

Response to the Isle of Man Chamber of Commerce 2026 General Election Questions

1. The economy: my plan for growth

I absolutely agree that economic growth needs to be the top priority for the next administration, but I would add an important caveat: growth for the sake of growth isn't enough. It needs to improve the lives of the people who already live here.

The information provided by the Chamber of commerce makes the position very clear. Our GDP has contracted by 7.4% over two years, export sectors have lost more than 1,000 jobs and the number of entry-level opportunities for young people has fallen significantly. At the same time, 75% of businesses surveyed have said they have no confidence that Government's economic vision aligns with their needs.

I don't think we can continue doing things simply because that is how they have always been done.

My approach would be to concentrate on the strengths we already have, while identifying areas where we can realistically build something new.

Financial and professional services will remain hugely important, but I also see significant opportunities in fintech, digital assets, artificial intelligence, data, specialist technology, knowledge-based businesses and high-value manufacturing.

The Chamber's own material highlights opportunities around AI assurance and governance, digital assets, data, ethical AI, intellectual property and biotechnology. I think we should seriously investigate these opportunities.

However, we need to be realistic. Creating the legislation and regulatory framework necessary to compete in these areas can take money, expertise and time. I would rather see us work with jurisdictions such as the UK, Jersey and Guernsey and learn from what is already working and use what they have already put into place.

I would also support stronger marketing of the Island. We have good infrastructure, an educated population, physical space and a good reputation, but lack a clear commercial identity. I think we need to answer a simple question:

What do we want the Isle of Man to be known for internationally?

Then Government, business and education need to work together towards that objective.

Population and migration

I don't believe population growth should be treated as an economic strategy in isolation.

We need people with skills that the Island genuinely needs, and there are businesses that cannot currently recruit the people they require. But continually increasing the population without ensuring housing, healthcare, education, transport and infrastructure can cope is not sustainable. I would like to see us slow down, take stock and properly understand who is already here, what skills we have and what skills we actually need. And there is an important question that needs asking:

Why aren't we doing more to train our own young people to fill some of these vacancies?

We have good schools and the UCM. If there are genuine skills shortages, we should be asking whether we can train more of our own young people rather than automatically looking overseas. Any Population growth should therefore be targeted, planned and sustainable.

2. Cost of living, taxation and business costs

The cost of living is one of the biggest concerns I hear from people.

I don't believe we can continue trying to solve every financial problem by increasing taxes on ordinary working families and businesses. At the same time, I believe those who have the greatest ability to contribute should make a fair contribution towards the services and infrastructure that support our Island.

I would look at whether the tax burden is fairly distributed, including consideration of a higher contribution from the very highest earners, while ensuring that the Isle of Man remains competitive enough to attract investment, businesses and the skills we need.

I would also like Government to examine the treatment of second homes and properties used predominantly as short term holiday lets.

We have a limited supply of housing on the Island. I more than most, recognise the important contribution tourism makes to our economy, and I am not opposed to holiday accommodation. However, where residential properties are being removed from the long term housing market and used as holiday accommodation, particularly where they sit empty for significant parts of the year, we need to consider whether the current system is fair to local residents who are struggling to find somewhere to live.

I would therefore support investigating a fairer and more targeted taxation or rates system for second homes and predominantly short term holiday lets, with any additional revenue being directed towards housing and local infrastructure.

I would also want to ensure that genuine small scale holiday accommodation and people letting part of their own home are not treated in the same way as individuals or businesses holding multiple properties purely as investment or holiday let assets.

My approach to taxation would therefore be:

Protect ordinary working families.

Keep the Island competitive for productive businesses and investment.

Ask those with the greatest ability to contribute to make a fair contribution.

And use taxation intelligently to address problems such as housing availability rather than simply raising money. Government also has a responsibility to look at its own spending before asking taxpayers for more.

I use five questions when considering spending:

What problem are we solving?

What alternatives have we considered?

What will it really cost?

What do Islanders get in return?

And would we spend our own money this way?

I think those questions should become part of the culture of Government.

3. Government and business

One of the most concerning figures in the Chamber's material is that 75% of businesses surveyed said they had no confidence that Government's economic vision aligns with their needs.

That tells me the relationship isn't working as well as it should.

Business should not be expected to write Government policy, but Government needs to listen to the people who actually employ people, invest money and take commercial risks.

I would support a more structured relationship between Government and business, with regular engagement and clear mechanisms for businesses to raise concerns and receive proper responses. I also support greater accountability within Government.

As an Independent Candidate it doesn't mean being difficult for the sake of being difficult. It means being prepared to ask questions and vote according to the evidence and the interests of the people I represent. If that means disagreeing with other MHKs, then so be it.

4. Regulation and the cost of doing business

This is another area where the Chamber's evidence is concerning.

75% of respondents said regulation was stifling growth, while none described the current regulatory environment as supportive. I absolutely believe the Isle of Man should be a well regulated jurisdiction. Our reputation matters enormously, particularly in financial and professional services.

But good regulation and unnecessary bureaucracy are not the same thing. I would want Government to review regulations with business and ask:

- Is this regulation achieving what it was intended to achieve?
- Is there a simpler way of achieving the same outcome?
- Does it duplicate another requirement?
- How long does it take businesses to comply?
- Is the cost proportionate to the benefit?

I would also like to see greater use of digital services and clearer timescales for Government decisions. Caution is not wisdom, delay has a cost too. The Chamber's material makes exactly this point; slow decisions and regulatory friction can result in genuine opportunities being lost.

5. Workforce, skills and recruitment

This links directly to my concerns about population.

The Chamber reports that 75% of businesses surveyed have difficulty recruiting suitably experienced staff. We need a proper long-term workforce strategy. That means understanding what jobs will the Island need in five, ten and fifteen years and then working backwards to determine what education, apprenticeships and training we need. I want stronger links between schools, UCM and employers. If we need engineers, technology specialists, care workers, tradespeople or financial professionals, let's make sure our young people know those careers exist and have a route into them. Where we genuinely cannot fill vacancies locally, then targeted immigration should be part of the solution.

But it shouldn't be the first solution. Housing is also fundamental, we cannot attract workers if they cannot afford somewhere to live.

6. Infrastructure and connectivity

Survey's show that 93% of businesses rated the Island's transport links as underperforming or poor, while 64% were dissatisfied with digital infrastructure. Those figures cannot be ignored.

Our air and sea links are essential to our economy, education, healthcare and family life. I would support maintaining reliable air connectivity and improving the resilience of our transport links. I also believe residents should receive better value from our sea and air links. I will explore options to improve affordability of sea travel for Isle of Man residents, recognising that affordable links are important for family life, education, healthcare and business.

Digital connectivity is equally important. If we want to develop fintech, AI and other technology businesses, our digital infrastructure needs to be capable of supporting them.

7. Housing

Housing is one of the clearest examples of why I believe we need to plan rather than simply react. I don't think we can talk about housing without also talking about population, employment, affordability and infrastructure. They are all connected.

The Isle of Man Government has already done some very useful work in this area. In 2024, the Housing and Communities Board published the Island's first Objective Assessment of Housing Need. It was specifically designed to provide a data led evidence base for future housing policy and looked at population projections, demographic changes and demand across private, affordable and supported housing.

We also have the Residential Land Availability Study, which monitors how much housing is actually being built and where land remains available.

My question is: are we making enough use of that information?

I believe housing policy should start with evidence of what homes we actually need, where we need them and who needs them. That means looking at the number of homes required, but also the size, type and tenure of those homes. We need to know whether we need more family homes, smaller homes, affordable rented accommodation, social housing, accessible housing or homes for older people.

And this needs to be linked to our workforce strategy. If we are saying we need more people to come to the Island because of skills shortages, then we need to understand exactly what those skills are and what housing those people will require. Equally, we should be asking why we aren't doing more to train our own young people through our schools and UCM to fill some of those vacancies. I would therefore like to see housing, employment and skills planning much more closely connected.

I also believe we need to look seriously at social housing as well as affordable home ownership. Government has already recognised the need to increase affordable housing provision, with a commitment announced in 2024 to support up to 1,000 affordable homes over ten years, subject to funding, sites and construction capacity.

I would like to build on that work rather than continually starting again. I would also be interested in looking at models such as Jersey's Affordable Housing Gateway and considering whether something similar could work here, providing a clearer and more transparent way of identifying housing need and matching people to appropriate affordable and social housing.

I don't believe the answer is simply to build as many houses as possible. We should make much better use of brownfield and previously developed land where practical before unnecessarily sacrificing green space. And when developments are approved, the infrastructure needs to be there alongside them, roads, schools, healthcare, parking, drainage, sewerage, public transport and green space. We need to build communities, not just houses.

I would also want Government to make much greater use of the evidence already available when determining how much land needs to be released for housing. The Government's current planning evidence base already brings together the OAHN and the Residential Land Availability Study for this purpose.

This brings me back to population. I don't believe we should simply increase the population and then build housing to accommodate it.

We should first establish what skills the Island genuinely needs, what our existing population can provide, how many people we are likely to need, and what impact that will have on housing and infrastructure. If population growth slows, even temporarily, that gives us an opportunity to take stock and plan properly rather than continually chasing demand. For me, the objective is straightforward:

The right number of homes, of the right type, in the right places, at a price people can afford with the infrastructure to support them.

That's what I mean by getting the basics right.

If our assumptions about population growth change, our housing requirement changes too. That's why I believe population policy and housing policy cannot be separated. If we continually increase the population, we create additional demand for housing. If we slow population growth and properly identify the skills we actually need, we have more opportunity to plan housing sensibly.

My overall approach

I am standing as an Independent because I believe the Isle of Man needs people in Tynwald who are prepared to look at things differently and ask difficult questions.

I don't have all the answers, and I don't pretend to.

What I do have is real world experience of working, running businesses, employing people, managing businesses, raising a family and dealing with the same financial pressures as many other people. I believe the Island needs to get the basics right before taking on more ambitious projects.

We need a sustainable economy, affordable homes, better opportunities for our young people, businesses that can grow, reliable transport and digital infrastructure and we need to more support for our farmers and fishermen while also protecting our environment .

And we need Government that is prepared to explain where taxpayers money is going and what we are getting for it.

Evidence shows that our economic position has deteriorated and that businesses are increasingly concerned about regulation, recruitment, connectivity and Government's direction.

I don't think the answer is simply more Government or less Government. I think the answer is better Government. Government and business need to work together, but Government must also be accountable to the people who ultimately pay for it.

For me, that comes back to the principle behind my manifesto:

Getting the Basics Right.

If we get those basics right, we can build a stronger, more resilient and more prosperous Isle of Man for everyone.

Thanks

Alex Perriam

Independent Candidate for Glenfaba and Peel