

“We need a long-term vision for our economy”

I’m not going to talk about the P word. After a whole year of loss, lockdown, and worry, I think we are all thoroughly fed up with talking about it. That’s not to say I don’t appreciate many people are still living with its consequences, whether that be long-Covid, lost job/revenue or, worse still, losing a loved one. It’s also not gone away, its threat is plain to see on the Continent, but in Jersey we have a cautious lull and that gives us the opportunity to stop, look around and focus on the future.

As Chair of the IoD Jersey and Head of the Legal & Technical team at Jersey Finance, I am in the fortunate position of being able to work with some very talented and experienced teams and leaders. Those leaders include not only CEOs of companies and chairs of the local trade associations but those heading up other key bodies in the Island such as Jersey Finance, Jersey Business, Lean In Jersey, Leadership Jersey, the Diversity Network and The Good Business Charter. The latter organisation being a good example of an excellent initiative which highlights, celebrates and encourages the contribution of businesses in Jersey to building a better community and one which I am therefore very much looking forward to joining as a director of the board at the beginning of July.

In this regard, one of the positives to have come out of this last year, has been how we have all worked together across all industries and social strata to overcome a common enemy as a community. I truly hope that this approach will continue.

A good example of this collaborative approach was the Economic Council in respect of which I represented IoD Jersey last year. This is a voluntary, non-government, independent and diverse group which was established to help develop some blue-sky thinking on perspectives of our economy. In mid-December, we published our paper entitled ‘New Perspectives’ (and which can be found on the www.gov.je as well as the www.iod.je websites) in which we put forward proposals for government to discuss and hopefully implement. They weren’t suggestions to maintain a status quo for a small elite, but realistic measures which we believed would benefit every one of us in the Island.

We unanimously believe that Jersey needs to stimulate growth by encouraging a more vibrant entrepreneurial culture and enhancing local innovation. It’s what Jersey has always done well, re-inventing itself, using its small and nimble size to pivot within a fast-changing world and environment. That growth does, however, need to be sustainable. Sustainability is a tremendous force in shaping society and economies globally, and we must place it at the centre of our own economic policy.

The Island has to embrace the importance of the new economy, being created globally through technology, artificial intelligence and data. However, unless we aspire to the highest levels of education and skills across our entire population, our economy will not prosper in this new world. Finally, we also believe that for Jersey’s economy to flourish, the Island needs regeneration from an infrastructure and quality of life perspective.

We hoped these points would be the catalyst for new debate, focusing on the long-term vision for our economy. We concluded it with eight messages for government to facilitate progress:

1. Jersey's economy needs an inspiring and clear vision for its economic development with a twenty-year plus horizon
2. The government's new 'Economic Framework', which is under development, needs to be accelerated and must include clear strategies for all key economic segments and industries (the 'verticals'), that are maintained to ensure they remain current
3. Government primarily needs to be a true enabler and facilitator of innovation – to help create the right environment – and needs to speed up its own orientation in this respect. The role of government is not always to be the funder of initiatives, as the private sector and private/public partnerships can sometimes provide more viable solutions
4. Government should actively elicit reactions and responses to this paper from organisations and citizens as additional input and provide its own considered response
5. Government's enabler role requires it to provide opportunities for the highest levels of collaboration amongst suitably qualified local residents and people with diverse backgrounds. Our intellectual capital is a powerful asset that should be harnessed to help shape strategies
6. The engine of good decision-making is reliable data, which allows rigorous and proper analysis
7. Jersey's international reputation and its local identity are precious, and should be actively managed, both for economic and cultural reasons
8. To offer to provide the government with an ongoing source of challenge and guidance

A significant amount of time was provided by all those concerned into the content and preparation of the paper on a voluntary basis. Almost four months on (but also conscious of the overarching need for government to focus on the Island's economic re-connection and recovery during that time) we nevertheless now welcome hearing back from ministers with their formal response and strategic plan for the long-term vision for our Island. We understand from our recent discussions that this will soon be forthcoming.

An important element of that future is next year's elections. It is the opportunity to choose those people who will lead Jersey until 2026. Whilst that may sound a long way off, one thing we have all learnt is that time goes fast, and a lot can happen in one year.

At the end of last year, IoD Jersey published a series of articles within which it advised that it would be launching an election campaign, the objective of which is two-fold. Firstly, to encourage more people to stand for election next year and, secondly, to encourage more people to vote. This campaign is due to launch shortly. We need diversity in our States and we also need good leaders with experience and the ability to manage the hundreds of millions of pounds our government deals with annually. We also need people who will listen, inspire and understand the needs of the entire community. These are the traits of good leaders.

Last week in this Weekend Essay slot, Kevin Keen, the driving force behind Leadership Jersey and a highly respected local industry leader, put forward his views on the pay we offer our elected leaders. He highlighted the differential between our recently departed Chief Executive, Charlie Parker, who with pension benefits took home over £300,000, compared to our Chief Minister at £50,000. A look at another similar community, Bermuda, shows their premier has been receiving around £150,000.

The reason I am highlighting this is to demonstrate how highly – or not – we value our elected leaders. This is from the purely financial view, but a look at social media comments and letters to this newspaper will show that trait is pervasive. My point is, how can we expect to be led by the best our Island has if we don't value our leaders?

I have been approached by several people who have considered standing for election, but who have either been put off because they can't afford to stand because of the level of pay and/or have been put off by the toxic nature of public communications. There is an unhelpful and unconstructive minority (and who are well known to us all) who dominate discourse and serve only to dishearten and disenfranchise those who put their time and effort into trying to run this Island. How many of you would have wanted to lead a jurisdiction during an unprecedented global pandemic in such exceptional and challenging times?

Since the beginning of our IoD Jersey election campaign, I have made clear that I'm not passing comment on the merits, or otherwise of our current elected leaders. My focus is very much on the future of the Island. However, what I would urge is that as we head towards the next election, we all encourage a move away from negative, demoralising, personal attacks and instead focus on a healthier and more informed collaborative debate which surely has to be for the wider benefit of us all? Together, we can create the change our society needs and form a cohesive, positive swell that can flow into every area of our lives.

Part of the shift towards valuing leaders is to have the option of choosing from an excellent pool of diverse talent, and to feel a part of the process that puts them in office. The decisions our elected representatives make affect us all. If we do not vote, then we lose the opportunity to have an influence on those decisions. Whether you're worried about the new hospital and health care, the environment, economy, or education and jobs, your vote ultimately influences all of these. If you don't vote for the candidate who represents how you would like to see your Island run, then you are giving a vote to the candidate who you do not wish to win. Your one vote might seem just a drop in the ocean, but it isn't, it could be the one vote that pushed your chosen candidate over the finish line.

Running an Island, a business or indeed an organisation like IoD Jersey have similarities. A good leader needs to listen and to consider the views of all their team, not just a small vocal minority or those who have their own agenda. They also need to have more than one axe to grind.

History is littered with leaders who have been voted in on one attention-grabbing issue only and then failed to look after all the other more mundane, but critical issues that arose in

their term of office. Or elections where a passionate minority has monopolised support and won, while the apathetic majority thought they didn't need to bother and lost (that goes for referendums too).

The lack of diversity in our Assembly doesn't help. If you don't see people like you in power, then that's disenfranchising too. That goes for gender, age, ethnicity and disability.

Just because a candidate puts something into a manifesto, it doesn't mean they will definitely follow through. What our elected States Members do, once we've given them the mandate to lead us, is a whole different matter. Therefore, it's so important to choose the right people for the role, and that means looking carefully at what those individuals are standing for, the substance of what they are saying they will do, and ensuring their values align with our own, and with the best interests of our Island.

One member of IoD Jersey recently contacted me and said: 'These people run our island – but there is no proper job description or interview and selection process that is consistent. Once employed, there is no HR or line manager support for the individual to get the training etc.'

The majority of our businesses are not run this way (and we would all I believe consider it very unusual and strange if this indeed was the case) and yet this is the way our island, which we all fund to the tune of hundreds of millions of pounds, is organised.

I hope that there are people reading this article who are considering standing for election next year and who are prepared to showcase their experience and vision for our island. People with substance, drive, determination, experience, energy and tenacity who can drive the values that are needed to build a bright future for all of us. People who are standing because they want to make a real difference. IoD Jersey wishes to encourage a raft of excellent and diverse candidates to step forward to lead our Island by standing in the election and provide a supportive platform from which they can do so.

If you're not one of those people, you nevertheless still have an imperative role to play by heading to the ballot box next June and choosing those who you think will make the best leaders, to ensure that our island emerges from the pandemic in a strong economic position and with a clear future vision.