

Liberal Vannin
Candidate for
Douglas East



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Hon Alf Cannan MHK
Legislative Buildings
Finch Road
Douglas IM1 3PW

Dear Mr Cannan,

“It’s not a lockdown, it’s going to be a closedown”

According to news reports, in Tynwald this week, you announced that you would be keeping a “watching brief” on the impact of the Government’s policies on the people and businesses of Mann. Let me take this opportunity to help you by relaying the feedback of the people of Douglas East.

1) FINANCIAL IMPACT ON BUSINESSES

Listening to the businesses of Douglas East, the message has been loud and clear, and best summarised by one business manager. The business manager made his feelings clear, so let me quote him directly:

“It’s not a lockdown, it’s going to be a closedown. I’ve lost two chefs due to the restrictions, several serving staff, and if I lose any more staff, my entire business is going to need to close down.”

This direct feedback is representative of problems facing businesses across Douglas East and is leading to significant disruption across our community. Other local businesses have also reported that they “are facing significant staffing shortages”.

Some of these problems are financial: because of these significant staffing shortages, planned business operations have been cancelled, leading to obvious financial consequences. These problems are cascading through the economy, because clients are also cancelling events (including individual treatments) which reduces the income of many small businesses. These small businesses then have reduced cash flow of their own, leading to a spiral jamming up the Manx economy.

2) NON-FINANCIAL IMPACT ON BUSINESSES

Businesses across Douglas East are also facing non-financial problems. Most frustratingly, businesses are having difficulty planning and preparing for future developments. This is exacerbated because your Council of Ministers continues to keep the scientific advice that it receives a secret.

It is plausible to understand that under normal, non-pandemic, conditions, political advice made to the Council of Ministers should be kept confidential. I understand that the Council of Ministers believes that such secrecy is important to ensure that advice is open, frank and honest.

However, when dealing with scientific advice during a pandemic, such rationales are not applicable. Science is best performed when it is open and transparent, and subject to public scrutiny. No honest scientist should be afraid of their scientific work being open to scrutiny because *open scrutiny is the fundamental basis of the scientific method*. As I highlighted as early as April 2020, it is likely that the large errors of the Department of Health and Social Care in modelling the initial COVID-19 outbreak on the Isle of Man could have been avoided if the modelling had been subject to normal, open, scientific scrutiny.

3) FINANCIAL IMPACT ON WORKERS

In addition to the impacts on businesses outlined above, many local workers are suffering similarly. One worker tells me, “Obviously now I’m isolating I can’t work... the sick pay just won’t even cover close to what I need.”

This is not a new problem, and indeed, my proposal from July 2020 remains relevant here:

Currently, if someone is found to have the virus, they are forced into quarantine for two weeks¹. It is very easy to imagine someone not wanting to get tested, because if they do have the virus, they will be put under the quarantine, and thus, not be able to work, support their family, and put bread on the table for their loved ones. It is easy to imagine a poorly paid essential worker having the virus, and, through no fault of their own, being unable to afford quarantining and self-isolation at home. They may be used to struggling through coughs and colds, because they have no choice due to economic pressures. Thus, some people who get the virus and have few or no symptoms will not want to do the test, especially since so many people have lost work as it is.

The key beneficiary of the quarantine is not the person with the virus. Being in quarantine does not benefit the person locked at home (since they are getting not much medical treatment currently anyway) and, indeed, it harms them, since they are prevented from working, seeing family, and so on. The key beneficiary of the quarantine is everyone else: everyone else has a lower risk of contracting the virus from someone who is stuck in their home.

Thus, given that the key beneficiary of a forced quarantine is the broader community, it is right that the broader community provide support to people who are forced to quarantine at home for our benefit. This support should be, at the very least, some sort of financial support, such as additional sickness payments in lieu of their normal earnings. Those payments will remove one key impediment to conducting testing, and in doing so, will help reduce the risk of the rest of us getting infected.

¹ Since this was written in July 2020, it refers to the two-week quarantine that was imposed at the time. The same principle applies to the current quarantine restrictions.

The strongest argument against such a proposal is that people might deliberately try to contract the virus so that they then can get two weeks of paid leave at home. This is unlikely – some businesses provide generous sick leave support to staff, and there does not seem to be many people who deliberately infect themselves with killer viruses.

Consequently, I ask that you take this feedback on board and give all due consideration to the request from the people and businesses of Douglas East to provide additional support.

I trust that you will take this into account.

Yours sincerely,

MICHAEL JOSEM