out the terms under which the Agreement may be renegotiated and changed. It cannot be unilaterally changed by either side, there has to be a full negotiation. Again, my understanding is that that is not in place for the other Crown Dependencies.

1025 The other thing I would say is, Mr Speaker, although the convention is that the UK will always provide for defence and consular support for Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories, we know from previous experience that conventions over time can change. The fact we have a written agreement, I believe, puts us at an advantage.

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr Thomas.

1030 **Mr Thomas:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Does the Minister agree with me that this contribution should not be seen entirely on its own? It should be seen in the context of all of the agreements we have with the United Kingdom over things like customs and excise, National Insurance, Health, Education – and, in fact, the whole basis of legislation. So if we are going to revisit, for instance, the November 2020 Independence
1035 Report conclusions, we should consider the whole package in a reasoned and reasonable way collectively.

But having said that, secondly: does the Treasury Minister agree with me that the GDP deflator, which I believe was once used in some of the other agreements we have, has been replaced by a more reasonable basis? So might it not be helpful to immediately look at the basis of upgrading,
1040 given we are paying more and more each year, because it seems like differences between ... economies and inflation is behaving in the different countries?

The Speaker: Treasury Minister to reply.

1045 **The Minister:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Taking the 'but' first, which I knew would be coming somewhere along the line. There is no intention at the current time to revisit the Agreement or to open any formal negotiation with the UK around the Agreement.

In terms of the other point that the Hon. Member for Douglas Central, Mr Thomas makes in relation to, 'Isn't it important to look at the entire relationship?' I fully concur with him,
1050 Mr Speaker, it is important that *everything* is taken into account including – for instance, he listed a few there, Mr Speaker – there are other agreements as well in relation to how Manx students are treated when they go off to university at the UK. I think it is important that we do look at the full picture as to how this slots in with the very close relationship – and I have got to say the very
1055 *amicable* relationship – we have with the UK.

The Speaker: Final supplementary, Mr Thomas.
No? Okay.

1.6. COVID-19 – Winter support packages

The Hon. Member for Douglas South (Mrs Christian) to ask the Minister for the Treasury:

What winter support packages are available for businesses and individuals affected by COVID-19?

1060 **The Speaker:** Question 6, then, we turn to the Hon. Member for Douglas South, Mrs Christian.

Mrs Christian: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I would like to ask the Minister for Treasury what winter support packages are available for businesses and individuals affected by COVID-19?

1065 **The Speaker:** I again call on the Treasury Minister to reply.

The Minister for the Treasury (Mr Ashford): Thank you, Mr Speaker; and can I start by thanking the Hon. Member for her Question.

In respect of businesses, the Economic Recovery Group (ERG) continues to monitor the situation and is aware of a level of concern, particularly in relation to the Christmas and winter
1070 periods, from the retail and hospitality sectors. The ERG is in regular dialogue with the industry

and met with representatives of those domestic sectors via the Chamber of Commerce last Friday. Following this meeting and, after listening to information and evidence provided, the ERG will this week consider if additional support is appropriate and will make an announcement hopefully tomorrow.

1075

Clearly, developments over the weekend may also impact our local businesses further. The ERG will continue to monitor the developing situation liaising with industry, and stand ready to introduce appropriate and proportionate support, if deemed necessary. People who are unable to work because they are having to isolate can claim short-term Incapacity Benefit, which is currently being paid at an enhanced weekly rate of £230 for the first 14 days, or a period of incapacity from work.

1080

People who are not entitled to Incapacity Benefit, because they do not satisfy the National Insurance contribution conditions, as well as people who are entitled to Incapacity Benefit but need *additional* financial support, can claim means-tested Income Support.

1085

People who are having to refrain from work to look after their child who is having to isolate, may also be entitled to Incapacity Benefit and/or Income Support.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mrs Christian.

1090

Mrs Christian: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I welcome the ERG's additional support packages.

One thing I would just like to raise, obviously the Minister talked about the support for the Isolation Incapacity Benefit and he has already indicated that this does not quite reach all the people, particularly young people who have not contributed enough NI, who support our retail and hospitality industries. Also, there are a lot of pensioners, who I am sure are many of our constituents, who also cannot tap into this and they actually have additional jobs to supplement their pensions, and they are also being left to fall through the cracks.

1095

There are also people who are newly returned to work, as well. These people are falling through the cracks also.

1100

I feel a little bit saddened that we have not really learnt from the same mistakes that we did in the last administration by really not looking at how this support is not actually reaching everybody. I know the intention of the Minister is that he wants to reach everybody and support people when they need to isolate.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

1105

The Speaker: Minister to reply.

The Minister: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

First of all, in relation to the NI contributions test that the Hon. Member has referred to. The NI contributions test for Incapacity Benefit using previous years' payments is the same test that currently exists in the UK, and is actually a requirement of the 1977 Social Security Reciprocal Agreement that we have with the UK. We cannot unilaterally change the NI contributions test for Incapacity Benefit here on Island without first negotiating a change to the 1977 Agreement with the Department of Work and Pensions in the UK. The previous indications we have had when this *has* been raised is that the UK would not be supportive, nor agree to changes to the Agreement in this way.

1110

1115

The key point though, Mr Speaker, is the Hon. Member mentioned there about pensioners and those who are younger and who may not have made the appropriate contributions in previous years. As I said in my initial Answer, there is Income Support as well, which is a means-tested benefit and does not rely on previous contributions. So at both ends of the scale, in relation to pensioners and also those who are younger, certainly I know people who have contacted me that I have directed to Treasury or to the Benefits Team, and they have ended up being able to claim Income Support.

1120

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr Glover.

1125

Mr Glover: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Could the Treasury Minister just confirm that that applies to single self-employed people, who obviously can apply for Incapacity Benefit, but that is hardly touching the surface as they have used savings already during the pandemic?

1130

But what about the situation where their youngsters fall ill and they therefore are not working? What options are open to them, please?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Treasury Minister.

1135

The Minister: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Again, as I said at the end of the original Answer – but I do appreciate the Hon. Member is joining us virtually today so he might have missed it – those who are having to refrain from work to look after their child who is having to isolate may also be entitled to Incapacity Benefit and Income Support.

1140

In relation to those that are self-employed, again, they may be entitled to Incapacity Benefit for the period. And for those that are having severe disruption to their business there is of course the Loan Guarantee Scheme that Government has also set up, working within the banks to help support people.

1145

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mrs Christian.

Mrs Christian: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

1150

We have a micro-business economy on the Isle of Man. My concern is that 84% of our businesses – that is 4,600 businesses on the Isle of Man – employ fewer than nine people. Many and *any* one of these businesses are family businesses and *could* lock down today if they test positive. They could have a whole household and are actually forced to close their business today because of the regulations that went in at 4 a.m. So there is a matter of urgency.

1155

Does the Minister agree that a specific household isolation package is needed *now* to support family businesses following these regulations?

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Minister to reply.

1160

The Minister: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

There is effectively a household isolation package in place because Incapacity Benefit relates to the individual. So in the event the household was isolated – say, you had a husband, wife and two children – they would all potentially be able to claim Incapacity Benefit; or, if not, Income Support.

1165

In relation to the locking down of households I do need to point out, Mr Speaker, that at this current time that relates *only* to those cases where it is suspected to be the Omicron variant. It does not relate to other variants. Obviously, if we started seeing large amounts of those cases on the Island – as Council of Ministers has done throughout this entire pandemic period – we would then have to reconsider our policies.

1170

As I said in my main statement, Mr Speaker, in answer to the Question, in the event of that situation radically changing then ERG will be responsive. I believe the ERG group has been responsive throughout the last administration to business needs, and we would reconsider our position.

1175

The Speaker: Final supplementary on this Question, Mrs Christian.

Mrs Christian: Thank you.

1180 That really disappoints me that the Minister actually believes the isolation incapacity benefit is going to be enough to support a business that has to close down. That means they will not get their revenue for maybe up to two weeks. They may also have to ask other members of staff to not come in.

What I really want to ask the Minister is will he support a business support winter plan document to back up the Public Health Winter Plan document so that businesses can know exactly what is going to happen, and what support there is when we go in and out of levels 1, 2 and 3?

1185 Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Minister to reply.

The Minister: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

1190 The ERG will be meeting tomorrow and we will be announcing what support will be available for businesses over the winter months. It will not just be this month, it will be running through to the end of March, the support that we put in place, because we do recognise it is important to get businesses to that point.

1195 In relation to businesses that may need to close, as I have stated, Mr Speaker, there are other schemes available as well, including the Loan Disruption Guarantee Scheme that was deliberately put in place to help support businesses, and that is still up and running.

Mrs Christian: Putting people in debt –!

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

1.7. Retired people in the south – Isolation and loneliness prevention

The Hon. Member for Arbory, Castletown and Malew (Mr Moorhouse) to ask the Minister for Health and Social Care:

How his Department prevents isolation and loneliness amongst retired people in the south of the Island?

1200 **The Speaker:** We move to Question 7. I call on the Hon. Member for Arbory, Castletown and Malew, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I would like to ask the Minister for Health and Social Care how his Department prevents isolation and loneliness amongst retired people in the south of the Island?

1205 **The Speaker:** I call the Minister for Health and Social Care to reply.

The Minister for Health and Social Care (Mr Hooper): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

1210 One of the main areas of focus for the Wellbeing Partnerships is addressing loneliness. This is being addressed by improving the relationship between third party and statutory services in the delivery of integrated care. Local Area Coordination is a new exciting approach on the Isle of Man to build, inclusive and supportive communities that help people stay strong and resilient and which results in services, which are more personal, local, flexible and accountable.

1215 Local Area Coordination is a long-term, evidence-based approach to: support people of all ages and backgrounds in our communities to help build and pursue their personal vision for a good life; to stay strong, safe and connected as contributing citizens; and to find practical solutions to their own problems wherever possible.

1220 Local area co-ordinators support people of all ages to explore how they can live better lives by taking time to get to know people, building reciprocal and positive relationships and working alongside people. No referrals or assessments are involved. There is no eligibility criteria and no labels. Statutory services such as community nurses, OTs, social workers often come across lonely and isolated individuals and may traditionally have struggled to know where to signpost them. This lack of a clear pathway to access support is also mirrored by concerned relatives, neighbours, Police and other members of our communities.

1225 Wellbeing Partnerships offer a face-to-face direct point of access for anyone to refer themselves or anyone else, with the consent of the person in question, for issues such as loneliness and isolation. Referral co-ordinators can then make onward referrals to the right services or, if more complex, discuss the issues at a multi-professional meeting, which will be tailored to invite the services most likely to be able to provide the support needed.

1230 For example, if a person was referred due to concerns regarding loneliness and isolation we might invite a member of the Southern Befrienders or Age Concern to attend to discuss the case. If there were concerns for the person's mental health then there may be a mental health professional invited. This does not necessarily mean that all these professionals will provide input into the person's case but each individual's unique perspective usually leads to a well-considered and sensible package of support.

1235 Addressing loneliness and isolation, which may wrongly be seen as a lower level health issue, is dependent on thorough and robust third sector support and good working relationships between them and Manx Care. Third-party providers offer a huge range of services across the Island for people of all ages including those of retirement age, including befriending, drop-in services, walk-in groups, meet-ups and various other initiatives to tackle loneliness and isolation. 1240 But this is always at risk of disappearing if they are not able to fundraise.

1245 We aim within the Wellbeing Partnerships to be a one-stop shop for all things well-being, and anyone fitting the description within the Hon. Member's Question would be encouraged to visit their local well-being co-ordinator to discuss their unique concerns. Recruitment is currently underway for two local area co-ordinators on the Isle of Man to support the south of the Island. That is Port Erin, Rushen, Port, St Mary and, of course, Arbory, Castletown, Malew and Santon. We are currently working with each of our local communities to ensure they are part of the process and, where possible, community members may join the community panel who will help select these local area co-ordinators.

1250 **The Speaker:** Supplementary question, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and thank you, Minister, for that detailed Answer.

1255 Is the Minister aware of the challenges faced by The Hub in Port Erin? I am sure he is and it has been mentioned in passing. Can he see any way to actually support this facility that is currently improving the lives of 350 people at the same time as the Southern Wellbeing Centre is being created in the same facility? It looks slightly counterintuitive to let one go and create something new.

Thank you.

1260 **The Speaker:** Minister to reply.

The Minister: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

I am aware of the announcement that was issued by the Southern Community Initiative (SCI) in early November, advising of the forthcoming closure of The Hub in Port Erin. It is recognised

1265 that the loss of this initiative will be a blow to the community and there are work streams underway to work in partnership with the new lead for Housing and Communities to discuss issues like joint commissioning for services.

1270 Neither the local area co-ordinators or Wellbeing Partnerships are intended to replace the contribution of organisations such as community initiatives. Both of these schemes have a separate purpose. However, the plan is to work in partnership to add value. Local area co-ordinators will act as a bridge to the community, building relationships and looking to recognise and create new opportunities; and I know Manx Care are currently working on how they might be able to continue to facilitate the current SCI room offering after the charity sadly closes their doors.

1275 The Hon. Member for Rushen, Dr Haywood, as a Member of the Department, is liaising with Manx Care on possible next steps.

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr Glover.

1280 **Mr Glover:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Will the Minister agree that we need this partnership to be a partnership and there is to be no empire building? Manx Care needs a full understanding of local community, and what is already there, and it is really important that Manx Care and the third sector work together.

Thank you.

1285

The Speaker: Minister to reply.

The Minister: Yes. *(Laughter)*

1290 **The Speaker:** Supplementary question, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

1295 Both the Department and Manx Care have cited the third sector as being a strategic partner, indeed, an essential partner, in delivering the Health and Social Care plans. Has the Minister any thoughts about how the third sector can be supported more effectively at the moment, given the wider challenges due to COVID and other issues?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister to reply.

1300

The Minister: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, and thank you very much to the Hon. Member for asking this question. I would absolutely love to share my thoughts with him on this issue.

1305 The Hon. Member will remember serving alongside me on a working group for the previous Chief Minister, looking at how Government can better support our communities, and a number of reports have been tabled before Tynwald, and I would encourage the Hon. Member and, in fact, all Hon. Members to dust those reports off.

In addition to this, I am sure the Hon. Member will recall the community hubs pilot that is currently being trialled and that I hope will continue to gain traction as we look to deliver improved services in our communities as set out in the draft Island Plan.

1310 In addition to the suggestions in those reports, I am also very keen to work with our new lead for Housing and Communities, the Hon. Member Mr Thomas, on how we can improve the way Government supports and provides funding towards third party organisations by developing a proper model of outcomes-based cross-Government commissioning.

CABINET OFFICE

**1.8. Voter registration promotion –
Online portal**

The Hon. Member for Douglas South (Mrs Maltby) to ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office:

What plans there are to promote voter registration via the online portal by 16- to 18-year-olds and others?

The Speaker: Question 8, I call the Hon. Member for Douglas South, Mrs Maltby.

1315

Mrs Maltby: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I would like to ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans there are to promote voter registration via the online portal by 16- to 18-year-olds and others?

1320

The Speaker: I call on the Minister for the Cabinet Office to reply.

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Ms Lord-Brennan): Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank the Hon. Member for her Question.

1325

In the New Year, the Crown and Elections team will be running a communications campaign as part of the annual electoral registration drive to encourage anybody eligible to register to vote, especially via the online portal. For promoting registration with 16- to 18-year-olds, the team will be working with the Department of Education, Sport and Culture early in 2022 to promote the importance of registering to vote for young people.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

1330

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mrs Maltby.

Mrs Maltby: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and thank you, Ms Lord-Brennan.

1335

I am really encouraged to hear that you are reaching out to Education to better enable people to register online. It should not be just something that we do in election year; it needs to be an annual thing, so that is good to hear.

I would like to know if the Minister has plans to include online registration information when they issue Manx National Insurance cards or within school libraries. How can we make this provision easier for our 16- to 18-year-olds?

1340

The Speaker: Minister to reply.

The Minister: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

1345

At the present time, it would be via the Crown and Elections team promotion of that particular online electoral registration. But I take the Hon. Member's point about there being other opportunities to raise this very point with young people; and might also suggest that that is maybe not just something that is valuable coming from Government interactions, but also from Tynwald interactions or other groups.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

1350

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

1355

Awareness-raising is good, but can we also think about the fundamental issues that go alongside that, in terms of students returning to university and also the closing date for

registration – that occurred incredibly early – I think it was 2nd September, before the schools actually went back. So basic things like that need to go hand in hand in terms of the awareness-raising changes.

Thank you very much.

1360

The Speaker: Minister.

The Minister: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

1365

There is an annual process for this, so it is not something that is necessarily waiting until the final weeks prior to the Election, as the Hon. Member has suggested.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Supplementary, Mr Thomas.

1370

Mr Thomas: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

1375

Sixteen and 17-year olds, like all individuals in the Isle of Man, have a different type of registration; they have individual registration, staring them in the face because of the changes to the law. Does the Minister agree with me that it would be important to set a date when we are going to bring in individual registration and then use that as part of the campaign to persuade people to register to avoid the hundred pounds, or whatever it will be, administrative fine for not registering?

The Speaker: Minister to reply.

1380

The Minister: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I think perhaps the timing of that maybe does need some consideration. Obviously, it is the first time that the latest legislation has been tested in recent times to do with elections, so I will have a look at the interaction of his point on timing with the process and ask the team to look at that.

1385

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Final supplementary, Mrs Maltby.

1390

Mrs Maltby: Yes, just a quick assurance, Mr Speaker, that I also am very happy to hear what the Minister is saying, but we all have a part to play in ensuring eligible voters are registered. I just want to know, when you are talking about this annual drive, whether the Minister would commit to an annual notice of real data on the uptake in voter registration, so that we have a measure of success on that registration drive.

1395

The Speaker: The Minister to reply.

The Minister: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I think that would actually be worthwhile, so I am happy to raise that with the officers in the Crown and Elections team.

1400

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Standing Order 3.5.1(2) suspended to take the remaining Question

The Speaker: Hon. Members, that completes the hour available for Questions.
Mrs Christian.

Mrs Christian: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

1405 I beg to move under Standing Order 3.5.1(2) that the time for Oral Questions be extended to permit the remaining Questions – which is *one* – to be answered at this sitting.
Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: A seconder for that proposal? Mr Moorhouse.

1410 **Mr Moorhouse:** I beg to second.

The Speaker: In which case I put the question to the House that the remaining Question be taken at this point. Those in favour, please say aye; against, no. The ayes have it. The ayes have it.

ENTERPRISE

1.9. COVID-19 economic impact – Engagement with customer-facing businesses

The Hon. Member for Douglas South (Mrs Christian) to ask the Minister for Enterprise:

What engagement his Department has had with customer-facing businesses in order to understand the current economic impact of COVID-19, and what its findings were?

The Speaker: I call on Mrs Christian to ask Question 9.

1415

Mrs Christian: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I would like to ask the Minister for Enterprise what engagement his Department has had with customer-facing businesses in order to understand the current economic impact of COVID-19, and what its findings were?

1420

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: I call on the Minister for Enterprise to reply.

The Minister for Enterprise (Dr Allinson): Thank you, Mr Speaker

1425

I would like to thank the Hon. Member for Douglas South for her Question and for the House giving me the chance to answer it!

1430

I would like to start by saying that we really do appreciate that businesses are facing very significant challenges right now. Many businesses are having difficulties in particular with staff isolating, customers cancelling reservations, and other issues such as rising costs. We are continuing to work with industry to identify the best way to support them. In terms of the engagement, the Department has had with customer-facing businesses, the Business Agency in particular – and DfE more generally – is constantly talking to businesses to understand their situation.

1435

Over the past few weeks I, and officers, have met with stakeholder groups such as the Restaurateurs Association, the Licensed Victuallers Association, Construction Isle of Man and various local authority and traders' groups across the Island. In addition, the Chamber of Commerce has recently surveyed members on our behalf. Only last Friday the Economic Recovery Group met with the Chamber to discuss the results of the survey and the present situation.

1440

In addition to the impact of staff isolating and increasing costs, feedback has identified issues such as concern about the number of cancellations linked to COVID; a drop in customer footfall

due to reduced corporate employee trade; and difficulty with recruitment of staff, especially for many customer-facing businesses. DfE has been participating in a workshop on these topics.

1445 Businesses have faced a very challenging winter season over the pandemic. However, the Department for Enterprise and Treasury are working very hard with businesses to see how they can be supported into spring next year. Following the meeting with the Chamber, the Economic Recovery Group is reviewing a range of options and an announcement will be made shortly. I must stress, as the pandemic situation is developing constantly there is a need for us to adapt but our priority is looking at how we support businesses up to March next year.

Thank you.

1450

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mrs Christian.

Mrs Christian: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

1455 The Minister mentioned a Chamber of Commerce review. Is he able to elaborate how many businesses actually partook in that review?

Also it is my understanding that the Chamber of Commerce, albeit we really do heavily rely on their feedback as a Department, and yourselves as a Government, they still do not represent quite a lot of employees and employed people and businesses – I think of specialised industries such as animal day care, taxi firms, personal trainers, physiotherapists. So how does the DfE currently engage with those sectors to evaluate the economic impact of COVID in *these* industries?

1460

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Minister to reply.

1465 **The Minister:** Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

The Business Agency has co-hosted nine workshops alongside the Chamber of Commerce covering a range of topics for small businesses, and over 470 individuals attended. I think the Hon. Member is quite right that the Chamber obviously represents as many people as they can, but the commerce, retail and hospitality sector on the Isle of Man is incredibly diverse.

1470

That is exactly why, this month, there was the successful launch by the Chamber of a Local Economy Forum specifically looking at trying to engage small businesses who otherwise may be either too busy or unable to do so. One of the members of the Chamber, Carol Glover, did point out, as the Hon. Member has previously said in one of her statements, that we have on the Island over four and a half thousand businesses that are seen as micro-businesses, employing fewer than nine people. So it is very important both for the DfE and the Chamber – and Government more generally – to engage with these various businesses, not only to support them but also hear their views.

1475

In terms of the engagement with the Chamber, as I said in my initial statement on Friday, the Economic Recovery Group met with the Chamber and they carried out a survey in the week commencing 22nd November, particularly looking at customer-facing businesses. They had 92 responses from a range of businesses there, particularly looking at hair and beauty, retail, hospitality and also food and beverage. One of the most interesting parts of that was when people who took part in the survey were asked: ‘The main issues negatively impacting on your business currently?’ And 70% said it was really the fear customers had about going out.

1480

1485 Which is why I welcome the statement made at the start of this session by the Chief Minister, in terms of the appropriate and responsive measures that we have brought in this week. Not only to protect our population, but to build that resilience and build that confidence within the population to go out and to actually use those local services to buy local, to drink and eat local, and to actually make sure that we can not only keep our Island safe but keep the economy going through this very uncertain time.

1490

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr Thomas.

Mr Thomas: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

1495 Does the Minister regard the PricewaterhouseCoopers report that was commissioned as being an engagement with customer-facing business?

And, given that that report is now published, what weight does the Minister give the findings of that report in his thinking about the economic impact, and how to respond to that economic impact?

1500

The Speaker: Minister to reply.

The Minister: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

1505 I assume that the Hon. Member is referring to the PricewaterhouseCoopers report, which was carried out in April this year and published on 3rd June. Unfortunately, they did identify one of the major problems in terms of interacting with the business sector: they had 16 interviews and received 22 qualifying responses.

1510 One of the problems they highlighted was the fatigue – and the amount of work – a lot of small businesses are under; and the fact that some of them are fed up constantly responding to consultations from Government and from the Chamber. That is why the Department for Enterprise, Treasury and Government as a whole are reaching out both to the representatives, and to those local businesses individually, to try to make sure that we actually know the problems they are currently going through and can respond appropriately to support them through the winter period.

1515 Thank you.

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mrs Christian.

Mrs Christian: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

1520 Thank you for your answer, Minister. I hear that the main issue is customer confidence. I am also pleased to hear the Chief Minister reaffirm today that it is business as usual with a mask. It is socialise as normal, just take an LFT, and only go out if negative.

So could I ask the Department, the Minister, what is he planning to do to tackle this main issue – as not everybody listens to the House of Keys?

1525 Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Shame on them! *(Laughter)*

Minister to reply.

1530 **The Minister:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I think what is really important – not just for the Department for Enterprise but for all Government Departments, and Government in general – is to have consistent messaging and consistent communications, both with the business sector and with the general population that whilst there is uncertainty over the Omicron variant we are dealing with this in an appropriate, proportionate way.

1535

We are trying to make sure that, whilst we have brought in extra mitigation methods this week, those will be reviewed as we learn more information about this variant of concern. But also that we will *absolutely* support the local community, the Health and Social Care sector and local business to get through what could be a difficult winter, but ultimately has to be an enjoyable festival. Thank you.

1540

The Speaker: Further supplementary, Mr Thomas.

Mr Thomas: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

1545 Just for clarity, given that the Minister made such a big thing about an assumption that this was the PricewaterhouseCoopers report from April and June 2021, are there any *other* reports from Pricewaterhouse, or anybody else, (*Laughter*) that he has seen that say something different from the PricewaterhouseCoopers report?

The Speaker: Minister to reply.

1550

The Minister: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

1555 In terms of the PricewaterhouseCoopers report, the only one I am necessarily aware of at the moment, and which I have in my hand, is the Domestic Economy Review that was carried out earlier on this year. But obviously there is ongoing work and ongoing reviews from a whole range of organisations and bodies throughout this period to try to gauge the impact – the economic impacts, but also social and personal impacts – of the pandemic on our population.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Final supplementary, Mrs Christian.

1560

Mrs Christian: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

1565 I know the Minister is working in a very fast, reactive situation right now and I am sure he is also getting information from many hospitality sectors, but we are hearing in the last 24 hours of *many* cancellations of Christmas parties, or events – smaller events, not necessarily larger ones. I am literally getting text messages as I am stood here, hearing *many* are cancelling today.

1570 What is his Department doing to try and liaise with businesses, to reassure them that actually just asking for an LFT to go to these events ...? And they should *try* and support the industry; right now it is *so* important. We need to get that message out today, before more cancellations happen, that it is safe to go to these events and take an LFT before you go. How is his Department going to communicate that? What are his plans to do that in the next couple of days?

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Minister to reply.

1575 **The Minister:** Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

As *you* have pointed out, I hope more people listen to the House of Keys broadcasts so that they can hear this quite clear messaging from Government that we are taking appropriate measures to ensure that the population is as safe as possible during this period.

1580 We, in terms of the Department for Enterprise, are liaising directly with businesses and with the Chamber of Commerce today, in terms of the mitigations that were mentioned and brought forward by the Chief Minister on Sunday and reiterated again this morning, and in terms of their implication for face-to-face business. Also, as the Treasury Minister has stated, the Economic Recovery Group will be meeting again this week, and an announcement will be made in terms of the support to be made available for local businesses. In terms of the overall public confidence, I would like to think that by seeing the quick and appropriate response from Government to this variant of concern, local people can be absolutely assured that Government, the Council of Ministers and the whole population are working together to actually make sure we keep our Island safe. Also to make sure we can go about our lives in as normal and safe a way as possible.

1590 Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Members, that concludes the business before the House this morning. Our next sitting is 10 o'clock on Tuesday, 7th December in our own Chamber.

The House adjourned at 11.47 a.m.