



TYNWALD COURT OFFICIAL REPORT

RECORTYS OIKOIL
QUAIYL TINVAAL

PROCEEDINGS DAALTYN

(HANSARD)

Douglas, Tuesday, 19th May 2026

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Volume 143, No. 17

ISSN 1742-2256

Present:

The President of Tynwald (Hon. L D Skelly)

In the Council:

The Attorney General (Mr W H Wannenburgh),
Mrs T M August-Phillips, Mr G R Clueit, Mr P H Craine, Mrs D Kelsey,
Mr R J Mercer, Mrs K Morphet, Mr P H Reid
with Ms J Corkish, Deputy Clerk of Tynwald.

In the Keys:

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);
Hon. T D Johnston (Ayre and Michael);
Mrs C A Corlett and Hon. 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 Hon. C S B Christian (Douglas South);
Hon. D H P Caine and Mr A J Smith (Garff);
Ms 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 Ms J M Edge (Onchan);
Mr L L Hooper and Dr A J Allinson (Ramsey);
Dr M E K Haywood (Rushen)
with Mr J D C King, Clerk of Tynwald.

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Tynwald

The Court met at 10 a.m.

[MR PRESIDENT in the Chair]

The Deputy Clerk: Hon. Members, please be upstanding for the President of Tynwald.

The President: Moghrey mie, Olteynyn Onnoroil.

5 **Members:** Moghrey mie, Eaghtyrane.

The President: The Chaplain will lead us in prayer.

PRAYERS

The Chaplain

Leave of absence granted

The President: Hon. Members, I have given leave of absence to Mrs Kinnish and the Lord Bishop for the sitting; and the Attorney-General for this morning.

Bills for signature

10 **The President:** The following Bills are ready for signature: City of Douglas 2025; Foundations (Amendment) Bill 2025; Safeguarding (Amendment) Bill 2025; and the Isle of Man Constitution Bill 2023. With the consent of the Court, they will be circulated for signing while we proceed with other business. Is the Court content? (**Members:** Agreed.) Thank you.

Papers laid before the Court

15 **The President:** We turn to Item 2 and I call on the Clerk to lay papers.

The Clerk: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane. Ta mee cur roish y Whaiyl ny pabyryn enmyssit ayns aynr jees jeh'n Chlaare Obbyr.

Thank you, Mr President. I lay before the Court the papers listed at Item 2 of the Order Paper.

Items subject to motion that have had four weeks on the Register of Business

Items for affirmative resolution

Value Added Tax Act 1996

Value Added Tax Act 1996 (Amendment) Order 2026 [[SD 2026/0078](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Customs and Excise Act 1993

Customs and Excise Acts (Application) (Amendment) Order 2026 [[SD 2026/0077](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Items for approval

National Health Service Act 2001

National Health Service (Charges for Drugs and Appliances) (Amendment) Regulations 2026 [[SD 2026/0105](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

War Memorials Act 2016

War Memorials (Planning) (Amendment) Order 2026 [[SD 2026/0084](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Customs and Excise Management Act 1986

Customs and Excise Management Act 1986 (Amendment) Order 2026 [[SD 2026/0076](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Pension Schemes Act 1995

Pension Schemes Legislation (Application) Order 2026 [[SD 2026/0069](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Social Security Administration Act 1992

Social Security Benefits Up-rating (No. 2) Order 2026 [[SD 2026/0085](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Beneficial Ownership Act 2017

Beneficial Ownership Act 2017 (Amendment) Order 2026 [[SD 2026/0097](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Reports

Department of Education, Sport and Culture – Progress update on the Standing Committee of Tynwald on Public Accounts – Second Report for the Session 2024-25: Student Awards [[GD 2026/0034](#)]

Council of Ministers' Report – Update on the Island Plan Built Environment Reform Programme Strategic Objective 4: "Ensuring Attractiveness of Brownfield Development to help protect the Island's Greenfields and Landscape Beauty activity" and the Housing and Communities Board "Vibrant Communities" workstream [[GD 2026/0031](#)]

Tynwald Management Committee's Second Report for the Session 2025/26 – Tynwald Honours: Peter Kelly MBE CP RBV [[PP 2026/0070](#)]

Items subject to motion that have not had four weeks on the Register of Business

Items for approval

Elections (Keys and Local Authorities) Act 2020

Elections (Keys and Local Authorities) (Amendment) Regulations 2026 [[SD 2026/0039](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Beneficial Ownership Act 2017

Beneficial Ownership Information Regulations 2026 [[SD 2026/0098](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Items not subject to motion

Documents subject to negative resolution

Social Services Act 2011

Department of Health and Social Care Fees (Amendment) Order 2026 [[SD 2026/0059](#)]
[[MEMO](#)]

High Court Act 1991

Rules of the High Court of Justice (Amendment) 2026 [[SD 2026/0045](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Customs and Excise Duties (General Reliefs) Act 1986

Travellers' Allowances (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 2026 [[SD 2026/0079](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Gaming Betting and Lotteries Act 1988

Crown Green Bowling Festival Order 2026 [[SD 2026/0018](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Crown Green Bowling Festival Order (No.2) 2026 [[SD 2026/0019](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Airports and Civil Aviation Act 1987

Civil Aviation (Restriction of Flying) (TT - Red Arrows Display) Regulations 2026
[[SD 2026/0104](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Legislation Act 2015

Legislation (Change of Tynwald Procedure - Beneficial Ownership Act 2017) Order 2026
[[SD 2026/0106](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Document subject to disapproval resolution

Immigration Act 1971

Statement of Changes in Immigration Rules (No.2) 2026 [[SD 2026/0092](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Documents subject to laying only

Isle of Man Financial Services Authority – Beneficial Ownership Act 2017 Guidance April 2026
[[GC 2026/0016](#)]

Social Security Pensions Act 1975

Pensions Increase (Annual Review) Order 2026 [[SD 2026/0089](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Town and Country Planning Act 1999

Town and Country Planning (Douglas Head) Conservation Area Order 2026
[[SD 2026/0066](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

War Memorials Act 2016

War Memorials (Creation and Designation) Rules 2026 [[SD 2026/0083](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Currency Act 1992

Currency (National Parks of the British Isles Collection) 10 Pence Coin Order 2026
[[SD 2026/0042](#)]

Reports

Council of Ministers' Annual Report on Poverty Measures [[GD 2026/0021](#)]

Superannuation (Manual Workers) (No.1) Scheme 1973 – Public Sector Pensions Authority Annual Report and Accounts for year ended 31 March 2025 [[GD 2026/0043](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Isle of Man Government Unified Scheme 2011 – Public Sector Pensions Authority Annual Report and Accounts for year ended 31 March 2025 [[GD 2026/0037](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Isle of Man Teachers' Pension Scheme 2025 (previously the Teachers' Superannuation Order 2011) – Public Sector Pensions Authority Annual Report and Accounts for year ended 31 March 2025 [[GD 2026/0038](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Police Pensions Regulations 2010 – Public Sector Pensions Authority Annual Report and Accounts for year ended 31 March 2025 [[GD 2026/0039](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Police Pensions Regulations 1991 – Public Sector Pensions Authority Annual Report and Accounts for year ended 31 March 2025 [[GD 2026/0040](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Judicial Pension Scheme 2004 – Public Sector Pensions Authority Annual Report and Accounts for year ended 31 March 2025 [[GD 2026/0041](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Judicial Pension Scheme 1992 – Public Sector Pensions Authority Annual Report and Accounts for year ended 31 March 2025 [[GD 2026/0042](#)] [[MEMO](#)]

Department of Health and Social Care – Nursing, Residential and Home Care – Report to Tynwald Court [[GD 2026/0044](#)]

Isle of Man Legal Aid Committee Report 2024-25 [[GD 2026/0029](#)]

Public Health Isle of Man – Suicide Prevention Strategy 2023-2027: Annual Update [[GD 2026/0046](#)]

Acting Tynwald Commissioner for Administration (Felicity A Kniveton) Report on Case [[TCA 2024/0009](#)]

Tynwald Commissioner for Administration Ninth Annual Report April 2026 [[PP 2026/0072](#)]

Select Committee of Tynwald on Poverty (2021) – First Report for the Session 2025-26 – Child Poverty: Education and Health Solutions [[PP 2026/0085](#)]

Economic Policy Review Committee – Second Report for the Session 2025-26 – The Department for Enterprise and the Executive Agencies [[PP 2026/0087](#)]

Ecclesiastical Committee of Tynwald – First Report for the Session 2025-26 – Role of the Committee in the Church Legislation Procedure [[PP 2026/0083](#)]

Questions

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

1. Noble's Hospital procedure suspension 12th May 2026 – Why all adult inpatient and day cases suspended

The Hon. Member for Onchan, Ms Edge, to ask the Minister for Health and Social Care:

Why all adult inpatient and day case procedures at Noble's Hospital were suspended on 12th May 2026; and if she will make a statement.

20 **The President:** We turn to Item 3, Questions. We have an Urgent Question and I call on the Hon. Member for Onchan, Ms Edge.

Ms Edge: Thank you, Mr President.

 I would like to ask the Minister for Health and Social Care why all adult inpatient and day case
25 procedures at Noble's Hospital were suspended on 12th May 2026; and if she will make a statement?

 Thank you.

The President: I call on Shirveishagh Slaynt as Kiarail y Theay to reply.

30

The Minister for Health and Social Care (Ms Christian): Thank you, Mr President.

 Let me begin by thanking the Hon. Member for this Question as it provides a timely opportunity to further update Members of Tynwald and the wider public.

 Adult inpatient and day case procedures at Noble's Hospital were temporarily suspended
35 from Tuesday last week, 12th May, until yesterday, Monday. This was not a routine occurrence. It followed a period of exceptional operational pressure during which Manx Care took the very unusual step of escalating to OPEL 4, the highest level of recognised operational pressures escalation framework which is used to manage demand patient flow and safety across acute services. In practical terms, OPEL 4 means that the pressure is severe, bed occupancy is
40 exceptionally high, further escalation action is required and services must prioritise urgent and emergency care in order to protect patient safety and dignity.

 I would also like to address the initial publication communication. The first wording issued on 12th May was inaccurate as it referred to all inpatient and day case procedures, when in fact the temporary suspension applied to adult inpatient day case procedures only. Urgent treatment
45 continued throughout, including children's procedures and cancer-related care, and the wording was corrected later that same day. Manx Care apologises for confusion this may have caused to patients, families and the wider public.

 As part of the OPEL 4 response, elective activity was stepped down. Additional monitoring and escalation arrangements were activated and clinical teams redeployed capacity to protect
50 urgent and emergency care. Nineteen elective cases were stood down, releasing 28 additional beds. Affected patients are being contacted directly and actively rebooked with patients prioritised on the basis of clinical need and waiting time, rather than returned to the end of the queue. Manx Care is working towards rescheduling affected patients within 28 days wherever operationally possible.

55 The public information and further operational data provided by Manx Care helped to explain why that decision was taken. Over the 48 hours of 12th and 13th May, around 280 patients attended the Emergency Department, with around 60 admissions during that period. I am

further advised that attendees had already been running at between 120 and 140 patients in a 24-hour period, with a usual admission conversion rate of around 17% to 19%, but that this increased significantly during that period in question.

At the same time, discharges were not keeping pace with admissions. Around 12 patients were waiting for an inpatient bed in the Emergency Department and both adult bed occupancy and critical care occupancy had reached 98.9%. Those were the immediate pressures that led to the escalation.

This should also be seen in context. I am advised that this is only the second occasion in the past 18 months on which Manx Care has had to apply a true OPEL 4 response involving the standing down of elective activity. That demonstrates that this was not routine practice, but a response to an exceptional surge in demand. At the same time the ward refurbishment programme, including Ward 2 being out of use while the clinical decision unit (CDU) is developed, and the temporary relocation of Martin Ward in Ramsey, have reduced flexibility within the Hospital and contributed to the challenge of managing flow.

More broadly, Mr President, I am advised that this remains a multifactorial issue involving demand, bed availability, patient flow and discharge. However, the immediate trigger for the OPEL 4 position was the sudden spike in emergency attendances with admissions over that 48-hour period. It would therefore be more accurate to say that the existing capacity constraints contributed to the pressure, but that the escalation itself was triggered by a sudden and exceptional surge in emergency demand and admissions.

The Department has commissioned an urgent independent review of bed capacity at Noble's Hospital. I am advised that engagement will commence this week and a report is expected by the end of May, and I am also advised that the interim 12-space clinical decision unit has been delayed because additional flooring issues were discovered during the Ward 2 refurbishment. However, that work is now under way and completion is expected by end of July, with operational benefit from early August.

Pressures began to stabilise within around 48 hours, and services stepped down from OPEL 4 to OPEL 3 as demand became more manageable, although the Hospital has remained very busy and capacity continues to be monitored closely. Planning for the TT period remains in hand through a dedicated operational pressure plan, which has been finalised, signed off and will be published this week.

Above all, I want to acknowledge the disruption and disappointment that caused for the patients and families directly affected. These decisions are never taken lightly. They are taken only when clinicians judge that immediate action is necessary to protect patient safety and dignity across the Hospital. Our priority is now to ensure that those whose treatment was postponed are supported, kept informed and are rebooked as quickly as possible, while continuing to provide safe care for everyone who needs urgent treatment.

Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Supplementary, Ms Edge.

Ms Edge: Thank you, Mr President.

I would like to ask the Minister what a true OPEL 4 is, different to what an OPEL 4 is, and that it is only on two occasions? There have been previous Written Answers that have shown OPEL 4 previously, but can she also confirm who was involved in making that decision and were there any clinicians, senior in the Hospital, making those decisions?

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Thank you, Mr President.

My understanding is that true OPEL 4 would obviously include standing down of the adult day elective procedures.

110 With regard to who would have been involved in those decisions, it would have been obviously the operational leads and also the clinical leads for each of the Departments that would have helped to contribute to those decisions.
Thank you, Mr President.

115 **The President:** Supplementary, Mr Glover.

Mr Glover: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.
The Shirveishagh mentioned 280 patients attending the Emergency Department, and far from discouraging people from going to the Emergency Department, how many of that 280 could
120 have got help elsewhere? Is there an education piece that the Department of Health needs to re-institute about what other options are available to people?

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

125 **The Minister:** Thank you, Mr President.

There is analysis happening currently, obviously on the situation from last week, but a formal debrief and review of the OPEL 4 event is being undertaken so that Manx Care can identify what triggered the escalation, what worked well and what needs to change. Some of that work has already begun through the current system of wide discharge and flow improvement activity. The
130 purpose is to ensure that any learning is translated into practical action to strengthen resilience, improve flow and reduce the risk of a similar escalation happening again.

The President: Supplementary, Dr Haywood.

135 **Dr Haywood:** Thank you, Mr President.

The Minister has spent a lot of time telling us what happened but not necessarily why, and so I am interested to hear that there is some analysis going on. Is that analysis looking at the reasons for those people presenting at the Emergency Department and has consideration been given to the fact that you have got the minor injuries unit not taking people at the moment, and
140 so actually you are diverting people down there? Will that analysis include the trends across time because this spike probably is ... you have probably come close to it, I would think, before? The Minister is smiling which maybe indicates that she knows the answer to that.

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

145 **The Minister:** Yes, I am advised that the analysis will include why over this period and obviously looking at previously before.

With regard to the closure of the Ramsey Minor Injuries Unit, obviously that has reopened on Monday, so that will obviously support this weekend going forward. I mentioned in my original
150 Answer that the pressures at Noble's was multifactorial but I am advised that absolutely the temporary loss of flexibility caused by the situation in Ramsey has been a contributory factor. Before its closure, the Ramsey Minor Injuries Unit had been seeing around 40 patients a day, and the temporary relocation of Martin Ward patients has also reduced flexibility within the wider system. Re-opening services in Ramsey should therefore help relieve some pressure,
155 although it was not the sole explanation for the OPEL 4 event.

Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Supplementary, Ms Edge.

160 **Ms Edge:** Thank you, Mr President.

I want to focus on this definition change of an OPEL 4 and an OPEL 4 plus that it sounds like, which has led to elective care patients, I believe – and whether the Minister can confirm this – were already on trolleys outside theatre ready to go in when cancellations took place. That does not sound like planning for a plus OPEL 4 to me. With regard to the previous answers, we were told when we were in OPEL 4 it was 259 beds. How many beds were available on this particular date and can she please send the change and step up from an OPEL 4 to an OPEL 4 plus that has been used to cancel electives for people waiting in corridors?

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Thank you, Mr President.

Absolutely, a lot of those questions are beyond my technical ability, Hon. Member, but I certainly can get the clinical definition change, how many beds were occupied on that day and what is the change step for the Hon. Member, and supply that to all the Tynwald Members.

Thank you.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Glover.

Mr Glover: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

Just going back to my original question, if the Minister could just touch on public awareness of other options apart from the Emergency Department.

She also mentioned that the departments in Manx Care are ready for the TT period, which is another time of obvious pressure there. With the remaining closure of Ward 2, how much more is that amplified?

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Thank you, Mr President.

The Hon. Member is correct and he obviously was in a SAPRC hearing yesterday where that was fully explained by the interim operational director in terms of the public awareness and other options. He did raise in that meeting that there is a public health need to try and educate, but he absolutely was very adamant that we must never tell patients that they should not attend A&E. But there obviously is a balance to strike be able to give that education and increase that education.

With regard to the TT operating plan, it was also confirmed to the Hon. Member during that session that there is a dedicated TT operational pressure plan with defined governance, escalation processes and major trauma support arrangements, including the necessary memorandum of understanding. It has been finalised and signed off this week and, as I said, it will be published.

No additional beds have been created specifically for TT, but the plan is designed to strengthen resilience through daily oversight of the Emergency Department status, bed capacity, critical care, theatre staffing and OPEL level. TT readiness is being managed through a dedicated operational pressure plan with clear safe-to-start governance that explicitly considers system pressure. The current mitigation includes system-wide discharge and flow improvement work, daily TT huddles and operational proformas that track Emergency Department status, bed capacity, critical care, theatre staffing and OPEL levels, so that clear and early action can be taken before pressures escalate.

Hon. Members, I did attend the Hospital yesterday and I can say that obviously – I went in the afternoon, it was a Monday afternoon – it was again an exceptionally busy afternoon. There were about 80 attendances at that moment that had arrived within A&E, but I can say I did see absolutely excellent work from the A&E staff moving through to the wards also. It was obviously a lot calmer in the other wards, but it really is an absolute credit to those staff.

I also saw the extra teams that are already here in terms of the ambulance teams and I met with them, which was also very helpful. So there is extra staffing which will aid for this. But I think the most important thing is we have got through obviously many TTs before but obviously patient safety and emergency care is important. So if people need that emergency care, the teams have to be able to respond to that and that is always a clinical decision.

Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr President.

In the initial Answer, the Minister identified that the reason was the beds, and she made reference to 19 beds being freed up. She also made reference to a figure of 98.9% of bed occupancy. Is she able to give us an indication of how many beds were available? I have done a quick calculation, it is probably less than two and a half, which really is a critical situation.

We have heard before about the independent review that is going on looking at bed availability. That has not been raised so far this morning. Can we have an update please in terms of that area? Can I have a speed up ...? There are clear issues with bed availability and if an independent review is taking place now, how soon can we get answers?

It is also a month since 75 medics identified this as being a key area. We are heading towards TT, and the same issues are coming up over and over again. The Minister has tried to provide some reassurance this morning, but does she actually feel she has gone far enough?

Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Thank you, Mr President.

I am not sure if the Hon. Member perhaps could, because I escalated my Answer to Members so it does actually answer some of his questions. It was actually 28 beds that were freed up. That is two wards. That was Ward 11 and Ward 12. I also gave an update in my initial Answer on the rapid review and, as I said – I can repeat it – the urgent independent review is commencing this week. There were some stakeholder engagements last week as well and we expect that to be completed by the end of May.

I will be meeting with the gentleman who is doing the review this week as well and we obviously are going to be asking him to look at the lessons last week to help us to make sure that those planning processes are good and are fit for purpose to get that assurance as a Department. That is our responsibility.

I think they were his only questions. Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Supplementary, Ms Edge.

Ms Edge: Thank you, Mr President.

I heard the Minister talk about a dedicated TT plan. Is there a dedicated Manx residents plan for OPEL 4? And especially if there is a 98.9% bed occupancy, that would be classed as in special measures in the UK.

So what is the OPEL 4, and the OPEL 4 plus that we have heard about today, plan for Manx residents going forward, as it is clear to me, in the original Answer, the Minister said there was 280 patients through A&E that particular day with 60 admissions. At what point during that 60 admissions does a senior individual in Manx Care say, 'We are admitting five people, we are going to run out of beds with the next five' so it does not get to 60 before it becomes crisis point and people could be lying on trolleys ready to go into theatre? They must have had a bed if they were already in ready to go to theatre.

265 I know the Minister cannot confirm that today but I hope when she does, if that was the case with any individuals on our Island, why was that allowed to happen?

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

270 **The Minister:** Thank you, Mr President.

Just to put this in perspective – and I do not mean to disregard what happened obviously last week, because it was exceptional circumstances – the average amount of time that an NHS trust would go into OPEL 4 is about 20 days, and some of those NHS trusts record 125 days going into OPEL 4. Just to put a scenario in terms of that, it is really important this is a normal process for a hospital to have an escalation process of OPEL 4.

275 The Hon. Member mentioned about the amount of patients that came in, it was 280 patients. The 60 patients that were the intake is an unusual amount. It is normal, as I said in my original Answer, for about 17% to 19%, sometimes as low as 14%. That admission rate was particularly high and that is what we do need to look into in that investigation, to understand why that was particularly high on that day.

280 I certainly have not been advised of any scenarios where there was a bed in a corridor on that day, Hon. Member. I do believe that the situation happened fast in terms of the admissions. There were over a hundred calls to the 999 ambulance on that day. No one could have anticipated that on any given day on the Isle of Man and that is why OPEL 4 procedures are there to kick in, to make sure that we prioritise urgent and emergency care.

285 Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Glover.

Mr Glover: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

290 The Shirveishagh may have mentioned this in their answer but I will just get confirmation on when Ward 2 is likely to come back online. Furthermore, the elephant in the room really, it has been acknowledged by the Minister, acknowledged by Manx Care that the Emergency Department is not fit for purpose anymore, in terms of there are plans to reconfigure or expand the current Emergency Department. When are those plans likely to come forward and how long will they take to come to fruition?

295

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Thank you, Mr President.

300 As I said in my earlier answer, yes, Ward 2 is due to come back online at the end of July. We are obviously working with our Dol partners in terms of being able to do that as fast as we can and I do know that they have been working very reactively. They were there yesterday, I understand, working on this, but the flooring does need quite some extensive work.

Sorry, Hon. Member, could you remind me of the second part to your question?

305

The President: Over to you, Mr Glover.

Mr Glover: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

310 Yes, the Emergency Department, the Minister herself has acknowledged it in previous weeks, (The Minister: Got it.) and Manx Care have acknowledged, that the current Emergency Department is too small. So when are plans going to come forward for it to be reconfigured and expanded, and when are those then likely to come to fruition?

The Minister: Thank you, Hon. Member.

315 I think I have updated in terms of this in the other place. The Project Development Fund (PDF) funding has been approved by the Treasury and work is under way for those design plans to be drawn up. Again, remember we are the customer, so we will be working again with the Project Management Unit (PMU) to work out that calendar and that time and action plan. That is not something that is going to come online fast, which is why the rapid bed review is so
320 important, so that we can ensure that we have got the mitigations between now and then, and to make sure that we ensure that we do have enough bed capacity.

Thank you, Hon. Member.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Callister.

325

Mr Callister: Thank you, Mr President.

I do thank the Health Minister for all the information this morning. Just to follow on from the question just tabled by my colleague from Arbory, Castletown and Malew in respect of future planning, I thought – I am doing this from memory – that the original plan for the Noble's
330 Hospital had an A&E department that could cope with a population of around 100,000 people, but parts of the A&E was sectioned off and given to other parts of the Hospital. Is it time to actually look at the original plan again and actually put the A&E department back to how it was originally designed from the plans going back into the 1990s?

335 **The President:** Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Hon. Member, I have spoken to the clinicians in the A&E and the A&E, in the sense of the way that it is currently structured, is not structured in a modern healthcare way. The flow is very restrictive. That will need to be addressed in a new A&E build. That is
340 exceptionally important. This building was built almost 27 years ago.

Yes, it is fit for this population. However, modern medicine obviously has changed and also ... I can certainly supply the Hon. Member with the request to Treasury. There is analysis on that and the size of the Department is way out of sync of what the size of Departments in the UK are. I have not got those exact figures, but we are exceptionally a smaller A&E department compared
345 to what you would have in the UK and that absolutely needs to be addressed.

I am really sorry that that has not been addressed sooner. I have been in this post for nearly 18 months and it is certainly something that was brought to my attention very quickly and I have acted on that. It has been really important that we get those plans in, but we must acknowledge that this is not something that will happen overnight. But we are progressing with those plans
350 and that is absolutely a priority.

It is not just about obviously the patients and about the Manx public, this is absolutely about our staff and giving them the best ability to be able to have a better working environment. That is not just a building, that will also be technology as well. Having the single patient record is also extremely important. All of these factors will really help in the future. As I said, I am sorry that
355 that has not progressed as fast in this administration as I would like it, but I am committed, since I have been in this job, to push this through.

Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Final supplementary, Ms Edge.

360

Ms Edge: Thank you, Mr President.

Actually, when the Hospital opened in 2003 there were 360 beds and A&E was built for a population of 85,000, not 100,000. So it is ready for some review.

What I want to ask the Minister is we have heard a lot about the bed review. Clearly when
365 the Hospital opened – and my hon. colleague for Onchan asked the right question – there were 360 available beds, we are down to about 170. So we have halved it. Our population has maybe

reached 85,000. So there is something more significantly changed within our Hospital setting. I am not saying that has happened just in Manx Care's time.

370 Can the Minister confirm, the rapid bed review, which was promised in March, is now here in May and we have not seen it, the Minister's discussing it with the consultants ... when will we see that report and how will that feed into the future planning of Noble's and getting those beds back up to meet the population level, which in 2003 they knew we needed 360 beds, Mr President?

375 **The President:** Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Thank you, Mr President.

380 I have said in other places that this bed review not only is important to look at the decisions that have been made in terms of the CDU, in terms of also an additional bed capacity of an additional 14 beds, to look at that to see whether that is enough. That is really what the bed review is about: to look at what other options for us as a Department and also for the Isle of Man public to get assurance around that.

385 I completely understand the Hon. Member has raised this bed issue before; even before I became Minister she has raised this several times. This is absolutely something that needs to be done and she is absolutely right that we need to feed this information and the solutions ... These solutions are not going to come from somebody from across, these solutions are going to come from the clinicians working in the Hospital right now. That is what the stakeholder group is so ... why it is so important to get their participation to be able to make sure that this is fit for purpose. As I said, that is what we are working towards.

390 The Hon. Member did make a point that I announced that there would be a bed review; I think that might have been April. We obviously have gone through a tender process – a quick tender process – and I think we have done that quite fast. I have been getting updates daily on this from the Department and from the exec in charge of that.

395 I do think, as I said in my original Answer – I am sorry, I do not think, I know I said in my original Answer – we expect that review to be completed by the end of May. I will confirm with Hon. Members when that can be ... Obviously we will need to analyse it, but we will be able to share that with you and what proposals will come from that for future planning and for intermediate planning, if needed.

400 Thank you.

The President: Before we move on to our starred Question 2, I would just remind Ministers and Chairs that your initial Answers are supposed to be three minutes long. If you wish to have a more wholesome Answer, please circulate that in advance, because that will be more beneficial for the Members.

2. Ramsey and District Cottage Hospital – Reopening plans

The Hon. Member for Ramsey, Mr Hooper, to ask the Minister for Health and Social Care:

What the plans are for reopening Ramsey and District Cottage Hospital; and if she will make a statement.

405 **The President:** Now moving on to our Question 2, I call on the Hon. Member for Ramsey, Mr Hooper.

Mr Hooper: Thank you very much, Mr President.

I would like to ask the Minister for Health and Social Care what the plans are for reopening Ramsey and District Cottage Hospital; and if she will make a statement?

The President: I call on Shirveishagh Slaynt as Kiarail y Theay to reply.

The Minister for Health and Social Care (Ms Christian): Thank you, Mr President.

If I may, I would just like to respond to that point that you made. I did circulate my original Answer. (**The President:** You did?) I did. It was sent last night and I have also sent it for one of the other Questions going ahead. So I have absolutely applied that rule. (**The President:** Thank you.) I hope that did not fall into my three minutes so it starts now. (Laughter)

The President: Not all the Members picked up on it.

The Minister: Thank you very much; I shall speak quickly then.

Mr President, Ramsey and District Cottage Hospital remains an important part of the health and social care offer for the north of the Island. Our priority is to resource safe and local access to key services as quickly as possible, while being clear with patients, service users, staff, stakeholders and the general public about what can return now, what requires interim accommodation and what will need to be considered as part of the longer-term future of the site.

Some of the services are already operating from Ramsey District and Cottage Hospital with outpatient activity, blood clinic and ECG services continuing from Martin Ward. In terms of services returning to the site, the Minor Injuries Unit, plain film X-ray, ultrasound and bone densitometry services returned to the site yesterday – Monday. This means that there is already a continued on-site presence at Ramsey while this staged restoration progresses.

This staged progress restoration is important not only for restoring local access in the north, but also for improving wider system resilience and helping to reduce avoidable pressure elsewhere. Alongside this we are using temporary modular accommodation to bring further services back to Ramsey safely and more quickly than would be possible if we waited for the full remediation of the wider site.

A modular dental unit is planned to be available from 21st June. Phototherapy is expected to restart in July when the new modular unit specifically for dermatology is opened. Modular solutions for renal dialysis are also being progressed with current planning assumptions pointing towards the end of July. Inpatient rehabilitation continues from Noble's Hospital for now and will be considered as part of the next phase of planning towards the end of July.

These interim units will allow essential services to return locally while the longer-term plan for the site is developed. Beyond these immediate steps, DHSC, Manx Care and DoI are working together on the longer-term strategic plan for health and social care services in the north. A recent condition survey indicates significant building issues at the site, with costs potentially in the range of £6 million to £10 million. This means wider strategic planning is required rather than simply returning all services to the existing building.

Regular strategic meetings are being held and the next scheduled meeting will be used to agree responsibilities, timescales and deliverables for the next stage of work. That work will need to consider the future estate, service reconfiguration, workforce and affordability while recognising the strategic importance of Ramsey for local access and wider system resilience.

We also recognise the importance of engagement and keeping the public and Members informed and the latest service tables and dates will be published on the Manx Care website and have been circulated to Members ahead of this sitting. Further public engagement is planned so that stakeholders and the community can be kept updated as developed.

I hope that was three minutes. Thank you, Mr President.

460 **The President:** Supplementary, Mr Hooper.

Mr Hooper: Thank you very much, Mr President.

 I would like to thank the Minister for that Answer, and I would like to thank the Minister for keeping us as MHKs updated, actually, as things have been going on. But I think there is
465 definitely a wider conversation to be had with the public around getting this information shared. The Minister has circulated a table, which I thought was quite useful. If that is going to be published, that will be excellent.

 Can she just advise, though, there are a number of services in there that are set to be continued from the Jurby Health Centre. How is the Department progressing on with resolving
470 transport issues? Obviously bus and public service transport between Ramsey and Jurby is not the best at the moment. It has been downgraded in recent years. Obviously if we are starting to say, for a slightly longer term, core services are going to continue to be delivered out there, I think we need to look at how people are going to access some of those services.

475 **The President:** Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Thank you, Mr President; and thank you to the Hon. Member for his participation. I have to say he and Dr Allinson have been absolutely brilliant working with us and helping us to understand the needs of the north. I am very grateful.

480 Yes, absolutely we will publish that. I actually asked for that to be put together. I am a visual person rather than a numbers and writing person, so I like to see something visually. I hope that will help the Isle of Man public to understand when services are currently there and will be returned and where they should go, because not everybody accesses these on a daily basis, so you might just be coming into needing that service now. I think that is absolutely really
485 important.

 With regard to Jurby, the Hon. Member is correct, I have actually raised that with the DoI Minister and we are working together to look at what solutions could be made to obviously improve a possible bus service in Jurby. That will also take part in terms of the planning as well, so we do also need to look at whether it is more cost-effective to put on extra buses and to
490 actually put some of the services in Jurby. So we will be looking at that as part of that team that I mentioned – or not team, the meetings, that general strategic meeting in the north. So we will be reviewing that.

 Thank you, Mr President.

495 **The President:** Supplementary, Dr Allinson.

Dr Allinson: Thank you very much, Mr President.

 I would like to thank the Minister for her commitment to reinstate services in Ramsey, not just for the residents of Ramsey, but for the entire north of the Island. Obviously with the TT
500 coming up, also for people right around the Island who can use those services.

 I think in publication of the amount of money that has been spent by the DoI over the last five years, it is quite clear that some of the necessary investment into the building itself was not keeping up with the maintenance issues.

 Could she give a clear indication that now her Department will be working with the
505 Department of Infrastructure to look at the overall estate, to look at the priorities for her Department in terms of provision of services for the whole Island, including the dermatology service, and will work to quite quickly bring forward some plans and proposals of how these could be provided, particularly because we have just talked about the lack of capacity at the Emergency Department and the considerable amount of time that has been known, but not
510 actioned on?

 Thank you.

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Thank you, Mr President.

515 The Department of Health and Social Care is responsible for delivering healthcare services and obviously we need to say what we need, and that is absolutely part of that conversation, but we are absolutely reliant on our colleagues within the DoI and the wider Government in terms of looking at the wider estate. It is really important that we do that.

520 If anything is lessons learnt from Ramsey and District Cottage Hospital, that building I think was originally built in 1907 and several wings of it have been built over time, it is really important that every Government that sits in this building absolutely addresses estates, not just in terms of healthcare, but also in terms of schools and the buildings that our officers and executives work in. This is really a really important piece of work.

525 So I do agree with the Hon. Member and, yes, absolutely while I am in post I will certainly make sure that this is a priority. But I absolutely implore any administration that comes in to keep that pressure up. We must make sure that our buildings are fit and safe and we must make sure that long-term planning happens, because Ramsey is just the edge of the problem here. We need to know what our long-term plan is in terms of delivering healthcare on the Isle of Man. Is that going to be more hubs in closer-to-home locations? Do we have those buildings fit for
530 purpose? Are they there? Do we need more space in terms of hospital? How is that service going to be provided in the north? How is it going to be provided in the west and the south as well?

These long-term plans absolutely have to come in. We are working with Public Health, they are doing a strategic needs assessment and that will absolutely feed into this piece of work. So I do thank the Hon. Member for that question.

535

The President: Supplementary, Mr Hooper.

Mr Hooper: Thank you very much, Mr President.

540 I have two further questions for the Minister. One is very specific about Martin Ward. So the rehabilitation service, the Martin Ward service, that was previously in Ramsey is currently being provided in Noble's and we heard just this morning about how that is exacerbating the bed pressures in Noble's Hospital.

545 But the Minister mentioned in her remarks that actually they were looking at making a decision on this in the near future. I think the table that she circulated says the decision is not expected until the end of June. So actually you are a month away from making a decision about how that service will be re-enabled in the north. How long will it be from that decision being made to services actually returning to the north of the Island? It feels like these deadlines will keep slipping and there is a real risk there that this service is not returned in the near future.

550 The Minister has mentioned a few times about this ongoing discussion, this ongoing conversation, about service delivery Island-wide, about service delivery in the north. Can she just expand a bit on how she is going to make sure the local residents are engaged in that process? She has mentioned obviously that the clinical staff are critical – they absolutely are – but I would suggest also patients and service users have to be at the core of that conversation as well.

555

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Thank you, Mr President.

560 In answer to the first question with regard to Martin Ward, Martin Ward is not set up for patient rehabilitation in the way that obviously it was in Ramsey and absolutely this is the core. I know that Manx Care are pushing as quickly as they can to make sure that that provision is provided in the best possible way.

I do not want to pre-empt any dates or delivery times. The Hon. Member mentioned earlier that we obviously involve him regularly and other MHKs of the north as well. When that decision is made in June, there will be a clear pathway, because obviously, wherever that provision is going to be, we might need some renovation. Again, that might not be up to us, that is up to our Dol colleagues and us being able to plan that in. But it is absolutely the right thing for patients for it to be relocated as quickly as possible out of the private patients' unit (PPU), and also for staff, because the majority of staff I understand live in the north and so it is really important that we try and get those back up to providing that provision in the north.

Engagement is hugely important and the Hon. Member has been helpful and I thank him for his suggestions. Manx Care do plan to do an engagement, working with the commissioners and the MHKs after the TT, to start that process engaging with the public and talking to them about service provision.

Manx Care have also confirmed that what they would like to do is put together a consultative committee with regard to specifically Ramsey and provision in the north. That consultative committee – we can certainly share the terms of reference when that has been completed – we would expect there to be obviously the commissioners and that they would look at doing a consultation and engaging with the public about the provision in the north.

So I think that there is absolutely engagement that has to happen and I fully support the Hon. Member's encouragement in that, but I think at this moment this needs to happen going forward.

Thank you, Mr President.

INFRASTRUCTURE

3. Landlord Registration (Private Housing) Act 2021 – When coming into effect

The Hon. Member of Council, Mr Clueit, to ask the Minister for Infrastructure:

When the Landlord Registration (Private Housing) Act 2021 will come into effect.

The President: Moving on to our third starred Question, I call on the Hon. Member of Council, Mr Clueit.

Mr Clueit: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

Would Shirveishagh Bun-troggalys update this Court on when the Landlord Registration (Private Housing) Act 2021 will come into effect?

The President: I call on Shirveishagh Bun-troggalys to reply.

The Minister for Infrastructure (Mr Crookall): Thank you very much, Mr President.

The Department is currently in discussion with the Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture to finalise arrangements for the implementation of the Landlord Registration (Private Housing) Act 2021. At this stage, a definitive commencement date has not been yet agreed. However, work is progressing, including the development of the regulations to ensure that the necessary operational arrangements, including the responsibility for managing the register, are in place ahead of the implementation.

It is important to note that the standards expected of private landlords are already largely established in existing legislation and are currently enforced by the Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture. The Landlord Registration (Private Housing) Act 2021 will primarily

introduce a formal registration requirement, bringing greater transparency and assurance that those standards are being met. The Department will confirm a commencement date once these preparatory discussions being detailed, along with the regulations, have concluded.

Thank you.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Clueit.

Mr Clueit: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

I thank the Shirveishagh for the previous Answer. How many landlords and how many dwellings are currently on the voluntary register? Does the Shirveishagh accept that without the mandatory framework in force, the Act's statutory sanctions, including the rent not payable consequence for unregistered landlords, remains entirely unavailable to protect tenants?

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Thank you, Mr President.

I understand the questioner's concern over this. There are 291 dwellings currently registered on the voluntary scheme, alongside 144 registered landlords. Tenants do have protection in relation to the condition of their properties under the existing legislation. However, additional tenant protections will not be enforceable until the Act is fully introduced, and I appreciate his concern on that.

The President: Supplementary, Loayreyder.

The Speaker: Gura mie eu.

The Minister will recall that draft regulations were circulated alongside the Bill when these were brought forward. That was five years ago. I was just wondering why has this stalled for five years and what work is still needed before it comes into force?

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: In June 2024 this Court unanimously upheld that regulations particularly those under section 21 of the minimum conditions standards should be made by July 2025. The planned minimum standards to be included in the regulations are already in existence under the legislation. They will be drawn together under this scheme and are already in place and enforceable.

Thank you.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Clueit.

Mr Clueit: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

Once again, I thank the Shirveishagh for his answers. I have one final supplementary. In March of this year, this Court unanimously approved the Youth Select Committee's recommendations that the Department report on progress by the end of 2026. Given that this follows the 2024 assurance that progress will be made as soon as possible, and the missed July 2025 deadline, will the Shirveishagh commit that the report back will be a written statement laid before Tynwald, and can he explain to tenants, who are currently unprotected by this Act, why three unanimous votes of this Court have not been sufficient to drive delivery?

Gura mie eu.

A Member: Hear, hear.

655 **The President:** Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Thank you very much, Mr President; and apologies to Mr Speaker before – I will come back to him in a minute. I misunderstood what he was saying and I picked up the wrong answer in my responding to him.

660 Planned discussions with DEFA will influence the content of any future reporting, and it is hoped that these will be done by the end of this year, if everything goes according to plan, for Mr Clueit's answer.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Hooper.

665

Mr Hooper: Thank you very much, Eaghtyrane.

 As we have been sat here in this Chamber, I have actually had an email from a constituent with pictures of an extremely inappropriate property, which clearly shows that the current enforcement regime does not work and the minimum standards are not effective.

670 Is the Minister content that, given that this is the situation that tenants find themselves in today, where they are being so obviously failed by the system of protection that is supposed to be protecting their interests, does he think that this indeterminate implementation date that he has given us is acceptable?

675 **The President:** Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Thank you, Mr President.

 I think it is the date that we are working to. I am not content with it and if anybody is suffering as a result of the regulations that we have at the moment, we should absolutely be doing better. Many of us have been in the Department responsible for this and should have been working and have been working on it. Officers have only got a limited amount of time and they are working on other things as well as this.

680 I am not making up excuses, but I am, if you will accept that, because there is only so much time in the day for officers to do this, and we keep changing things and asking them to do different things. But I do take on the Hon. Member's point.

685 **The President:** Supplementary, Loayreyder.

The Speaker: Gura mie eu.

690 The Minister suggested that he may have picked up the wrong part of my answer, so maybe if I ask a similar question he will give me the answer he intended to give.

 The regulations were drafted five years ago. What was the point of requiring regulations if all those powers were already available and already enforceable, and what still needs to be done in order to bring these things into force?

695

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Thank you very much.

700 I think it is a case of where this will sit best at the end of the day when it is dealt with. At the moment, my officers are dealing with it, but we are not the best people to deal with this. It will probably end up back with the Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture, or even with the Department for Enterprise. But we are working on that. This has gone on for a long time, there has been a lot of work done in the Department with different Ministers and Members, and we are working with those other Departments to get it right. Hopefully, as I said earlier, by the end of this year that will be the case.

705

The President: Supplementary, Mr Mercer.

Mr Mercer: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

710 Would the Minister agree with me that uncertainty in an important business sector such as this can also have a chilling effect on investment decisions and housing supply? Isn't it time to provide certainty to that market?

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

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The Minister: Yes, I quite agree. We had some comments right at the beginning, I remember this, from the landlords that they were concerned about it and some were withdrawing and selling their properties. We are aware of that and a lot of it was anecdotal, but we are aware that some people have pulled out of the market. We have worked with them over the years and
720 a lot of them have stayed and have registered, and I thank them for doing that. Hopefully by the end of this year we will have a system that is much better and works for everybody involved.

MANX UTILITIES AUTHORITY

4. New primary radar system need – MUA discussions with DoI

The Hon. Member for Arbory, Castletown and Malew, Mr Moorhouse, to ask the Chair of the Manx Utilities Authority:

What discussions the Authority has had with the Department of Infrastructure about the need for, and cost of, a new primary radar system.

The President: We move on to our fourth starred Question. I call on the Hon. Member for Arbory, Castletown and Malew, Mr Moorhouse.

725 **Mr Moorhouse:** Thank you, Mr President.

I would like to ask the Chair of the Manx Utilities Authority what discussions the Authority has had with the Department of Infrastructure and about the need for, and cost of, a new primary radar system?

730 **The President:** I call on the Caaarliagh Bun Shirveishyn Vannin to reply.

The Chair of the Manx Utilities Authority (Mr Wannenburg): Thank you, Mr President; and I thank the Hon. Member for his Question, and, of course, for his ongoing interest.

735 Manx Utilities and its consultants have engaged with the Department of Infrastructure and the Airport to assess any potential interaction between the proposed windfarm and aviation systems, including radar. As has been outlined previously in the House of Keys, the Airport's radar infrastructure is ageing, and the Department is considering its future replacement requirements.

740 From Manx Utilities' perspective, any potential impact has been assessed through the environmental impact assessment (EIA) process in consultation with the Department of Infrastructure and aviation stakeholders. A dedicated aviation chapter has been part of the environmental statement, which will be submitted as part of our planning application.

As part of the early-stage cost modelling, a contingency allowance has been included for potential aviation mitigation. However, this does not represent a confirmed requirement or any financial commitment.

Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Moorhouse.

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

As part of the Answer, the Chairman indicates that the costings have been included in terms of the figures going forward. Is he able to give an indication of what costings that is in terms of the amount of money?

Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Caairliagh to reply.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr President.

A contingency has been included as part of the early modelling. It reflects the possibility of contributing to mitigation as would normally be expected. It is not a confirmed requirement, nor is it a committed cost. The radar replacement needs exist independently of this process and no funding arrangements have yet been agreed.

Thank you.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr President; and thank you, Chairman.

With regard to the costings, they have been considered, but there is a zero cost within the current tally of costs that is going to be referred to later in this sitting. Is that correct?

Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Caairliagh to reply.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr President.

I have no idea what he just said. If you could repeat that, that would be useful.

The President: Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: With reference to the costings, the Chairman has identified that there is a cost in consideration, but there is no clarity in terms of the money. That is suggesting that, at the current moment in time, the figure that is on the table in terms of the projected cost of the turbines is potentially missing out £10 million of additional cost for the radar system. Is that correct?

Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Caairliagh to reply.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr President.

I will do my best to answer. No cost has been determined. Discussions have been taking place through the EIA process with the Department of Infrastructure and aviation stakeholders. Replacement of the existing radar is already being considered and procurement has not yet been undertaken to establish costs.

Thank you.

795 **The President:** Final supplementary, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr President.

Is the Chairman able to give us an indication of the environmental impact assessment contents with regard to the primary radar system at the Airport, presuming there is a paragraph or two giving real clarity in terms of the MUA's consideration and, hopefully, commitment to resolving challenges?

Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Caairliagh to reply.

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The Chair: Thank you, Mr President.

Of course that process is still ongoing.

Thank you.

CHIEF MINISTER

5. Proposed Manx Telecom sale – Government due diligence

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

What due diligence has been carried out by his Government on the proposed sale of Manx Telecom.

810 **The President:** Moving on to our unstarred Questions, Question 5, I call on the Hon. Member for Arbory, Castletown and Malew, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr President.

I would like to ask the Chief Minister what due diligence has been carried out by his Government on the proposed sale of Manx Telecom?

815 Thank you, Mr President.

The President: I call on Ard-Shirveishagh to reply.

820 **The Chief Minister:** Mr President, the sale of Manx Telecom is a commercial transaction between private parties. Accordingly, the Isle of Man Government have not undertaken due diligence on the purchase in a commercial or transactional sense.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Moorhouse.

825 **Mr Moorhouse:** Thank you, Mr President; and thank you, Chief Minister.

When was our Government informed by the UK's Cabinet Office that an investigation was being carried out into the takeover because of Manx Telecom's critical role within their jurisdiction?

Thank you, Mr President.

830

The President: Ard-Shirveishagh to reply.

835 **The Chief Minister:** Mr President, the merger was scrutinised in the UK primarily under the national security framework, rather than under any competition law. I believe the merger was a trigger event under the National Security and Investment Act 2021, as parties to the merger were identified as critical providers to the UK government departments. There was no equivalent legislation in the Isle of Man, and the merger was not scrutinised by the Isle of Man due to competition concerns or the UK government. I am not aware that we were officially informed that the UK was undertaking this scrutiny.

840 **The President:** Supplementary, Mr Moorhouse.

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

845 Given the sheer size of the company and it being a key element in the Island's infrastructure, why wasn't an assessment carried out in terms of the transaction? In terms of the risks, there are potentially huge ones. A Jersey-based company now potentially places the focus of its business in benefiting its economy to the detriment of ours. Were these considerations not there at all?

Thank you, Mr President.

850 **The President:** Ard-Shirveishagh to reply.

855 **The Chief Minister:** I would respond and ask Hon. Members to note that the takeover of Manx Telecom would not have triggered any review under our current legislation, specifically the Competition Act, as essentially there is no change to the structure of the market here on the Isle of Man. As Jersey Telecom is not in the Manx market, there has been no movement in market power or market share. In any event, the ex ante regulatory controls in place remain in force to protect the Manx economy and, indeed, the Manx consumer.

860 **The President:** Final supplementary, Mr Moorhouse.

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

865 Given the company's dominant role within the local economy and its significance going forward, did the OFT and/or the Department for Enterprise actually provide papers for CoMin, and was this something that was actively discussed? After the takeover of Shoprite, there was the indication that there was going to be more proactive action when large takeovers took place, and nothing does seem to have happened in this case.

Thank you, Mr President.

870 **The President:** Ard-Shirveishagh to reply.

875 **The Chief Minister:** Mr President, CURA was kept informed throughout this process, but as I have just explained before, in the Manx Telecom-Jersey Telecom merger both parties operate in different markets, and therefore there has been no change in market share or power. This is effectively a change of ownership and competition law is agnostic in relation to ownership structures or undertakings. In other words, there was no trigger point for this sale/merger to be reviewed under any existing framework.

**6. Efficiencies Programme –
Outstanding quarterly reports; first-year cashable savings**

The Hon. Member for Ramsey, Mr Hooper, to ask the Chief Minister:

When the two outstanding Efficiencies Programme quarterly reports will be published; what the total cashable savings delivered in the first year were and how these were validated; and if he will make a statement.

The President: Moving on to our sixth Question, I call on the Hon. Member for Ramsey, Mr Hooper.

Mr Hooper: Thank you very much, Mr President.

I would like to ask the Chief Minister when the two outstanding Efficiencies and Change Programme quarterly reports will be published; what the total cashable savings delivered in the first year were and how these were validated; and if he will make a statement?

The President: Ard-Shirveishagh to reply.

The Chief Minister: Thank you, Mr President.

Since the Efficiencies and Change Programme was established, quarterly public reporting has been published covering the period between April to December last year. Copies of the three quarterly reports published to date are available to view online on the Efficiencies and Change Programme page on the Isle of Man Government website.

Mr President, the first annual report for the Efficiencies and Change Programme has now been drafted and was discussed at the Operational Performance and Change Board meeting yesterday. This report will include progress achieved between January and March of this year, alongside a wider assessment of key focus areas and delivery outcomes across the full reporting year.

I can advise the Hon. Court that the Efficiencies and Change annual report will be published at the end of this month, i.e. by the end of May 2026. I am pleased to confirm that the report will show that over £4 million of savings in efficiencies have been realised over the first year of the programme, with £2 million of which being recurring savings. As such, this alone is expected to deliver £10 million-worth of savings over the five-year programme.

Thank you.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Hooper.

Mr Hooper: Thank you very much, Mr President.

I would like to thank the Chief Minister for that Answer. I would just like to ask him, though, if that £4 million is cashable savings? Is that a number that he can validate and provide some substance to? The reason I ask is that the most recent quarterly report actually has a number on the back page of £50 million of savings across the five-year programme, not the £10 million that the Chief Minister has just outlined. Can he provide some substance to that £4 million figure?

The President: Ard-Shirveishagh to reply.

The Chief Minister: Absolutely, and that will be published in detail, line by line, showing which projects have realised the savings, the £4.267 million worth of savings I have just discussed.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Hooper.

Mr Hooper: Thank you very much, Mr President.

I am going to have to wait to see what the Government is actually going to tell us about these savings. The reason I am asking for this level of detail is because it is not included in any of the quarterly reports so far. The quarterly reports make these bold claims about savings being made, but actually provide no information as to what they were, how they have been calculated or how they have been validated.

By comparison, there is actually a chunk of information about Manx Care's Cost Improvement Programme (CIP) that details individual projects and savings by project, which at least gives us some picture. But all we are seeing about the broader Government programme is headline numbers that are not being substantiated by any information whatsoever.

The President: Ard-Shirveishagh to reply.

The Chief Minister: As I have said, the annual report will have an appendix that will detail the projects that will contribute to the realised total.

The President: Final supplementary, Mr Hooper.

Mr Hooper: Thank you very much, Mr President.

Can the Chief Minister advise if these savings figures include things like improved income collection, measures which are not actually savings or efficiencies, just the Government doing its job and collecting debts that are owed to it?

The President: Ard-Shirveishagh to reply.

The Chief Minister: As I said, we will explain that in the annual report which will be published at the end of this month.

TREASURY

7. State pension forecasts – How long they take to issue post-request

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

After receiving a request, how long it takes to issue a state pension forecast.

The President: Moving on to Question 7, I call on the Hon. Member for Arbory, Castletown and Malew, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr President.

I would like to ask the Treasury Minister, after receiving a request, how long it takes to issue a state pension forecast?

Thank you, Mr President.

The President: I call on Shirveishagh Tashtee to reply.

The Minister for the Treasury (Mr Thomas): Thank you, Mr President.

I would like to thank the Hon. Member for his Question. The Treasury's Income Tax Division is currently working on state retirement pension statement requests received in February this year. This information is published on the state pension page of the Government website and is updated regularly. I thank the questioner for posting a link to this information.

Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr President; and thank you, Minister, for the Answer.

In terms of the Answer and the information on the Government website, does that suggest, if we work on the February materials, that all applications received prior to 1st February 2026 have now been responded to?

Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: In the 2025-26 tax year, the Income Tax Division issued a total of 2,291 state pension statements. As of 13th May 2026, there are 536 applications awaiting processing. Sorry, I have not got individual detail of the exact date of all of those 536 applications.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Moorhouse.

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

The information on the Government website suggests the current waiting times is close to a third of the year and for people considering retirement it is a considerable wait. Are targets in place for providing updates which are going to actually be met at a faster rate than this?

Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Thank you very much.

The target for Income Tax Division is an aim to be processing all forecast applications within three months by the end of July 2026. A new National Insurance system is currently in development and is scheduled to be rolled out towards the end of this year. It is anticipated that this new system will be capable of generating automated pension forecasts in a lot of cases, which should reduce wait times in the future.

We also have to understand that the interest in pension forecasts was amplified by opportunities for purchasing past years in the United Kingdom, and so at one point the response time was up to nine months, when there was all sorts of calculation being done by people to see to what extent they can purchase past years in the United Kingdom without a six-year restriction. That was a significant contribution to the buildup and the unfortunate backlog which resulted.

We also ought to remember that individuals are sent their claim forms for their state pension four months before reaching state pension age, currently in the transition stage between 66 and 67. After this point, an application for state retirement pension statement is no longer processed during those four months, however the Treasury will write to any taxpayer with the option of paying voluntary contributions in respect of the previous six tax years if this would benefit the taxpayer. It is then their decision whether they pay the additional contributions or not.

I hope that is helpful.

The President: Final supplementary, Mr Moorhouse.

1010 **Mr Moorhouse:** Thank you, Mr President; and thank you, Minister. That was very helpful.
In terms of the new automated system, is there going to be a switch to that fully or will the
current operations be working in parallel in the first instance?
Thank you, Mr President.

1015 **The President:** Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: There are some very exciting developments in terms of systems in Treasury for
National Insurance and for other systems now. I will make sure that all Members get an
appropriate briefing as soon as possible. In the National Insurance system I have been at outside
1020 meetings where they have been going on to plan for this transition. So I will be looking forward
to briefing Members more.

ENTERPRISE

8. Brownfield regeneration in the north – Why no Island Infrastructure projects there; measures to support

The Hon. Member for Ramsey, Mr Hooper, to ask the Minister for Enterprise:

Why no Island Infrastructure Scheme supported projects are progressing in the north; and
what measures he is considering to encourage and support brownfield regeneration there.

The President: Moving on to Question 8, I call on the Hon. Member for Ramsey, Mr Hooper.

Mr Hooper: Thank you very much, Mr President.
1025 I would like to ask the Minister for Enterprise why no Island Infrastructure Scheme (IIS)
supported projects are progressing in the north; and what measures he is considering to
encourage and support brownfield regeneration there?

The President: I call on Shirveishagh Gastid Dellal to reply.
1030

The Minister for Enterprise (Mr Johnston): Thank you, Mr President; and I thank the
Hon. Member for his Question.

The Island Infrastructure Scheme is a demand-led scheme and projects can only be supported
where a landowner or developer brings forward an application and can demonstrate that the
1035 proposal is unviable without financial support, but deliverable with it within scheme guidance.

To date no IIS scheme projects are progressing in the north of the Island because the
Department has not had a proposal that has met the scheme's eligibility criteria. Officers of the
Department continue to engage with Ramsey Town Commissioners (RTC) and the Northern
Chamber of Commerce as key stakeholders in the regeneration of Ramsey. Whilst no eligible IS
1040 scheme applications have been received, it is worth noting a higher level of interest in the
town's regeneration scheme. Since summer 2025, six offers of assistance have been made to
businesses in Ramsey and the north of the Island, with a further nine applications currently
progressing through the approval process.

Thank you.

1045 **The President:** Supplementary, Mr Hooper.

Mr Hooper: Thank you very much, Mr President.

1050 The reason I am asking the Minister about this scheme in particular is because, when you
look at the Government's brownfield regeneration update, it seems to be the only thing they are
hanging their hat on in terms of any sort of success. Does the Minister not find it unusual that
actually there have been no applications to meet the schemes criteria from the whole north of
the Island? Does that not reflect on perhaps the scheme design may be deterring people in the
north from putting applications in, for whatever reason? What work has been done to try and
1055 investigate why there are no applications coming forward that would meet the scheme's
eligibility criteria?

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

1060 **The Minister:** Thank you, Mr President.

I think it is obviously important to make the point that, of course, there are no limitations
geographically in where anyone can apply for the scheme. Clearly, we have had now two rounds.
What I can say is in the original round there were four applications that came from the north.
What I am aware of is that they fell away. Some of the applications were not continued and in
1065 one the viability meant that it did not meet the scheme.

So, in that sense, as I said, I do not think the north has been treated any differently. We are
obviously reliant on individuals to come forward to us in that process. I will also say in the
second round that no applications came forward from the north. So the question that the
Hon. Member is asking, I understand what he is saying, as he is aware as he brought the scheme
1070 through as Minister at the time, it is important that we do assess and review.

At this stage, there is no evidence to suggest it has not been successful in the sense of the
applications we have, but I think it is important that we review it where we can. I think what we
can say is that broadly we might be moving around other areas where we can look to have those
discussions.

1075 What I would say is that actually during 2024, for example, the Manx Development
Corporation (MDC) had a number of discussions with Ramsey Town Commissioners around a
number of sites that they had to see whether things could be moved forward. Approval was at
the time given by the Brownfield Regeneration Steering Group, which I sit on, to continue
discussions and undertake a feasibility study in one of the key sites. However, following a
1080 meeting with the RTC Housing Policy Committee, there appeared to be a reluctance to dispose
of the sites for the redevelopment and that fell away.

What I would say is we do engage. It is not just about the IS, we do look at other things as
well. What I can also add is that recently the officers from the Department for Enterprise and
the Cabinet Office Planning Policy Team have been working with Ramsey and the Northern
1085 Regeneration Steering Group to support the area's regeneration work. So we do engage where
we can.

Thank you.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

**9. Farmers' glyphosate use –
DEFA records; ban impact assessment**

The Hon. Member for Ramsey, Dr Allinson, to ask the Minister for Environment, Food and Agriculture:

Whether her Department has records regarding the use of glyphosate by farmers; and whether any impact assessment has been carried out on the effects a ban on this product would have.

The President: Moving on to Question 9, I call on the Hon. Member for Ramsey, Dr Allinson.

1090 **Dr Allinson:** Thank you, Mr President.

I would like to ask the Minister for Environment, Food and Agriculture whether her Department has records regarding the use of glyphosate by farmers; and whether any impact assessment has been carried out on the effects a ban on this product may have?

Thank you.

1095

The President: I call on Shirveishagh Chymmyltaght, Bee as Eirinys to reply.

The Minister for Environment, Food and Agriculture (Mrs Barber): Thank you, Mr President.

1100 The Department does not currently maintain records on the usage or quantities of glyphosate applied by Manx farmers. However, all active farmers are responsible for complying with relevant legislation regarding the use of approved products, safe storage practices and maintenance of accurate farm records. Glyphosate is approved for use in the UK until 15th December 2026, while approval in the EU is valid until 15th December 2033.

1105 The European Union date exceeds that of the UK, following a 10-year approval given in November 2023. This decision came following a determination that there was insufficient scientific evidence to warrant a complete prohibition. Nonetheless, certain restrictions do apply, which differ among EU member states. It is understood that the UK Health and Safety Executive is currently undertaking a comprehensive regulatory review, with an outcome expected prior to the expiry of the current approval in December 2026.

1110 At present, glyphosate continues to serve as an important resource for farmers, assisting in weed control and crop management. While no local impact assessment has been conducted concerning the implications of a potential ban on glyphosate, its removal would likely result in increased tillage, higher emissions, greater costs and, ultimately, could lead to reduced food production.

1115

The President: Supplementary, Dr Allinson.

Dr Allinson: Thank you very much, Mr President. I thank the Hon. Member for her Answer.

1120 This was really triggered by a campaign from the Soil Association in the United Kingdom to look at banning the use of glyphosate in certain circumstances. Obviously, the impact of any ban in the UK, which would follow on from the impact of the existing ban in the EU, might disadvantage farmers. The National Farmers' Union (NFU) in the UK have made the argument for the continued use of this product. Will she commit, as the UK looks at reviewing their guidance, to work with the local Farmers' Union representatives to make sure that they are not disadvantaged by any decisions that may be taken from across?

1125

Thank you.

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

1130 **The Minister:** Thank you.

Absolutely, as with any of these changes that would have an impact on us here, it is vital that we work with stakeholders and there is wider work that we are doing more broadly around fertiliser and also some of the elements within the Agri-Environment Scheme that incentivise people to move away from some of these fertilisers. But they do still provide a core function within our agriculture sector on the Island and it is important we do that work as it becomes clearer the direction that we look likely to go into.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Moorhouse.

1140 **Mr Moorhouse:** Thank you, Mr President.

Is it a case that more of this fertiliser is likely to enter the Island's drainage system following the use by households and gardeners than from farms?

Thank you, Mr President.

1145 **The President:** Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Thank you, Mr President.

The key point is that it is really important that anyone who uses chemicals does so in accordance with manufacturer recommendations. As the Hon. Member says, while residential use can contribute to run-off, it does tend to be on a smaller scale and not applied to crops that are intended for human consumption. Saying that, we have seen an increase in people doing their own vegetable growing at home, and I think, as he says, this will be part of that wider consideration with regard to where and when this product can be used.

10. New Energy Efficiency Scheme – When to be brought to Tynwald

The Hon. Member for Ramsey, Mr Hooper, to ask the Minister for Environment, Food and Agriculture:

When a new Energy Efficiency Scheme will be brought to Tynwald.

1155 **The President:** Moving on to Question 10, I call on the Hon. Member for Ramsey, Mr Hooper.

Mr Hooper: Thank you very much, Mr President.

I would like to ask the Minister for the Environment, Food and Agriculture when a new Energy Efficiency Scheme will be brought to Tynwald?

1160 **The President:** I call on Shirveishagh Chymmyltaght, Bee as Eiriny's to reply.

The Minister for Environment, Food and Agriculture (Mrs Barber): Thank you, Mr President.

The new low-carbon heat scheme is expected to be presented to July Tynwald. The scheme is still progressing through the approval channels, and delivery to July Tynwald will be reliant upon decisions at each of those stages. It has taken quite some time to develop this scheme, far longer than we had anticipated at the outset, due to the scale and complexity of it.

The new Heat Wise Home Scheme that has been developed is more comprehensive than the previous scheme, as it seeks to offer the best support options to householders and the correct technologies for their homes.

1170 The scheme plans to focus on support which decarbonises our home heating systems on the Island with tiered financial support, which is focused on grants for low-income households, loans for higher-income households, and a balance of both for middle-income households. The new scheme is also planned to expand the list of measures currently offered by the Energy Efficiency Scheme to include low-carbon heat sources, window and door replacements and an increased
1175 level of insulation measures.

While the new scheme is going through the relevant approval processes, my Department has extended the current Energy Efficiency Scheme by securing further funding to allow low-income households to apply for free energy efficiency measures.

1180 **The President:** Supplementary, Mr Hooper.

Mr Hooper: Thank you very much, Mr President.

I would like to thank the Minister for that announcement and for confirming that a scheme will be coming forward to July Tynwald. Obviously, the scheme was originally supposed to come
1185 April 2025, then October 2025 and April 2026; it keeps getting pushed back. I appreciate the complexity in the design of the scheme and some of the hurdles the Minister is trying to get over, but given that the Government has almost decided to do nothing else in terms of energy support and fuel price support during the current issues, this scheme feels like it is very much people's last and only option to get some sort of Government support to improve their energy
1190 efficiency and to reduce their fuel use.

The Minister there is saying that July is the target date. Giving an absolutely honest appraisal, does the Minister really think that is achievable or are we really still in the phase of hoping that something is going to come forward as opposed to it being ... actually, we are just ticking a few boxes, we are just dotting a few i's and crossing a few t's, or are we still very much in no man's
1195 land, very much delaying on this?

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Thank you.

1200 I can confirm that the scheme is fully developed. It has already been through a number of the processes and it has been approved through those, so I am confident that it is in the right place to be able to go to the next approval stages. Some of the challenge has been around delivery, how that will be delivered, making sure that we have the right assurance relating to the loan element of the scheme.

1205 I would want to put it on record that I absolutely recognise the impact that the delay has had in terms of this scheme because we know that people have put off putting some of these measures in. That obviously is something that is frustrating for everyone, both the people who are wanting to get the work done on their properties, the people who are in businesses that are doing that work, and also the Island from an emissions perspective.

1210 I absolutely acknowledge that on no element is this good news. It is absolutely frustrating, but I can assure that the Department has worked excessively, with a small team I think it is fair to say, to try to get this work done and all of the various elements of the approval process do appreciate the importance of this, especially given the wider global impact at this time.

1215 **The President:** Supplementary, Ms Edge.

Ms Edge: Thank you, Mr President.

1220 Just in the previous response, the Minister said she secured further funding for the scheme for the lower band of householders. Can she confirm where she got that funding from and how much was secured?

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

1225 **The Minister:** Thank you.
Yes, that is £100,000 from the Climate Change Fund.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Hooper.

1230 **Mr Hooper:** Thank you very much, Mr President.
Actually my question was along very similar lines. The question I am hoping the Minister will be able to answer is in terms of bringing this new scheme forward to Tynwald, has she already secured funding to roll out this enhanced scheme, and can she give us an indication of what that funding is and where it is coming from?

1235 **The President:** Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Thank you.
We had in-principle approval of £16 million, again from the Climate Change Fund; that was some time ago. But obviously the detail has to go through those processes again to make sure that there remains comfort to use that money for this scheme as now drafted.

1240

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

11. Medicinal cannabis use – Noble's Hospital protocol for admitted patients

The Hon. Member for Ramsey, Dr Allinson, to ask the Minister for Health and Social Care:

What the operational protocol is for allowing patients prescribed medicinal cannabis products to continue to take them when admitted to Noble's Hospital.

The President: We now move on to Question 11. I call on the Hon. Member for Ramsey, Dr Allinson.

1245 **Dr Allinson:** Thank you, Mr President.
I would like to ask the Minister for Health and Social Care, what the operational protocol is for allowing patients prescribed medicinal cannabis products to continue to take them when admitted to Noble's Hospital?

1250 **The President:** I call on Shirveishagh Slaynt as Kiarail y Theay to reply.

The Minister for Health and Social Care (Ms Christian): Thank you, Mr President.
Noble's Hospital has a policy outlining the process for the use of a patient's own prescribed cannabis-based medicinal products while in hospital, dependent on the category and form of the legally obtained medicinal product.
The current policy was issued in January 2025 and referenced to guidance from the British Paediatric Neurology Association, Royal Pharmaceutical Society, General Medical Council,

1255

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency and Royal College of Physicians. This policy has a 12-month reviewal date and is currently in the reviewal process.

1260 Included in the policy is the definition of what a cannabis-based medicinal product is and details three categories based on medicine legislation.

Category 1, licensed medicines with marketing authorisation: (a) cannabis-based medicinal product, which has a UK marketing authorisation; and (b) cannabis-based medicinal product, which has a marketing authorisation from outside the UK.

1265 Category 2, special licensed medicinal products: cannabis-based medicinal product, which has been manufactured and distributed in compliance with good manufacturing practice and good distribution practice, at a site authorised to manufacture a medicine to the defined quality standard from a registered prescriber, i.e. a medicinal specialist licensed product.

1270 Category 3: non-licensed products which do not comply or lack evidence of complying with good manufacturing practice or good distribution standards.

The policy details the roles and responsibility of healthcare staff, including informing patients of the policy, ensuring the safe storage of the cannabis-based medicinal product and consideration of any potential drug interactions. Only doctors registered on the General Medical Council Specialist Register may prescribe category 2 cannabis-based medicinal products. Patients
1275 who are prescribed and taking cannabis-based medicinal products initiated by NHS specialists that are in category 1 – licensed – will continue to have them prescribed while in hospital. If the patient accesses these medicines privately, an ongoing supply in hospital would need to be provided by the patient. These medicines will be stored according to their legal class.

Patients who are prescribed products that are in category 2 – specialist licence – will have
1280 their cannabis-based medicinal products stored in the relevant ward's controlled drug cupboard and registered as patient's own medicine in the controlled drug register. As only doctors who are registered on the specialist cannabis-based products General Medical Council register are authorised to prescribe category 2 cannabis-based medicines, these will not be prescribed whilst the patient is an inpatient.

1285 A record is made on the patient's inpatient drug chart that the patient usually takes a cannabis-based medicinal product. A ward may facilitate a patient continuing to take the category 2 cannabis-based medicinal product in line with the self-medication policy, provided the medicine is appropriate for use, i.e. in date and labelled by a registered pharmacy for the patient, including clear directions for use.

1290 If the medicine is to be smoked or vaped, these forms are not supported for self-administration on site, as the Hospital is a no-smoking facility and both forms could result in staff or other patients passively inhaling the product. If the medicine is to be made into a tea, this form is also not supported for self-administration as the safe storage of tea during consumption cannot be assured. If the patient is self-administering their cannabis-based
1295 medicinal product, a record of each administration is made in the controlled drug register by the relevant nurse. On discharge, the patient is given their remaining cannabis-based medicinal product and this is recorded in the relevant patient's own section of the controlled drug register.

Thank you, Mr President.

1300 **The President:** Supplementary, Dr Allinson.

Dr Allinson: Thank you very much, Mr President.

I would like to thank the Minister for her comprehensive Answer. This was really triggered by some constituents who are currently prescribed medicinal cannabis and are concerned if they
1305 went into hospital for whatever reason that they would not be able to continue taking that. Obviously it has been extremely helpful for their chronic health conditions, so I assume in her Answer, when she looks at category 2 medications, that she is including the vast majority of prescriptions that would be issued for Island residents privately.

1310 But if I can just pick up on one of the comments she made about vaping and smoking, which is slightly wider than medicinal cannabis, but includes people who have nicotine issues as well. One of the issues in the UK is that sometimes people are not able to smoke or vape on hospital grounds. Obviously with medicinal cannabis that may be an impediment to them continuing on with their medication and can lead to a deterioration in their symptoms. What provision is being made or looked at for people safely to be able to smoke or vape close to the Hospital that does not harm their health or the health of other people who may inhale that?

1315 Thank you.

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

1320 **The Minister:** Thank you, Mr President; and thank you for the comprehensive question.

This was actually a question which I asked Manx Care. I will try to say this is as eloquently as I can. With regard to vaping and smoking, it will depend on staff availability first and foremost, but provision would be made for a staff member to accompany that person out of the building into a special area for them to be able to vape or smoke. That, of course, will also be dependent on their clinical situation, so whether they are able to move out of the Hospital to be able to do that. But they will do their best, as I am assured, to make that provision.

1325 Should anybody have any queries or any concerns, I do encourage them to write to Manx Care Advice and Liaison Service (MCALS) if there are any queries that they have, if they are going for an operation in the future and they just want to have some clarity, because even I found that information quite intense in terms of the information there. So I do encourage, and I do thank the Hon. Member for his Question and being able to raise this because it is important that patients are able to have any medicinal products that they require as part of their ongoing health.

1330 What I would say also, is something that I certainly have seen as Minister, that what is becoming extremely apparent is there are a great deal of policies, which is information that patients require. I am working with the Department to ... There are some 500 or 600 policies to go through, but what I am working with the Department to do is to gradually pick the most important ones and to get those published and also get them published in layman terms, so that we can really understand them – because I know sometimes I need that – so that the public can understand what services and what needs, etc., are available to them in the Hospital and what they can expect.

1340 I think that would be really helpful and really good in terms of communication for the wider public. So I am working on addressing that and hopefully I will be able to get some of those policies out in these next coming months and published on the Manx Care website.

1345 Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Craine.

Mr Craine: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane; as gura mie eu, Shirveishagh.

1350 I wonder if the Minister is able to provide any information about whether the three categories of cannabis-based medicinal products given in her Answer are THC dominant, THC-CBD balanced or CBD dominant? That would be helpful.

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

1355

The Minister: Thank you, Mr President.

I do not have the technical ability to be able to say and give that answer, but I can certainly circulate that to Hon. Members following this sitting.

Thank you.

1360 **The President:** Supplementary, Ms Edge.

Ms Edge: Thank you, Mr President.

1365 Can the Minister confirm, if a patient was in A&E for a long wait, whether that would be classed as they were an inpatient, because they have not actually been admitted to the Hospital, however they still may have a medical reason to have cannabis?

1370 I am concerned more with regard to my recollection of our legislation going through was with regard to vaping the product not smoking the product, and we have said we are going to try and create a policy. Will the Minister confirm that she will check that legislation before introducing a policy of smoking and vaping, if there is to be one? But also is there a policy within the Hospital with regard to anybody that takes any drug and whether she could circulate that as to how they will be treated when they arrive at the Hospital?

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

1375 **The Minister:** Thank you, Mr President.

I am unaware of a patient that she is specifically referring to in the first part of her question, but I am happy to have that looked at. Also I am happy to confirm whether coming into the A&E – I think that is what she is saying – so what happens in terms of that; are they classed as an inpatient and would this follow. I can certainly find that information out.

1380 The second part of her question – sorry, this is my menopause brain coming into effect, well and truly, if the Hon. Member could just remind me.

The President: Back to you, Ms Edge.

1385 **Ms Edge:** Thank you, Mr President.

Just with regard to if anybody arrives at Noble's Hospital that is identified as either a medicinal user of drugs or not, how they would be treated. Is there a policy within the Hospital?

The President: Back to you, Shirveishagh.

1390 **The Minister:** Thank you.

You also asked about having that policy published; so yes, absolutely. Yes, I can certainly inform the Hon. Member and Tynwald Members of that information in that question, but I do not have that with me today.

1395 I thank the Hon. Member for her question.

The President: Supplementary, Dr Allinson.

Dr Allinson: Thank you very much, Mr President.

1400 If I could just help the Minister out in what is a very complex field, with medicinal cannabis you do not smoke it, you vaporise it to some extent, and the Hon. Member of Council, the prescribed medicinal cannabis products often are a combination of CBD and THC, but some are CBD only.

1405 Can I just ask her though, going forward, this is a rapidly developing issue, both in terms of the prescriptions that are being available on the Isle of Man, but also the education that is needed for the medical professionals and nursing professionals with this. Alongside this, we have got some other drugs that are now being increasingly used privately, such as weight loss drugs. Primary care is quite good at recording these, secondary care less so.

1410 Are there protocols in terms of people coming into hospital, particularly for anaesthetics and for operations, where routinely they are asked whether they are taking prescribed products that may not be prescribed by their GP and are being prescribed privately? Obviously there are some

contraindications and, for patient safety, this should be at the forefront of people's minds: that they have the ability to tell healthcare professionals what they are taking without any obvious stigma and also that that is then recognised in terms of any adverse effects that may cause.

1415 Thank you.

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Thank you, Mr President.

1420 It is clearly an exceptionally operational question that he is asking me. There is a wide myriad of information, which I am learning at a very fast rate, but that specific one I cannot answer. But I would say that certainly in my experience I have been asked whenever I have attended hospital what prescriptions I am on, whether that be prescribed or non-prescribed. But I can certainly ask Manx Care that question: is it normal practice and is training given to staff to understand the wider types of drugs that are available in the domain today.

1425 Thank you, Mr President.

INFRASTRUCTURE

12. Vehicle Test Centre visits since 1st April 2025 – Number seeking vehicle licences

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

How many people have visited the Vehicle Test Centre to get a vehicle licence since 1st April 2025.

The President: We move on to Question 12. I call on the Hon. Member for Arbory, Castletown and Malew, Mr Moorhouse.

1430 **Mr Moorhouse:** Thank you, Mr President.

I would like to ask the Minister for Infrastructure how many people have visited the Vehicle Test Centre to get a vehicle licence since 1st April 2025?

The President: I call on Shirveishagh Bun-troggalys to reply.

1435

The Minister for Infrastructure (Mr Crookall): Thank you, Mr President.

A Member: He has got no idea what date.

1440 **The Minister:** No. The Department does not hold records for how many people visited the Vehicle Test Centre to obtain a vehicle licence from 1st April 2025 to date.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Moorhouse.

1445 **Mr Moorhouse:** Thank you, Mr President.

Slightly disappointing. In terms of the last financial year, is the Minister able to tell us how many people purchased their vehicle licences at the post office?

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

1450 **The President:** So broadening the scope of the Question, if the Minister wishes to reply.

The Minister: He is, and I do not have that figure with me, Mr President. I will try and get that one, if we have it.

1455 **The President:** Another supplementary, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr President.

 I think that is the issue that you identified, that when Infrastructure looked at shifting this from the post offices, they did not look at that fundamental issue of how many people in 2025 actually went to the post office and bought their vehicle licences there. That gap in information has resulted in a tremendous problem for many local people.

1460 Is the Minister able to give us any indication of what data it has regarding the people who were caught up in this situation? He has told us he has got no information on how many people used the post office last year or how many people have actually been going to the test centre for their licences.

1465 Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

1470 **The Minister:** Thank you, Mr President.

 I am very sorry, and I would like to apologise to the Hon. Member. In the last financial year, 2025-26, 47,060 purchased their vehicle licences at a post office. For the same period, 46,324 people purchased a vehicle licence online. Apologies for that.

1475 **The President:** Final supplementary, Mr Moorhouse.

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

 I find that figure really quite concerning, that if 47,000 of the vehicle licences were sold by post offices last year and then we have the expectation that those people will suddenly appear at the Vehicle Test Centre counter and be dealt with, what contingency programme was put in place to ensure that was doable? From the outside it was simply a case of, 'We will have a small number of staff available and we will see what happens.'

 Thank you, Mr President.

1485 **The President:** Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: I understand the Hon. Member's concern over this. Last month, 12,355 applications across all drivers and vehicle services were processed between 1st April – so for the whole of April – 9,690 were completed online, that is 78% are done online, and 2,665 were paper applications, so the other 22%. A lot of those will have been from the garages, the traders and that, that bring up the paper applications, because they will do more than one, so rather than do them online. So they brought those up online. That is where we are headed at the moment. It is about 80%/20% we are looking at at the moment.

1495 **The President:** Final supplementary, Dr Haywood.

Dr Haywood: Thank you.

 I wonder if the Minister would agree with me that one of the shifts that has happened in the last year is actually there were several people who could not ever renew their vehicle licence online because you could not access the insurance details. There has actually been a change in protocol to allow you to submit those when they are not immediately available electronically,

which has opened up the ability for people who may have been frustrated and had to do paper licences to be able to use the online service.

1505 **The President:** Shirveishagh to reply.

1510 **The Minister:** Yes, I think I got everything that the former Minister said there, and I think I agree with everything that she said. That is why, down at the Sea Terminal, we made the availability of the hub area down there to help people. We actually found that hardly anybody came down there and they all went to the Vehicle Test Centre. That is why that counter was closed and people have moved up there. But we are working with the Cabinet Office and others to try and get those hubs out in the area, so people who want to do it personally still can do so.

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

13. Digital age verification – DHA action since 2023 to increase retailer acceptance

The Hon. Member for Ramsey, Dr Allinson, to ask the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs:

What her Department has done since 2023 to increase the acceptance by retailers of digital age verification.

The President: Moving on to Question 13, I call on the Hon. Member for Ramsey, Dr Allinson.

1515 **Dr Allinson:** Thank you, Mr President.

I would like to ask the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs, what her Department has done since 2023 to increase the acceptance by retailers of digital age verification?

Thank you.

1520 **The President:** I call on Shirveishagh son Jeerys as Cooishyn Sthie to reply.

The Minister for Justice and Home Affairs (Mrs Poole-Wilson): Thank you, Mr President; and I thank the Hon. Member for Ramsey for his Question.

1525 Under regulation 64 of the Liquor Licensing and Public Entertainment Regulations 2022, the Department has powers to specify and approve types of electronic verification that can be accepted for the purchase of alcohol. To date, the Department has received requests for and has approved three forms of digital identity. The approved forms of digital ID are the Yoti application, the Post Office EasyID application, and the Lloyds Bank Smart ID application. This is in addition to non-digital forms of ID which can be accepted, which are a passport, driving
1530 licence, student identity card, proof-of-age card or UK residence permit.

The issue of electronic verification has been a standing item on the Isle of Man Licensing Forum agenda, both in preparation for and following its rollout, so that the Forum could ensure suitable consultation, training and awareness, and then monitor implementation. The Forum has acknowledged that the rollout has been gradual in order to build up confidence for retailers and
1535 awareness for the public and accepts that use has been limited. Targeted work is ongoing with businesses that are known to not be accepting this form of ID to enable them to do so. However, it has also been acknowledged that there have been limited cases where the public have presented digital ID.

1540 The Department continues to progress targeted work with retailers who are reported as not yet accepting electronic verification, work with the Licensing Forum around ensuring awareness

and training to support implementation, and issue further communications. It is hoped that this will increase its utilisation.

Thank you, Mr President.

1545 **The President:** Supplementary, Dr Allinson.

Dr Allinson: Thank you very much, Mr President.

I would like to thank the Minister for her Answer and her prior engagement on this issue, which was really triggered by constituents. Some of our young people obviously need to prove their age in various circumstances. I thank her very much for her ongoing work with retailers and licensed premises. Will she continue that, to try to get some consistency across the field on a small island, that people know how and when they can verify their age, particularly in terms of some of the large retailers where the head office is across, who may not be aware of our legislation and the sometimes peculiarities of the Isle of Man?

1555 Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Thank you, Mr President; and I thank the Hon. Member for his further question.

I think one of the interesting things for us is that of course the Department of Home Affairs does not legislate in relation to other age-restricted products. However, I know that the Licensing Forum has been in touch with the Office of Fair Trading and, as far as we understand it, digital ID may be used for purposes beyond alcohol sales. I think at least there is some understanding of consistency there.

As I mentioned in my initial Answer, Home Affairs Department officers have and continue to engage with larger retailers. We have also sought to engage with the Department for Enterprise and, in particular, the Business Agency in this space, because we understand that it is through this engagement hopefully increased understanding and also understanding what else might be needed to support retailers having the confidence to recognise and support the use of digital ID.

One further thing that the Forum is working on is the development of a Licensing Forum survey as a targeted call for evidence to understand the extent to which digital ID is being used and accepted, and what training or support would help the industry feel more confident applying it in practice.

1575 Thank you, Mr President.

EDUCATION, SPORT AND CULTURE

14. Arbory School pupil arrivals and departures – Progress since January 2026 review

The Hon. Member for Arbory, Castletown and Malew, Mr Moorhouse, to ask the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture:

What progress has been made since the review in January 2026, at Arbory School, of the arrival and departure of pupils.

The President: Moving on to Question 14, I call on the Hon. Member for Arbory, Castletown and Malew, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr President.

1580 I would like to ask the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture what progress has been made since the review in January 2026, at Arbory School, of the arrival and departure of pupils?
Thank you, Mr President.

The President: I call on Shirveishagh Ynsee, Spoyrt as Cultoor to reply.

1585

The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture (Mrs Caine): Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

A paper containing various options and costs of potential improvements to the parking provision for the arrival and collection of pupils at Arbory School is to be brought to the next Department meeting later this month for consideration. Thereafter, as necessary, we will be seeking to engage with Treasury on the funding and prioritisation of the same. Once this has been considered, I am happy to circulate an update via email to Hon. Members.

Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Moorhouse.

1595

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr President; and thank you, Minister, for the positive update.

In terms of the proposals, will additional land be required? Neither the owner of the land bordering the school or opposite the school appear to have been spoken to yet. Presumably, that is something that will be considered and take place.

1600 Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

1605 I am not presuming anything, I have not seen the paper. When I am able to see it and consider the options, then we will move forward as appropriate.

Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Glover.

1610

Mr Glover: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

Does the Minister appreciate what she has just said previously here; is she able to confirm that all the options actually do not involve any purchase of land?

1615 **The President:** Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

I have not yet seen the paper that is coming to the Department next week. As soon as we are presented with the options, the Department will be able to determine the way forward.

1620 Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr President.

1625 Is there any indication of how quickly, having seen the options available, that these things can actually be put into place? There are concerns about the slow nature of this. It is thinking back to information that came through in 2018. There were discussions in January and we are now heading towards June, so there is a really slow process that has gone on. Is the Minister able to accelerate things at a great speed in the coming days and hours?

1630 Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

1635 I do appreciate the concern. As I stated in my Answer, once an option has been agreed, the progress and the speed of that would depend on approvals in design, any procurement and construction processes. How quickly the changes are going to be implemented depends on the option we go for. I have not yet seen the paper with the options that will be coming forward to the Department.

Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

1640

The President: Supplementary, Ms Edge.

Ms Edge: Thank you, Mr President.

1645 In the Minister's original response she talked about funding prioritisation. So can the Minister confirm what other schemes are sitting in the funding chain? Is it minor capital funding and are there other schemes there for other schools that have serious issues with drop-off and pick-up also?

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

1650

The Minister: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

This scheme is coming forward and it will be decided on its merits when it comes forward. It is not prioritised against the others. We have various ongoing work at our primary schools.

Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

1655

The President: Supplementary, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr President.

1660 Given the specific concerns regarding what is happening at the moment at Arbory School, the Minister has given a positive indication in terms of her role within the process. Will that be opened up to ensure that the teachers, the head teacher and also parents and possibly even children, have some input into the process, or is the Minister able to confidently take this forward and have change quickly?

Thank you, Mr President.

1665

The President: Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

1670 I think, for now, it is best that we wait for the presentation of the paper to the Department with the available options that have been identified.

Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

The President: Final supplementary, Ms Edge.

1675 **Ms Edge:** Thank you, Mr President.

Perhaps the Minister could circulate the paper once she has seen it and decided on the decision. But I would like also from the Minister just to confirm what funding stream is available for this; and was it in the Department Plan?

1680 **The President:** Shirveishagh to reply.

The Minister: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

1685 I am not sure what the Hon. Member is asking. When we have the options presented to us, the Department will be considering those and determining the best way to progress. I have undertaken I am happy to circulate an update via email to all Hon. Members when we have an update we can provide.

Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

Mr Moorhouse: Hear, hear.

OFFICE OF FAIR TRADING

15. Funeral director regulation – OFT investigation

The Hon. Member for Ramsey, Dr Allinson, to ask the Chair of the Office of Fair Trading:

Whether the Office of Fair Trading has investigated the possible regulation of funeral directors.

1690 **The President:** Moving on to Question 15, I call on the Hon. Member for Ramsey, Dr Allinson.

Dr Allinson: Thank you, Mr President.

I would like to ask the Chair of the Office of Fair Trading, whether the Office of Fair Trading has investigated the possible regulation of funeral directors?

1695 Thank you.

The President: I call on Caairliagh Oik Dellal Cair to reply.

1700 **The Chair of the Office of Fair Trading (Mr Glover):** Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane; I thank the Hon. Member for Ramsey for his Question.

The Office of Fair Trading – it is well timed as well – is intending to engage in a regulatory compliance consultation with the Island’s funeral directors this year. The OFT plans to monitor various sectors of commerce for compliance based on complaints, legislative developments, emerging trends and regulatory best practice. Funeral directors will be written to and then visited to establish if they are compliant with the necessary consumer protection law and the legislative principles of fair trading and best practice in the industry.

1705 At the conclusion of the consultation period, consideration will be given to further actions appropriate to the outcomes. Options may include new regulation, voluntary compliance with a fair trading charter or continued compliance with the current legislative requirements.

1710 **The President:** Supplementary, Dr Allinson.

Dr Allinson: Thank you very much, Mr President.

1715 I am very grateful to the Chair for his statement today in answering the Question. If I can just point out that this is not because I think there is the need for draconian regulation or that we should start regulating every aspect of life or death on the Isle of Man, but it has been drawn to my attention that some of the peculiarities of the Isle of Man, with not having the same regulation across, is stopping various funeral directors here offering some of the prepayment plans that were available previously from UK providers that are now not available at all.

1720 I welcome his commitment and I would ask him whether he would also take the trouble to look at the Scottish government's code of practice for funeral directors, which is very much voluntary, but tries to institute best practice and also transparency in terms of published fees. Thank you.

1725 **The President:** Caairliagh to reply.

The Chair: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

1730 Indeed when this was discussed at an OFT board meeting the Scottish model was, in fact, brought to our attention at that. So yes, I can guarantee that we will be looking at that as a standard.

MANX UTILITIES AUTHORITY

16. Proposed onshore windfarm – Projected cost; financial, contractual, policy commitments made

The Hon. Member for Arbory, Castletown and Malew, Mr Moorhouse, to ask the Chair of the Manx Utilities Authority:

What the projected cost of the proposed onshore windfarm is and whether any financial, contractual or policy commitments have been made with regard to this facility.

The President: Moving on to Question 16, I call on the Hon. Member for Arbory, Castletown and Malew, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr President.

1735 I would like to ask the Chair of the Manx Utilities Authority, what the predicted cost of the proposed onshore windfarm is and whether any financial, contractual or policy commitments have been made with regard to this facility?
Thank you, Mr President.

1740 **The President:** I call on the Caairliagh Bun Shirveishyn Vannin to reply.

The Chair of the Manx Utilities Authority (Mr Wannenburgh): Thank you, Mr President; and I thank the Hon. Member for his Question.

1745 The proposed onshore windfarm remains at the pre-application stage. In terms of cost, responses provided previously in this Court have indicated that the project is expected to be in the region of £40 million, with earlier working assumptions around £36 million, depending on design and contingency.

To date, around £3.7 million has been spent on pre-development work, including environmental assessments, technical studies and preparation for a planning application.
1750 Importantly, responses provided previously have also confirmed that no financial or contractual commitments have been made to construct the proposed windfarm. No financial commitments beyond consultancy work to support the planning application have been approved or procured, and any decision to proceed would be subject to planning consent and funding consideration by this Hon. Court.

1755 So while the project is being developed in line with agreed energy policy, it has not yet reached the stage where any contractual commitment to deliver the facility has been made.
Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Moorhouse.

1760 **Mr Moorhouse:** Thank you, Mr President; and thank you, Chairman.

It was slightly disappointing that a historic figure was given with regard to the projected costs. As the Chair stated, it is a figure that has been given previously. Is he able to give us a date of when that figure was actually calculated?

Thank you, Mr President.

1765

The President: Caairliagh to reply.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr President.

No, not at the moment, but I am happy to come back to him.

1770

Thank you.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Hooper.

Mr Hooper: Thank you very much, Mr President.

1775

I have got two questions for the Chairman. The first is this was originally supposed to be coming through the planning process in early 2025, and at that point the estimated total cost was £40 million, that has been quoted. Obviously there has been a significant delay since then, but the costs do not appear to have changed. I would have expected a 12-month delay or a two-year delay to actually have had a significant impact on potential cost estimates.

1780

Construction prices have changed. They are now undertaking a much fuller EIA than they had originally proposed, so lots of things have changed. But the cost does not seem to have, and that is a little bit confusing. I wonder if the Chairman can explain how that is the case.

The second question I have got in relation to that is you mentioned they are still in the pre-planning stage. The target date that Tynwald set for completion of the project was the end of 2026. Does he think that we are anywhere near on track for Tynwald's estimated completion date?

1785

The President: Caairliagh to reply.

1790

The Chair: Thank you, Mr President.

In terms of the escalating costs, the latest figures I have is what I have already quoted.

The second part of your question, Mr Hooper, I am sorry, could you just repeat that?

The President: Back to you, Mr Hooper.

1795

Mr Hooper: Tynwald originally set out the date for completion of this in the Climate Change Plan to the end of 2026, which would have necessitated planning being approved some time ago and construction actually starting over the summer of 2026. Clearly, that is not going to happen. So, what are we looking at now in terms of the potential actual delivery date that the MUA is looking at?

1800

The President: Back to you, Caairliagh.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr President; thank you, Mr Hooper.

1805

Cost information is kept under review as part of the normal project development process. However, definitive construction cost is only established once procurement has been established, and that stage has not yet been reached as the project remains at pre-application. But I am very much hopeful that it will be submitted very quickly, very soon.

Thank you.

1810 **The President:** Supplementary, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr President.

I am slightly concerned that we are not getting good news, we are not getting bad news, we are getting no news today.

1815 In terms of going forward, when does the Chairman believe we will actually get a clear cost of what this will ultimately be? At the moment, we seem to have a delayed figure, which, as Mr Hooper has identified, is one that is clearly out of date, and that has concerned a lot of people.

Thank you, Mr President.

1820

The President: Caairliagh to reply.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr President.

1825 The overall project cost of the windfarm remains at £40 million, as I indicated earlier. Cost estimates for the construction will be refined and updated prior to any funding application to Tynwald. Such an application will not be made to Tynwald until the planning application has been submitted and may not be made to Tynwald until planning consent has been secured.

It is not appropriate to commit funds to updating cost estimates on an ongoing basis. Projections are only updated following a significant change to the assumptions underpinning the project.

1830

Thank you.

The President: Final supplementary, Mr Moorhouse.

1835 **Mr Moorhouse:** Thank you, Mr President; and thank you, Chairman.

I feel as if we are operating in a goldfish bowl with all the changes happening around me, but the MUA is still holding firm on the £40 million of costs. In terms of the assessment of this project, have there been no ongoing discussions with the turbine manufacturers about how their costs are changing? If there have been any ongoing discussions, is he able to give us an indication of how those costs are changing, presumably increasing quite dramatically?

1840

Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Caairliagh to reply.

1845 **The Chair:** Thank you, Mr President.

I do believe that was the question that Mr Hooper asked not long ago, and I answered it then.

Thank you.

PUBLIC SECTOR PENSIONS AUTHORITY

17. Public sector pension forecasts – How long they take to issue post-request

The Hon. Member for Arbory, Castletown and Malew, Mr Moorhouse, to ask the Vice Chair of the Public Sector Pensions Authority:

After receiving a request, how long it takes to issue a public sector pension forecast.

1850 **The President:** Moving on to our final Question, Question 17, I call on the Hon. Member for Arbory, Castletown and Malew, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr President.

I would like to ask the Vice-Chair of the Public Sector Pensions Authority, after receiving a request, how long it takes to issue a public sector pensions forecast?

1855 Thank you, Mr President.

The President: I call on the Vice-Chair of the PSPA to reply.

1860 **The Vice Chair of the Public Sector Pensions Authority (Mr Callister):** Thank you, Mr President.

I do thank my colleague from Arbory, Castletown and Malew for the Question. Pension forecasts are typically requested by an individual for specific purposes. The Public Sector Pensions Authority aims to issue these normally within seven working days, subject to receiving the necessary information, including pay and service details from employing authorities. In addition, the Authority produces annual benefits statements.

1865 The 2025 statements were due to be issued in November 2025, however, these have been delayed due to the PSPA to update its administrative system, following approved changes in this Court in December 2025 as part of the cost-sharing review. These changes include amendments to pension actuarial rates from April 2024. The PSPA is therefore prioritising system updates to ensure all forecasts and statements accurately reflect the revised scheme's rules and provides members with a clear and up-to-date position. I can confirm that the information regarding these delays have been published on the PSPA website.

1870 The Authority recognises the frustration this has caused and is actively managing enquiries, particularly where members require information urgently. It is anticipated that the benefit statement will be issued to all members during June 2026. I can also confirm that members with a confirmed retirement date are continuing to receive estimates, and no settlement or payment has been delayed as a result of these updates.

1875 Thank you, Mr President.

1880 **The President:** Supplementary, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr President; and thank you, Vice-Chair, for such a detailed and comprehensive Answer at what must be a challenging time.

1885 In terms of the seven-day working target, that is clearly in place, as the Vice-Chair has identified. In terms of the current situation, it is, from what the Vice-Chair says, just a temporary concern. Is he able to give us an indication of how many people that is affecting?

Thank you, Mr President.

1890 **The President:** I call on Lhiass-Cairliagh to reply.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you, Mr President.

1895 No, I do not have that information about the number of people who may be affected, but these are annual statements. Anybody who is coming up to the retirement will actually receive all of the payments and everything else on time. It is just the annual statements that are being affected at the moment. We are hoping to get them out for June.

1900 Part of the reason is the fact the PSPA and the OHR payroll have been working together for the last two years in order to actually make sure that the data that we are required to update these statements is accurate. We are hoping, and I have been actually trialling this over the last 12 months, Mr President ... I have been using this thing called My Pocket Pension, which actually gives me up-to-date information relating to my own pension. We are hoping that will actually

come into use in the next 12 months. That may actually get us to a stage where we do not need to issue paper statements in the future.

Thank you, Mr President.

1905 **The President:** Supplementary, Mr Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr President; and thank you, Vice-Chair, again for such a detailed answer.

1910 Given the challenges that the section is very clearly aware of and doing their best to overcome, has there been any update to the wider public just in terms of this temporary issue and providing reassurance that in June 2026 everything should fall back into place?

Thank you, Mr President.

1915 **The President:** I call on Lhiass-Cairliagh to reply.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you, Mr President.

1920 As I mentioned in my initial information, we did update our website to ensure the public is fully up to date on this. However, if there is anybody out into the public domain that has concerns around their statements or any questions they want to ask about their pension, I would actually contact the PSPA directly. Their phone number is 685598 or you can email them via pensions@pspa.im. The officers will be more than happy to actually help them.

1925 As I have mentioned before, this really only relates to the annual statements that people will hopefully get. They should get them normally in around March or April time each year. They are slightly delayed, but hopefully those statements will go out this month – or next month, sorry, in June. Then hopefully from there going forward we will have the app published and people will have up-to-date information, accurate information, when they need it.

The President: Final supplementary, Ms Edge.

1930 **Ms Edge:** Thank you, Mr President.

Can I just ask the Chair with regard to he said that obviously there is going to be an app, it is going to be online. We have heard this with the MiCard and people not being able to access things. How is the Pensions Authority going to ensure that members of the scheme are informed of the app and what consultation has taken place with them?

1935 **The President:** Vice-Chair to reply.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you, Mr President.

1940 The PSPA, out of all the Departments I have worked in, have always been forward-thinking. The officers are always on the ball. There will be obviously full media around this app when it is actually launched. If people still prefer to have statements and paper claims in the future, I am sure the Authority will help people as and when they need those statements.

1945 Just to be clear, the Question is about annual statements. There are occasions when people might ask for an ad hoc statement. Again, the Authority will do everything they can to help people. That is also outlined in the Public Sector Pensions Administration (Fees) Order 2024. If anyone needs any help, reach out to the Pensions Authority; they will be more than happy to help.

The President: That concludes our Question Paper.

Order of the Day

**4. Department of Education, Sport and Culture –
Progress update on the Standing Committee of Tynwald on Public Accounts –
Second Report for the Session 2024-25: Student Awards –
Progress update received**

The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture to move:

That the Department of Education, Sport and Culture – Progress update on the Standing Committee of Tynwald on Public Accounts – Second Report for the Session 2024-25: Student Awards [[GD 2026/0034](#)] be received.

1950 **The President:** We now move on to Item 4, and I call on the Minister for Education, Support and Culture to move.

The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture (Mrs Caine): Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

1955 I am pleased to provide this progress update on my Department's work to implement the recommendations from the Public Accounts Committee's Report on Student Awards.

 Student awards are central to widening opportunity, supporting lifelong learning and helping ensure our Island has the skills it needs for the future. This update focuses on what has already changed, what will change from September 2026, and work that is under way.

1960 In respect of recommendation 1, policy alignment and accessibility, the student award policy has been reviewed and aims to ensure alignment with Our Island Plan's educational objectives, particularly around access, equity and lifelong learning. That alignment is reflected in the regulatory changes that increase support and broaden eligibility through the Student Awards Regulations 2025 that were approved in this place and came into operation from January.

1965 Recommendation 2: better data and evidence of impact. I accept the importance of being able to assess outcomes both quantitatively and qualitatively, so we can demonstrate value for money and continuously improve. We are developing new systems to support recent changes. As part of that work, we are discussing additional functionality that would support improved data collection and analysis over time. Our immediate priority is ensuring the student awards application process runs effectively to support today's students, while we work towards building in the capability to evaluate impact.

1970 Recommendation 3: maintenance grants and widening eligibility. From September 2026, the minimum income threshold for a full maintenance grant rises from £21,547 to £30,388. We are also increasing the upper income threshold from £73,386 to £90,000, broadening access and ensuring support better reflects current household circumstances. These changes mean more students will qualify for support and eligible students from lower-income households will have improved access to the full grant.

1975 Recommendation 4: student loan management and debt recovery. I recognise the need for robust student loan management and effective debt recovery processes. We are in the planning stages of migrating the loan book to an improved system, which is the first step to strengthen management, controls and reporting.

1980 Recommendation 5: fairer support for distance learning. From September 2026, distance learners will benefit from the same income thresholds as full-time students, which improves fairness and accessibility across different routes into higher education. Distance learners will be eligible for both a tuition fee grant and a loan which aligns support with that available to students studying full-time off Island. The tuition fee grant income limit for distance learning will increase from £46,500 to £112,000.

Recommendation 6: enhanced support for disabled students. The Student Awards Regulations 2025 ensures support for eligible disabled students will increase substantially. The basic annual allowance will increase from £1,642 to £2,600. The non-medical helper allowance will increase from £12,420 to £19,760 per annum, and the specialist equipment allowance will increase from £4,905 to £7,800. These changes reflect the Department's commitment to removing barriers and ensuring all students can access and complete their studies.

Recommendation 7: eligibility beyond traditional academic measures. We accept the recommendation to consider alternatives to the current academic achievement eligibility criterion of 80 UCAS points. We are undertaking an initial review in collaboration with University College Isle of Man to explore ways to broaden access for those with relevant experience, other qualifications or clear alternative career paths. This work will consider how to maintain confidence in readiness for study, while recognising potential that is not always captured by traditional measures.

Recommendation 8: streamlining applications with security and consent. The importance of an efficient application process is recognised. Whilst being mindful of the sensitive nature of income data held by Treasury, we are considering options to review the sharing of income data to support applications, while maintaining appropriate security, authorisation and consent. We have started consideration of the sharing of results data from schools, and future system development may support capturing relevant results data within the application process, where applicable.

Recommendations 9 and 10: incentives and skills shortages. I accept the principle that any incentive schemes should be designed with clear intended outcomes and with data collection built in from the outset in order to assess success. For skills shortages, we are progressing work on how incentives such as bursaries and loan forgiveness could be used to target priority sectors alongside engagement with stakeholders to ensure proposals are deliverable and costed.

In parallel, as set out in the Skills Strategy 2024-2027, enhancements have been made to the support available to employers via apprenticeship and vocational training schemes. This includes additional payments for priority groups, for example, care-experienced individuals and individuals with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Recommendation 11: continuing a balanced package of grants and loans. The Department continues to provide support through a combination of means-tested grants and access to loans, with the intention of targeting support to those who need it most whilst retaining flexibility for students. Under the new regulations, maintenance support for off-Island study has increased from £8,100 to £8,500, and support for London and overseas study has increased from £8,640 to £9,000. Although the tuition-free grant has reduced from £6,750 to £6,000, students can now borrow up to £3,535 to cover the remaining balance where needed.

Recommendation 12 was on the maintenance loans expansion. I acknowledge the recommendation to expand loan provision to cover maintenance to support the 'affordable for all' objective. This was not incorporated into the new Regulations at this time due to budgetary constraints, but this may remain an area for future consideration as resources allow.

Recommendation 13, in terms of ongoing reporting, overall, I hope you will agree, the Department is making good progress against the recommendations, with a number being implemented through the Student Awards Regulations 2025. Consideration and corresponding development will continue on the remaining items, including systems, evaluation and further policy development, and a further progress update will be provided to Tynwald in May 2027.

Hon. Members, I am satisfied that meaningful and proportionate progress has been made in response to the Committee's recommendations, in particular the increased access to and eligibility to receive an award. My Department will continue to improve and refine policy and systems as necessary in the interests of students and, ultimately, our Island.

Eaghtyrane, I beg to move that the progress update on the Standing Committee of Tynwald on Public Accounts Second Report for the Session 2024-25, Student Awards, be received.

Gura mie eu.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Mrs Maltby.

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Mrs Maltby: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane. Ta mee shirrey kied dy pholldal.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Loayreyder.

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The Speaker: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

On behalf of the Public Accounts Committee, who initiated the report, may I thank the Minister for providing a progress report on the recommendations approved by this Court, following its recent report on student awards. It is really encouraging to see the work undertaken by the Committee translated into action, and we commend the Minister for

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delivering on so many of the recommendations. During its research, the Committee noted the absence of a clearly articulated policy framework for student awards. This still appears to be the case. However, the Committee had particular concerns around accessibility and therefore welcomes the Department's proposals for enhanced support for disabled learners and increased maintenance grants, which should go

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some way towards addressing these issues. In terms of addressing the impact of these measures, the response to recommendation 2 remains unclear. We would welcome greater clarity from the Minister on what data will be collected, and when, to help determine whether the resources invested are delivering the intended outcomes. We would also be grateful if the Minister could explain how the system integration will support management of the loan book. Is this work to be taken forward through shared financial services or as an in-house initiative by the Department of Education, Sport and Culture?

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As distance learning becomes increasingly prevalent, particularly among mature students, the Committee welcomes the levelling of the playing field in terms of support for this area.

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The Committee recognises that a significant number of recommendations were made, and that not all can be implemented immediately. We note the proposed review of eligibility for student awards and hope that it will focus on ability in its many forms, including provision for those seeking to retrain. However, no completion date is identified for this work, and the Committee would appreciate clarity on when it is expected to be undertaken, and whether the Minister anticipates that it will be subject to consultation.

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The Committee remains frustrated by Treasury's ongoing reluctance to share, even with explicit consent, the Income Tax and benefits data it holds on record. This adds unnecessary bureaucracy for citizens and suggests an unwarranted lack of confidence in the ability of Treasury and other Departments to establish secure and effective information gateways.

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We also note the work being undertaken with the Skills Board on how incentives might be used to address skills shortages. While it is clear that the enhanced payments have been introduced for certain disadvantaged groups, the report does not explain how this links to addressing identified skills shortages. I hope the Minister will accept that the brief update provided falls short of the recommendation for a cost-benefit analysis, which was approved, of incentives that could be used to tackle the skills gaps. We therefore hope this work is ongoing and would welcome a timeline for its completion.

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Similarly, we look forward to the Government reconciling its commitment to higher education being 'affordable for all' with the current inability to expand loan provision. This may link to the accessibility review and eligibility criteria, but it cannot be said to be 'for all' if funding is not available to everyone who needs it.

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There is much to be done in the 12 months leading up to the May 2027 review, but the Committee is keen to encourage the Department to maintain its positive momentum and keep up the good work. We are certainly happy to receive the report today, and I hope she is able to provide answers to the questions raised in the near future.

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Thank you, Eaghtyrane.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Dr Allinson.

Dr Allinson: Thank you very much, Mr President; and I would like to thank the Minister for her update. It shows a real desire to update our student awards system, making it more accessible and fair.

I note the realism in the commentary on the amended recommendation 3. I agree that the Department, operating within a tight budget, must continue to try to strike a balance between increasing minimum income thresholds at which a full maintenance grant is awarded and their other significant financial commitments. Student awards are an investment in the future of our Island, but the breadth of commitments across the educational landscape also need resourcing.

In July we will debate the latest excellent report from the Tynwald Select Committee on Poverty which looks at educational disadvantage and proposes a holistic approach to early years education and health.

The move to a unified family-hub model, which will bring together financial advice, mental health, perinatal support, speech and language pathways and early childhood services expands on the recently published Public Health strategy, which had the title of 'Healthier Lives Together'. But these initiatives will involve numerous agencies and Departments, requiring ringfenced funding and multiyear funding to remain resilient and effective. This is important because if we are going to tackle educational disadvantage, it has to be the root cause of that problem.

I also welcome the commitment to recommendation 11, which maintains but also improves on our current system of means-tested grants and access to loans.

There are some who advocate a loan-only model, with the aspiration that this might be reduced if and when students decided to return to the Island. But I am sceptical of such policies. We have witnessed the spiralling personal and government debt problems in the United Kingdom and have seen how they directly harm aspiring students from less well-off families and act as millstones around the necks of graduates hoping to buy their first home or start a family.

Our current system supports the aspiration of our Island families and helps support students to make the right decisions for their futures. I am grateful that this remains the commitment of the Department and look forward to the delivery of greater choice of subjects which can be studied on Island whilst being supported by an inclusive financial system.

Thank you.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Mr Callister.

Mr Callister: Thank you, Mr President.

Not really a statement today, it is more of just a question. I do thank the Education Minister for the information this morning. There are a lot of positives in this report, I absolutely get that, but one thing when I was looking through this is, if you take the information right back, somebody applying for a grant or support this time around will be around £1,785 worse off, which means that over the life of this there are about £5,000 worth of additional costs and debts attached to that individual, which is not good at the start of their working career. When I looked at this, it does seem to hit, once again, the middle-income families on the Island the hardest.

My question really to the Minister is around should we keep having cliff-edge systems or should we be looking at some form of sliding scale system, similar to what they have in England, to be able to support families better? We seem to have this system of actually introducing policy where it always seems to be a cliff edge. You are either on the cliff or you are about to go over it.

So there are a lot of positives in it. As I said, I have not prepared a statement. It is more about just the fact that we are, from this paper, going to be given around an additional £5,000 debt to young people at the start of their career. I am really struggling to accept that part.

Thank you, Mr President.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Dr Haywood.

2145 **Dr Haywood:** Thank you, Mr President.

I am welcoming the progress set out by the Minister today. I think there is clear evidence that the Department has acted on many of the recommendations in a meaningful way. The increase in maintenance grant thresholds, alongside the extension of eligibility, is a significant widening of support and it will help more families access higher education.

2150 Similarly, the decision to bring distance learners on to an equivalent footing with full-time students is an important step in fairness, recognising that learner pathways are no longer a one-size-fits-all. Even traditional bricks-and-mortar universities are using blended teaching methods now, and that involves lectures perhaps being delivered by a colleague in a faraway university, so that you have got subject matter experts really getting to students and improving
2155 the teaching standards.

I think it is right that our awards shift, as those teaching methods that are likely to become embedded in the future, we allow our students to access some of the best available and appropriate teaching for their needs. I particularly welcome the strengthened support for the students with disabilities with the increased allowances across the board, and that is not just a
2160 financial change. I think that is a clear statement that we believe that access to education should be genuinely inclusive.

More broadly, the Department's commitment to improving data collection and aligning the policy with the Island Plan is encouraging, because it is moving us to a better evidence-based and a more strategic approach. But I think there are some areas where progress is still needed.
2165 I think the data collection systems, while it is noted that they are being developed, the report makes it clear that they are not fully in place, and without any robust outcome data it is difficult to assess whether our significant public investment in education is delivering the intended social and economic benefits.

I have some concerns about the review of the eligibility criteria beyond the 80 UCAS points threshold. I know that it is still at an early stage, but if we are serious about widening
2170 participation, that work does need to move forward and translate into practical alternatives.

However, as a former lecturer in the higher education system, I want to sound a note of caution here. The rapid expansion of higher education that took place some 20 years ago now created the expectation that at least half of our school leavers would head to a degree. There
2175 are many for whom continuing into academia is just not the right pathway, it is not the right place to send them. Three more years of hard academic learning is not necessarily what people need when they are setting out on their careers.

So I would welcome the Department committing to review the outcomes of students that they have supported over the last 10 years. What were their grades going in? Is there a
2180 relationship between the grades going in and the outcomes? Not the outcomes taken straight away as to what grade of degree do you end up with but over the years that followed. The Department does have a relationship, does have a connection, with those students because we have given them a loan for their student fees and so we do still have a database of those students. We do know where they are and it is not beyond the wit to be able to contact them
2185 and to discuss these things.

As much as I support continued training, I want to stand and note that academia is not always the answer and so, in that review of looking at those, do not always look towards skewing people towards academia. There needs to be a wider approach to improving skills for all ages.

2190 The expansion of the maintenance loan provision as identified for the affordable-for-all object has not come through due to budgetary constraints, and I think this is where actually that lack of data starts to undermine. If you cannot show that there are societal and economic benefits from educating those students, it is really hard to justify putting more money into

educating students. We have got a serious gap at the moment for students who will not qualify for full grant support, but are still facing significant financial pressures.

Finally, while work is going on about incentives to address skills shortages, the report is confirming that further analysis and detailed plans are still to come. That critical piece of the puzzle is needed if we are to link that student support more directly to the needs of our economy.

There are three bits of things that I would like to see happen. First, I would like the Minister to commit to prioritising the rapid acquisition of comprehensive data frameworks with clear reporting back to Tynwald on outcomes, not simply outputs, so that we can assess the value and the equity over time.

Secondly, I think the reforms to eligibility need to explicitly widen access for non-traditional learners, those with vocational experience, alternative qualifications, later entry into education, or indeed a return to education, because we are now seeing that we have a generation who have already done a degree, and some 10, 15 years later then discover that actually their chosen career pathway is going to take them down another route, and want to go back and study again.

That is not necessarily bad, and I am minded here to think of the people that we have turned down for having teacher training access, because they already had a master's degree, they had already studied at that level. That is utterly absurd in my mind, that you take people who are qualified to master's level, and then you do not allow them to transfer into teaching when at the age of 40 or 45 they suddenly go, 'What I would love to do is transfer all of my knowledge from my years in the sector, and to go in and do teaching.' I think we have to be really clever about that, not just set arbitrary boundaries. We need a system that reflects real pathways and not just the academic ones.

Third, I think there needs to be a clear medium-term plan for closing this affordability gap, including considering expanding maintenance loans or targeted support so that there is no student on this Island that is deterred from going to university by cost alone.

In short, Mr President, I think this report is real and welcome progress. We have gone far enough, but it does highlight that we need to get genuinely equitable access to higher education, and that is going to need continuing focus. It is going to need some robust evidence to justify to this Court and to the executive why more money should be invested into this sector, and we need a willingness to go and keep plugging away at those gaps to make sure that we are giving the very best support that we can for our whole Island.

Thank you.

A Member: Hear, hear.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Ms Edge.

Ms Edge: Thank you, Mr President.

I am actually from the generations where there was very little support to get further education, and the way to get it was through your employer and employer contribution. We have shifted significantly away from that, and I am not sure we have seen the benefit of all the investment brought back to our Island.

But I do welcome the progress that we have made and I particularly acknowledge the work of the Public Accounts in bringing forward many of the recommendations. As a former Minister for Education, I understand both the importance and the complexity of student funding policy.

Balancing that accessibility against fairness, our public finances and what we need as a workforce, and this is not necessarily straightforward, particularly for a small Island with limited resources and increasing economic pressures.

So there are some positive measures within this report which I support. The increase in maintenance grant thresholds, the widening of support for distance learners and the strengthening of disability support are all welcome developments. In particular, recognising

distance learning on a more equitable basis reflects the reality of modern education and modern employment pathways.

2250 Mr President, the world of education is changing rapidly, and the Isle of Man needs to keep up. Learning is no longer confined to a traditional three-year university route immediately after school. Increasingly, as other Members have said, people we train throughout their life, they want to study flexibly, combine employment and education, and develop skills through hybrid models of learning. The technical college, the tech, was developed and built for this exact purpose, Mr President, and we need to make better use of it.

2255 With the onset of artificial intelligence, which was introduced to our Hon. Court probably only three years ago, the automation and the technological change is reshaping the workforce and education globally. For that reason I believe the student awards policy must increasingly be reviewed, not simply as an education policy, but as part of our wider economic and workforce strategy.

2260 Whilst there is progress within this report, I do not believe we are yet fully aligned with the fairness principles being referenced in relation to Child Benefit thresholds. The report states that the upper threshold of £90,000 was designed to align with changes to Child Benefit thresholds, but in practice the systems remain fundamentally different. Many of our middle-class income Island families continue to experience significant financial pressures, which are not reflected purely through gross household income figures. A family that earns £90,000 with several
2265 dependent children, mortgage costs, travel costs and rising living expenses is not necessarily financially comfortable.

I therefore believe there remains a legitimate discussion around whether the student awards framework should move towards a more tapered and flexible model, as my Onchan colleague said earlier, rather than continuing to rely on rigid threshold structures.

2270 I also note that the original recommendation regarding inflation-linked disability support appears to have been weakened within the Department's response. I would like the Minister to look at that. Whilst I welcome the increase in disability support levels, we have got to recognise that without periodic review or indexation, the real value of that support can erode over time.

2275 Another important area is recommendation 7, regarding the review of 80 UCAS points and the eligibility requirement. I strongly support this review. Academic potential and the future contribution to our Island economy cannot always be measured through a single traditional academic route. Mr President, how many universities have closed during the duration of this administration? It is not a traditional route as it was once seen. Many people develop through the vocational pathways, apprenticeships, work experience and that mature learning or their
2280 alternative career progressions.

As an Island, we should be encouraging opportunity with that adaptability and lifelong learning. I was pleased to see the reference to incentives linked to skills shortage, including bursaries and potential loan forgiveness schemes. But I believe this area now requires much greater urgency and greater strategic thinking. AI is here, it is not going to go away, and there
2285 are a lot of people in our workforce currently that will need re-skilling.

If we know the Island is facing shortages in healthcare, teaching, construction, engineering and care provision, then our education funding system should actively support workforce planning in those areas. We should not simply react to shortages once they become critical; we need to listen to data that is out there in the economy. We should build a system that
2290 anticipates future economic need and develops our Island talent accordingly.

The principles behind student support must ultimately be about fairness, accessibility and opportunity, but they must support our Island's resilience for the future. Education policy, economic policy and workforce planning are now fundamentally interconnected, and to secure the skills and the security for our Island in the future. This cannot be seen as a standalone policy,
2295 Mr President.

The Isle of Man has an opportunity to build that flexible and future-focused approach to learning, one that supports all of our young people, our mature learners, career changers and

that evolving need of our economy. We cannot miss this opportunity, Mr President. So I therefore welcome the progress that is being made, whilst encouraging the Department to continue modernising the system to ensure it genuinely reflects the realities that are facing our Island families and the future needs of our Island.

Thank you, Mr President.

The President: I call on the mover to reply.

The Minister: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

I would like to start by thanking Hon. Members for participating in the debate this morning, and for the generally positive feedback on the progress that the Department has made and continues to make in response to the PAC recommendations. I will pick up a few individual questions and then I will cover themes generally as well that have come out of the debate this morning.

Mr Speaker, on behalf of the PAC, I thank you very much for those positive comments. In terms of the point you raised about the data collection, in terms of understanding the resources invested delivering the most positive impact, essential system development has been prioritised to ensure that new and continuing student applications for the 2026-27 academic year can be processed efficiently according to the 2025 Regulations, and providing the ability to compare to the 2019 provisions, where appropriate, in line with the transition provisions.

Additional system functionality is being considered and discussed, which may support data collection to allow analysis of the outcomes of student awards funding to provide an understanding of investment impact, but that is going to take time.

In terms of the loan system, this is in an early stage and we are trying to ensure efficient processing for loan management, but also reporting on loan debt so that the Department is able to efficiently collect money due.

In terms of the deadlines, the Department is aiming to have responses to each of the recommendations by May 2027, and it is the intention that Tynwald will receive another update in May next year.

In terms of Dr Allinson, again, Hon. Member for Ramsey, thank you for those positive comments. I would concur that we are aiming for a more accessible and fair student awards system. It is absolutely an investment for the future but, indeed, it is a fine balance between providing support and managing public finances.

In terms of – I am sorry, I am turning to the Hon. Member for Onchan, Mr Callister, and the query that he raised – yes, we have. It is a fact that in order to make the improvements across the piece, particularly in terms of improving the disability allowances and enabling on-Island study, the tuition fee grant has reduced, but the overall available student awards package balances, I feel, support and sustainability. Students have access to a student loan to contribute the remaining fee costs where needed, if they choose to take that up.

Also, although we have increased the thresholds, there is still a sliding scale of maintenance thresholds to that £90,000 and beyond. In fact, I think both the Hon. Members for Onchan – Ms Edge as well – raised that knotty issue that it is not a universal benefit. Long gone are those days, certainly in my generation, of supported study universally available for everybody.

In fact, I agree with the Hon. Member, Ms Edge. There have been several representations made to me about the hardship for those considered well-to-do, but actually multiple children, three plus in some cases, where your income is around that £90,000 level with those demands for travel, for maintenance, for mortgages and everything else. In fact, that is the number of people who feel most impacted by this. But that would be a consideration for future administrations. Have we got the balance right in terms of supporting our workforce for skills and balance, and should the eligibility criteria be revisited for those reasons? That is potentially a very big policy discussion for the future.

2350 Dr Haywood, again, thank you for your comments. The review of the policy framework as a whole will be undertaken shortly with a further update, as I said, to be provided at the May 2027 sitting. In terms of UCAS points, we are moving that review forward.

2355 Also, I think you queried about maintenance loans being available for those families who require it. We recognise the recommendation, but it has not been incorporated into the 2025 Regulations due to budget constraints. This was very much a balancing across the existing funds available, but we will keep the policy point under review as part of future student awards development, should budgets allow.

2360 I think I have covered all the points, and I would just like to thank Hon. Members, and in particular the Public Accounts Committee, for bringing forward the recommendations. I feel that we as a Department and as a nation have moved forward. I very much want to maintain and protect the available funding that our students are able to access. I think we have moved fairly and consistently to widen access and to improve the level of funding, albeit a mixture of grants and loans available, and our students are significantly better off when we look to the adjacent Island and the very large debts that they can incur, to obtain, for those who decide and choose to do it, a higher education path.

2365 With that, Mr President, I beg to move.

The President: Now, Hon. Members, we come to vote on this Item, Item 4, as laid out on the Order Paper. All those in favour, please say aye; those against, please say no. The ayes have it. The ayes have it. Item 4 is carried.

5. Council of Ministers' Report –

Update on the Island Plan Built Environment Reform Programme Strategic Objective 4: 'Ensuring Attractiveness of Brownfield Development to help protect the Island's Greenfields and Landscape Beauty activity' and the Housing and Communities Board 'Vibrant Communities' workstream – Debate commenced

The Minister for the Cabinet Office to move:

That Tynwald receives the Council of Ministers' Report – Update on the Island Plan Built Environment Reform Programme Strategic Objective 4: 'Ensuring Attractiveness of Brownfield Development to help protect the Island's Greenfields and Landscape Beauty activity' and the Housing and Communities Board 'Vibrant Communities' workstream [[GD 2026/0031](#)].

2370 **The President:** Moving on to Item 5, I call on the Minister for the Cabinet Office to move.

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr Ashford): Thank you, Mr President.

2375 I rise today to move that Tynwald receives the Council of Ministers' Report 'Update on the Island Plan Built Environment Reform Programme Strategic Objective 4: 'Ensuring Attractiveness of Brownfield Development to help protect the Island's Greenfields and Landscape Beauty activity' and the Housing and Communities Board 'Vibrant Communities' workstream'. A nice short title there! (Laughter)

2380 This Report is before the Hon. Court today in response to a resolution from the November 2025 sitting of Tynwald. The final element of the motion relating to proposed amendments to the Rating and Valuation Act 1953 and further disincentives was addressed via a letter from Treasury to Hon. Members back in February. This Report updates on our Island Plan commitment to building a secure, vibrant and sustainable Island. It addresses a central challenge

for us as a Government: how we meet development and housing needs while protecting our greenfield land and the Island's landscape beauty.

2385 Strategic Objective 4 in the Built Environment Reform Programme (BERP) was clear in its intent: to shift development pressure towards brownfield sites and previously developed land. The programme recognised that policy alone is not sufficient. Instead, it enabled a joined-up approach that looked at planning processes, policy levers and delivery mechanisms to make brownfield development a realistic and attractive option for developers, communities and
2390 investors alike.

The Report also highlights the overlap between this work and the Housing Communities Board's Vibrant Communities workstream. This reflects a place-based approach that sees housing delivery alongside regeneration, town centre renewal and the creation of liveable, sustainable neighbourhoods. Brownfield regeneration brings clear benefits. It makes better use
2395 of land that is already developed, helps revitalise town centres and urban sites that already benefit from infrastructure and services, supports sustainable patterns of living, and reinforces public confidence that growth will not come at the expense of our countryside and landscape.

Mr President, this work also depends on effective cross-departmental collaboration. Planning reform, housing policy, infrastructure investment and economic development must continue to
2400 move in step if brownfield regeneration is to be delivered at scale. The Report demonstrates that Government is actively aligning planning reform, housing policy and community objectives to make better use of land, support vibrant communities, and protect the Island's greenfield spaces and landscape for future generations.

Mr President, we have made significant progress in the last five years, as illustrated in the
2405 Report. It is easy to forget now where we were at the start of this administration in 2021. The Island Infrastructure Scheme is enabling 206 new residential properties in Douglas and Port Erin, along with one commercial development in Douglas. The Manx Development Corporation (MDC) has also been making significant progress in relation to the schemes that they have been involved in.

2410 However, the Report is balanced in recognising the challenges ahead. Brownfield sites are often more complex and more expensive to bring forward than greenfield alternatives. Issues such as remediation, infrastructure capacity, site assembly and commercial viability can all act as barriers to delivery. There is an ongoing challenge for Government to ensure that planning processes remain proportionate, predictable and supportive of quality redevelopment, that
2415 policy direction is clear and consistent over time, and that the balance between design, quality, deliverability and overall cost is carefully managed, particularly in the current construction and economic climate.

Mr President, the next five years requires a continued focus on the Island's brownfield sites. The first step in that process is the development of the new Island Strategic Plan. The
2420 preliminary publicity made it clear that a key focus of the Plan was to ensure a strong emphasis on regeneration and place-making principles, with the aim of revitalising urban environments and strengthening local identity. The Treasury Minister has announced a review into the cost of brownfield regeneration. This will also look at how this impacts the Manx Development Corporation, including its governance objectives, strategic approach and delivery performance,
2425 as well as its financial sustainability and long-term viability.

Mr President, progress has been made, even if sometimes, from my personal point of view, it has been frustratingly slow in some areas. But there is much more to do. We have created the foundations for the next administration – and absolutely no pun intended – but they will need to build on this progress (**Several Members:** Ooh!) and ensure that we meet the needs of our
2430 community.

I commend the Report to the Hon. Court, and with that dreadful joke, (Laughter) I beg to move, Mr President.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Mr Johnston.

2435 **Mr Johnston:** Mr President, I beg to second and reserve my remarks.

The President: I call the Hon. Loayreyder.

The Speaker: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

2440 Mr President, I previously described Government's approach to regeneration of brownfield sites as being all carrot and no stick, and this Report has done absolutely nothing to change my view of that approach. This Report is absolute proof. Now, do not get me wrong, I do believe that carrots are necessary, we do need to provide incentives and they are well articulated in the Report. But if we turn to Pillar B in the Report about disincentives and other financial tools,
2445 there are only three bullet points. So Members might give me the latitude to just go through each of them.

The first is about a community infrastructure levy (CIL) that has been kicked down the road, so that is not going to happen.

The second is about restricting access to the slush fund – sorry, the Island Infrastructure Scheme – to be more targeted, and that is not a disincentive, that is just a restriction of the incentive. We seem determined to throw money at luxury developments, particularly in my constituency, which will do nothing to help people get on the housing ladder.

(**Several Members:** Hear, hear.)

The third one is about a framework for addressing empty problem properties. However, the only solution that has been put forward is, in my view, a flawed Rating and Valuation (Amendment) Bill (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) which will not solve the problems that have been identified, but will create exciting new ones for the Minister to have to tackle.

Just looking at the legislative policy solution that is the Rating and Valuation (Amendment) Bill, it really only has three things in that, so I will just go through the three things in that.

2460 The first provides a cost-sharing mechanism between the Treasury and the local authority, so does nothing to change things when it comes to the cost of rebates, it just allocates that cost between two bodies.

The second monkeys around with the charitable definition within the Rates Act, which again provides no improvement on the current state of things for the purposes of brownfield buildings.

The final part deals with rating unoccupiable buildings, which I fear will hasten more demolitions as there would be a financial incentive to do so. Once a building is demolished, there is no building, so it appears to me that that would be the easiest way of exempting it from the rates altogether. I am not sure that this represents much of an improvement. I would
2470 suggest that this provision needs further thought that prevents blight to our Island and encourages development where planning permission is granted.

So it would be better if it sat alongside a provision for increased rating of undeveloped land which holds a valid planning permission. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) That would remove the demolition incentive and provide rateable income on land banking, which I believe has had a real impact on Government's desire to build more homes over recent years. That is, I think, an area that we do need to tackle in terms of people owning buildings and not developing them where there is no financial disincentive for that to happen. So I think that is a possible solution for the Minister to take away and work up.

I am terribly sorry, Eaghtyrane, not to be more positive in my contribution, but I do look forward to the Minister's reaction, and for some more in terms of not just throwing money at the problem, but also providing some actual disincentives to solving it.

Thank you, Eaghtyrane.

The President: I call on the –

2485

The Clerk: Sorry, Mr President.

The President: One moment, conferring.

I have just been alerted to motions and amendments Standing Orders here 3.11(3), 'No debate shall be permitted at any time' as 'a matter tabled' considered by a Branch.

Mr Thomas and another Member: Hear, hear.

The President: So that does cause issue with the comments just made. So, Clerk, is there, what point – (Interjection by the Speaker) Your point ... One moment –

Mr Hooper: The Report itself references those changes to the Rating and Valuation Act 1953 and expounds upon them as a massive success. I think we have to be able to comment on what is in the Report, notwithstanding that requirement of Standing Orders.

A Member: Hear, hear.

The President: Well, that is the wording in the ... I just wish to make the Members aware of it. The comments have already been made, so there is nothing more I think I can do at this particular point. But I would caution Members in referencing that in further debate on this particular Item.

So, with that, I now call on the Hon. Member, Mr Callister.

Mr Callister: Thank you, Mr President.

I do thank the Chair of the Housing and Communities Board and the Minister for DEFA for the update on the Built Environment Reform Programme, and for outlining some of the workstreams aimed at reducing pressure on greenfield land while protecting our Island's landscape and environmental assets.

While I recognise that there is some genuine progress that has been made in certain areas, I remain of the view that overall progress during the past five years has been far too slow, I think a point that the Minister has just made himself, particularly in addressing empty and dilapidated properties, introducing measures such as additional taxation or unutilised brownfield site land, and reviewing, more importantly, Housing Policy 5 within the Isle of Man Strategic Plan 2016.

Mr President, the Court first received its first Strategic Plan back in October 2007, and I am surprised that a key planning policy, especially Housing Policy 5, has not been amended to reflect the reality that brownfield sites are significantly more difficult to develop than greenfield land. This is due to contamination of higher cost, greater complexity and increased risk.

Housing Policy 5 currently states:

In granting planning permission on land zoned for residential development or ... residential areas, the Department will normally require that 25% of provision should be made up of affordable housing. This policy will apply to developments of 8 dwellings or more.

Applying this Policy equally to both greenfield and brownfield sites is, in my opinion, one of the main reasons we continue to see far too many brownfield sites left vacant and empty right across our Island. Brownfield site developments carry a much higher level of uncertainty, unlike greenfield sites, which are typically clear, undeveloped and easy to assess.

Brownfield land can present unknown ground conditions, hidden structural issues or contaminations that only become apparent once development has commenced. This creates additional financial risks, delays in delivery and understandably makes investors more cautious. In addition, brownfield sites are often located within the urban or town centre environment, presenting further challenges such as restricted access, the need to work around existing structures and the proximity of neighbouring properties.

However, despite these challenges, prioritising brownfield sites brings significant benefits, as the Minister outlined. It generates unused land, reinvents our town centres and villages, supports existing infrastructure and reduces pressure on greenfield development, therefore protecting our natural environment, which the Minister mentioned.

The reality is that without the right mix of incentives, planning reform and public sector support, brownfield site development will continue to lag behind greenfield development in both pace and attractiveness. This is precisely why schemes such as the Island Infrastructure Scheme are necessary to bridge the financial visibility gap. However, if Housing Policy 5 were amended appropriately, the long-term need for such intervention could be reduced significantly.

I would also welcome a review of section 13 agreements, particularly in relation to affordable housing, infrastructure contributions, community and facilities, and public open space, again with a specific consideration given to the challenges around brownfield sites.

Mr President, at the heart of this Report, it reflects a very simple but important mission, and that is to breathe new life into our towns and villages, make better use of previously developed land and protect our greenfield landscapes for future generations.

Encouragingly, this ambition is beginning to translate into action. However, we must also ensure that the necessary planning policy and legislation changes are made to actually support this direction. At the start of this Court back in November, I actually mentioned that we should seriously look at our uninhabited sites and properties.

At the time, back on that, I actually moved a motion to try and bring something in relating to empty homes, and that was to follow the UK's guidance back in April 2024 around an empty property premium. In principle, it is straightforward. It encourages property owners to bring empty properties back into use, thereby reducing the long-term vacancy levels and improving the appearance of our communities.

Under that system in the UK, which I mentioned in November last year, it typically provides an exemption for the first 12 months. Thereafter, it increases in premiums up to about 400%, I think it is at the time, and this needs to be seriously considered in order to get these sites actually developed and back into the market. Ultimately, it is about increasing housing supply, improving community, the way they look, the way they feel, but also ensuring that existing housing is used effectively.

In closing, Mr President, once again, I thank both Ministers for this Report. However, significantly more needs to be done if we are to truly address the housing challenges, especially those around brownfield development, and growing the number of empty properties and dilapidated properties on our Island that could be brought back into use for future generations.

Thank you, Mr President.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Mr Clueit.

Mr Clueit: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

I welcome the production of this Report and I welcome the shared ambition it sets out to make brownfield development more attractive, to bring empty and derelict buildings back into use, and crucially, to relieve pressure on our green fields and protect the Island's landscape beauty. The Report correctly identifies that brownfield regeneration is not simply a planning preference, it is an economic challenge. Brownfield sites are far more complex, more constrained, and more risky, and it is risk – planning risk, cost risk, time risk, and market risk – that kill schemes long before the first spade goes in the ground.

So my central question today is this: are we serious about solving the market failure at scale or are we content with a set of worthy initiatives that remain too small and too uncertain to change developer behaviour? If the answer is serious, then we must be equally serious about the hard truth that sits underneath this Report. Most brownfield sites do not fail because the developers lack goodwill. They fail because the numbers do not work.

What does the Report get right? The Report groups activity under incentives, direct regeneration through the Manx Development Corporation and enabling reform through the planning system. That structure is sensible.

It also points to tangible actions. The Island Infrastructure Scheme, designed to bridge viability gaps and unlock unoccupied urban sites; the Town and Village Regeneration Scheme, supporting improvements and conversions including upper-floor residential; movement on removing rates exemptions for dangerous or ruinous buildings via amendments to the Rating and Valuation Act 1953; acknowledgement that construction costs and market conditions are now a serious threat to brownfield viability, with a Treasury-led review under way; and continued work on the Strategic Plan and the Unoccupied Urban Sites Register, including a consultation intended to improve the evidence base.

That is all constructive, but I will come to the key issue: it still does not add up to a system that reliably delivers brownfield housing and regeneration at the pace we need. The central weakness: we are not tackling risk and viability decisively.

The Report states that the Island Infrastructure Scheme has mobilised significant private sector investment and supported several developments. That is positive. But it also highlights the policy challenge. These interventions remain case by case, and therefore inherently uncertain. Developers can deal with tight margins. What they will not tolerate, especially on brownfield, is open-ended risk, uncertainty in planning outcomes, uncertainty in timescales, unknown site conditions and cost escalation while schemes sit in limbo.

If we want to change outcomes, Government must do two things, consistently and transparently: (1) reduce risk and (2) close viability gaps where the public benefits justify it. That leads me directly to the Manx Development Corporation. EIGHTYRANE, there has been a persistent ambiguity in our approach to MDC. Are we treating it as a commercial housebuilder expected to make a profit or a regeneration vehicle designed to deliver outcomes that the market will not? These are not the same thing and we cannot have it both ways.

Members will be aware that MDC's completed refurbishment scheme of the former Nurse's Home, Thie Clag, has not proven financially successful on a straightforward development basis. The reality is that the only route to breaking even may be to hold the units as rentals for a period of years, tying up capital that MDC needs if it is to deliver future sites. This is not a minor operational detail. It goes to the heart of whether MDC can be a scalable delivery mechanism at all. A regeneration body that must hold assets for years to recover its cost becomes capital constrained, slow and inherently limited in output.

So I ask Government, do we expect MDC to break even on typical brownfield regeneration schemes? If so, on what evidence, given current build costs, abnormal site costs and market values? If not, will Government say plainly that MDC is delivering public policy outcomes and therefore will be funded like a public policy delivery vehicle? If we continue to demand commercial outcomes from non-commercial sites, we will get one of two results. Either MDC does very little or it pursues the easy sites and Government loses the regeneration mission.

EIGHTYRANE, the Report is clear that the Island Infrastructure Scheme exists to bridge viability gaps on occupied urban brownfield sites. Yet MDC does not qualify for IIS support. That is a fundamental policy mismatch. If IIS is meant to unlock schemes that are not viable under normal market conditions, then the body taking the hardest sites on behalf of the public should not be excluded from the very tool designed to close the viability gaps.

So I call on Government to do one of the following and to do it quickly. Either amend IIS qualifications so MDC can access it on equivalent terms, or establish an explicit, transparent brownfield gap funding mechanism for MDC projects that delivers the same effect. But we must stop pretending that we can ask MDC to regenerate the most difficult sites without access to viability support while expecting it to remain financially sustainable.

I welcome movement on removing rates exemptions for dangerous or ruinous buildings, but I would also caution this Court that mild disincentives rarely change entrenched behaviour. If holding vacant and derelict properties remains economically rational, if the carrying costs are

low and enforcement is uncertain, then properties will continue to sit empty. So I ask for clarity on how quickly these reforms will translate into real costs for long-term vacancy and derelictions, how consistently will they be applied, and what further measures Treasury can bring forward if vacancy remains persistent.

2640 We need a regime where inactivity is not the cheapest option indefinitely. The Report references the Strategic Plan process and ongoing consultation. That is necessary work, but brownfield viability lives and dies on time certainty. So I urge Government to consider a specific targeted reform, a brownfield fast-track planning route with clear statutory timeframes, streamlined validation requirements for urban generation proposals and guidance that reduces
2645 uncertainty around acceptable density, mixed use and town centre parking expectations. If we do not reduce time and uncertainty, then even generous grants will be eaten up by delay and inflation before the scheme completes.

So what am I asking Government to commit to? Eaghtyrane, I want this debate to end with a clarity in commitments, not just warm words. So I ask the Council of Ministers to commit to
2650 the following.

(1) Define MDC's purpose explicitly – commercial developer, regeneration agency or a hybrid – and publish what financial performance is realistically expected.

(2) Correct the IIS-MDC mismatch. Allow MDC access to IIS or create an equivalent gap funding instrument specifically for MDC's regeneration role.

2655 (3) Publish a transparent viability framework for brownfield support so developers and the public can see when and why intervention is justified.

(4) Introduce time certainty measures in planning for brownfield regeneration, because time risk is viability risk.

(5) Set measurable targets, units delivered on brownfield, vacancy reduction, and pipeline
2660 milestones, so we can judge progress by outcomes, not activity. Because if we are serious about protecting green fields, the route is not rhetorical. The route is delivery; town by town, site by site, with a policy system that makes brownfield the rational choice, not the heroic one.

Eaghtyrane, the Report is a useful update, but now we need the next step: a hard-edged delivery model that aligns initiatives, incentives, reduces risk and funds the viability gap
2665 honestly. I support the Report being received, but I urge Government to return to this Court with the specific decisions on MDC's funding model and IIS eligibility, with clear planning reforms to accelerate brownfield delivery.

Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

2670 **The President:** Hon. Members, we will now take our lunch break. The Court will stand adjourned until 2.30 p.m. Next up to speak is Mr Hooper.

The Court adjourned at 1.06 p.m.
and resumed its sitting at 2.31 p.m.

Council of Ministers' Report –

**Update on the Island Plan Built Environment Reform Programme Strategic Objective 4:
'Ensuring Attractiveness of Brownfield Development to help protect the Island's Greenfields
and Landscape Beauty activity' and the Housing and Communities Board**

'Vibrant Communities' workstream –

Debate concluded –

Report received

The President: We continue at Item 5 and I call on the Hon. Member, Mr Hooper.

Mr Hooper: Thank you very much, Mr President.

2675 To be honest, I was quite surprised, not only reading the Report, but listening to the Minister moving the Item, at how much success the Government appears to have had. He was very positive, effusive almost, in his praise of the amount of work the Government has undertaken around brownfield regeneration. But it is really interesting when you then look into the detail, that does not really marry up with the kind of jovial, positive tone he was trying to reinforce.

2680 When you look through the Report, a big chunk of the success rests on two things: the Island Infrastructure Scheme (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) and the Manx Development Corporation. The Infrastructure Scheme itself seems to be working pretty well; I have got some concerns about some of the detail, but actually it seems to be delivering. And as the Minister for Enterprise mentioned earlier, I think it was me that brought that scheme through Tynwald.

2685 The MDC, the Development Corporation, again seems to be having some success, although Mr Clueit hit it very much on the head when he talked about MDC having a very split focus and Government not really knowing what it is for. Again, MDC was something that myself and Bill Shimmins gestated and brought through in the last administration.

2690 So when you take those two things out of the equation, what has the Government actually managed to do on brownfield regeneration? The Report talks about the Town and Village Regeneration Scheme (TVRS). That is nine properties come through TVRS. That is fantastic, that is nine more properties that we maybe would not have had previously. But that is it; that is the only other measure of success in here.

2695 They were supposed to have all sorts of pieces of work under way; they were supposed to have a community infrastructure levy that was supposed to be investigated and possibly even delivered. There is supposed to be rates relief and Land Registry relief for regeneration projects, residential land tax holidays, property and land tax considerations, VAT treatment for refurbishments, grants or schemes for non-viable but nationally beneficial sites, community purchase schemes, compulsory purchase orders.

2700 There is a list of things which this Report says, 'We were tasked with going away and looking at all of these things.' The Government's solution is, in its entirety, one sentence. It just says, 'Additional tax and financial measures' including some of these things 'were considered but deprioritised as unfeasible or low-value within programme scope.' That is it. That is all we get. No explanation, no data, no report; one sentence saying this big list of things that loads of other jurisdictions do, that we should probably be doing, that we were asked to go away and do, we have decided to just park all that, throw it all off and we are going to explain that to you with one sentence in our report.

2710 That is not good enough. Maybe some of these schemes are not viable, but that could be on how they are scoped. Maybe we need a bit of explanation as to the things that were in scope and out of scope, the way these things were analysed and evaluated. I would very much like to see some of those analyses, some of those reports, some of that detail, some of that information, because I do not quite understand why these things would not be beneficial.

2715 So one of the things on the list was a review of car parking requirements for town centre living, a review of section 13 agreement processes. Mr Callister talked about that quite extensively. Those things actually would benefit and are not overly complex to introduce changes to because they are policy change, not necessarily legislative. So I would like to know why things like this were just decided that they were suddenly out of scope, they were low value.

2720 When we are talking about low value, the one thing which this Report touches on is the need to remove rates exemptions for dangerous or ruinous buildings. The Government says they are doing this through a Bill, which we are not allowed to talk about in here, but ultimately that is something of a damp squib because even that is going to be a low-value change, because rates for a lot of people on the Island are not going to alter that economic calculation. You are not going to get someone owning multi-million-pounds worth of properties who is suddenly going to

2725 be incentivised to redevelop them if we start charging them £800 a year in rates. It is not going to happen.

So you need something like an escalator, something that says the longer you leave it empty, the more expensive your rates charge is going to be. That is fine, that is pretty standard elsewhere, but I can tell you that I am trying to engage with the Treasury in a conversation
2730 around this and it is torturous, Hon. Members. It is very difficult to get the Government to accept the reality of what is needed to make some of these things work, to make some of these changes happen.

So as much as I appreciated the Minister's very positive outlook on life, I think that secretly he agrees with me on this. (Laughter and interjection) The reason I say this is because I have
2735 worked with Mr Ashford on things like the Housing Board, I know how much he has been pushing and fighting for some of these changes to actually happen. So it must be pretty frustrating for him to have to stand up now and defend the Government position, which I know deep in his heart of hearts he probably does not fully agree with.

The reason for that is because all this stuff was put forward right at the start of this
2740 administration and sold to us and sold to the Manx public as things that were achievable, things that were doable, and we had that feeling of energy, that sense of we can do these things. And yet over the years all that has happened is, 'Oh, it is too difficult, it is too hard.' So we might do a CIL, we will push that into the next administration, though, because it is tricky. Some of these other things around rates and tax reform; well, that is complicated, that needs to get Treasury
2745 on board, we will push that into the next administration.

So then what we are left with is DfE putting money on the table, which arguably works. As Mr Clueit rightly pointed out, what you need to do to get these sites developed is reduce developer risk and make them more viable. Putting money on the table does both of those things quite effectively, but it is quite an expensive solution.

You then have the stuff the Cabinet Office are responsible for themselves, and that is things
2750 around planning policy change. This is something that I would like more of an explanation from the Minister on, because it is something that does sit within his remit. Enabling regeneration through the planning system is the way this Report frames it. The problem here is there has been lots of operational change in DEFA at the planning delivery level, which has facilitated
2755 some change and some improvements. But actually at the planning policy level we have not seen that same level of impetus.

So we were supposed to have things like comprehensive treatment areas delivered and planned. Government was supposed to do viability assessments of sites to help de-risk them for
2760 developers. These things have not happened. In part this has not happened because obviously this Hon. Court decided that we did not need a new North and West Area Plan, and so now you are looking at a big chunk of the Island relying on planning policy that is in some cases 40 years out of date and some of these things that should have been introduced, like comprehensive treatment, do not exist.

This is where I am frustrated with the Cabinet Office because their solution to this is not to
2765 bring forward interim measures, is not to say, 'Okay, what can be done in the time we have available to try and mitigate the worst things that we have lost here?' They are not doing that. Instead what they have decided to do is develop a new Strategic Plan for the period 2021 to 2036. We are now in 2026, so this plan is already five years out of date today.

By the time any new plan comes forward it will be 2030, probably is a reasonable estimate. It
2770 will have six years left to run before they will need a new plan. And that is just the Strategic Plan, that does not get down to the actual planning detail that you would get in an area plan or planning policy statements. We have not seen any of those issued either.

This is the thing that really frustrates me. I accept some things take time, a new Strategic Plan will take years to put together, but planning policy statements, comprehensive treatment areas,
2775 things that actually matter on the ground that will help developers, help redevelop brownfield sites, those are things that could be done much quicker and they are not being.

That is the thing that this Report really says to me is, yes, we have had two reasonable successes, not perfect through those two schemes, MDC and the IIS, but reasonable amounts of success. Things that are working broadly as they were intended to work; not perfectly, but broadly as they were supposed to work. Then this Pillar B work, the incentivising investment and the reform of planning and all the rest of it, that really has not happened. That is all the stuff that is entirely within the Cabinet Office's gift.

The Cabinet Office and the Treasury here are the ones that I think have dropped the ball because we are not seeing meaningful reforms to the way we tax and incentivise through financial incentives and tax incentives. We are not seeing those changes; we are not seeing changes through the planning system making it easier to redevelop brownfield sites. Even if we were to see some of those changes, they would not necessarily apply to the whole Island because the whole Island is not covered by new up-to-date effective area plans.

So whatever happens, my neck of the woods is going to lose out, because even if the Government did decide to start producing more detailed rules for comprehensive treatment areas, more flexibility, that is not going to cover Ramsey because we do not have any; because we do not have modern planning. We are relying on an area plan and a town plan from the 1990s.

So I appreciate the sense of frustration that the Minister must feel sitting there in his office, in his chair, knowing that we can do more, that we can do some of this stuff, if only there was the willingness to tackle it, to make some changes and to have some of these difficult conversations. That is what the Report does not say. It does not say why we have not done these things. Why don't we have derelict property rules? Why don't we have community purchase schemes or VAT incentives on refurbishment? Why don't we have these things? There must be reasons they have stopped.

It cannot simply be that they were considered to be unfeasible or low value, because if that is the case, if we are placing all of our hopes on starting to rate properties that are empty – actually, that is not true, we are not rating properties that are empty, we are rating properties that are uninhabitable and that is something that is different as well. Because what was supposed to happen was we were supposed to be looking at rating vacant properties in a different way, not just uninhabitable properties. They are different things entirely.

So I sit here thinking we are nowhere near where we need to be in this space. I am struggling to understand why that is the case. I am struggling to understand what is it that is stopping the Government from making some of these changes. I keep coming back to it has to be simply an unwillingness to make the changes because there is not another reason. I get that sometimes it is financial. Government does not have an unlimited amount of money. But some of these disincentives that we are talking about, some of these changes that we are talking about, are not financial. They are not going to cost the Government money.

So it is those changes that I am quite surprised at, because if the Government's position is all of these things are, in their words, low value, okay, but it is not going to cost you anything. What is the downside? What is the downside to rolling out a number of low-value options, lots of low-value changes that perhaps, when aggregated together, will have a meaningful material impact on viability of brownfield sites, on the developers' risk appetite for some of those sites. Why not?

Maybe individually, if you just did one of those things, it is not going to move the needle, it is not going to work. But if you did 10 of them, it would work. So this is the one thing that I would like to see from the Government, is I would like to see that analysis of all of these options that are set out in this report, plus anything else the Government has considered on this. I would like to see that; I would like to understand it. That is what needs to be explained, not just to this Court, but to the Manx public as well.

Because there was a lot of promises made at the outset around redeveloping brownfield sites, around regenerating our town centres, and the Government has fallen very far short of that promise. It is incumbent on the Government to explain why that is the case. Have I missed

2830 something? Am I, and others in here who have made similar remarks, so far off the money on this one. The Government obviously has some wonderful answer and there is no, 'This is the thing you have missed, this is the thing you have forgotten and you are not aware of' because, at the moment, Mr President, I just cannot see it.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Ms Faragher.

2835 **Ms Faragher:** Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

I will start with a positive: that I welcome the intention behind this programme and I do not think that very many of us would disagree that brownfield regeneration and bringing vacant buildings back into use and improving our city and town centres are important objectives for our Island. But if the Government is going to play a more active role in enabling redevelopment, then scrutiny becomes even more important. This report relies really heavily on public support mechanisms, infrastructure funding, grants, rates relief and planning facilitation.

2840 That raises the question: when public money and public powers help make developments viable, what exactly does the public receive in return? Regeneration cannot simply mean socialising risk while privatising reward. If taxpayers are underwriting difficult developments, then the public should reasonably expect clear and lasting community benefits.

I also think we need to acknowledge something honestly in this Court. Every Member in this place knows that housing, including vacant properties and the condition of our built environment, were among the defining issues of the last general election. All MHKs in here heard it repeatedly on the doorstep. People were already frustrated by derelict buildings, stalled sites, declining town centres, and the growing difficulty of finding suitable and affordable homes. While this report contains positive language, strategies and schemes and developments, many of our constituents will still look around and ask a really simple question: where is the visible change?

2850 After several years, many will feel that progress has been far too slow and that what is set out here still does not match either the scale or the urgency of the problem. I do not think that we can seriously pretend otherwise. I say this particularly because some of us in this Court have already tried to bring forward practical measures in this area. Just a few months ago, I brought a motion seeking to allow local authorities to apply charges to long-vacant properties and brownfield sites. This is quite a modest but practical proposal aimed at encouraging neglected sites back into use and helping address housing pressures.

2860 But the amendment brought forward by the Council of Ministers substantially weakened the proposal and the amended version was ultimately supported instead. I have to say I found that deeply disappointing, because if we all accept that housing supply, dereliction and vacant property are among the defining challenges facing our Island, then it is difficult to understand why even relatively cautious interventions continue to meet resistance. The public response to that motion showed very clearly that people want stronger action in this area and I think there is growing frustration that more than four years into this administration the pace of change still does not reflect the scale or the urgency of this problem.

2870 So there are several things that we all must continue to ask about. (1) Affordability. How many of the homes associated with these schemes will be genuinely affordable to ordinary residents of the Island, key workers and young families, not just technically new housing units on a piece of paper?

2875 (2) Occupancy. What safeguards will exist to ensure homes created through publicly supported regeneration are actually lived in and contribute to community life rather than becoming lightly occupied investment assets?

(3) Quality. As we accelerate redevelopment, how do we ensure we are not sacrificing design quality, heritage, public space, accessibility, or long-term liveability, simply to get schemes over the line?

2880 Finally, (4) public value. Where Government intervention increases land values or reduces
developer risk, how are we measuring the public return on that investment? The success of
regeneration should not be judged solely by the value of private investment leveraged, but by
whether our towns become better places to live, work and build communities. This is
particularly important in Douglas, where much of the regeneration focus is concentrated.
2885 Residents will rightly want reassurance that redevelopment delivers, not only commercial uplift,
but wider civic benefits, more housing that people can actually use, stronger town centre life,
improved public spaces and the restoration of long-neglected sites.
So while I support the direction of travel, or should I say the foundations that the Minister is
laying with his updates, I do not believe this report can be treated as mission accomplished. I will
2890 join Hon. Loayreyder in lamenting my inability to be more positive, but, Eaghtyrane, the Island
needs faster progress, more visible outcomes, and a greater sense of urgency than we have seen
so far. I want to say to Government we really need to move away from saying the right things
about regeneration, but repeatedly hesitating when meaningful intervention is proposed.
Gura mie eu.

2895
Several Members: Hear, hear.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Ms Lord-Brennan.

2900 **Ms Lord-Brennan:** Thank you, Mr President.

Actually I welcome the update from the Minister, because if Tynwald had not backed that
coming forward, we would never have been able to look at some of the things that were
outstanding.

I think partly where some things did start to go awry was when the programme oversight of
2905 the Built Environment Reform Programme switched over from central Cabinet Office co-
ordination, where a lot of planning policy sits, to DEFA. DEFA clearly had a lot of other things
going on.

The goals in the original Built Environment Reform Programme are still valid and, if Members
are interested and care to look at page 4 on the document, they can see there is a whole range
2910 of things listed from property and land taxation considerations, community purchase schemes,
derelict property orders, compulsory purchase orders, including comprehensive treatment area-
related powers. There is a whole list of things that are still absolutely valid. They were in the
original programme because they are achievable and I suppose my main contribution to this
debate is just to say that Government should not lose sight of those worthwhile objectives.

2915 If you look anywhere, real interventions – and there have been some successes – for this sort
of thing, they take longer than four years. So I think Government should revisit those points on
page 4; not consider this a closing report and that nothing further should happen, but to
continue with some of those well-thought-out levers and interventions that were identified.

I will just pick up on a point that Mr Hooper said. You do not need an area plan to have a
2920 comprehensive treatment area. I think in the Area Plan for the East, there were comprehensive
treatment areas brought forward subsequent to that. If it is something that is important to him,
then he could move for a comprehensive treatment area for Ramsey if that is something that is
going to make a difference, if he wishes. But there is a lot more to that than it just being
included in the area plan as a sweetener, which I suggest it probably was, because it was only for
2925 Ramsey.

Thank you, Mr President.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Mr Johnston.

2930 **Mr Johnston:** Thank you, Mr President.

Following the Hon. Mr Speaker's comments, I felt compelled to stand and defend my slush fund – I mean, sorry, IIS fund! (Laughter)

The Speaker: You were right the first time.

2935

Mr Johnston: I have to say on that point, this scheme does what it says on the tin. It has done what it set out to do and that is really important, to unlock the redevelopment of unoccupied brownfield sites. I think it is important to recall this was never a scheme to develop affordable housing per se. Too much is put on its shoulders, that is the case. That was never its central remit. It was always about looking at a broad range of different opportunities and areas.

2940

If you listen to some of the other comments that have just been made now, I appreciate Members have come from different perspectives when we are looking at brownfield redevelopment, but I think it is dangerous or unfair if we think these things are mutually exclusive. We must recognise that all of these areas are important.

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If we are not seeing the investment going on within the private sector, if we are not seeing that private sector leverage going on in the economy, if we are not investing in our visitor economy through hotels, if we are not investing in our retail sector, our residential sector, then the whole economy suffers and housing is an important part of that. We recognise the challenges around housing. We need a broad range of housing as well. So we have got to try and remember and keep a balance when we are having these discussions.

2950

Yes, clearly, there has been substantial investment and we talk about it being expensive. Again, it depends how you classify that. Yes, there has been, up to now, £16.2 million of funding promised towards these developments, but that is leveraging £80 million of private investment on the Island. That is the money that is being invested on the Island. That is developers making the decision to invest here rather than taking that money elsewhere, which they have the flexibility to do in most cases.

2955

So I think we have to remember what that goes towards and remembering of course that money is not paid out by Government until these developments are completed, by which time we would have already received a considerable return to extract the benefit on construction and other areas against that funding. So again, we have to make sure that we are keeping these things in balance.

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Hon. Members, let's look around us: things are happening, there are cranes in the sky as we speak and it is very positive to see some of these long-held sites that we have seen for many years sitting idle, work going on. So it is important to record that. We have seen the groundworks under way at Villiers Square, a mixed-use development, 80,000 ft² of commercial, retail and leisure space, and civic square, including a new 80-bedroom Travelodge hotel, something we need. These are important things we need in our broader economy.

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One hundred and nine apartments in Lake Road, under development as we speak. Again, these are not luxury apartments, they are not all first-time buyer, but there is a balance, there is a broad spectrum that we need to see across the economy, including also mixed-use development in North Quay that has now had permission granted through the scheme, and also on Duke Street, subject to planning.

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I think, again, I just want to record that and say that this scheme has a specific remit and it cannot cover every base and nor should it. So here we are, a successful scheme developed by the Department for Enterprise since 2017. Who knew? (Laughter)

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The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Dr Haywood.

A Member: We all learn something new every day.

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Dr Haywood: Thank you, Mr President.

This report is a useful update on where BERP has got to. It does demonstrate some activity and in places there is some tangible progress. But the key question for this Court is a simple one: has the programme delivered on the promises made when it was launched? I think, on that test, the answer can only really be partially and probably not very convincingly in some areas.

The original ambition of Strategic Objective 4 was clear: to make brownfield development more attractive and viable, reducing reliance on greenfield land and to transform the regeneration of our town centres. What we see in this report though is not really a fully realised programme, which is what I thought we were probably all expecting, but a collection of initiatives that have got to various stages of delivery.

As acknowledged in here today, there has been some progress. The Island Infrastructure Scheme, Mr Johnston's slush fund, has helped unlock £80 million of private investment, supporting over 200 dwellings across a number of sites, but it is a small number of sites. The Town and Village Regeneration Scheme is targeted support on some smaller scale stuff and the Manx Development Corporation has got some visible outcomes; refurbishment of Thie Clag and progress on other sites.

Those are all welcome and please do not anyone walk away thinking that we do not welcome those. But that is not the systemic reform that was published in the start of this and it is not what we were promised. When BERP was introduced, the promise was not we were going to simply fund a handful of developments, it was about addressing structural barriers that were holding back brownfield regeneration.

There were lots of policy levers that were originally identified and they have been mentioned – tax changes, VAT adjustments, wider financial reform – and they have, by the Minister's own admission, been deprioritised for a variety of reasons. I think Mr Hooper's challenge of, 'But actually what were the details around those and what were the precise challenges?' is a really relevant one, because we all know that you try to get a scheme through in one format and hit various challenges along the way. And actually the sensible, rational mind needs to then step back and work out how do you work around those challenges, rather than just saying it is a bit too hard and I am going to step away from it.

But that feels a little bit what we have done. We have deferred the community infrastructure levy; any wider work on viability pressures, things like rising construction costs, still under review, there is no completed response in place. So in other words, some of the most significant levers for change that we were expecting to come through as part of this have been delayed or not delivered. That means the hard-to-do stuff has again been left undone.

So that raises a fundamental question about whether the programme itself managed to tackle any of the causes of the problem or has just merely treated some of the symptoms at this stage. It is a question of scale as well. The delivery of a few hundred units across a limited number of sites is positive, but it is not yet clear that that is materially enough to shift the balance away from pressure on greenfield development or to provide the transformation that our town centres need. Indeed, the report itself acknowledges the ongoing issues with empty and derelict properties and the need for further measures to discourage that vacancy and underuse.

So while the momentum does exist, I do not think there can be any claim that the BERP programme as such has achieved the systemic impact that was originally promised to us.

I think there is a final question about clarity and accountability. The report aggregates activity across multiple schemes, Departments and initiatives, but it does not offer us very measurable outcomes against the original objectives. There is no clear baseline, no defined targets and no real transparent assessment of the success. Without that, it becomes hard for this Court and the public to say whether the promises of the BERP reform stuff have truly been met.

So where does that leave us? I think it leaves us with a report that shows there is some work under way, some delivery has been achieved, but key reforms have been delayed or diluted, the structural issues probably remain unresolved, and so this will continue to be a problem for us going forward. The overall impact I do not think is clearly demonstrated yet.

3035 The promise of BERP was to deliver a step change in brownfield regeneration and, when you read through the Report, you have to end up at the conclusion that that step change has not happened. We have had at best some incremental progress in some areas, but it is time to move beyond that and get back to those first principles to address the viability at its roots, to use the full range of policy levers, to think carefully and hard about those and to make those work. Because on the surface they are very attractive levers to pull. However, they are hard to do. But just because something is hard to do does not mean we should walk away from it.

3040 More importantly, we have almost missed an opportunity here to deliver the transformation that our towns and communities need and that they are asking for, and so I would hope that the next administration can pick up and start moving forward on some of these things that we have flagged, but have not yet managed to achieve.

3045 Thank you.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Mr Glover.

Mr Glover: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

3050 A lot of the points I am not going to go over because they have already been made – carrot and stick, MDC and the positives that are in there. But certainly when I read the Report, it was the tone of the document to me; it just felt a bit, ‘meh’. I am not sure how Hansard is going to deal with that, but it just lacks urgency. There are lots of intentions, there is a lack of evidence really on meaningful impact. So that lack of urgency when it should be a priority. We were told that back in 2021. We had housing pressures then, we have still got housing pressures now.

3055 So Mr President, I do want to just emphasise a couple of points that have been alluded to by others. It does smack of a Government delaying difficult decisions. You can look at the community infrastructure levy deferred to 2027 as an example of that and there have been others quoted by other Hon. Members. There is too much critique and not enough evidence of meaningful interventions.

3060 So I will just ask the Minister two questions, if I may: can the Minister demonstrate – and mean it as well – what success looks like here and does the Minister accept that progress has been too slow?

Gura mie eu.

3065 **The President:** I call on the Hon. Member, Ms Edge.

Ms Edge: Thank you, Mr President.

3070 I, too, support brownfield regeneration, protecting of our green fields and bringing empty and derelict sites back into use. They are all positive and there are some positive elements within this Report, including action on dangerous properties and regeneration projects progressing through the Manx Development Corporation. I will say no more. I did not vote for the Manx Development Corporation and a number of Members have already made those concerns very loud and clear.

3075 I do have significant concern about the direction of travel though, Mr President, as the Report highlights that the Island Infrastructure Scheme has supported approximately £80 million of private sector investment linked to developments expected to deliver 206 dwellings. So what concerns me with that, despite the figures of that scale, the Report is providing no clear indication of how many of those homes are genuinely affordable for our local people.

3080 Many Islanders cannot access the housing market and I find it alarming that such significant levels of public support, incentives and planning flexibility can be associated with developments without stronger guarantees on affordability outcomes. Committed sums, Mr President, are not a home; they are a value of money that transfers. They do not deliver a home. They are not going to house young families, key workers or local residents struggling to remain within their communities or even on our Island at all; their place of birth.

We also need to recognise that housing alone is not enough to retain families and young people on our Island. There is little point building homes if communities lack leisure facilities, activities, attractive public spaces, and the wider quality of life that encourages people to stay here and build their futures and call it home.

3090 The Department for Enterprise Minister talked about, 'We are going to get leisure facilities, we are going to get this.' Wrong site, Minister. There is no crane on that site yet. Vibrant communities require more than apartment numbers and viability calculations. Public investment should enhance the Island life for everyone, not simply improve a development viability or deliver returns to developers. The investment on return is what the Manx taxpayer wants to see
3095 outcomes with: £80 million, what are the outcomes for the people of the Isle of Man?

I am concerned that the viability arguments are increasingly being used to reduce affordable housing obligations while the public are given very little transparency around how those decisions are reached. So Mr President, I believe, before any expansion of the Island
3100 Infrastructure Scheme, Tynwald should receive clear evidence showing how many affordable homes have actually been delivered, where have the committed sums gone, what wider community benefits have been secured and whether public intervention is genuinely improving quality of life for local people.

Regeneration should mean sustainable communities for our families, our young people, who want to remain here, participate and build their futures. But the Island needs to stop piecemeal and do full infrastructure strategic planning with a vision of what the Island's future looks like.
3105 As, if you build more in our towns, you will need more school places in the east. Where is that strategic approach, Mr President? There is no development on our schools in the east, yet we are talking here about £80 million on investments for more homes in the east.

An overall strategic infrastructure plan and vision for our Island is what is needed, not
3110 piecemeal infrastructure investment schemes that the Minister is very proud of; came in 2017, it significantly changed in this administration, Mr President, and he needs to go back and look at what those changes meant. But we should be in here ensuring that any investment from taxpayers' money of £80 million delivers for the people of our Island? (Interjection) It is not taxpayers' money?

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The President: Hon. Member, Ms Edge has the floor.

Ms Edge: So the sums that the Island has invested into the £80 million private investment schemes should be very clear, transparent, and that the public of the Isle of Man can actually
3120 see what they are getting for their investment. At the minute, on the last scheme that was announced, the public were not very impressed with it because the return was not there. Although that one site –

The President: Will the Hon. Member give way?
3125

Ms Edge: No, I will not at the moment.

On that one site, where it did have some leisure facilities, etc., included, we still do not know where the affordable homes are sitting in our capital and how affordable they are going to be, Mr President. Because I am not seeing affordable homes in the £200,000 region in any of these
3130 developments and that is what the people of the Isle of Man are wanting to see.

Affordable homes for young people to start their families and retain their lives on the Island in a very viable way for them, not the developer, and Government investment. Because that is what we all invest in. And if the Government is investing in schemes, they should make sure that the opportunity for locals and families to settle and remain here are there. Too many of our
3135 families are leaving this Island, Mr President, and these schemes are not helping.

Thank you.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Mr Moorhouse.

3140 **Mr Moorhouse:** Thank you, Mr President.

A positive view is this is wonderful collage of movements. This is an interesting insight into where we have been, rather than a clear vision of where we should be. I brought a motion on derelict properties three years ago. It is good that it still remains on the radar, but it is not going forward as quickly as it could, despite two other Members bringing related motions.

3145 The MDC has a place, but should it be involved with things such as turning a guesthouse into eight housing units, and is that a highlight? Along with that, the DoI Minister recently spoke about the Parade Street car park. That appears here. In terms of that, where does responsibility lie? Hopefully candidates considering standing in the 2026 General Election will look at this document and be inspired in terms of thinking what could be done, what could be done better.

3150 So I feel this document could potentially change many things.

It is true that we have limited resources, but there is a real need to actually move things together; move items, not in isolation as we have got here in terms of the brownfield sites or in terms of DoI's challenges with social housing aspirations with areas such as Crossag Farm. Hopefully, the next administration will look at things like this together and see the opportunities that can be brought by bringing the limited resources together and ensuring better outcomes for all.

3160 As an oversight, it is positive to sit down to reflect on what has been done and what can be done. But there are many questions remaining, many issues linked to this. So, as many Members have identified key concerns, which would be pointless for me to go through again because they have been made so clearly already, but one small issue that has not really been mentioned is that proud moment emphasised by the Minister when he made reference to regeneration and the new leisure facilities. With those will come new challenges in terms of we do not want a simple shift away from existing businesses and an even greater need for low-cost employees.

3165 So going forward, there are going to be massive challenges, but as a document I feel this could be useful in terms of allowing people to think of what has been done, what can be done and where we should be going.

Thank you, Mr President.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Mr Thomas.

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Mr Thomas: Thank you very much, Mr President.

I would just like to start by thanking Ms Faragher for bringing her motion back in November 2025 on charges on empty and dilapidated properties, which allowed me as a backbencher to amend it to call for this very helpful Report, which has stimulated a debate to which Minister Ashford, David Ashford, the Cabinet Office Minister and the Department for Enterprise Minister, Mrs Barber, Housing and Communities Board, have risen to produce for us a report.

3180 So apologies that this has been quite a long debate – it was a backbencher amendment because I was a bit confused what happened to the Built Environment Reform Programme objective for work and I was a bit confused about exactly what had happened to the Housing and Communities Board Vibrant Communities workstream. Now everything is much clearer and I appreciate the chance for that debate, which apparently will inform the election and election candidates for the next administration as well.

3185 So, all in all, it has all been very helpful. One point I can add to the debate, which has not been mentioned so far, is that back in my Budget speech in February I did announce that

To inform future policy in this matter, the Brownfield Regeneration Steering Group last week –
– that was in mid-February –

– commissioned a review into the impact of the rising costs of construction and the impact this has on the Manx Development Corporation. I hope to report back to Tynwald with the review's conclusions before the end of this parliamentary year.

So I hate to put pressure on myself and the officers behind me, but I have announced that we hope to be reporting back before the end of this parliamentary year on the work on the development viability of the Island Infrastructure Scheme and the Manx Development Corporation. The IIS was in the previous paragraph in my Budget speech.

Unfortunately that will not deal with housing policies, because the consultants we engaged have had generalised housing policy excluded from their terms of reference. This is about development viability, building on the initial work on development viability that was carried out earlier on when the decision was made about the community infrastructure levy.

Having already commended the Cabinet Office for rising to this challenge, Minister Ashford in particular, I also want to remind people that there was a report at the time about the Built Environment Reform Programme when Objective 4 was stopped, and there was also a report, a bit about empty properties, earlier on. So there are other documents that are already available to those election candidates who might want to take forward this work.

Finally, I feel I have to comment on some of the points that Mr Hooper made in his speech, not only because he was the only person who voted against in the House of Keys having this debate today by not supporting my amendment – I am not exactly sure why he did not support my amendment back in November 2025, but if it has been an important debate, it was despite Mr Hooper's vote trying to speak against it and so on.

But the points I would make are that we need to understand the strategic planning process and the whole point of the strategic planning process and a plan is that you have five years in the past and then 10 years or 15 years in the future. That is the whole point of it: you analyse the past to work out the future. So this time the Planning Policy part of the Cabinet Office is ambitiously looking to plan for 15 years, rather than 10 years that they did in the previous Strategic Plan.

So it is not failure to have five years in the past, that is the whole point of strategic planning: you take five years in the past and then you go forward for 10 or 15 or 20 years beyond that. So I commend Planning Policy for having accepted the challenge of extending the period into the future that they are trying to plan for.

The other point I wanted to say was that the comprehensive treatment area goes back to the Area Plan for the East. There were five of them in the Area Plan for the East, four in Douglas, one in Onchan, and the ones in the North and the West Area Plan are a tiny part of those five. And if Hon. Members remember, we extended the period by which the comprehensive treatment areas could be taken forward to 10 years in a recent legislative amendment. So that part is still very much in process.

Finally, this all started from Ms Faragher's move about vacant properties and dilapidated properties and lots of people making claims about earlier contributions in this administration. We all have to remember that not all of the 6,000 properties that came up as vacant in the last census are vacant by most people's normal use of that word. Some of them are second homes, some of them are holiday homes, some of them have all sorts of uses. This is an incredibly complicated issue and we have to thank Mr Callister, Mr Moorhouse, Ms Faragher, and all the people who have moved us to tackle this difficult problem. Next time around, Government has to get it right through a holistic, comprehensive approach earlier than it is doing this time.

I fully support receiving this Report and thank Mr Ashford for taking on the burden of producing it.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Mr Reid.

Mr Reid: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

3235 I welcome this Report and recognise the progress that has been made, particularly through the Island Infrastructure Scheme and the work of the Manx Development Corporation, which is often much maligned but, as has been mentioned already, there has been a lot of progress. I guess I do want to highlight some of the concerns though that the Report brings out that we really need to take note of.

3240 Firstly, much of the progress has relied heavily on that public subsidy. While effective in locking development, we really need to ask whether this approach is a sustainable approach in the longer term or whether we are actually masking the viability of the brownfield sites by doing so.

3245 Secondly, I would just like to highlight the progress on disincentives seems to have been very slow. This was raised earlier. The removal of rates exemptions for dangerous and derelict buildings is welcome, but it is long overdue. Empty and underused properties continue to be an eyesore on our Island and there is no greater place to look, unfortunately, than on our promenade in Douglas, as you walk into our capital.

3250 All the work that is being done on the prom is fantastic, but then you walk past the number of buildings that are dilapidated and have not been invested in properly. It is quite shameful. It certainly is not the case on other jurisdictions that I have worked in in the past. They take great pride in the buildings and it is concerning that is still the case; many in need of renovation, removal or improvement in some way.

3255 Thirdly, delivery still remains modest. I agree that there have been some excellent improvements, but certainly the number of homes that have been brought forward through these schemes is positive, but not yet anywhere near the scale that we need to meet the demand of our Island. That has been mentioned many times today.

3260 Finally, just picking up on the key elements in the Strategic Plan, the Urban Sites Register, the Treasury review in progress, and it is excellent, but it is clear that there is still a lot of work to do and a lot of that is unfinished.

3265 So I guess my view is we are definitely moving in the right direction and I appreciate the Report does highlight some of that direction, but possibly not at the scale and at the pace that we actually need on the Island. We certainly need fresh vigour in applying powers we have and fresh thinking and approaches to accelerate and meet the needs of our Island, whether they be in housing, business or heritage, and they would certainly be warmly welcomed by myself.

Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

The President: I call on the mover to reply.

3270 **The Minister:** Thank you very much, Mr President.

Can I thank all the Hon. Members that have engaged in this Item because it is a very important topic and Item, and it is very heartening to hear the comments of all Hon. Members in this Court that have spoken, whether they have been critical comments or helpful comments.

3275 In relation to Mr Speaker, starting off, Mr Speaker said all carrot and no stick and that his views have not changed and that carrots are unnecessary. He focused on the Pillar B disincentives and other tools and also saying about the community infrastructure levy being kicked down the road, which I will address later on in my remarks. He said that the Island Infrastructure Scheme is simply limited, there are problem properties, flawed ratings – I am sorry, Mr President, I will not mention that here, with your ruling, but he said about problem properties.

3280 Demolishing a building, my understanding is, if we develop the way we want to develop, I think longer-term policy is that it may not necessarily exempt from rates if you just do it, but obviously as the situation currently stands now, he is quite correct. But also one of the things that I have always had a very public ... [A light falls down] I have always had a very public view on, if the Chamber does not start falling apart on me!

The President: They have been replacing some lights earlier, that one may not have made it.

The Minister: Well that was an enlightening moment, Mr President! So, yes, demolition is quicker than you think, Mr Speaker! (Laughter)

But anyway, and getting back to what I was saying before the rude interruption, in terms of demolition, my views have been very clear on the public record for a long time that, where possible, we should not be demolishing things and just getting rid of things. It should be quite a high test to be able to demolish something in the first place.

In terms of increased rating of land for those with valid planning approval, that was something I supported as Chair of Planning, so I can say to Mr Speaker when he says, 'Go away and look at some of these things', these are some of the very same things that I raised back in the good old days of my being Chair of Planning.

Disincentives do need to be a focus going forward, I fully agree with that. He is right, we have focused at the moment on the carrot, because what has been the aim? The aim has been to try and get the development and, to be frank, in the first early stages, one of the best ways of getting that development is to offer that carrot to allow the private investment to go in. So he is right, that has been the focus, on incentives, but most definitely the disincentives still need to be a massive part of that.

This is where I am going to mention those fateful words, which I am going to mention several times, which is Strategic Plan. Again, my views have long been known that the Strategic Plan, certainly since the first one came in 2007, has been very much simply a pure process-driven document rather than a policy document, in my view. This new Strategic Plan that we are developing very much has to be about policy, about using the levers within the Strategic Plan to work the planning system to get, not just development on our Island, but the development that we believe we need. It is a chance for Government to actually move the levers and that is both in terms of incentives and disincentives.

So I hope that all Hon. Members who are currently in this Hon. Court, and whatever new Hon. Members there might be after September, will engage in that process, because I think that is an absolutely key thing that will be able to drive a lot of what Hon. Members have talked about and say that they want today.

In terms of Mr Callister, he remains obviously of the view that progress so far has been too slow in relation to empty and dilapidated properties. He is frustrated and he also mentioned about Strategic Plan and Housing Policy 5. As I have just said, in my view the Strategic Plan needs a different approach and that is something I have been making very clear in my current role as Minister for the Cabinet Office, as well as previous roles that I have held.

I have also been quite clear, both in this role and when I was Mr Callister's predecessor as Chair of Planning in terms of my views of Housing Policy 5 and section 13 agreements and the need for them to change. The Hon. Member mentions a mix of incentives and I would add disincentives is the mix that is not quite there yet. This debate has yet again drawn out just how central the new Strategic Plan will be and I hope that all Hon. Members engage in relation to that.

We also must not forget, Mr President, where we started from in 2021. For many Hon. Members, progress has been frustratingly slow, they say, but there has been progress and that is important to acknowledge. When we started with this in 2021, from the back end of the last administration, let's be honest, there was not really any firm strategy at all in place and things have taken time to develop.

That brings me to the remarks by the Hon. Member of Council, Mr Clueit, who very conveniently of course is a political Member within Treasury, which of course oversees the Manx Development Corporation. So he is absolutely in the perfect position to be able to pick up on many of the points that he raised in his speech and drive things forward. Some Treasury board meetings could be becoming very robust discussions in the near future, to pre-warn the Treasury Minister.

3340 He mentioned about changing developer behaviour and the key lever in relation to that, from my point of view – I will use the words again – is the forthcoming Strategic Plan. Because you need to use the planning system to ensure you get the development that you feel the Island needs over the coming years and decades. The way to do that is through that Strategic Plan.

3345 He also said that most developments fail because the numbers do not stack up and he is quite correct. If the numbers do not stack up, at the end of the day, a developer is wanting to make a profit off the site. They are not going to do it simply for the community return where they are going to throw millions at a site that they are not going to see any commercial return on. Particularly in the case of some of the bigger companies, I do not think their shareholders will be too happy about that approach either.

3350 So we do need to get to a situation where it is viable and attractive to develop brownfield sites. In terms of the Island Infrastructure Scheme that is what we have been looking to drive. The Hon. Member, the Minister for DfE, made quite clear, in terms of the money invested, that has come with £80 million of private sector investment. That is not a small amount of money in an Island of our size. So I think it is driving behaviours, it is starting to get some traction, but it is going to take time to do.

3355 The Hon. Member, Mr Clueit, said this Report does not add up to the pace that we need and also that developers will not tolerate open-ended risk. That is exactly the point. That is exactly why we need to establish the right balance. In terms of MDC, like I said, I think the Hon. Member does make some very good points. His remarks really were around there having to be political decisions about what MDC actually is. I am glad that he mentioned that because I have said this
3360 for quite a while, that one of the things that needs to be defined very clearly in the next administration is to decide very early on and give direction to MDC as to what its role really is.

Is it a support mechanism for private developers to be able to develop, is it a developer itself or is it the construction arm of Government? That is a question that needs to be defined. MDC, within the remit they have been doing, have been doing a very good job. They have moved
3365 things on that, if they were not there, just never would have happened. So I do look forward to the Hon. Member working in his Treasury board role across Government to help facilitate the changes that he has laid out so passionately in his remarks.

Turning to Mr Hooper, he said I very much surprised him. I always like to surprise the Hon. Member into action and standing up and giving a speech. He also described me as rather
3370 jovial in my opening remarks. I have got to say it is a long time since I was last described as jovial. In fact, it was probably 7th January 2018, the day before I became Minister for Health! (Laughter)

The Island Infrastructure Scheme is enabling 206 new residential properties. In terms of the section 13 agreements, I go back to my remarks to Mr Callister, my personal views on that,
3375 I have never been shy of actually emphasising. (Interjection) So on that, I have got to say we most definitely agree.

From my point of view, I want to be absolutely clear that the changes being proposed in relation to rates and so on is a start, it is not an end in itself, very much not an end in itself. To screw up an old phrase, it is the beginning of a change and may be the end of the beginning, not
3380 certainly the end in totality.

It is the same when it comes to the way we deal with derelict and abandoned properties. This is the start and that policy should always be evolving. There have been comments today around remarks of this should not be a report that says job done. It is far from that. This is an update
3385 report in compliance with the November Tynwald motion, which I will come on to further on in the remarks. It is not saying this is what we have done and there is nothing more to do. It is giving a progress update and it is saying there is a lot more to do, there are a lot of things to be considered, and there are a lot of things to be driven forward.

The Hon. Member mentioned about comprehensive treatment areas and the North and West Area Plan was proposing that, particularly in Ramsey, which I know the two Hon. Members for
3390 Ramsey were very passionate about.

The Hon. Member, Ms Lord-Brennan, was very right in saying the comprehensive treatment areas are in the Area Plan for the East, but as the Hon. Member for Ramsey, Mr Hooper, knows, I am keen to see what we can do in the time left in this administration and I have engaged with both Members for Ramsey, particularly what we can do outside of the legislative framework that the North and West Area Plan would have given us.

The work in relation to developing brownfield sites, I do agree that it definitely needs to speed up. The groundwork has taken much longer than any of us would have ideally wanted, because I do think every single Hon. Member, and one of the common themes throughout this is we all actually want the same thing. We want to see those blots on our landscape built on and developed in a way that benefits our Island community.

In relation to Ms Faragher, regeneration, she said, cannot simply mean socialising risk while privatising reward. The reward in this is in delivering revitalised sites that are no longer a blot on our landscape and that also provide homes for our residents. Affordability, I fully agree with the Hon. Member, that has to be the driver in all that we do. This administration became the first in Manx history to set an actual affordable housing target over the next 10 years. If we are to meet that target, then I fully believe that brownfield sites will need to have an important role in that.

The Hon. Member mentions also about civic uplift and that is a key thing. Development needs to provide civic value. The Report is most certainly not mission accomplished, nor is it trying to be positioned in that way. It is a mission commenced and, as I said, as far as I am concerned, this is only the end of the beginning.

In terms of Ms Lord-Brennan, she mentioned page 4, and there is a whole list of things that remain valuable. I fully agree. The Hon. Member is right. We must not lose sight of those worthwhile objectives. It is most certainly not a closing report, as the Hon. Member emphasised. It is an update complying with the November motion last year.

In terms of Minister Johnston, he was compelled to his feet to stand and defend his fund, however you want to describe it. (**The Speaker:** Slush.) (Laughter) He said that all these areas are important and there is need for private sector leverage investment in various sectors across the economy and it all interlinks and that there has been substantial investment. I fully agree with the Hon. Member. The public money has leveraged £80 million in private investment, and there is additional exchequer benefit from development as well off the back of that. He is right that a broad spectrum across the economy is absolutely key. And of course, I note his comments about the 109 apartments that will be coming on Lake Road.

In terms of Dr Haywood, who said this was a useful update and it shows partial delivery, I fully agree. It does show partial delivery and I think that is one of the points of the Report, to actually show where we are up to. I think on something like this you are never going to get to full delivery, because there is always going to be further options and further things to be considered.

In terms of addressing of structural barriers, it still has to be the key. Let's be honest, it has not been easy or as simple as was perhaps maybe first thought. In terms of scale and materially that scale being enough to shift pressure away from greenfield sites, that does take time. A lot of this stuff does actually take longer than four years to develop, implement and then build up the momentum to have the impact that we all want to see. The Hon. Member also said that the promise of the BERP was to deliver a step change, but the key with step change is just that: it comes in steps. Several steps have been taken and made, but I fully acknowledge there is further to go.

In terms of community infrastructure levy, I just want to be clear. We did a development viability study. This was necessary before we went ahead and introduced regulations to bring in a community infrastructure levy. One of the things this showed was this would have demanded more from site developers, which would have made sites even more unviable. We did not want to place further burdens on brownfield site development.

In terms of Mr Glover, he said it felt a bit 'meh'. I also look forward to seeing how Hansard handles that! It is an update at the end of the day, so I am afraid it is not going to be the sparkling report, perhaps, that the Hon. Member might have hoped for.

3445 I do have to very gently disagree with him that it has a lack of sense of urgency. The update report is just that: it is an update of where we currently stand. Again, I think all of us in this Hon. Court want us to move at as fast a pace as possible to ensure that we get the development that our Island needs and deserves.

3450 He set me down two challenges. He said, 'Can the Minister demonstrate what success looks like?' Well, for me, success looks like getting private investment in sites that otherwise would go undeveloped, getting build where there would otherwise be blight, and actually providing things that are useful to our Island community. For me, that is what success actually looks like. 'Can the Minister accept progress is too slow?' Well, I actually beat him to it. As I said in my opening remarks, I felt things have on occasions been, from my point of view, frustratingly slow. I do believe there is progress and I do believe we are travelling in the right direction.

3455 In terms of the Hon. Member for Onchan, Ms Edge, committed sums are not a home. I am going to again re-emphasise the fact my views on the section 13 agreements are long on record over numerous years, Mr President, including when I was Chair of Planning. She said that we need to build communities, and I could not agree with her more. I think this is the point. It is not about affordable housing in isolation or private sector investment in isolation, or not just about building. It is about what we create and the community benefit that we create and what it delivers for people around our Island.

3460 She mentioned about seeing builds coming through in the £200,000 mark. I am afraid I am going to perhaps disappoint her a bit, because the actual standard for a three-bed build in the UK now costs in the region of £250,000 just to build. So I do not think you will be seeing any in the £200,000 mark, because that is actually below what the actual build of a property cost is actually these days. (Interjection by Ms Edge)

3470 In terms of Mr Moorhouse, he said it was a wonderful collage, so I am absolutely delighted I have been able to add some colour to his life today. He also said this document could be useful, so I thank him for his positivity that he did find it useful and it did enhance his life, even if for a brief moment! (Laughter)

3475 In terms of Minister Thomas, can I take the opportunity, Mr President, to thank Minister Thomas for the helpful amendment of November last year that has led to me being on my feet today. I will thank him properly later. (Laughter) I am glad that he is happy about the clarity he feels this has delivered. I know he says he hates to put pressure on himself, as we all do, but I am sure we all look forward to the report back before the end of this administration.

3480 In terms of the Hon. Member of Council, Mr Reid, he is right to say progress has been made in certain areas, while not as fast in other areas. It is about sustainability of approach, the Hon. Member mentioned, and I fully agree. It is about ensuring what we do is actually sustainable in the long term and actually adds value to our community.

3485 Again, another shameless plug, but the Strategic Plan gives an opportunity to revisit incentives and disincentives by using the levers of the planning system to ensure not just we get development but, crucially, the right development that we actually need. That is why it is so important, I will say again, that current Hon. Members, and any future Hon. Members who might be here after September, engage in that Strategic Plan process. He is right, things do need to scale up and that is the challenge going forward: ensuring that we do scale things up to the levels required. It is not a small challenge either.

3490 What I would say to Hon. Members is the Report is what it says on the tin. It is an update of where we are now, but by no means is this Report saying this is mission accomplished, this is the end of the process. This is the beginning of the end of the start of the process, Mr President.

Thank you.

A Member: Hear, hear. Well said.

The President: Hon. Members, we come to vote on this Item, Item 5, as laid out on the Order Paper. All those in favour, please say aye; those against, please say no.

A division was called for and electronic voting resulted as follows:

In the Keys – Ayes 23, Noes 1

FOR

Dr Allinson
Mr Ashford
Mrs Barber
Mrs Caine
Mr Callister
Mr Cannan
Ms Christian
Mrs Corlett
Mr Crookall
Ms Edge
Ms Faragher
Mr Glover
Dr Haywood
Mr Hooper
Mr Johnston
Ms Lord-Brennan
Mrs Maltby
Mr Moorhouse
Mr Peters
Mrs Poole-Wilson
Mr Smith
Mr Thomas
Mr Wannenburgh

AGAINST

The Speaker

3495 **The Speaker:** Mr President, in the House of Keys, 23 for, 1 against.

In the Council – Ayes 7, Noes 0

FOR

Mrs August-Phillips
Mr Clueit
Mr Craine
Mrs Kelsey
Mr Mercer
Mrs Morphet
Mr Reid

AGAINST

None

The President: Legislative Council: 7 for, none against. Therefore, Item 5 is carried.

**Announcement of Royal Assent –
City of Douglas Act 2026;
Foundations (Amendment) Act 2026;
Safeguarding (Amendment) Act 2026**

The President: Before I move on to the next Item, I would just like to announce that Royal Assent has today been given to the City of Douglas Act 2026, Foundations (Amendment) Act 2026 and Safeguarding (Amendment) Act 2026.

**Isle of Man Constitution Bill 2023 –
Sent to Privy Council**

3500 **The President:** And the Isle of Man Constitution Bill 2023 has been sent to the Privy Council.

**6. Tynwald Management Committee's Second Report for the Session 2025-26 –
Tynwald Honours: Peter Kelly MBE CP RBV –
Report received and recommendation approved**

The Chair of the Tynwald Management Committee, Mr Speaker, to move:

That the Tynwald Management Committee's Second Report for the Session 2025/26 – 'Tynwald Honours: Peter Kelly MBE CP RBV' [[PP 2026/0070](#)] be received and that the following recommendation be approved:

Recommendation

That Tynwald approves Peter Kelly MBE CP RBV be awarded the Tynwald Honour in recognition of his public service to the Isle of Man, particularly in the areas of Manx heritage, architectural conservation and community service, on 6th July 2026.

The President: We now move on to Item 6 and I call on Loayreyder to move.

The Chair of the Tynwald Management Committee (The Speaker): Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

3505 The Tynwald Honour is the highest honour which the Isle of Man can bestow. It is awarded only to those who have made an outstanding contribution over many years to one or more areas of Manx life, and there is no expectation that the award be made annually. Hon. Members can see the full criteria for the award in our Report.

3510 In light of the agreed criteria, your Committee has resolved to award the Tynwald Honour to Mr Peter Kelly MBE CP RBV in recognition of his public service to the Isle of Man, particularly in the areas of Manx heritage, architectural conservation and community service. A biography of Mr Kelly and his contribution to the Island can be found in the Report. However, I would like to briefly highlight to this Hon. Court some of Mr Kelly's achievements which led the Committee to its decision.

3515 Mr Kelly is widely recognised as one of the Isle of Man's foremost champions of Manx heritage, architectural conservation and voluntary service. I am sure he will not thank me for saying that he was born in 1947, and his lifelong commitment to the Island's history and built environment was evident from childhood and developed through his education, professional practice and decades of community leadership.

3520 Articled to a local architect in 1965, Mr Kelly spent over 20 years in professional practice, specialising in vernacular architecture and sensitive conservation and adaptation of historic buildings. In 1985, he was seconded to co-ordinate Manx Heritage Year, a pivotal role that led to more than two decades of service to the Manx Heritage Foundation – now Culture Vannin – including appointments as honorary heritage consultant.

3525 Beyond his professional career, Mr Kelly has made an extraordinary voluntary contribution. He founded and served as the first Chairman of the Isle of Man Victorian Society, co-founded Save Manx Heritage and has long been a respected heritage caseworker. His contribution to public understanding has been immense, including more than a thousand broadcasts of Kelly's Eye on Manx Radio, alongside regular publications and international recognition for his expertise, notably on the architect Baillie Scott.

3530 Mr Kelly has also given over 60 years of service to Manx Scouting, including 34 years as Island Chairman and continuing as appointed Island President. He served as an Onchan Commissioner on national advisory bodies and in leadership roles across Island organisations, all entirely in a voluntary capacity. His service has been recognised through the MBE, appointments as Captain of Onchan Parish and the RBV, and the Silver Wolf, Scouting's highest honour. More information
3535 on Mr Kelly's career and significant contribution to the Island can be found in the Report before you.

 Hon. Members, I am sure you will agree that Mr Peter Kelly would be a most worthy recipient of the Tynwald Honour. It is now necessary for Tynwald Court to decide whether the honour should be bestowed on him, hopefully as part of the Tynwald Day ceremony in July, and
3540 I commend his nomination to the Court.

 Mr President, I beg to move the motion standing in my name.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Mr Callister.

3545 **Mr Callister:** Thank you, Mr President.

 I did have a two-page speech, but I think the Speaker has summed up everything very eloquently. I am very happy to second this nomination.

 Thank you.

3550 **The President:** I call on the Hon. Member, Ms Edge.

Ms Edge: Thank you, Mr President.

 I want to just say quite briefly with regard to Peter and his contribution to the Island over many decades, as we have just heard from the Hon. Speaker. On a personal note, Mr President,
3555 I had the privilege of working with Peter for many years in Onchan District Commissioners in the surveyor's department. Peter dealt at that time with the conveyancing matters when properties were being sold in Onchan. During that time, he taught me a great deal about what to look out for with property boundaries, land issues and the complexities that can arise.

 I can honestly say, Mr President, I sometimes thought Peter knew every property, every
3560 boundary in Onchan and on our Island. He also knew every waterway, every sewer and every combined sewer. He was excellent in the role when I worked alongside him, and without gaining some of that knowledge from him I probably would not have looked more closely at the most recent purchase of a property I had five years ago, and I could have got into a lot of bother if Peter had not taught me what he did.

3565 I am delighted, after him giving so many decades of service, both in a job role in our local authority and in the wider community, that he has been put forward for this. He has always done it with humility, professionalism and dedication.

 Thank you, Mr President.

3570 **The President:** I call on the Hon. Member, Mrs Kelsey.

Mrs Kelsey: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

I too rise to say – I would like to say it is a personal capacity, but actually it is a subject that is very close to my heart – that Mr Kelly is the Captain of the Parish of Onchan. I am on record to be a great fan of the Captains of the Parishes. Long may we support the Captains of the Parishes. It is a historic honour. Actually, the fact that Mr Kelly was picked in 2010 to become the Captain of the Parish of Onchan is testament of some of his lifelong work, which is why today I will be fully supporting the motion in front of us.

Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Anything you wish to add, Loayreyder?

The Speaker: Eaghtyrane, thank you.

I would just like to thank the Hon. Members for Onchan and the Hon. Member of Council for their contributions and welcome those contributions.

I should point out that Mr Kelly is not in the Gallery to hear the speeches made about him today, because he is on the campaign trail trying to save a building in Castletown! What would you expect?

With that, I beg to move.

The President: Hon. Members, we come to vote on this Item, Item 6, as laid out on the Order Paper. All those in favour, please say aye; those against, please say no. The ayes have it. The ayes have it. Item 6 is carried.

**7. Financial Services Act 2008 –
Financial Services Authority appointments –
Ms Maeve Sherry and Mr Owen Purcell appointed**

The Minister for the Treasury to move:

That Tynwald approves, in accordance with paragraph 1(1) of Schedule 1 to the Financial Services Act 2008, the Treasury's appointment of Maeve Sherry and Owen Purcell as Members of the Isle of Man Financial Services Authority for a period of up to five years [\[MEMO\]](#).

The President: Moving on to Item 7, I call on the Treasury Minister to move.

The Minister for the Treasury (Mr Thomas): Thank you, Mr President.

In accordance with the Financial Services Act 2008, members of the board of the Isle of Man Financial Services Authority are appointed by the Treasury, subject to the approval of Tynwald. Due to the impending ending of tenure of three members of the board on 30th June 2026, including the current Chair, the Treasury undertook an open recruitment and interview process to seek applications from suitably qualified and experienced individuals to fill these roles. As a result of this process, I am now pleased to recommend the following individuals for appointment as members of the Authority: Ms Maeve Sherry and Mr Owen Purcell.

Unfortunately, the recruitment process did not result in the Treasury identifying a suitable candidate for the position of Chair and a further recruitment exercise will commence in the summer. In the meantime, Lillian Boyle, the current Chair, has kindly agreed to remain in post to allow sufficient time for the recruitment of her replacement.

Another member whose current tenure is due to end on 30th June, Mark Waterhouse, has also agreed to continue as a member. These extensions of tenure to 31st December 2026 will

provide both continuity and the benefit of several years of experience as members of the Authority ahead of and during the September 2026 Moneyval onsite visit. I am grateful for both members' continuing commitment to the work of the Authority.

Both Ms Sherry and Mr Purcell would be new members to the board. However, I believe that each possess the required skills and knowledge to fulfil the requirements of the role. I trust that this is demonstrated by the summary CVs appended to the explanatory memo. The motion now seeks the support of Hon. Members for their appointment.

Mr President, I beg to move that Tynwald approves the Treasury's appointment of Ms Maeve Sherry and Mr Owen Purcell as members of the Isle of Man Financial Services Authority for a period of up to five years.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Mr Smith.

Mr Smith: Thank you, Mr President.
I beg to second.

The President: Hon. Members, we come to vote on this Item, Item 7. All those in favour, please say aye; those against, please say no. The ayes have it. The ayes have it. Item 7 is carried.

**8. Cohabiting couples –
Extending joint Income Tax treatment –
Motion lost**

The Hon. Member for Ramsey, Mr Hooper, to move:

That Tynwald is of the opinion that joint Income Tax treatment should be extended to cohabiting couples; and that this change should be included in the next Income Tax Bill brought forward by the Treasury.

The President: Moving on to Item 8, I call on the Hon. Member, Mr Hooper.

Mr Hooper: Thank you very much, Mr President.

I have quite long argued for our tax system to have some slightly greater complexity built into it, because this will give it more nuance, more options, really, for public policy. Generally, those comments would apply to high net worths, investors, but also Manx companies.

For the average taxpayer, though, simplicity is what we are looking for. Simplicity is key. Our system of joint taxation does that. It makes things simpler. So joint tax, in a nutshell, simplifies the administrative position for the taxpayer and for the Tax Division: one tax return instead of two. So in my case, for example, I file our tax return every year, despite the fact it is my wife who is a chartered tax adviser (Laughter) and I am not constantly frustrated by that one bit.

The second thing that it does, as well as reducing administration, is it allows the transfer of allowances between individuals. That generally benefits couples who have an inequality of income. For those of you who do not know what this means, if you are jointly assessed, if you make that election, allowances and deductions under the 10% band are automatically offset against the joint income of both partners whilst being assessed. If you are independently assessed, you cannot do that in the same way.

So in essence, you can share your tax bands and tax allowances. If one of you does not fully utilise all of the allowances the Government says you can have, you can then share any unused portion with your partner. So the result for couples that find themselves in this situation, generally speaking, is a lower tax bill. A lower tax bill generally is good news for everybody.

I do not think I can ever recall having complaints about the concept of joint taxation on the Island. I think the system generally works quite well and it works as it is intended to work. I think it is one of the strengths of our tax system that we have this concept of joint taxation, which does not exist in many other jurisdictions. Bizarrely, we require people to be married or to be civil partners in order to benefit from this system. It does not apply to cohabiting couples, long-term cohabiting partners. That does not make much sense to me.

Even more bizarrely, we actually made a decision some time ago to extend partial treatment of the joint taxation system to cohabiting couples who have a dependent child by allowing cohabiting couples with a dependent child to share unused personal allowances, but not the 10% band; just the unused personal allowances. Again, that is quite good. It is not quite the same treatment.

It also does not apply to families who have other dependants. So whilst you have a dependent child under the age of 16, you are able to share some allowances. That works pretty well, but the moment your child ages up, which children are known to do, suddenly you cannot qualify for this beneficial treatment at all. But if you have got married or you are a civil partner, then actually the system does not really care whether you have kids, whether you have any dependants or indeed how old they are. You are able to elect for this joint taxation treatment anyway. So the policy positioning on this is confused, I think, to say the least.

The reason I tabled this motion is because I have had a number of constituents approach me about this issue where, for whatever reason, they do not want to get married. Often that is because they have been married before. (Laughter) I have had people from all over the Island reach out to ask about it and to actually talk about their particular circumstances. These range from people with low to middle household incomes, and even a few with quite a high level of income, but where there is a great disparity between the income of partners, where one partner's earnings are significantly higher or lower than the others. I have talked to people who have dependants, like adult dependants, and others who do not.

The point I am making is this issue actually affects people from all walks of life with all sorts of family circumstances. I was even asked briefly whether the current policy was compliant with the Equality Act, which is quite interesting, because the Equality Act has very specific language around occupations and student loans not being in breach in terms of the references to married and unmarried partners, but nothing in respect of tax policy. Which leads me to think there must be a proportionate means and a legitimate aim, and I do not really understand what that is.

What is the legitimate aim of applying joint taxation treatment solely to those who are married?

Essentially, all the feedback that I have had from people has been pretty much the same: why are cohabiting couples excluded from our joint taxation policy? Why should people have to get married or become civil partners in order to access the benefits of this system? This is a system, like I have said, that is better for taxpayers, because it reduces their administrative burden, but it is also good for the tax office because they are filing fewer tax returns. There are fewer tax returns to worry about. There is less paperwork involved, less bureaucracy. For me, this idea of joint tax treatment should be extended to people that are cohabiting and the Treasury should make this change as part of the next Income Tax Bill that they bring forward.

Hon. Members, Mr President, this is simply about basic fairness, and in that respect, I beg to move.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Dr Allinson.

Dr Allinson: Thank you very much, Mr President.

I beg to second and reserve my remarks.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Mrs Morphet.

Mrs Morphet: I will be voting in favour of this motion today. It is right that our legislation keeps pace with reality and provides clarity, fairness and consistency across Government. I particularly hope that any future legislation brought forward will include a clear and workable definition of cohabitation. This is especially important in the context of Social Security, where cohabiting couples are already treated as couples for benefit purposes. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.)

At present, decisions rely on the concept of people living together as husband and wife, which is not defined in any regulations and is applied administratively. That lack of clarity creates problems around transparency, consistency of decision making and the ability for individuals to properly understand or appeal decisions that affect their income and housing security.

Statutory definitions matter. They ensure fairness for claimants, confidence for decision makers and accountability where decisions are challenged. They reduce the risk that similar circumstances are treated differently simply because the test itself is unclear or the test is being completed by someone else.

More broadly, I would stress the importance of consistency across Government. Definitions and approaches used in one area of law should not sit uncomfortably against those used elsewhere. If we are recognising cohabiting relationships in family law or other contexts, then the approach taken in Social Security and Income Tax should align in a way that is logical, proportionate and fair. I hope this motion leads more widely than actually worded to legislation that brings greater certainty and coherence to an area that currently causes some difficulty for people.

Thank you.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Mr Thomas.

The Minister for the Treasury (Mr Thomas): Thank you very much, Mr President.

Of course we want a simple tax system, just like Mr Hooper mentioned when he was moving it. Anything to do with simplifying this must be a good thing, but I am going to argue in a moment, in words prepared for me by the Treasury, that this is anything but simplification.

Of course we want to look after that wonderful thing called joint taxation, which Mr Hooper celebrated, but I am going to argue that this risks joint taxation. If we move down this path, we will end up with individual taxation and many more tax returns. Mr Hooper often uses words like 'bizarrely' and 'does not make any sense', but I am just going to argue about some of the sense that the existing situation makes when I argue my remarks.

Finally, I want to just build on what Mrs Morphet just argued. Of course we want certainty. Perhaps Social Security and Income Tax and other situations are different, and I will address some of those in my remarks. It is relatively a long set of remarks, but they have been prepared for me and they are important sets of remarks. I conclude with the most important point, which is it is perilous to go quickly into the unknown when we are all looking for certainty. That is the most important thing. We all want simplicity. We all want certainty. This is not the sort of thing you do on the hoof in Tynwald on a Tuesday afternoon at four o'clock.

In this Hon. Court on 18th February this year, I provided an Answer to a Question on extending the tax treatment of married couples and civil partners to cohabiting couples. As agreed, on 9th March I circulated a letter to Members laying out the policy position in the Isle of Man and summarising the approach in neighbouring tax jurisdictions. From my Answer and the subsequent note, Members will be aware that Treasury has no current plans to extend joint Income Tax treatment to cohabiting couples.

The extension of joint Income Tax treatment to cohabiting couples is not straightforward. It would introduce significant legal and administrative complexities for the Income Tax Division, complexities that in my view help explain why no neighbouring tax jurisdiction has adopted an equivalent policy. Indeed, the trend elsewhere has been in the opposite direction rather than in this direction.

My principal concerns with the motion are practical: how we define a cohabiting couple, how that status would be verified and how we would police changes over time without creating an incentive for dispute, avoidance or manipulation. I understand the Hon. Member's point that the Income Tax Act 1970 already permits a limited transfer of unused allowance, up to £6,400, where a cohabiting couple has at least one child, but that provision does not solve the core problem of definition or verification. It is a narrowly targeted relief with limited take-up, not a general framework for treating cohabiting couples as a single taxable unit. It should not be presented as evidence that extending joint taxation would be straightforward.

Joint taxation is fundamentally different, because once allowances are shared, one partner can become legally responsible for the other's tax. Put simply, if one partner does not pay the tax due, the other can become liable for the full amount. Married couples and civil partners benefit from financial protections that are legally established. Cohabiting couples do not, yet under a system of joint assessment they would nevertheless become jointly and severally liable for any Income Tax.

By contrast, the current provision allows the higher earner to claim up to £6,400 of their partner's unused allowance. If the claim is later found to be incorrect, the allowance is withdrawn and the claimant is liable for the tax on the overclaimed amount, currently up to £1,344.

In any event, the scale and financial input of the existing transfer are minimal compared with the potential impact of extending joint taxation. In 2023-24, approximately 230 cohabiting taxpayers with at least one child transferred unused allowance, reducing taxable income by under £200,000. For those reasons, the current limited mechanism should not be treated as precedent for joint taxation for cohabiting couples.

The central question remains – just as Mrs Morphet laid out – how do we define, how do we verify and police cohabitation over time? A commonly used description of a cohabiting couple is two people who live together in an intimate, committed relationship who are neither married to each other nor in a civil partnership. The difficulty is that intimacy and commitment are not documentary facts in the way that marriage or civil partnership is, and that is where the complexity begins.

Where a couple is married or in a civil partnership, verification is straightforward: a marriage certificate or proof of civil partnership. For cohabiting couples, verification would be far more subjective, far more labour intensive and potentially intrusive, requiring judgement calls, evidence gathering and, inevitably, disputes.

For Social Security purposes, I understand the stability of a relationship is determined by considering the way in which two people spend their time together, and the way that this has changed while they have been together; whether they intend to get engaged or married; on what basis they split household chores and responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning and paying bills; whether they are both involved in caring for any children who live with them; whether they tend to spend their leisure time together or separately; whether they normally take joint holidays; whether they plan any future activities or responsibilities jointly or separately; whether the relationship has a volatile history, i.e. the couple is known to have had several splits and reconciliations.

Furthermore, the length of time two people have been together is likely to indicate the stability of a relationship, but for Social Security purposes it is not decisive in itself. The fact that two people have lived together as though they were married or civil partners in the past should not lead to an assumption that a stable relationship currently exists. For two people to be living together as a married couple or as civil partners it is reasonable to expect some degree of sharing of household costs, or for one partner to be supporting the other financially to some extent. It is that financial interdependence which is often the catalyst for joint Income Tax treatment.

In practice, assessing that interdependence in respect of cohabiting couples would require the consideration of factors such as do they have joint accounts or investments? Is one person

financially supported by the other? How is the household income shared or used? Are their resources pooled in a common fund? Is this all their income or only the money for things like shopping or bills? Is one person bearing the major share of the household expenses, for example, the mortgage, rent, gas or electricity? Whose name is on the bills? Is the property jointly owned and whose name is the mortgage in? Have these financial arrangements always been the same or have they changed? If so, how and when?

Income Tax Division does not currently need to carry out such verification for joint treatment as documentation confirming marriage or civil partnership is provided. I do, however, expect that Social Security already considers many of these factors in respect of cohabiting couples, but the context is different. Firstly, those assessments are made on a smaller scale and primarily in real time. Secondly, the incentives are reversed. For benefits, people may be reluctant to be treated as a couple because it can reduce entitlement. For Income Tax, the incentive will often be to be treated as a couple because it can reduce liability. That matters because it affects both the volume of claims and the risk of challenge.

Income Tax is assessed annually. That means part-year changes are difficult to administer, especially where elections are made, withdrawn or remade within the same year. With marriage or civil partnership, multiple changes in status within a single tax year are uncommon. With cohabitation, by its nature changes in living arrangements may occur more frequently. The result would be a larger number of complex, time-consuming cases. In addition, the Income Tax Division may not be informed promptly when a taxpayer begins or ceases cohabiting, particularly where assets are not co-owned and there is no formal legal step required. That lack of a clear start and end point increases both error and administrative burden.

I would like to ask the Hon. Member moving today to clarify how he would review joint taxation for polygamous relationships, covering this in his closing remarks, yet another complex policy.

The Speaker: It is not true what they say about Ramsey! (Laughter)

Mr Thomas: This leads me on to the potential for coercion. Marriage and civil partnerships involve clear legal steps and safeguards. If we extend joint tax treatment to cohabiting couples, we must be satisfied that adequate protections exist to prevent a person being pressured into an arrangement, on paper or in practice, purely for financial advantage.

Turning to cost, where a person is individually assessed, the Income Tax Division does not routinely hold information indicating whether they are part of a cohabiting couple. There are around 16,000 individually assessed people with no tax liability who may have unused personal allowance that could become transferable. In addition, a further 6,700 individually assessed taxpayers are in the 10% band only and may also benefit if joint taxation were extended. In other words, the eligible population could be substantial and that has both fiscal and administrative consequences.

The current cost of joint taxation, meaning reduced Income Tax receipts to general revenue, is estimated to be in the region of £14 million per year. That estimate is based on approximately 13,600 jointly assessed couples. It is therefore reasonable to anticipate that extending the same treatment to cohabiting couples could carry a sizeable additional cost hit to the revenue. Members should ask what will we stop doing or what would we raise to fund that, especially if the change also increases compliance and administrative workload, as I have laid out I think quite clearly.

If Members' motivation is equality of treatment, there is another way to approach it, one that many other jurisdictions have implemented, and that is the one I started this whole thing with, by moving away from joint taxation altogether. I talked to this recently with the Society of Chartered Accountants, and that was quite a frightening proposition for them, fundamentally changing a fundamental part of the Isle of Man's tax system through the decades. That would place individuals on the same footing regardless of marital or relationship status while avoiding

3855 the difficult questions of definition, verification and changing circumstances that this motion would create.

Furthermore, I would invite the Hon. Member to explain how it can be equitable to single people who live alone to treat individuals who are legally single, but simply live with another person more favourably. A single person living alone does not share household costs and may therefore be disadvantaged compared with a cohabiting couple without children, which is the demographic this motion is intended to benefit.

In conclusion, I cannot support this motion today and I hope we will not support this motion in this place today. The policy objective may be well intentioned, but the motion underestimates the practical complexity it would create for our Income Tax system, complexity around definition, verification, incentives, safeguarding and part-year administration. Nor could I reasonably commit to those issues being properly designed, consulted upon and implemented in time for the next Income Tax Bill.

Income Tax Bills are normally annual and for this purpose requires careful, measured work. In my view, any fundamental decision on the future of joint taxation – moving to individual taxation, for instance – should sit within the next administration's wider tax strategy, not introduced in a single motion one May without any consultation, impact assessment or further explanatory information, including costs and implications and impacts.

I will not be supporting this motion today.

3875 **The President:** I call on the Hon. Member, Mr Ashford.

Mr Ashford: Thank you very much, Mr President.

While I understand the sentiment from the Hon. Member for Ramsey, I am afraid I will not be able to support the motion today. Perhaps before I start properly I should declare an interest, Mr President, as I am part of a cohabiting couple. So Mr Hooper's motion, if it came to pass, could have a direct impact on me. While I thank Mr Hooper for trying to make things more tax efficient for me, I am afraid it is an opportunity I am going to have to decline.

The first thing I need to say, Mr President – I think it is very important to get this on record – is opposition to this motion in no way downplays the relationships cohabiting couples have. As I said, I am part of one. It is not a refusal to acknowledge stable, loving, long-term relationships outside marriage or civil partnership. It is not an opposition which says only one model of family life has value. Mr President, modern family life is varied. Many couples live together for many years, raise children together, share homes together and support one another in every practical sense. That is a social reality and it would be foolish for any legislature to pretend otherwise.

The motion before us today is not simply asking us to recognise that reality. It asks Tynwald to state that joint Income Tax treatment should be extended to cohabiting couples and that this change should be included in the next Income Tax Bill brought forward by Treasury. That is a very significant proposition. It is a proposition with legal, fiscal, administrative and policy consequences. In my view, it is not a proposition that should be agreed in principle today without answers to some very basic questions.

So the first question for me is this: what exactly is a cohabiting couple for the purposes of Income Tax? It may sound simple, but it is not. Marriage and civil partnership are legal statuses. They have a clear start date. They have a formal legal record. They have legal consequences. They also have a clear legal mechanism for dissolution. (**Mr Callister:** True.) Cohabitation is different. (Laughter) Two people may live together as partners. Two people may live together as friends. Two people may live together for financial convenience. (**Mr Callister:** Correct.) I would not go home if I was you, Mr Callister! (Laughter) Two people may share a home for part of the year.

A relationship may begin gradually, end gradually or be disputed by one of the parties. If this motion is passed, Treasury will be expected to legislate for a tax advantage based on a

relationship status that the motion does not define, and would mean Government would have to start defining people's relationship statuses.

Mr President, the present joint treatment regime is not merely a box-ticking exercise. Under section 65A of the Income Tax Act 1970, where a valid joint treatment election is in force, spouses or civil partners have their income deductions and reliefs aggregated. These are also treated together as a single individual and are jointly and severally liable for Income Tax, penalties, interest and other amounts due under the Income Tax Acts. That matters.

Joint assessment is not simply letting one partner use the other partner's allowance. It brings with it shared tax treatment, shared disclosure, shared administration and, crucially, shared liability. Section 65C also makes clear that an election requires both spouses or civil partners to sign specifically correspondent arrangements and authorise disclosure of tax information (A Member: Hear, hear.) to one spouse or civil partner to the other.

If we extend that to cohabiting couples, we are not just offering a benefit. We are creating a legal gateway for one person's private tax information to be disclosed to another person. We are creating the potential joint and several liability between people who may have deliberately chosen not to enter a legal relationship carrying those consequences. That is a major step. It should not just be put into the next Income Tax Bill, simply because the phrase 'cohabiting couples' sounds fair and modern.

The second question for me is how would Treasury police it? Would a couple have to live together for six months, one year, two years, five years? Would they need a joint tenancy, a joint mortgage, a shared bank account, children together or simply a declaration? Would Treasury be expected to investigate the nature of people's relationships? Would officials have to decide whether two people are genuinely a couple or merely sharing accommodation? Would they have to decide when a relationship began, when it ended and whether it existed for the whole tax year?

At present, the Act contains conditions for joint treatment. Section 65B requires spouses or civil partners, in broad terms, to live together for the whole year of assessment and both be resident in the Island for the whole year, unless they both commence residence during the year and meet the relevant conditions. That works because, again, marriage and civil partnership provide a legal anchor. Cohabitation does not provide the same anchor unless we create one, and if we create one, we must be honest about what follows. Either the definition is loose, in which case the system becomes vulnerable to tax planning and abuse, or the definition is tight, in which case Treasury may be forced into intrusive and unattractive inquiries into people's private lives. Neither outcome is attractive from my point of view.

The third question, Mr President, is what is the cost? The motion does not tell us. It does not tell us how many couples would be eligible. It does not tell us how many would benefit. It does not tell us the estimated annual loss of revenue, although the Minister for the Treasury has given a ballpark figure in his speech.

It does not tell us whether the benefit would mainly assist low-income households, middle-income households or higher-income households with one partner using the other's unused allowances. That matters because tax reliefs are not free. Every pound forgone through one relief is a pound that must either be found elsewhere; cut from spending, drawn from reserves, or left as part of the wider pressure on public finances.

The Isle of Man already provides a higher rate threshold for jointly assessed married couples or civil partners which is double that for an individual. We are talking about a tax change with real consequences. Before Tynwald expresses an opinion in favour of that change, it should have before it a proper Treasury assessment, it should have the numbers and it should have options. Without that, we are being asked to support a tax policy without any kind of idea what the fiscal impact will be.

The fourth question for me is why should cohabitation be treated the same as marriage and civil partnership for tax purposes but not necessarily for other purposes? Marriage and civil partnership are legal frameworks. People who enter into them acquire rights and obligations.

The tax system reflects that legal status because the law can identify it and also attach consequences to it. If we now say that cohabitation should carry the same tax treatment, we need to ask whether we are creating a partial status like marriage for a tax advantage, but not necessarily enough like marriage for the wider legal responsibilities that accompany formal legal relationships. That is why this is such difficult territory to be stepping into.

Some cohabiting couples may want the tax advantage, but not the legal obligations of marriage or civil partnership. Some may not want either. Some may not want their finances aggregated. Some may not want their tax information shared, and some may not want joint liability. Some may be in relationships where one party has more financial power than the other, and we should be very cautious before creating a system that could place pressure on one partner to enter a joint tax arrangement. Tax policy should not create new vulnerabilities in private relationships.

Some Hon. Members may say, Mr President, the law already recognises people living together as if they were spouses or civil partners in some areas of Income Tax, and that is true. The Income Tax Act 1970 contains provisions dealing with additional relief in respect of children, where a person is living with another as if they were spouses or civil partners. Mr Hooper referred to that in his opening remarks.

That actually proves the point. Where the law has dealt with cohabitation it has done so for specific purposes, with specific conditions in a targeted way. That is very different from saying that the whole joint Income Tax treatment regime should be extended to cohabiting couples. Targeted reliefs are one thing. Full joint assessment is another.

From my point of view, the motion before us asks Tynwald to declare the destination before we have seen the map. It asks us to commit to inclusion in the next Income Tax Bill before we know what the clause would say, what it would cost, how it would be administered, how abuse would be prevented, or how vulnerable taxpayers would be protected. It is effectively, from my point of view, legislating by sentiment because it sounds right, and sentiment is not enough when we are dealing with people's tax affairs, confidential financial information, joint and several liability, and public revenue.

I also think there is a wider point about the tax system. Every time we create another category, another election, another special treatment and another boundary line, we make the system more complex. It does not make it simpler. Complexity has a cost. It costs Treasury time. It ultimately costs the taxpayers. It creates disputes. It creates appeals. It creates cliff-edge cases.

Those cliff-edge cases would involve real people, real relationships, and sometimes painful personal circumstances. When did the relationship begin? When did it end? Were they living together as partners or merely sharing a home? What happens if one person says they are a couple and the other person says they are not? What happens if the relationship breaks down after the tax return has been filed? What happens if one partner has tax liabilities the other did not fully understand?

Mr President, we should not use the next Income Tax Bill as a vehicle for what, for me, is an undefined policy. We should not be creating a new tax status before we know what it means. We should not extend joint and several tax treatment into informal relationships without understanding the consequences.

So Mr President, while I thank Mr Hooper for trying to make me more tax efficient and ensure that I receive more income in my pocket, I am afraid I must respectfully decline and I will be voting against the motion.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Dr Haywood.

Dr Haywood: Thank you, Mr President.

I welcome this motion. I think there is a clear opinion expressed through this that our tax system should better reflect the realities of modern life on the Island. Our society has changed.

4010 Long-term cohabiting relationships are now a stable and recognised part of how many people
organise their lives, raise families and contribute economically. Yet our Income Tax system still
reflects a model of family life that no longer captures that diversity. Extending joint Income Tax
treatment to cohabiting couples is, in my view, a fair and overdue recognition of the change.

I am aware that many other jurisdictions, including the UK and Ireland, have chosen not to
4015 extend joint taxation beyond marriage or civil partnership. I do not think that should deter us
necessarily. The Isle of Man has often been willing to lead where others have hesitated and to
shape our policy around our own values rather than simply mirror our larger neighbours.

I think the proposal is really at its heart about fairness and consistency. When two people
living together as a committed couple share responsibilities, housing costs and financial
4020 decisions, it is reasonable that the tax system recognises that shared economic reality. After all,
the benefits system, as we have heard, already does and I have found it astonishing that we are
happily defending the Social Security position for part of Treasury's functions but cannot
seemingly manage to extend that to taxation. Maybe the argument should be applied the other
way. If a couple are not married or in a civil partnership but merely cohabiting, then stop
4025 treating them differently in the benefits system as well, or even in part of the taxation system.

For many households, particularly those with uneven earnings, joint assessment can make a
really meaningful financial difference to them and it can increase their financial resilience as a
consequence. I think it is right that we recognise what would be the symbolic importance of this
step. By extending joint taxation to cohabiting couples, we are sending a message that the
4030 Island values stable relationships in all of their lawful forms and that dignity and respect in the
tax system should not depend solely on your marital status.

Of course, I agree it is not without cost. Combining personal allowances and tax bands will
have a fiscal impact, and Treasury will quite properly need to assess that carefully as part of the
next Income Tax Bill. I do recognise there are challenges getting it through the next Bill, but
4035 actually this Government is not averse to missing a deadline or two when it suits it. **(A Member:**
Hear, hear.) So whether it was the next one or the one after, I am fine with that.

Policy leadership, though, is not about avoiding every cost. It is about recognising what kind
of society we live in and want to support and designing our systems to fit that accordingly.
I think what matters now is that Treasury brings forward some legislation that is clear and
4040 workable and proportionate, one that balances the fairness to households with responsible
stewardship of the public finances. If this change is to get public confidence, it will be important
that the eligibility criteria are clear and proportionate and fair.

Extending joint taxation should not require intrusive investigations. Neither do I think it
should rely entirely on an open-ended declaration. It would be for the couple to elect to be
4045 jointly taxed, and they will make that election on the basis of their own relationship. So if one
partner has hidden income somewhere that he is deciding not to declare to his cohabiting
partner, then I suspect he probably will not agree to be jointly taxed.

I would encourage Treasury in bringing forward the necessary legislation to ground the
eligibility in objective and familiar indicators. I actually think the ones that are used in Social
4050 Security are possibly a little bit too intrusive at times, but this might be something around the
minimum period cohabitation or evidence that the couple are sharing a principal household and
clear safeguards to ensure that an individual cannot be jointly assessed with more than one
partner at the same time. Some criteria like that are already well understood in other areas of
public policy and I think that would provide some coherence across Government.

4055 On administration, I think self-declaration might be an appropriate starting point, provided it
is supported by clear statutory criteria, the ability for Treasury to verify claims where necessary,
and meaningful consequences for deliberately misinterpreting the rules. That would strike the
right balance between trust, simplicity and fiscal responsibility.

I really want this not to be about policing relationships, though. I want it to be about ensuring
4060 that a benefit designed to reflect shared economic life is targeted at genuine households. A
measured, risk-based approach would allow Treasury to protect the public purse, whilst avoiding

unnecessary bureaucracy for compliant taxpayers. I think handled in that way this reform should be both progressive and responsible, aligning our tax system with modern relationships while maintaining confidence that the system works and is fair.

4065 I think I will be supporting this motion today, as you can tell. I believe that we could be proud that the Island would choose to be thoughtful and inclusive and forward looking in how we design our tax system, that we recognise the evolving nature of households and the differing relationships within those households, and that we ensure that our laws keep pace with the lives that people actually lead on this Island.

4070

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Mr Clueit.

Mr Clueit: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

4075 Let me begin by acknowledging the intention of the Hon. Member for Ramsey, Mr Hooper, who brought this forward. The desire for fairness and equity in our society is a principle we all share in this Hon. Court. However, the devil is in the details and I will thank the Ministers for Treasury and Cabinet Office for covering most of the concerns that I share with this motion, so I will not repeat them here.

4080 Canada currently does utilise a system where common law partners declare their status, and the result? The Canadian Revenue Agency is forced to spend vast amounts of time and resources investigating whether two people living in the same house are romantically involved or just roommates. (Laughter) It leads to very intrusive, subjective tax audits to determine when the relationship began, paused or ended.

4085 Without formal legal registration, such as a marriage certificate or a civil partnership, we open the door to a system that relies entirely on self-declaration. In an environment lacking clear, legally verifiable boundaries, the system is wide open to both accidental misreporting and deliberate exploitation by those seeking to lower their tax burdens illegitimately.

4090 Furthermore, we must address the fiscal reality of our jurisdiction. The Isle of Man is proud to offer one of the most competitive low-tax environments anywhere in the world. Our tax rates are designed to be fair, to stimulate investment and to allow hardworking people of this Island to keep more of what they earn. But these low rates only work if the tax base remains broad and sustainable.

4095 Extending joint taxation to cohabiting couples is, by design, a measure that will reduce the tax liability of the individuals involved and thereby reduce the total revenues collected by the Treasury. Why would a jurisdiction that already boasts exceptionally low taxes proactively introduce complex legislation specifically designed to diminish the funds necessary to support our schools, our hospitals and our infrastructure?

4100 Finally, Hon. Members, we must look at the direction of travel, not just globally but right here on our doorstep. The motion before us implies that expanding joint taxation is a modernisation. It is not. The modern standard of taxation is moving rapidly away from joint taxation and towards fully independent taxation.

4105 Look at our fellow Crown Dependencies. Both Guernsey and Jersey have undertaken massive, complex reforms to dismantle their joint taxation system in favour of mandatory independent taxation. They have done so because independent taxation is simpler to administer, reflects the reality of modern financial independence, and removes the archaic notion that a household's income should be treated as a single, indistinguishable unit. It seems entirely counterintuitive that while our neighbours are untangling themselves from the web of joint taxation to modernise their economies, this motion asks us to expand ours into completely uncharted and legally ambiguous territory.

4110 If couples wish to avail themselves of the legal tax benefits of joint assessment, the Isle of Man already has clear, accessible and legally sound mechanisms to do so through marriage or civil partnership. (A Member: Hear, hear.) To extend these tax benefits to unregistered cohabiting arrangements would introduce an administrative nightmare for the Assessor of

Income Tax, inviting inevitable abuse of the system and unnecessarily reducing the public revenues upon which this Island relies. Therefore, I am unable to support the motion.
Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

The President: I call on the mover to reply.

Mr Hooper: Thank you very much, Mr President.

Members will be unsurprised that I was not expecting Government support for this motion. In fact, the Treasury have not engaged at all on this particular Item. It is interesting actually hearing some of the objections to it because they do not really stack up. Like if the issue is we should not be expressing an opinion that is quite so definite, usually Government would amend something and say, 'Well, let's think about maybe possibly considering something' and kicking it into the long grass. That is what I believe the Treasury will be doing with other motions today, just kicking things further down the road; pretty standard fare for Government.

So for the Government to say, 'Actually, we object to the principle of this' that is pretty firm, actually, from the Government, saying, 'We object to the principle that cohabiting couples should be treated in the same way as those who are married for the purposes of Income Tax.'

I think the Hon. Member, Mrs Morphet, made an exceptionally good point that for some things Government actually does treat cohabiting couples as if they are financially interdependent, for benefits, for student awards, for all sorts of things, but when it suits the Government to do so. When it suits the individual to be treated that way, the Government says, 'No, thanks, actually, no, no, no, no, no, you are not really a couple, there is no legal definition of your cohabiting relationship.' Brilliant, so let's apply that to Social Security. It is too difficult to define how people are cohabiting so we should not do it for Social Security reasons. That is the argument the Treasury Minister has just made. It is too hard to do this.

What I find really interesting, though, is the objections come to two particular issues. They seem to have coalesced around how you define these relationships and how you enforce these relationships. So in terms of how you define them, Mr Ashford actually quoted the relevant section of the Income Tax Act. Section 39B talks about people who are living together as if they were spouses or civil partners. That is how the law currently, right now, defines a cohabiting couple. That is the law that the Income Tax Division work off today. That is something which they deal with.

In fact, if you want to take advantage of the exception and the allowance sharing that is built into that piece of legislation, there is a form you fill out. It is a two-page form and it is a self-declaration that you are in a relationship. So as to Mr Clueit's concerns that we are moving to a system of self-declaration, yes, we have a system of self-declaration, Mr Clueit. That is how our system works right now.

Hon. Members may be interested to learn when the Income Tax Act was changed; so when did Treasury start doing this. You could think maybe it is quite recent. Maybe it is new. Maybe they are still finding their feet on understanding how to administer this system dealing with cohabiting couples. It was in 2000. It was 26 years ago the Treasury introduced this concept of cohabiting couples in Income Tax legislation. They have been dealing with this definition for 26 years. But now, of course, the Treasury are saying we cannot possibly define these cohabiting couples. You can hear the panic in the Minister for the Treasury's voice.

The question I would ask the Minister for the Treasury is if it is so difficult to define these relationships, how have they been doing it for the best part of a quarter of a century? The answer is because it is not actually that difficult. The law sets out a test. I completely agree with the comments that were made around it being an administrative test and not necessarily being applied in a consistent manner. Those are issues that can be dealt with through Treasury policy or even a statutory definition and if you are going to place a more detailed statutory definition into legislation, an Income Tax Bill, I would submit, is the right place to do that.

4165 So far we have heard that it is impossible to define something that the Tax Division and Treasury defined successfully in law 26 years ago. So let's park that concern, because it is quite evidently nonsense. The second issue then comes down to enforcement: 'We cannot possibly enforce some of these issues.' Okay, again, how do you enforce the law as it currently stands? How do you deal with people self-declaring today who may need some enforcement action?
4170 Treasury must know how to do this. Like I said, they have been doing it for 26 years.

So when you take those two issues out of the equation you then start to get into this slightly more bizarre commentary that we have had. You are totally correct, Hon. Members, when you say a joint taxation election makes you jointly and severally liable for each party's tax. That is a statement of fact, that is fair, but the key thing is it is an election. Joint taxation is not
4175 automatically applied to anybody. Joint taxation you have to elect for. It is a choice that you make. If somebody wants to make that choice, to be jointly taxed, and that choice to be jointly and severally liable, that is a choice they can make today.

I would like to know how the Treasury polices for coercion within a marriage, because they do not. They cannot. So that argument that says we can do it safely in this context, because
4180 when people are married, obviously there is never any financial coercion in those relationships, so we are happy to accept an election from people in those contexts, but we cannot do it when a person is not married or when people have chosen not to get married or become civil partners – and there may be lots of reasons why they may not choose to be civil partners.

(A Member: Hear, hear.)

4185 Coming back to some of the slightly more, and I am going to use this word 'bizarre' objections, I have no idea what is going on in Douglas Central, but the idea of polygamous relationships suddenly being eligible for tax exemptions I think is quite an interesting one, because again we have a definition in law already that says you have to be living together as if you were married. It is pretty well understood.

4190 I was not surprised by the Treasury Minister's arguments, by the Government's arguments, because they were framed in a very good way. They were framed in the way that it is hard to define something that is inherently difficult to define and that would be too difficult for us to do. He glossed over the fact that they have been doing it for 26 years. He glossed over the fact that at the moment we have a self-declaration form that is how you apply for this current treatment.

4195 We also heard from Mr Ashford I think that some people may not want all of the legal liability that goes with a joint tax election. I think that is absolutely fine; in which case, do not elect. Be treated individually. It is pretty straightforward.

What I have not heard is a good reason why we should not be saying to people actually we have this idea on the Island that when you have – and I like this phrase from Dr Haywood – a
4200 shared economic and financial reality, when you have this shared financial interdependence from someone, why do we require that you formalise that through a marriage or a civil partnership in order for the state to say, 'We are happy to treat you as if you are a couple'? Why do we only require that when it comes to giving someone a benefit, a support?

We do not do it when it comes to making payments for Social Security purposes. We do not
4205 say, 'It is in your interest to be treated as cohabiting here.' We say, 'It is in our interest as the state, because we can take all of your income into account.' Your household income is taken into account when you are applying for social housing, but we are not going to take your household circumstances into account for tax purposes; you cannot do that.

This idea that I heard from at least two Members, I am pretty sure it came from Mr Ashford
4210 and Mr Clueit, talking about this idea that it would cost the taxpayer a phenomenal amount of money and we cannot possibly look at giving people a tax break because it would cost the public purse, this is the same Government that in February rolled out a universal tax break to everybody on the Island. Predominantly higher earners benefited from that. Who did not benefit from that were lower earners. Who did not benefit from that? Cohabiting couples where one
4215 partner does not earn enough to be taxed. Those are the people who did not benefit from the universal tax break that the Government had.

Do not forget, in February, a universal tax break was a good thing. It put more money in people's pockets. It drives the economy; it drives local spending. That is what we heard in February. Now, 'Oh, no, we cannot possibly look at giving people in a cohabiting relationship a tax break because it will be bad for the public purse.' Well, pick a lane, Ministers. Either tax breaks are good or they are not good. Pick one. You cannot decide that on Monday something which is excellent public policy is suddenly bad public policy on Tuesday. Crackers. Absolutely crackers!

So Hon. Members, like I said at the start this is predominantly about fairness. The motion is broadly worded. It allows the Treasury a lot of flexibility as to how they may decide to roll this out. I would suggest that most of that is administrative. It is policy because legislatively we have a statutory definition of what constitutes a cohabiting relationship. We have a process for people to apply for that. I am assuming Treasury have an administrative process that sits behind this thing because they have administrative processes for just about everything.

Mr Thomas: Mr President, can the mover give way?

Mr Hooper: No.

I am going to come back to how I started, Mr President. This is about fairness. We have a concept in accounting that we call substance over form. What matters is the economic substance of a transaction, or in this case a relationship, not the form that that relationship takes. The legal form of a relationship should not be the thing that defines people. That should not be the gateway to support. 'Yes, we will help married people but we are not going to help people who for all intents and purposes are married but have chosen not to get married.' That is the very definition of looking at the legal form of a situation, rather than the actual substance of it.

I think that in Tynwald we should deal with the substance of issues that we are dealing with. We should not be overly concerned with the legal form that some of these issues take. I have no issue, as has been mentioned already, with the Treasury missing a deadline. If they decide they need to take longer than the next Income Tax Bill to work things out, that is fine. If that was their issue they should have amended the motion. They chose not to.

Hon. Members, I would encourage you to support this declaratory motion, this expression of opinion that is Tynwald Court saying, actually, we accept that modern relationships and modern life have moved on somewhat, that the Treasury acknowledged this in 2000, 26 years ago, and that it is probably about time that we took those steps just a little bit further. I do not think that asking the Treasury to move the needle once every 26 years is an unreasonably fast pace to move.

Eaghtyrane, I beg to move.

The President: Hon. Members, we come to vote on this Item, Item 8 as laid out on the Order Paper. All those in favour, please say aye. Those against, please say no.

A division was called for and electronic voting followed.

The Speaker: Eaghtyrane, in the Keys, 10 for, 14 against.

The President: Legislative Council: 2 for, 5 against. Therefore the motion –

Ms Christian: Sorry, Mr President, I actually voted the wrong way in that vote.
(**Several Members:** Ooh!) It slipped. We both slipped.

The President: So, Ms Christian, you wish to state?

4265 **Ms Christian:** I voted the wrong way and so did Mr Wannenburgh.

The President: Mr Wannenburgh?

Mr Wannenburgh: I did, I am afraid.

4270

The President: Did what? Vote the wrong way?

Mr Wannenburgh: I was getting so bored! (Laughter)

4275

The President: So I think we had better run that vote again.

Ms Christian: Thank you so much, Mr President.

The President: So please pay attention. (Laughter)

4280

Ms Christian: We were holding hands at the time. We were both distracted. (Laughter) That worked better, thank you.

A division was called for and electronic voting resulted as follows:

In the Keys – Ayes 8, Noes 16

FOR

Dr Allinson
Ms Faragher
Mr Glover
Dr Haywood
Mr Hooper
Mrs Maltby
Mr Moorhouse
The Speaker

AGAINST

Mr Ashford
Mrs Barber
Mrs Caine
Mr Callister
Mr Cannan
Ms Christian
Mrs Corlett
Mr Crookall
Ms Edge
Ms Lord-Brennan
Mr Johnston
Mr Peters
Mrs Poole-Wilson
Mr Smith
Mr Thomas
Mr Wannenburgh

The Speaker: This time, Mr President, 8 for in the Keys, 16 against.

In the Council – Ayes 2, Noes 5

FOR

Mrs Kelsey
Mrs Morphet

AGAINST

Mrs August-Phillips
Mr Clueit
Mr Craine
Mr Mercer
Mr Reid

The President: Legislative Council: 2 for, 5 against. Therefore, motion fails.
Mr Thomas? (Interjections)

4285

Mr Thomas: Obviously this is talked about and might be read in future years and I just for clarity want to say that the Treasury does actually request a copy of the marriage certificate or the civil registration partnership, not just the self-declaration. (Interjection by Mr Hooper)

4290 **The President:** Hon. Members, the debate has finished. The vote has finished and the motion has failed.

So at this point we will now take a tea break (**Several Members:** Hear, hear.) and the Court will stand adjourned until 5.10 p.m.

The Court adjourned at 4.42 p.m.
and resumed its sitting at 5.10 p.m.

**9. Tackling harm caused by drugs –
Citizens’ jury; legalising sale of recreational cannabis –
Amended motion carried**

The Hon. Member for Ramsey, Dr Allinson, to move:

That Tynwald is of the opinion that, consistent with the policy principles approved by Tynwald in November 2024 to inform the Isle of Man’s approach to tackling harm caused by drugs, a Citizens’ Jury should be established by December 2026 to consider timelines for the implementation of the agreed policies, and a future regulated environment which would allow for the sale of cannabis for recreational use.

[[GD 2024/0110](#)] is relevant to this Item.

4295 **The President:** Hon. Members, we continue our Order Paper at Item 9 and I call on the Hon. Member for Ramsey, Dr Allinson.

Dr Allinson: Thank you very much, Mr President.

4300 I am not going to start a debate on the current use of illegal drugs on the Island and the need for a more progressive and evidence-based policy, which minimises the harms caused to our community, because that debate has already taken place. In December 2020 my colleague, the Hon. Member for Ramsey, Mr Hooper, moved:

That Tynwald is of the opinion that the Island’s approach to tackling the harms caused by illegal drugs should be reviewed; ... [to] include:

- engagement with the Manx public; and
- a review and assessment that any potential decriminalisation or legislation and regulation of specific substances would have on reducing harm to individuals and society;

4305 The then Minister for Home Affairs pointed out that a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment on Drugs and Alcohol had been published in 2017 and succeeded in amending the motion to refer to this and a commitment by the Minister with responsibility for justice to bring a report to Tynwald by June 2021, setting out how a review of the Island’s approach to the harms caused by illegal drugs could be undertaken.

The then Member of Council, Mrs Poole-Wilson, stressed the need for a more holistic approach to this complex issue and the need to do things differently. She recognised that despite the constraints of international conventions, the Isle of Man was in a very strong

4310 position to innovate in its approach and that we should never lose sight of each individual life affected by this important issue for our Island. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.)

I am grateful to her in her subsequent role as the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs for commissioning the report by the Public Health Institute at Liverpool John Moores University, which used focus groups and stakeholder workshops with the general public, drug users and
4315 charities. The report, discussed by this Hon. Court in November 2023, presented several options of ways the Island could reduce the harm from drugs, but it did not make any specific recommendations.

The report was clear that the term ‘harm’ referred to the overall impact on society, from health and mental wellbeing to criminal behaviour, community issues, as well as the wider
4320 impact of exploitation, violence and punitive measures in the long term. But the report also highlighted the lack of data on the drug situation in the Isle of Man and the fact that there had been no recent local youth drug use surveys and only sporadic adult surveys which made trend analysis or any comparisons with England and Wales difficult.

Our community knows that prohibition and the so-called war on drugs is not working, either
4325 here or anywhere else in the world. Our current legislation provides an illegal market for criminals to exploit and harm our young people. Our criminal justice system has applied harsher penalties to increasing numbers of people, criminalising residents whilst increasingly filling our Prison with people from across.

There has been a lot of positive change since 2020. Increased education and court diversion
4330 schemes have been provided; medicinal cannabis products are now available for patients allowing them legal and regulated access to medications which can make a real difference to their chronic symptoms. I am grateful to the Public Health Directorate for their ongoing work on societal issues and the use of illegal drugs within our community and their focus on reducing harm and improving mental and physical wellbeing across the community as laid out in their
4335 recently published strategy ‘Healthier Lives Together’.

The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs has been more active and in November 2024 the Department published a set of policy principles to inform the Isle of Man’s approach to tackle harms caused by drugs. These were based on the impact of drug-related convictions on health and wellbeing and alternatives to punishment and non-criminal responses currently
4340 available for drug possession offences on our Island.

The principles set out that as a Government, and a society, there will be a harm reduction approach taken to drug use, especially with reference to children and young people, and that we would continue to protect our community from criminality associated with illegal drugs; that we will develop a clearer understanding of the impact of drugs locally and take an evidence-based
4345 approach whilst prioritising diversion and treatment over criminalising people for minor possession offences.

The principles document clearly sets out that:

There is much published evidence to suggest that a long-term solution for reducing the harm caused by drugs is to ensure that adults are able to make informed choices as to drug use in a regulated environment. Ultimately, a regulated environment allows people to make safe, informed choices. In the same way as the quality, sale and content of alcohol, tobacco and availability of vaping products are currently regulated in controlled environment, so the sale of drugs in this way could bring similar controls on usage. This could also address the issue of criminal supply and follows a model which is well understood and accepted.

The Department concluded that:

... these principles should inform future policy and operational changes, creating a clear statement of intent. Our approach should be informed by evidence, public consultation and data so that the many different aspects of drug harm are reduced in our community, and we remain a safe place to live and work.

As we approach the end of this administration, I and other Hon. Members regret the
4350 apparent lack of progress on this important issue. I recognise the many priorities the
Department of Home Affairs has to deal with – emerging threats, resource constraints and
limited capacity – but this issue must be tackled.

We must keep up the progress already made and continue to develop the policies and
policing that suit our Island community. Delays and lack of progress allow harm to continue.
4355 Harm to our children, our young people, our society as a whole and our economy. We know how
criminalisation and exploitation can ruin lives and break up families, how they can lead to poor
mental and physical health, self-harm and suicide. We should never accept the death of a
member of our community due to drugs as being inevitable.

Mr President, we now live in an age of permacrisis where almost every month there are
4360 events in the world around us that challenge our Island community. It is easy to be distracted
and concentrate on today, at the expense of how we make the Island a better place for
tomorrow. All my motion does is try to build on the work already done and suggests a way
forward.

Citizens' juries have been used across the British Isles and around the world and are a
4365 deliberative participatory process in which a small, demographically representative group of
everyday people is brought together to investigate a complex public policy issue and provide
actionable recommendations. A jury, a group of around 12 to 24 people from all walks of life,
hears from a balanced panel of independent experts, stakeholders and advocates. Jurors have
the opportunity to cross-examine these witnesses and request additional information and
4370 evidence.

Facilitators guide the group to move past any personal biases, digest complex information,
and find common ground through structured debate, and the process culminates in a formal
report that details the jury's findings, which is delivered directly to policymakers and the wider
community to influence decision-making. If we are to include our community in advancing the
4375 policy principles already approved by this Hon. Court, this is a way to maintain progressive
momentum whilst actively including the views and wishes of the community we serve.

Mr President, my motion reads:

That Tynwald is of the opinion that, consistent with the policy principles approved by Tynwald in
November 2024 to inform the Isle of Man's approach to tackling harm caused by drugs, a Citizens' Jury
should be established by December 2026 to consider timelines for the implementation of the agreed
policies, and a future regulated environment which would allow for the sale of cannabis for
recreational use.

The success of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub model has shown that exploitation is
preventable. Every harm to a member of our community and death due to drugs is avoidable.
4380 We should not accept a status quo which continues to harm our society. I ask Members to
support this motion and I look forward to the debate on this important issue.

Thank you.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Ms Faragher.

4385 **Ms Faragher:** Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

Thank you to the Hon. Member for Ramsey, Dr Allinson, for bringing this motion, which I am
very pleased to second and I want to just pick up first of all on the words that the hon. mover
used at the end of his speech there: that exploitation is preventable and that harm to our
4390 community due to drugs is avoidable, and we should not accept a status quo which continues to
harm our society. I really cannot agree more with those powerful words and I thank him for
saying that so clearly.

Eaghtyrane, the motion before Tynwald today is not asking Members to redraw the law around cannabis and it is not asking us to abandon caution or to ignore the risks associated with drug use. What it does ask is far more modest and far more reasonable. It asks us to establish a citizens' jury so that informed members of the public can consider two important questions: firstly, how the policy principles unanimously approved by this Court in November 2024 should actually be implemented; and second, whether the Island should in future move towards a regulated environment for the sale of cannabis for recreational use.

I support this motion because I believe that these are precisely the kinds of complex evidence-heavy and socially significant questions for which a citizens' jury is well suited. Over recent years we have received some of the clearest evidence ever gathered on the Island regarding the harms associated with illicit drug use and, importantly, the harms caused by aspects of our current response to it.

Liverpool John Moores' report demonstrated that the damage extends far beyond drug use itself. It highlighted criminal exploitation of vulnerable people, intimidation, family trauma, stigma, barriers to treatment and the way that criminalisation can deepen harm, rather than reduce it. In response, the Council of Ministers brought forward policy principles which marked a significant shift towards a more balanced public health-led approach and in November 2024 Tynwald approved those principles unanimously.

I join Dr Allinson in regretting the lack of progress on these policy principles. I submitted numerous questions requesting updates, but the replies have repeatedly been vague and lacking in substance. Meanwhile, Eaghtyrane, the harms identified in the report have not paused while Government deliberates. That is exactly why this motion matters. A citizens' jury would allow a representative group of members of the public to hear evidence, question experts, consider international experience and deliberate carefully before making recommendations. This matters because this issue is often reduced to slogans or false binaries – tough on drugs versus soft on drugs; prohibition versus legalisation. The reality is far more nuanced than that.

Other jurisdictions are already testing different approaches to cannabis regulation. Some are seeing benefits in reducing criminal markets and improving public health oversight but others have encountered challenges, which we could learn from. A citizens' jury would allow these experiences to be examined calmly, rationally and transparently.

Importantly, Eaghtyrane, it would also help build public trust and democratic legitimacy around whichever direction the Island ultimately chooses and I think that is crucial, because whether Members personally support or oppose future cannabis regulation, we should surely agree that decisions of this significance should be informed not only by political debate within this Court, but by structured engagement with the public and careful consideration of the evidence.

This motion does not predetermine the outcome. It simply recognises that the conversation cannot remain frozen indefinitely, particularly after Tynwald itself unanimously accepted that aspects of our current approach are causing harm and that reform is needed. If we are serious about evidence-led policymaking, serious about harm reduction and serious about involving the public meaningfully in difficult policy decisions, then establishing a citizens' jury is a sensible and proportionate next step.

I therefore support the motion, Eaghtyrane. Ta mee shirrey kied dy pholldal. I beg to second.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Mrs Poole-Wilson.

Mrs Poole-Wilson: Thank you, Mr President.

I am grateful to Dr Allinson for bringing this motion. It is plainly well-intentioned and it touches on a subject where views in our community are strongly held and where the consequences of policy change, whichever way one leans, are real. I also want to recognise at the outset that deliberative methods – citizens' juries and assemblies – can be a valuable way to

hear from people who may not usually participate in formal consultations, to examine complex evidence presented by experts, and to test policy trade-offs in a structured way.

Hon. Members, the motion before us is specific. It asks Tynwald to be of the opinion that consistent with the policy principles approved in November 2024 a citizens' jury should be established by December 2026 to consider, first, timelines for implementing the agreed policies and, second, our future regulated environment, which would allow for the sale of cannabis for recreational use.

I have discussed this matter with the Hon. Member for Ramsey and I explained that while I support the concept of citizens' juries in general, I cannot support establishing one in this case on the terms proposed. The core reason is practical and constitutional. Commissioning a citizens' jury to design a route to legalisation risks raising public expectation that Government can straightforwardly deliver a regulated recreational market, when the constitutional and international position is complex and, on any realistic assessment, challenging to achieve.

In addition, detailed work that has been undertaken elsewhere indicates that the evidential picture in relation to the legalisation of cannabis is still developing and is multifaceted and complex. I would point Hon. Members to the report published in March 2025 by the London Drugs Commission to provide further insight. In short, and forgive the pun, the jury is still out on the full implications of legalisation. Put simply, I do not think it is responsible to convene a deliberative process around an outcome that may not be within the Island's gift to implement or that could trigger significant external consequences beyond the policy merits of the debate itself.

Hon. Members should not interpret this as doing nothing on drugs harms. Tynwald has already approved a set of policy principles to inform the Island's approach to tackling harm caused by drugs including a stronger public health and harm reduction direction, and a recognition that criminalising minor possession can itself drive longer-term harm. The working group that was convened following support for the principles has made progress on developing an action plan that both captures current provision and additional steps that support translation of those high-level principles into actions to reduce harms.

When we debated the policy principles in November 2024, it was recognised that they were high level and that they needed translation into defined actions that could make a difference. And whilst that work has taken longer than was hoped, it is the intention to publish that action plan this summer. And the actions that flow from the plan are, I would say, what matters; to move us from debate into delivery, improving treatment pathways, strengthening diversion and support and protecting young people from exploitation associated with drug markets.

It is of note as well that Public Health has commissioned and is undertaking research examining emerging evidence relating to drugs, alcohol and cannabis-based medicinal products on the Island, the outputs of which will be important to take account of in delivery of actions to address harms.

In parallel, the statutory Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs has a defined role and as the Hon. Member for Ramsey has alluded to, has become more active recently. Their role is to keep the situation under review, advise on measures, including legal change, and report, grounded in evidence, on prevention, treatment, education and wider social harms. So if Members are asking how we progress the agreed principles, there is already a lawful and structured route for expert advice and evidence testing without creating a public process that implies that legalisation is a near-term deliverable policy commitment.

On the point of deliverability, Members also need to be aware that other jurisdictions have flagged constitutional sensitivities when contemplating cannabis legalisation precisely because of the relationships with the UK and of international obligations. That has been explicitly raised in Guernsey's recent consideration of cannabis regulatory options, including consultation with His Majesty's Comptroller on constitutional matters. Separately, and from an Island risk perspective, there are credible concerns about how recreational legalisation could interact with international instruments relevant to financial crime standards.

I am not suggesting that such challenges cannot be further researched and considered, but it would be wrong of me to speak in favour of a process which could lead the public to expect an outcome without acknowledging that such externalities exist and could be significant.

4500 I would also say that the Hon. Member for Ramsey in his opening remarks did refer to the considerations for the future section of the policy principles document that we debated and approved in November 2024. That consideration went on to say that:

... there are numerous different models used by jurisdictions around the world and the Island is bound by several international conventions. Further investigation of possible future regulatory regimes would be required alongside detailed public consultation and an assessment of the societal impact of such changes.

These things were set out for the longer term. They would require a great deal of work and, Hon. Members, I think we have the mechanisms to be able to progress them without raising hopes of a solution that may not be within our immediate gift to deliver.

4505 So what is the alternative? First, we should focus on delivery against the agreed principles: treatment capacity, education, diversion, prevention and safeguarding. The evidence base already cited to Hon. Members includes serious indicators of harm and demand, drug deaths, referrals into support pathways and the share of criminal justice workload linked to drugs.

4510 Second, if Members want a structured time bar and mechanism to maintain momentum, we should use the tools we already have – evidence through the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs and Government reporting back to Tynwald on implementation of the proposed action plan, rather than establishing a citizens' jury tasked with plotting a route to recreational legalisation.

4515 In summary, I respect the mover's intent and I support deliberative approaches in principle, but I cannot support this motion as drafted because it risks creating unrealistic expectations about legalisation in a context where the evidence basis is complex and evolving and constitutional and international position is also complex and potentially consequential.

4520 Moreover, I believe it is important that we see the policy principles already approved translated into actions to reduce the harms associated with drugs before we look to dedicate resource to what was always acknowledged to be a much longer-term approach. In short, we need the existing proposed safety net to be firmly in place first.

For that reason I seek to move the amendment that has been circulated, which is:

To leave out all the words after, 'That Tynwald' and to add in their place the words –

- 1) reaffirms its support for the policy principles to inform the Isle of Man's approach to tackling harm caused by drugs approved by Tynwald in November 2024;
- 2) notes the intention of the Council of Ministers that an action plan to implement the principles will be published by summer 2026;
- 3) notes that there is ongoing research being undertaken and commissioned by Public Health into illicit drugs, alcohol and cannabis-based medicinal products, and expects the action plan to be reviewed and updated to take account of the findings of that research; and
- 4) expects to receive periodic updates about the delivery of the action plan.

I would encourage Members to stay focused on the measures we have already agreed, measures which can be progressed now, will reduce harm and will protect our community.

4525 Thank you, Mr President. I beg to move:

To leave out all the words after 'That Tynwald' and to add in their place the words:

- 1) reaffirms its support for the policy principles to inform the Isle of Man's approach to tackling harm caused by drugs approved by Tynwald in November 2024;
- 2) notes the intention of the Council of Ministers that an action plan to implement the principles will be published by summer 2026;

- 3) notes that there is ongoing research being undertaken and commissioned by Public Health into illicit drugs, alcohol and cannabis-based medical products, and expects the action plan to be reviewed and updated to take account of the findings of that research; and
4) expects to receive periodic updates about the delivery of the action plan.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Mr Ashford.

Mr Ashford: Thank you very much, Mr President.

I rise to second the amendment, as well as endorsing everything that the Hon. Minister has just said. I think one of the important things for me to emphasise as Minister for the Cabinet Office is the part that says about the research currently being undertaken and commissioned by Public Health into illicit drugs. That work is ongoing and it will be an expansive piece of work that will need to be fed into the process. The action plan is in a form where it is nearly ready for publication, is my understanding, and it is very nearly over the line and it will be out and published this summer and it is important that we see that before we actually go any further.

I do have generally some concerns about citizens' juries as well personally and how they can be used on topics like this, but one of the things that I do want to emphasise from a personal point of view is in relation to the motion as it is worded. It tends to suggest, the wording to me, that it is already a foregone conclusion and a given that we will have legalised cannabis within the community, because the way the wording is positioned, that is not something that the citizens' jury appears to be looking at. The citizens' jury is looking at the implementation side. It is coming as if that decision has already been made and it is not something for a citizens' jury to consider.

So from my personal point of view I do not support that, but in terms of the amendment, it is wise to wait for the action plan to come out. It is wise to let Public Health have feed into that because that is, at the end of the day, one of their primary roles and then, from there, there will be informed decisions that can actually be made.

So I fully support the amendment, Mr President.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Mr Craine.

Mr Craine: Gura mie mooar eu, Eaghtyrane.

I am not opposed to considering a different approach to tackling the harm caused by drugs in our society, although I admit that I am cautious and I want us to be thorough.

I am given to understand that in the UK workplace drug testing is increasingly becoming a necessary and integral part of company policies across various sectors. The trend is driven by a number of factors. There is evidence of greater numbers of employees whose actions at work are being impaired by drugs or alcohol. There are growing concerns over safety at work, concerns for the worker involved, concerns for the worker's colleagues, as well as concerns for the general public.

There are concerns over the employer's legal liabilities if an accident is caused by an employee in a safety-critical role who is not fully fit for work. There are also understandable business concerns over worker impairment and productivity at work. It seems that employers in the UK are increasingly taking a proactive approach to address these challenges.

Many businesses implement supervisor training and establish clear, drug-free workplace policies. Additionally, many organisations are expanding their employee assistance programme to provide confidential mental health support and addiction counselling often focusing on rehabilitation and recovery. The UK Health and Safety Executive has issued a number of hugely relevant documents and guidelines over the past two years.

It is apparent that employers wishing to consider drug testing must navigate several legal and operational requirements to make the process run smoothly in relation to written policies and testing consent, in relation to justification and fairness and in relation to privacy and

confidentiality. These processes have actually been made more complex by the introduction of legally prescribed medicinal cannabis, which is THC dominant or THC-CBD balanced and needs to be managed in the workplace like any other impairing prescription medication.

Logistically testing for most drugs is apparently relatively easy, testing hair for pre-employment screening, using oral fluid, saliva, and traditional urine testing as well as non-invasive fingerprint sweat tests. In a number of ways testing is less useful for cannabis as the tests can only show past THC use, not current impairment, so behavioural impairment testing is used as well.

I want to ask are the Island's employers prepared for this? The Island's Health and Safety at Work, Etc., Act 1977 fundamentally reflects the equivalent UK Act of 1974. It establishes the same employers' responsibility for the safety and welfare of their employees. They are also responsible for protecting non-employees, including the general public, from workplace risks.

In 2024 it was estimated that approximately 60% of UK businesses have implemented some form of drug and alcohol policy. Are our employers ready for this? Fewer than 20% of workplaces are actually conducting regular testing, but in specific sectors testing is much higher. In the transport and logistics sector, over 60% of UK employers conduct regular testing. Are our employers ready for this? In construction, about 40% of companies require testing and in manufacturing around 30% of employers implement testing due to operating heavy machinery.

The issues I wish to raise are these. Can we rest assured that employers in the Isle of Man are ready and equipped to match these levels of workplace drug testing? Do we have workplaces in the Isle of Man where staff work under a licence which requires drug testing and, if so, is this drug testing consistently implemented?

I would urge Members to recognise that we must have evidence on current levels of drug policies and drug testing in different employment sectors within the Isle of Man before we consider pushing ahead with implementing policies to introduce recreational cannabis. This is a safeguarding issue. Without these, this motion is premature.

I want to raise another issue, Eaghtyrane, and I want to repeat that I am not opposed to considering a different approach to tackling the harm caused by drugs, though I admit that I am cautious. I am also not opposed to the principle of a citizens' jury but I note – and I think that others have alluded to this – that between the motion in November 2024 in this Chamber and today's motion, Tynwald has moved from approving policy principles to inform the Isle of Man's approach to reducing harm caused by drugs to being asked to establish a citizens' jury to consider timelines for the implementation of the agreed policies specifically allowing the sale of recreational cannabis.

We appear to have moved from policy principles to inform our approach to timelines for the implementation of so-called 'agreed policies' for the sale of recreational cannabis. In between, we have never confirmed what Tynwald's approach is, let alone developed agreed firm policies. These comments also relate to the amendment brought by the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs: we should only take action on policies, not on the principles to inform our approach. Have we missed out some steps here?

Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Mr Clueit.

Mr Clueit: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

I rise to speak cautiously in support of this motion. Cautiously, because I believe the direction of travel is right, but the route being proposed raises questions that deserve honest answers before we commit to it. I should say at the outset that I speak with some personal experience of this issue. I have lived in several jurisdictions where recreational cannabis has been legalised or decriminalised.

I have seen the positive effects – the reduction in petty criminalisation, the removal of stigma, the reallocation of police resources towards serious crime – but I have also seen the

negative effects, including the normalisation of use among young people, the strain on mental health services and the uncomfortable reality that regulated markets do not always eliminate criminal supply. I raise this not to prejudice the outcome, but to say that this is a genuinely complex territory and it deserves to be treated as such.

Nobody in this Court should be in any doubt that the status quo is failing. The document before us, GD 2024/0110, makes that clear. Thirty per cent of our prison population is serving time for drug-related offences. That is nearly double the rate of England and Wales. Drug-related violence is increasing. Young people are being exploited by organised criminal networks. As we know, the evidence tells us clearly that threatening people with criminal sanctions for personal possession does very little to reduce drug use. What it does do is ruin lives, limit employment, restrict travel and embed people more deeply in the very criminal world that we are trying to pull them away from.

The policy principles approved by this Court in November 2024 were sound. A harm reduction approach, diversion over criminalisation for minor possession, protecting children, evidence-led policy. I support those principles. This motion seeks to build on that foundation and I welcome that ambition, but ambition must also be matched by rigour and it is in that spirit of rigour, not obstruction, that I put the following practical questions to the mover.

First, on the citizens' jury itself. The document approved by this Court in November 2024 does not recommend this mechanism. It calls for public consultation and engagement, which is not the same thing. A citizens' jury is a specific, deliberative tool and it may well be the right one, but I would ask the mover to address several practical questions that the motion leaves entirely unanswered.

How would the jury be selected? Would it be randomly sampled from the electoral register, as is common in deliberative democracy models? If so, how would the Island ensure it is genuinely representative of age, geography and background, particularly given our small population? Would there be any qualification criteria or would it be open to any resident?

Who would bear the costs and what are those costs expected to be? Citizens' juries are not inexpensive. Participants typically require compensation for their time. There are facilitation costs, expert witness costs, administrative costs and the cost of producing a final report. In comparable jurisdictions such processes have run to six figures. Where would this funding come from and has it been budgeted for?

How long would the jury be expected to sit? The motion sets a deadline of December 2026 for establishment, but establishment is not conclusion. A thorough, deliberative process on a question as complex as cannabis regulation could reasonably take six to 12 months. Are we looking at recommendations in 2027 or 2028?

Critically, how can any jury deliberate meaningfully when the document itself acknowledges that we still lack reliable local data on drug use, drug-related deaths and the effectiveness of our existing interventions? We would be asking citizens to make recommendations on foundations that are not yet fully developed.

Second, I think this is the question the motion most conspicuously sidesteps: what is the relationship between a regulated cannabis market on this Island and the legal framework of the United Kingdom? The document is explicit:

Legalisation of drugs remains in contravention of the UN drug conventions, ...

Our Misuse of Drugs Act deliberately mirrors the UK's 1971 Act. The UK shows little sign of moving towards recreational legislation so cannabis legally purchased here would be illegal the moment it crossed to the UK. We would be creating a border enforcement problem and potentially a diplomatic one.

The document already tells us that organised crime targets this Island precisely because of its geography and the profitability of its market. A legal cannabis enclave surrounded by jurisdictions where it remains illegal risks making us more attractive to trafficking networks, not

less. I would ask the mover, has this been formally assessed and has any consideration been given to the reputational implications for our financial services sector of being the only cannabis-legal territory in the British Isles?

Third, I want to raise an option that the motion does not consider, but which the document's own evidence arguably supports more directly: a nominal fixed penalty notice for possession of small quantities, say, up to 25 g. That is not direct decriminalisation but it is a first step. Such an approach would remove the life-altering criminal record. It would satisfy the diversion principle. It would not require a citizens' jury, a new regulatory framework or navigation of international conventions, because possession would remain technically unlawful, simply sanctioned minimally, such as Portugal's administrative model operates. It could be implemented quickly and its impact measured before we take a larger step.

I would ask the mover why does this motion seek to move directly to full regulation, rather than testing this intermediate step first? Is there evidence that the Island is ready to leap, rather than step?

The document does not shy away from the evidence on cannabis and psychosis. The relationship may be causal. The risk is elevated for young people, for early onset users and for those with existing vulnerabilities. Any regulated environment must have robust safeguards built in from the outset. I would ask the mover to set out how the citizens' jury would be equipped to weigh these health risks and what non-negotiable protections would be placed outside the jury's scope entirely.

Eaghtyrane, I support the spirit of this motion. The harm caused by our current approach is real and documented. Change is needed, but the motion asks us to establish a process with a fixed deadline, a broad and complex mandate, unanswered questions about how it will be composed, funded and concluded, and significant unresolved legal and evidential questions about where it might lead. I urge the mover to address these concerns directly, not to slow progress, but to ensure that when we do move, we move on ground that is firm. I look forward to the mover's response.

Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Mrs Morphet.

Mrs Morphet: Thank you, Mr President.

I am grateful to the Hon. Member for Ramsey for bringing this motion and discussing this with me. I firstly, obviously, have to highlight my interest as a social worker who worked within the Drug and Alcohol Team on Island for five years with young people, and I also have a Masters in dual diagnosis. So unfortunately this has resulted in my longest speech to date and this speech will be evidence-based throughout.

I want to begin by acknowledging that the policy principles approved by Tynwald in November 2024 set out a constructive and important direction of travel. Those principles are clear. I would like to initially focus on two of these principles: committing us to a harm reduction approach and to ensuring that we develop a proper, evidence-led understanding of the impact of drugs on our community. Those are principles I strongly support, but I do not believe that this motion as currently framed is yet fully aligned with those principles in practice.

At the moment we still have a lack of robust local data on patterns of drug use, health impacts, service demand and long-term outcomes on the Island. Without this data, we are at risk of making policy decisions in the absence of a full understanding of their consequences. If we are serious about an evidence-led approach, then we have to strengthen our data collection, improve monitoring of drug-related harms and also consider the growing international evidence base.

Cannabis nowadays is not the low-potency substance it was 30 years ago. Typical illicit cannabis now has THC levels in the region of 15% to 20% and often higher and, importantly, medicinal products can be of even greater strength than the illicit cannabis. The well-established

research on cannabis is very clear on a number of risks. Prolonged use and misuse are associated with mental health conditions, including psychosis, depression and anxiety. There is a clear dose response relationship, meaning higher THC content and more frequent use increases risk.

4730 Cannabis use is associated with a two- to three-fold increase in schizophrenia incidence and, importantly, poorer outcomes for those that are already affected. Earlier use, particularly in adolescence, carries greater risk to cognitive development and we know that neurological development continues into the mid-20s.

4735 There is also a tendency to frame the debate as a binary choice between prohibition and legalisation, but the evidence shows that it is not that simple. We know prohibition does not work. History has evidenced this. We know that the war on drugs has not worked. It criminalises users, creates barriers to treatment and fuels organised crime.

4740 International experience has evidenced that legalisation can reduce stigma and weaken illicit markets, but without tight regulation, it can lead to increased use, higher potency products and rising health harms. In jurisdictions such as Canada and parts of the United States there have been increases in cannabis use disorder and associated mental ill-health, rises in Emergency Department presentations for intoxication and symptoms of cannabis use disorder and wider public health pressures. The real issue is not just simply legal versus illegal. It is how a system can be regulated safely.

4745 This brings me to an issue of current concern among practitioners on Island and I thank them for sharing these concerns with me. We are being asked today to consider a future regulated market for recreational cannabis, but we have not yet resolved the regulatory framework for medicinal cannabis on this Island. There are increasing concerns emerging from practice on Island: cases of worsening mental health, including psychosis, manic episodes and hospital admissions; reports of dependence, tolerance and dosage escalation; reduced engagement with services; serious concerns around clinical oversight and governance with prescribing; and a lack of consistent review and psychological support offered alongside prescribing.

4755 There is also evidence, internationally and locally, that a proportion of medical cannabis is used non-medically, some by young people being sold on, and there can be variability in THC levels and labelling accuracy. NICE guidance in the UK only recommends cannabis-based products in very limited circumstances, reflecting the lack of large, high-quality clinical trials. If we are already seeing challenges in what should be a tightly controlled medical context, we need to be cautious about expanding availability before those issues are addressed.

4760 Turning to the proposal for a citizens' jury, I recognise the potential benefits. Research shows that they can improve understanding, allow informed deliberation and broaden participation in complex policy debates. But the evidence on their effectiveness is mixed. They can be costly and resource intensive. Outcomes depend heavily on how they are designed and facilitated. There is a risk of self-selection bias that does not fully reflect the population.

4765 Group dynamics can lead to groupthink and, crucially, their recommendations are advisory only and are often not translated into policy. Without a clear framework for how outputs will be used, there is a risk that such a process becomes little more than a publicity exercise. Effectiveness depends on recruitment, facilitation and how those outputs are used.

4770 In conclusion, my concern is not with the principles within the motion taken individually, it is with the sequencing. If we are to proceed with the citizens' jury, we must first be clear on its purpose, its scope, how participants are selected, and how its findings will inform decision-making. Before we consider timelines for implementation of a future regulated recreational market, we must first strengthen our evidence base, ensure we have a robust public health framework, address the current issues with medicinal cannabis, and ensure our services are properly resourced to support any of those who may be affected. That is what a genuine harm reduction approach requires.

4775 Without those foundations, we risk moving ahead of the evidence and ahead of our capacity to manage the consequences. We must listen to our practitioners working in the field who are

clearly expressing concerns that need addressing, and we must act on any outcomes of the current review taking place.

4780 For those reasons, I cannot support the motion as it stands, but I do support moving forward with a measured approach; one that is firmly grounded in evidence, public health, harm reduction and the current realities and needs of our Island.

Thank you, Mr President.

Several Members: Hear, hear.

4785

The President: I call on the Hon. Loayreyder.

The Speaker: Follow that! (Laughter)

4790 It is not often I rise in this Court, Eaghtyrane, as a former Department of Home Affairs Minister. You do not hear that come from my lips very often, because there is nothing worse than a 'when I'. I could talk at length about this particular issue and I promise not to, but I cannot compete with certainly Mrs Morphet and even Dr Allinson's frontline experience of the issues that are being faced by people who are on both sides of this divide.

4795 But I think what we have in this Court today is an agreement on some common causes: of reducing harms, of the failure of the current system, and the need for a considered, if complex, joined-up approach. Dr Allinson has offered a way forward with that with the citizens' jury. It is a new thing to our shores but it is not a new thing.

4800 I, like others – and I think Mr Clueit went into great depth about some of the concerns around the citizens' jury – would say, if one of the major concerns that we have in this place is the speed of progress, I am not sure that the citizens' jury is the answer. It does risk slowing us further and adding cost into an exercise that is already well under way. I do see some of the same problems that we had as a House with the assisted dying debates around prejudices, perceptions of bias, who was heard, who was not and the issues around that. But I do accept the argument that they can increase debate and public understanding and they are a legitimate tool for that. Is this the right place to start? I am not sure.

4810 But the reason that I stood up is that I believe that this Minister gets it. I think that this Minister gets the complexity of the issue and the complexity of the solutions; gets the harms, is behind the policy principles and this Minister is on the same journey that most people in this Court are on about learning and about trying to find a better solution than the one that we currently have for the problems that are well known.

4815 So I think the motion that Dr Allinson has brought here today is borne out of frustration with the speed of progress and I can understand that. I am certainly happy to keep the pressure on the Department of Home Affairs and the Minister to deliver that workable solution to a complex problem in a timely manner. For that reason, I am happy to support the amendment. I will see that this comes from the Council of Ministers to an action plan to implement the principles to be published this summer.

4820 We need to proceed with a little bit of caution, because getting this wrong has the potential to far outweigh the benefits. Should we get this wrong, it is not worth thinking about. So we need to proceed with caution, but in the right way. So I am happy to support the amendment.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Dr Haywood.

Dr Haywood: Thank you, Mr President.

4825 At its heart this motion today is not directly about drugs legislation. We seem to have gone down a bit of a rabbit hole. It is a motion that is about process, evidence, inclusion and trust. Tynwald has already agreed a set of policy principles in 2024 to tackle harm caused by drugs, and this motion is simply asking us to take the next responsible step to establish the citizens'

jury to consider how and at what pace those policies should be implemented, and to examine, in a measured and evidence-led way, the question of a possible future regulated market.

4830 Mr President, these are complex, sensitive and often polarising issues. They are not well suited to blunt instruments like simple consultation or a referendum. A consultation by its nature tends to capture fixed pre-existing views, often dominated by those who engage most strongly or have the largest and noisiest voices, and are most strongly opinionated. A referendum, whilst important in certain circumstances, reduces a highly nuanced issue to a
4835 binary choice without providing the space for people to engage in evidence, to hear from experts or to reflect on competing arguments. We already know that our referendum legislation is so broken as to be utterly useless to us.

So by contrast – I am going to come at this from a data perspective – a citizens’ jury is a fundamentally different beast. It brings together a randomly selected representative group of
4840 citizens, so it is not people who nominate themselves. That is people who we go and invite to take part, we randomly select and invite them. We invite those people so that they reflect the diversity of the wider community that they represent.

In the citizens’ jury process, we give them time and support to learn, to question, to deliberate and to ultimately form some informed recommendations based on the evidence that
4845 they have gathered. Participants can hear from experts, they can examine that balanced information and they can engage directly with differing perspectives before reaching their conclusions.

This is why deliberative processes are increasingly used internationally to address complex and controversial issues and questions, because they allow citizens to move beyond the initial
4850 assumptions, the headlines, and the little header on Facebook, and they arrive instead at a more considered collective judgement.

Mr President, the academic evidence is quite clear that such processes improve the quality, the legitimacy, and the inclusiveness of decision-making, particularly where there are policy trade-offs that are going to be involved. If we are serious about building public confidence in
4855 decisions on drug policy, then we probably want those decisions to be informed, transparent and grounded in a process that commands trust. The citizens’ jury would offer exactly that.

There are clear international guidelines on how to establish and manage a citizens’ jury. We do not have to invent any de novo set up. This is just another layer of deliberation and not one that I think we should be scared of. This would provide yet another source of evidence to inform
4860 our future decision making.

Citizens’ juries sit between the immediacy of public opinion – that expressed on social media or on media broadcasts – and the responsibility of this Court, providing us with a structured way to test evidence, explore options and understand the societal implications of different
4865 approaches. The outputs would be recommendations that this Court could examine and agree or disagree with after we have too deliberated.

Mr President, I come from a background which relies on the gathering and evaluation of quality evidence. Our current means for assessing what our communities want and what they need, especially in complex situations, is very limited in capacity. We should be clear that the issue around cannabis legislation is already evolving. Cannabis-based medicinal products are
4870 legally available now for a range of conditions including severe epilepsy, multiple sclerosis-related spasticity and chemotherapy-induced nausea.

We have already stepped away from the UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs using the mechanism of respectful non-compliance. Actually, over 20 US states have done the same thing, and Malta, Canada, Uruguay; I could go on. Here on the Island many patients access such
4875 prescriptions, demonstrating both a real clinical demand and a growing public acceptance of regulated use in appropriate circumstances. Patients now receive medicinal cannabis through specialist services, reflecting a system that, while still cautious, has already moved beyond prohibition towards controlled and regulated access in specific contexts.

4880 So the question is not whether these pressures for wider access exist – they clearly do – the question is whether we approach them reactively in piecemeal or whether we examine them carefully, transparently and with the public fully engaged. I think this motion gives us the option to do that latter process. It does not prejudge the outcome. It does not mandate legal change. It does not promise legal change. It simply ensures that before any future decisions are taken, they are informed by a process that allows citizens to engage with the evidence in depth, to weigh
4885 the risks, benefits and safeguards of a possible regulated system.

It allows for a proper consultation with our community. They can look at critical questions. Public health impacts we have already heard about, harm reduction, criminal justice implications, regulation enforcement, protection of vulnerable groups, can all be considered within that framework. These are not questions that could be answered in a headline or a survey
4890 response or a yes/no vote. They require deliberation.

A citizens' jury would not be in competition with the ongoing research by Public Health, nor the action plan. It is a complementary process that would contribute further evidence. If we believe in evidence-led policy – sometimes I wonder if we do, but I genuinely believe in evidence-led policy – if we believe that public engagement goes beyond slogans, headlines and
4895 beyond a snippet on the radio, if we want decisions that are robust, legitimate and sustainable, then I think the establishment of a citizens' jury is not just appropriate, it is a necessary step that we should be embracing.

So I will be supporting this motion.

4900 **The President:** I call on the Hon. Member, Mr Hooper.

Mr Hooper: Thank you very much, Mr President.

I found this motion quite interesting actually. I find myself in agreement both with Dr Haywood and the Hon. Member of Council, Mrs Morphet, here, in that what I think everyone
4905 is agreeing to is that we need to have a proper, sound evidence base for taking any policy change around drugs forward, whatever that decision may be. I do not think that Tynwald has predetermined what the eventual outcome might be. Tynwald has approved a series of policies which I think take us in a particular direction, but the end of that journey has not really been specified.

4910 I really take on board the concerns that have been raised about the fact that the motion is silent on the way that any citizens' jury might be constituted, their exact remit. All those kinds of questions are quite valid and really would need to be answered as part of anything that comes forward in the near future. But I think what this comes down to for me is whatever way we decide to take this forward someone is going to have to consider all the evidence. That is the
4915 question here. It is not do we need evidence. The question is who should consider that evidence and who should be the ones forming a view off the back of it.

I think you have got two very different approaches being set out here. The original motion says the people that should consider all that evidence, all those unanswered questions that we have got, the people that should be the ones dealing with navigating their way through all of
4920 that, should be the people themselves. On the other hand you have got the Government proposal that says, 'Actually, no, let us do all that analysis for you, the Government will take this forward and the Government will be the ones analysing the evidence, producing the evidence and making recommendations.' They are very different approaches, I think.

Tynwald, in the original policy principles, was very clear about the need to consult and
4925 engage, and they are very different things. This Government is pretty good at consulting with people, but it is really bad at engaging with people. We are great asking a predetermined set of questions to get a predetermined outcome. We are really bad at actually getting in a room with people and asking broader questions, bigger questions.

So for me, whatever concerns people have got around how a citizens' jury might be structured, how it might be constituted, the exact remit it may be given, I think all those questions could be answered through that establishment process that the motion talks about.

But ultimately, if I am being asked to place my trust in either the Government to do the right thing and make the right decisions or placing my trust in the people, I think I would probably say them, because ultimately it is going to come here anyway. Whatever recommendations are made it is going to come back here. Either we are going to be sitting here looking at recommendations from the Government or recommendations from a citizens' jury that have no doubt been filtered in some way by the Government anyway, because everything that comes here ends up filtered through that particular lens.

So I think for me I am much more in favour of taking the motion as originally written. I am not entirely comfortable with the phrasing and the way it has been worded – but I do not think it is going to pass, so I am quite comfortable not amending it. But actually I think the principle that it is trying to establish is a pretty sound one.

I know the Speaker, when he was talking, said the current Minister 'gets it' and so maybe we can rely on Government to bring this through. I think there is a lot of truth in that. The problem is the current Minister may not be the Minister in six months' time, in a year's time, in two years' time, in five years' time. (Laughter) We just do not know how long the evidence gathering will take, and the analysis of that evidence, because it is a very big question and it should not be rushed.

Over the next two, five, however many years this is going to be, we are either placing our trust in the Government and whoever happens to be sat in that ministerial seat at that moment in time, or we are placing our trust in actually letting a subset of the people of the Island engage with this issue properly. We have the suggestion of a citizens' jury before on other big social issues in other areas and maybe that is something we should be more willing to use and more willing to engage in that process, trying something new, trying a different approach.

So I would encourage Members to, again, not get lost in the detail. This is not a debate about whether we should or should not legalise or decriminalise or whatever it may be. That is not the question that I think we are being asked. The question we are being asked here is in an evidence-led process, who is it that we want considering that evidence? Like I said, I think you have got two very different options on the table here and I am much more inclined to go with the original motion of a citizens' jury than I am placing my trust in whoever may be in Government in the future when this issue eventually does come forward.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Mr Thomas.

Mr Thomas: Thank you very much, Mr President.

Of course tackling harm caused by drugs and decriminalisation of the sale of cannabis for recreational use are very important issues. We do have two alternatives, because the Government's amendment – which obviously I support – basically replaces the approach of a citizens' jury with a different approach. I am taken back to 12th May in the House of Keys when we looked at assisted dying and some very important parts of the future debate I wanted to hear more about but I did not get a chance to hear about them at that time and I felt very frustrated.

So I am going to give the mover of this motion today the chance to talk about some of the things that are in his original motion before they get replaced by the Government's amendment, I hope. It is along two particular lines of enquiry that I want the mover to have the opportunity to respond to. The first one is an area floated by Minister Poole-Wilson and built on by Mr Clueit, which is how the sale of cannabis for recreational use in the Isle of Man would work in the context of the Common Travel Area and the context of international relations.

It seems to me very hard to imagine how it would work. That has been an issue in terms of assisted dying. How can the Isle of Man really go ahead of the people with whom we have

regular sea connections, Ireland, United Kingdom, and all of that? It is a really important issue. Can we go ahead of the islands around us, given the connections, given the Common Travel Area, given customs and excise, given all the other common connections and the political expectations in the Isle of Man?

4985 But the even more important question I want to give the mover a chance to address is citizens' forum juries are not foreign to the Isle of Man. We have had one before and we have had them floated before. I think I actually had an amendment on the Order Paper for the House of Keys once to establish a citizens' jury and I thought how it could work legally. I put down an amendment which I never actually had a chance to move.

4990 This is my very specific question. Let's go back to 2021, two issues that came to dominate this House of Keys, this Tynwald, this Government, were climate change and assisted dying. In 2021 we had a climate change citizens' forum, which was 36 people who were there generally to capture the voice of the community. My simple question is: is that what is in mind with all of this?

4995 Alternatively, in 2021 we had a very specific citizens' jury in Jersey set up to consider a very precise question, which was should assisted dying be permitted in Jersey and, if so, under what circumstances. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) A few things about that 2021 assisted dying jury. Basically, it cost just around £66,000 to organise, according to the freedom of information response of 14th April 2021 from the Jersey Freedom of Information Office. Three hundred
5000 pounds was paid to each of the 23 participants, which were randomly selected from over 4,000 people who were approached from generated activity.

Then there was a computer program basically to analyse the 477 responses, I believe, that came forward from that randomly selected invitation to come up with the 23 generation, which took two civil servants most of 2021 to organise. There were lots and lots of experts, both lived
5005 experience experts and professional experts, who presented to the 10 sessions of that citizens' jury process, who fortunately waived their fees for that purpose. So there was not actually any direct cost, because the civil servants were organising everything and they were experts who were prepared to talk for free.

Is that what we have in mind? Is it really necessary for something like assisted dying or
5010 tackling the harms of drugs to have one of these citizens' juries to make sure that the population is taken with you on these processes?

In very practical terms, what I came up with back a year and a half or so ago when I had the amendment drafted was to actually make the citizens' jury members appointed under the Juries Act, which was allowed, it got Treasury concurrence at the time. It would have meant paying
5015 people to take part for many hours over many weeks to consider very many difficult topics.

Is that what is in mind with all of this? If so, can we expect the cost to be £70,000 or £80,000 if we can get expert witnesses for free, and we can ignore the cost of the civil servants involved in the process and the independent advisory panel that was there in Jersey to make sure there was not any bias in the civil servants who were asking the questions, preparing the sessions and
5020 all of that.

All of it is written up in that freedom of information response. All of it is written up in the final report from the citizens' jury on assisted dying panel in Jersey 2021. I just think it would be very helpful and a great opportunity for the mover to educate us in the Island a bit more about how an assisted dying would work in practice when it is necessary and what happens as a
5025 result of it.

Thank you very much. I fully support the Government amendment.

The President: I call on the Hon. Member, Ms Edge.

5030 **Ms Edge:** Thank you, Mr President.

I want to speak, but I just want to do it with some caution, because I believe this is a far more significant step than perhaps it first appears in the motion. I fully recognise that addiction is

complex and that many people caught up in it, in substance misuse, are vulnerable individuals who require support, treatment and compassion rather than simply punishment. Many people affected by addiction may have experienced adverse childhood experiences, trauma, neglect, family breakdown, poor mental health, undiagnosed neurodiverse conditions or other vulnerabilities. These are real issues and they deserve serious attention.

I also accept that early criminalisation of our young people can cause long-term damage. It causes that damage to their education, employment and their life opportunities. The report did highlight these concerns. But compassion for looking at normalising drugs is not the right way. What concerns me is that we are now moving beyond discussions about diversion and treatment and are potentially beginning to create a pathway towards the regulated recreational sale of cannabis on the Isle of Man.

That is a major societal change and shift and I do not believe we can simply import models from much larger jurisdictions without carefully considering what the unique nature of our Island community is. The Isle of Man is different and we can be different. We are a small, close-knit Island where young people are often exposed to social pressures earlier. The report itself acknowledges that children on the Island may be introduced to drugs and alcohol at a younger age because of our small community environment.

It also highlighted concerns around organised crime and exploitation of vulnerable young people, violence linked to drug debt and mental health harms, including psychosis risks associated with cannabis use. I have seen personally and professionally the devastating impact drugs have on young people, families and how it affects those young lives.

What concerns me further is the wider direction of travel for our Island. We are all in here increasingly discussing population growth. We need more housing, we need social change, while at the same time we are seeing many of our businesses struggling. Community spaces for people, young people and families, are reducing and there is not enough for young people to do outside sport and outdoor activity. We are seeing our high streets under pressure and more businesses closing.

On a small Island, Mr President, we cannot ignore those alongside the possible implications of legalising cannabis. Families usually choose to live where there is quality of life, opportunity and a safe community. If we weaken our community and we reduce those opportunities for families, we are going to only increase the economic pressures for everyone. At the same time as moving forward towards normalising recreational drug culture on our Island, we really do risk creating long-term societal harms that may be very difficult to reverse. Many countries are wishing they could reverse them.

I believe Tynwald needs to think much more broadly and strategically about what kind of Island we are trying to create over the next 20 to 30 years. I will be supporting the amendment from the Hon. Minister, because it is the right way for us to continue looking at this topic. I too, like my hon. colleague from Douglas Central, find it interesting that a citizens' jury is now being proposed on this issue when similar mechanisms were resisted in other major ethical and societal debates very recently by this hon. place. Everybody knows I am talking about assisted dying, but we did not want a citizens' jury for that, Mr President.

For me, the move towards discussing regulated recreational cannabis markets is not a priority. We should be investing in meaningful opportunities for our young people, supporting mental health, improving early interventions, tackling organised crime, helping our vulnerable individuals into recovery and support, and building an economy and an Island environment that gives all of our young people aspiration and purpose.

The best prevention for everybody is hope, opportunity and a positive future. I do not want the Isle of Man to drift into a major societal change simply because some people and some Members feel it is okay and it is a trend. Our responsibility as Members is to decide what is right for our Island, our communities, our young people and to protect everyone.

Thank you, Mr President.

5085 **The President:** I call on the Hon. Member, Ms Faragher, to talk to the amendment.

Ms Faragher: Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

Just to talk to the amendment, because the amendment changes the motion from Tynwald to establish a process that could lead to reform, to Tynwald supports the existing principles and awaits further Government work and will be updated along the way. I would be a lot more comfortable with this if we had been updated over the last 19 months since the approval of the policy principles. But we have not; not once. That is despite my repeated questions specifically asking for a commitment to update Hon. Members. So I am just a little bit worried about relying upon being updated when it has been such a challenge to provide even one update since we approved the principles.

I would also be more comfortable if there had been any indication that we are altering our approach in line with the principles. In fact, since the policy principles were approved by this Hon. Court, our prison population has hugely increased. Thirty-three per cent of our prison population is currently there for drug-related offences. Police action around drug raids is still touted as success. Young people are still before courts with significant resource having been spent on trying to build a case to prove they were dealing when the reality is far more nuanced than that, and often contains in it elements of exploitation that are completely ignored once they have a criminal record for life. Victims becoming criminals.

So I would just seek some really clear, really genuine and timebound commitments from the Minister about this amendment; exactly how and when she will update Hon. Members and exactly when we will be seeing some tangible change.

Gura mie eu.

The President: I call on the mover to reply.

5110 **Dr Allinson:** Thank you very much, Mr President.

I would like just genuinely to thank all those people who took part in the debate and all those people who listened to the debate, because that is the reason really for bringing this motion.

I would like to thank Ms Faragher for seconding the motion and for her ongoing advocacy relating to drug law reform. As she has said, she has asked specific questions all the way through this administration and has been told, 'Wait, wait, wait, we are coming up with some more policies and some more principles.' But the reality is our laws on the Isle of Man possibly are causing more societal harm than actually the drugs involved; and that is ongoing and we have this huge body of evidence to say that we should be doing something different.

5120 She stressed that huge weight of evidence available to back effectively policy on development and changes to the way we treat the use of illegal drugs on our Island. Some of the work that Public Health are doing over this summer is just to update it. It has been so long since they have last asked people, they need to then ask them again to try to bring that up to date.

5125 But I would like to thank Mrs Poole-Wilson for her support of the concept of this citizens' jury. She says that this is a complex constitutional issue. We know that the UN Convention is quite strong and obviously we are signed up to it on the back of the UK, but we also know that there are countless countries across Europe and 25 American states which have legalised cannabis for recreational use. The UN Convention itself is well overdue for reform and review.

5130 I do think there is this constitutional issue that we and the other Crown Dependencies do need to work together to make sure that we represent the needs of our Island and, if necessary, stand up to pressure from the UK government, whose own drug law reforms have not changed since 1971. Actually, their drug laws are almost certainly going to be an issue at the next general election because of the attitude of the Green Party over there.

5135 The Minister talks about the principles but we have had six years of detailed work on this. I would have liked to have seen some development in terms of looking at perhaps the priorities of the Constabulary in terms of going after people for possession of drugs. Look at perhaps ways

that we could mirror some of the progressive policies being pursued by chief constables right across the UK, whereby people are able to grow certain numbers of plants for personal use and therefore get away from the criminality that is unfortunately pervasive right across the United Kingdom.

She talks very much of that this motion may bring forward unrealistic expectations, but those expectations were clearly set out in the evidence produced by the Liverpool John Moores University about a way forward that actually reduced harms and created a regulated market to do that.

I would like to thank Mr Ashford for his conversations and the centring on the research currently under way by Public Health on illicit drug use. I have met with the Director of Public Health. There is a lot of work going on. Again, this motion was to try to make sure that that work was then taken forward at the end of this year rather than sitting on a shelf in the next administration.

Mr Craine made some very good points about workplace drug testing. The analogy there is the way we have brought in drug testing for people who are driving. This is a new development in our drug policies which seems to have been brought in relatively quickly and used very much for people who are driving erratically or dangerously and testing them for drugs at the same time as alcohol. But it is certainly an issue that needs to be addressed.

Mr Clueit said that the direction of travel is right but was concerned that this was a complex issue and whether it was normalising the use by young people and causing more mental health issues. He had a whole range of questions about citizens' juries, but looked at drug-related crime on the Island. Drug-related and assault-related offences typically account for around 40% of all reported crimes on the Isle of Man. We know, and other people have spoken about, the increasing prison population, disproportionate to other jurisdictions, in terms of those people in there for drug offences.

We are now at this stage where, in the foreseeable future, Tynwald may be asked to vote for a large capital project to build another wing on the Isle of Man Prison. Surely we should be using that money far more in terms of preventative work and looking at our drug policies to stop people having to go to prison in the first place?

Mr Clueit again was asking a lot about how a citizens' jury would work. There are some very good models available in terms of citizens' juries. Basically, you have a random selection of the population. We already do that through the household expenditure survey. Statistics Isle of Man are actually quite good at doing that. The key really is in the independent facilitator.

In terms of the costs, we have heard £60,000, some of them are around £20,000. Where does that budget sit? We spend about £50,000 for every single person who is in our Prison for a year, at least. So it is an investment in terms of decent policy decisions. We never asked about the cost of some of the consultations or roadshows we do to try to engage with the public. I think Mr Hooper made a very good statement about the difference between consultation and engagement. That is very important and that is what this motion seems to delineate.

The reputational implications, if we were the only place in the British Isles to legalise recreational use of cannabis, are there. But as a lot of other people have said, the Isle of Man is different and we can do things differently.

In terms of Mr Clueit's mention about fixed penalty notices for possession, court diversion schemes, all these can happen without necessarily having to change legislation, which is when it gets flagged up by the Home Office.

I would like to thank Mrs Morphet for relating her experiences in drug and alcohol services and really looking at harm reduction and the need for evidence-based policies. We have increasing strengths of cannabis and I would advocate that is a direct result of increased criminal involvement. When people are actually given the option, they want to know what they are taking. Routine random drug testing at music festivals is now fairly standard, so people can actually find out what they are taking and reduce the harm there.

She talks about Canada and increasing attendances in the emergency department, but I would advocate that if you remove the stigma around illegal drugs, more people who are having harmful side effects will come forward for medical help and advice.

I would like to thank Mr Speaker for his previous experience as Minister for Home Affairs. Again, he was talking about a citizens' jury is not the answer. It is an answer. I think what we as parliamentarians are always trying to do is engage more effectively with the people who put us here. What we have seen is that the standard ways of doing that, by putting things on the Consultation Hub or putting things on Facebook, has limitations in a small Island. So I think we do need to look forward in terms of how we consult and engage with the public.

I would like to thank Dr Haywood for her statement and her words. This motion is about possible next steps on the journey we have already started as a nation to reform our legislation on illegal drugs. I appreciate her understanding of the citizens' jury process and the evidence behind them as another tool for advising decision makers, which is us. As parliamentarians, we were put here primarily to make decisions and pass legislation, and we need all the tools that we can. Really she stressed that this was a complementary process alongside the work currently done by Public Health to gather that evidence.

I would like to thank Mr Hooper for his words. How do we take drug reform forward with all the evidence and with engagement? There are different approaches to that but, again, it is all about the engagement with people.

I would like to thank Mr Thomas for his discussion about the role of citizens' juries, and he is quite right. When you look at the evidence behind citizens' juries, they have recently been very much to do with climate change, either at a national level or a local authority level across the UK. The Jersey government did a citizens' jury about assisted dying. In the UK, the Nuffield institute for bioethics similarly did a citizens' jury to look. Both came to very similar conclusions. But they were quite well established, large scale, organised engagement, based on government.

I would like to thank Ms Edge for her caution. I completely understand that. But, again, she says we can be different in terms of what we do going forward, because where we are now is at a snapshot of time in terms of the attitude towards drugs. When we go back to our own legislation, the Misuse of Drugs Act 1976, that is now 50 years old. The UK's was 1971. We are still working very much in that field.

In 2008, the former Prime Minister Gordon Brown and then Home Secretary Jacqui Smith reversed the 2004 decision to downgrade cannabis. Despite the official recommendations from their Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drug to keep it classed as class C substance, the government reclassified it as a class B. We have seen since then the growth in criminality and the growth of problems of medications directly related to their legislation which we mirror over here.

In 2010, Sir Mick Jagger, on the Larry King Live show on CNN, was talking about his experiences of coming to the Isle of Man and very much called for drugs to be legalised here. Mr Speaker said that the Minister gets it. So, in summing up, I would just like her to move like Jagger (Laughter) and actually advance the huge amount of work that has already been done by her Department, by Public Health, by the Cabinet Office, to move forward, because sitting still is harming our people. It is allowing exploitation, it is allowing criminals to exploit our country. Moving forward, we can do better. I trust that the Minister will live up to her commitment to do that.

Unfortunately, I cannot back her amendment. It talks about action plans, which apparently may be imminent. It talks about that Tynwald should expect to receive periodic updates. Again, this journey from my hon. colleague in his initial motion in 2020 and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) in 2017. With each year we go by, people are dying, children are being harmed, families are being disrupted, people are being put in prison, lives are being ruined, criminals are getting richer. We should do better.

Thank you very much for your conversations today. I hope this becomes an election issue here, as it will be in the UK shortly.

5240 Thank you very much, Mr President. I beg to move.

Two Members: Hear, hear.

5245 **The President:** Hon. Members, we come to vote on this Item, Item 9, as laid out on the Order Paper to which you have an amendment in the name of Mrs Poole-Wilson. I put first the amendment. All those in favour, please say aye; those against, please say no.

A division was called for and electronic voting resulted as follows:

In the Keys – Ayes 19, Noes 5

FOR

Mr Ashford
Mrs Barber
Mrs Caine
Mr Callister
Mr Cannan
Ms Christian
Mrs Corlett
Mr Crookall
Ms Edge
Mr Glover
Mr Johnston
Ms Lord-Brennan
Mr Moorhouse
Mr Peters
Mrs Poole-Wilson
Mr Smith
The Speaker
Mr Thomas
Mr Wannenburgh

AGAINST

Dr Allinson
Ms Faragher
Dr Haywood
Mr Hooper
Mrs Maltby

The Speaker: Eaghtyrane, in the Keys, 19 for, 5 against.

In the Council – Ayes 6, Noes 1

FOR

Mrs August-Phillips
Mr Clueit
Mrs Kelsey
Mr Mercer
Mrs Morphet
Mr Reid

AGAINST

Mr Craine

The President: Legislative Council: 6 for, 1 against. Therefore, amendment is carried.

5250 I now put to you the motion as amended. All those in favour please say aye; all those against, please say no. The ayes have it. The ayes have it. Item 9 is carried as amended.

Procedural

The President: Just before I adjourn until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning, I would just like to remind Manx Radio and also the Clerk of Tynwald to switch off the live broadcast and the livestreaming and remind Members, when in Chamber, beware of your conversations.

With that, the Court will stand adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

The Court adjourned at 6.43 p.m.