

Liberal Vannin

Policy Discussion Paper

On

Government Reform

Manifesto Pledge (What we will do)

Government incompetence has resulted in a whole host of expensive, inefficient and badly managed services, for example, rocketing energy prices, with serious revenue implications for the future of the Island. Gross incompetence along with questionable Capital Projects funded by the public purse will severely restrict the Government's ability to maintain the services of a caring and prosperous society for the next generation.

The Liberal Vannin Party will reverse this shocking trend which it sees as endangering the Island's future security and prosperity. Lack of foresight, ill conceived ideas and poor judgement have led to unwise decisions being taken not only on Capital and Revenue Projects but also on vital commodities which affect us all. Restrictions placed on the User Agreement with the Steam Packet Company, leasing expensive office accommodation in the private rental office sector for Government Departments and the Telecommunications Agreement are just some of the vital commodities which, if not handled in a competent manner, will affect business costs, hamper employment opportunities and affect the cost of living for us all.

The Party will restructure Government to create a responsible and accountable Government which is both focused and committed to facing up to the real issues and problems on the Island. We will work as part of a competent team to help resolve these issues and to secure and protect the long term future of the Island.

We believe that the only way to achieve an effective and efficient Government for the people of Mann is to change the current patronage system to one where Members are selected on merit and ability. We believe Liberal Vannin is capable of spearheading the way forward for a fully inclusive Government.

The primary goal of a Liberal Vannin Government will be to serve the people and not serve itself and to establish a sustainable economy for all.

The Liberal Vannin Party would support the long overdue Ombudsman service for the Island.

Policy Statements (How we will do it)

Quality of Government

The Liberal Vannin Party will create a fully accountable, auditable, transparent and efficient Government whose primary purpose is to provide quality public services that represent value for money. We will act as efficient and responsible custodians of the money entrusted to us by the taxpayer.

To achieve this we need to get ownership back into the hands of the elected representatives and restructure many of the Government Departments in order to get the frontline services working for the people. This will help put a stop to ever increasing Government bureaucracy and the disproportionate number of clipboard civil servants who have little or no accountability. Only when we have Ministers who are held to account for their mistakes should we expect our top civil servants who have UK and public

sector rewards to accept that they too must have public sector responsibility for incompetence and bad decision-making.

As part of the Liberal Vannin policy of ownership we would encourage more lay input into various areas of Government including the Police Authority, the Administration Committee for the National Health Service, the Social Services Committee and the Public Accounts Committee. We would also investigate the poor record of the DOT's priority list for road improvements and invite Local Authorities to make an input into services which affect their own areas.

Liberal Vannin candidates have been selected from a broad base of talent on the Island and the skills they bring to the Party will be the key criteria and not their own individual political ambitions or business connections. As part of their contract of employment all Liberal Vannin candidates have undertaken that they must turn up at their monthly constituency meetings where they can be held to account for what they are doing in the name of the people.

Audit of Government

The Party advocates the need for more resources to balance up the present way the Ministerial System works. We believe that Government Ministers who are responsible for running a Department should have in position an equally important 'Shadow Minister' whose sole purpose is to hold that Minister to account and ensure the actions and decisions taken by that Minister are auditable, transparent and provide value for money. We would release resources to enable the 'Shadow Minister' to perform this vital 'Quality Assurance' role.

The Liberal Vannin Party would support the long overdue Ombudsman service for the Island's residents but would seek to work with other jurisdictions in order to prevent it from being politically manipulated.

Public Accounts

People who are appointed to the Public Accounts Committee should have no other role in Government. We would strengthen the Committee by having independent lay input which would give it the additional skills base it needs to protect the public purse.

This important watchdog requires not only the lay input from a cross section of the community but also the proper resources as a priority of Government in order to protect the people's money. The Liberal Vannin Party would welcome greater control over auditing of public expenditure by supporting the Public Accounts Committee using independent agencies such as the Irish or the UK audit office who have a proud record of working throughout the world to protect the financial interests of their citizens of these countries.

We must not allow the usual vanity over sanity of Government who try to hide behind Nationalism in an effort to cover up their incompetence and who fail to learn from their mistakes.

Conflict of Interest Legislation

The Party will introduce 'Conflict of Interest' Legislation. It is essential that those people who are in a position of public office, either by election or by appointment, recognise their responsibilities to this end. This legislation will ensure that decisions are made without fear or favour.

Greater Public Involvement in the Democratic Process

A fully accountable Liberal Vannin Government will create a new Public Information Service whose primary purpose is to regularly report back to you, the electorate, on the progress of issues regarding the Government and management of your Island.

We will publish concise and clear jargon-free factual statements on the progress made in each of the key areas stated in our manifesto (and any other current and topical issues). Our objective will be to keep the public fully informed of our progress and encourage public debate to create a more inclusive political process. Monthly meetings attended by the Liberal Vannin MHK's in their constituencies will

promote a two-way dialogue bringing back reality into the process of Government that has been so lacking in the last 5 years.

When making decisions on critical issues which will affect the long term future of the Island we will hold referendums on major and constitutional issues to ensure the views of the people are heard and that Tynwald makes strategic decisions that accurately reflect the views of the electorate. We would hold a referendum if, for example, we needed to make changes to our constitution or declare total independence from the UK.

The Liberal Vannin Party firmly believe that because of far reaching consequences, such important decisions should be made by the electorate as a whole and not just by a committee comprising of the members of Tynwald.

Freedom of Information

We would look to introduce a 'Freedom of Information' Act to safeguard the public's right to know the facts on decisions made by the Government of the Isle of Man.

Ministerial Reform

The Ministerial system must have a comprehensive review from top to bottom. We must give back to the people a genuine choice as to who leads the nation. No member of the Legislative Council should be a Minister or Chief Minister in the Government of the day until they are elected by the people.

The existing system allows for 24 members of the public to be elected to the House of Keys by the electorate. The Legislative Council is elected by the members of the House of Keys and can consist of either members of the House of Keys or members from the general public. Members of both the House of Keys and the Legislative Council may then be appointed as Departmental Ministers or the Chief Minister.

The fundamental flaw of the system is that unelected members of the public may be appointed to Ministerial positions and exercise Ministerial powers without the democratic mandate of the people. Is it right that they should have an equal vote to the MHK's on the selection of the Chief Minister without having a public mandate to do so? Liberal Vannin firmly believes that only members of the House of Keys should be appointed to Ministerial posts as it is only MHK's who carry the mandate of the people.

Ministerial reform would also prevent the creation of cosy committees with vested interests which are clearly not good for accountable, auditable, transparent and efficient Government. We would support investigations being carried out with a cross-sectional representation in a truly independent way. Until this is done, good policies are unsustainable simply because of the lack of any true and impartial audit in the system.

Well publicised failings of the current Government and the direct result of the flawed system of Ministerial selection include:-

The Manx Electricity Authority (MEA)

The MEA affair is just the latest of a long line of scandals caused by bad governance on this Island. Ministers try to tell us that they are dealing with the problem - a problem that has cost the taxpayer a whopping £450 million! We need to learn the truth behind this failure, and understand how the Government allowed it to happen.

In July 2001 there were concerns whether the original proposal for the £185m investment to build a new power station and connect the gas pipeline was the correct strategic decision. The decision to spend £185m of taxpayer's money was approved by the Treasury Minister and supported by members of the House of Keys and members of Tynwald. A further £120m was then required to complete the project and the MEA chose to borrow the additional funds without the necessary approval of the Treasury. An additional £70m of taxpayer's money has been given to the MEA in the last two years to keep the MEA afloat and bail it out of this disgraceful affair.

The Liberal Vannin Party believes it is time we held the Government to account for this disgraceful affair. A total of £450m of taxpayer's money has been spent frivolously in pursuit of a questionable policy. Does this offer value for money? Putting it into context at current energy prices £450m would purchase enough electricity from the UK to run the Island for a period of 5 years at the current rate of demand.

Given that both the Treasury and DTI have a legal responsibility to oversee the activities and performance of the MEA it is now clearly evident that neither Ministers nor their Departments exercised a duty of care in the management and investment of the taxpayer's funds entrusted to them. There must be a Public Inquiry consisting of non-biased people who can find out the truth about this fiasco so that our electricity supply and running costs are back under control.

The Liberal Vannin Party supports the necessary investment in key elements of the Island's infrastructure. However, let us make sure we make the right decisions and ensure our capital infrastructure projects come in on time and on budget. Overruns of about 75% on capital projects is outrageous and if we had an accountable Government someone would be held responsible in a healthy democracy.

The Iris Project

It is clear that the IRIS project is not working as intended and the Party will call for an independent review, the results of which will be made public before any further expenditure is authorised.

Incineration

This project, which is a tragedy as far as both the environment and the taxpayer are concerned, has to be made to work efficiently to protect the £75m already invested. The Party will investigate ways in which the incinerator could and should be used more productively for our community.

As a Party we will be looking at the development of a progressive 'green policy' of recycling. We believe recycling is the only way forward in the development of a sustainable waste strategy.

Voter Reform

The electoral power of the current voting system is historic and is wholly dependant on where you live.

- If you live in Peel you have the right to elect 1 candidate to the House of Keys
- If you live in Douglas you have the right to elect 2 candidates to the House of Keys
- If you live in Onchan you have the right to elect 3 candidate to the House of Keys

This is clearly an unfair and unjust system and is not in the best interest of a truly democratic society. As part of our reform the Liberal Vannin Party will introduce a policy of having equal representation in all constituencies. Bigger constituencies will be created with more seats in each constituency and we will do away with single seat constituencies to allow greater representation and attention to be focussed on national issues.

The Scope and Structure of Government

The Liberal Vannin Party welcomes the report of the team that reviewed the 'Scope and Structure of Government'. The Party supports their observations that the current structure of the public sector is unsustainable and needs to be addressed under the following headings:

- The Scope is too large
- There has been an insufficient emphasis on value for money
- There is a necessity for greater working together across Government
- There is a great need to redefine and separate the roles of politician and the public sector manager
- There is a need for more transparency and openness to improve public understanding and debate

The Liberal Vannin Party is committed to implementing the recommendations of the report with priority given to the creation of a new department of Corporate Development as a driver for obtaining value for money in the public sector. Some of the recommendations might prove controversial and after further study the people of the Island will be given the chance to vote in referendums on each issue.

Bringing Government to the People

The Liberal Vannin Party is committed to actively encouraging the regeneration of towns such as Ramsey, Port Erin and Castletown and other areas on the Island which will have an obvious beneficial impact on key issues such as traffic congestion, parking, air quality and the environment in general. The Party believes that this regeneration can be achieved by the redistribution of public sector employees to major towns other than Douglas and moving both 'back' and 'front' office Government functions. The distribution of some 'front' office activities to outlying towns will have the added bonus of people not having to travel to Douglas to conduct all their Government business.