

28th April 2016



About me

By day I am a mild mannered Chartered Accountant working as a Manager at a local accountancy firm, most of my clients are local businesses and I also have a hand in my firm's international CSP business.

VOTE 
LAWRIE
HOOPER

I'm also part of the LibVan party and I work closely with our MHK's to ensure that there is co-operation between local and national government, as well as being able to raise local concerns directly in the House of Keys.

It was LibVan's Kate Beecroft MHK who called for the emergency debate about the Courthouse Post Office in Tynwald, that gave our community time to mobilise and try and negotiate with Isle of Man Post Office.

Thank you for taking the time to read my manifesto, feel free to contact me if you want any more information.

Most importantly, don't forget to use your vote on the 28th April.

Lawrie Hooper



Lawrie Hooper



Ramsey North Ward Election



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The last four years



It has been both a privilege and a pleasure to serve as a Commissioner for Ramsey North for the last four years. When I stood for Election in 2012 I was eager to have the opportunity to get deeply involved in all aspects of local government, and to have such an opportunity to engage with and challenge our national government to help improve our community.

I spent my first two years on the Commission as Deputy Lead Member for Parks and Leisure, before moving into my current role as Lead Member for Finance, General Purposes and Establishment. This role enabled me to get to grips with the day to day aspects of local government, as well as having a chance to have real input into how the Commission is managed and administered.

It's here that you'd expect me to talk about how the Ramsey Rate has remained unchanged four years in a row. How, in the face of Government services transferred to local authorities without any extra funding and increased Government charges and fees, my fellow Commissioners and I have worked hard to keep the rates down.

Well, the credit for this has to go entirely to the staff who work at the Commission. I'm constantly impressed by their willingness to go the extra mile and by their commitment to the town. They provide a consistently high level of service year on year whilst facing increasing pressures on their resources and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their hard work and dedication. The last four years wouldn't have been as enjoyable or as productive without them.

The last four years have been challenging, frustrating and rewarding all in equal measure. At times I've been shocked and appalled by some of Government's proposals, but at others inspired at the sense of community in Ramsey.



The last four years



A few of the things I've been responsible for over the last four years:

- All minutes are now recorded in public. Even private discussions have a public minute, which has the sensitive information excluded. No decisions should be held back from the public the Commissioners serve.
- Instituted a Policy committee made up of the Lead Members to consider and develop longer term strategy and policy for the Commission. This has enabled the Commission to be more pro-active in dealing with issues.
- Along with the rest of our Housing Committee, promoting a more officer led Housing Allocations process, to make the process more efficient.
- Successfully fought against the inclusion of a Biomass heating system in the new Sheltered Housing developments. The proposed heating system was not in the best interests of the tenants.
- Implemented the new role of Town Centre Manager who will be responsible for promoting the Town and engaging with the local community and local businesses. This role is currently being filled and I hope to see a real improvement in public engagement and promotion of Ramsey as a place to live and work as a result.
- Inclusion of a Rates leaflet with the Rates statement that is sent out to householders each year. This leaflet shows how the rates collected are spent, as well as a summary of the Commission's plans for the year. I believe that transparency in financial affairs is an important cornerstone of government.

Public Sector Housing



I've gone above and beyond the Commission to try and fight this corner, and was one of only three Commissioners Island wide to sign a letter to Minister Quayle opposing the continued rent increases without any consideration as to whether people can afford them.

Government mandated rent increases aside, the housing administered by Ramsey Commissioners is managed exceptionally well with the points system and housing allocations handled by well trained and dedicated staff.

As Lead Member I've been leading a restructure in the Commission's staffing, including most recently expanding our housing team to ensure that Ramsey Commission can keep on delivering this exceptional service to our tenants.

Unlike many Commissioners around the Island I am in favour of a more regional housing structure. In the North all housing is currently be administered by Ramsey Commission and the Department of Infrastructure. Surely it would make more sense for all housing in the North to be administered by Ramsey, with oversight provided by members from all the Northern parishes including Ramsey?

I've not been alone on the Commission in pushing for this desperately needed reform and now it seems we are finally making progress with Government.

I'm also in favour of having a tenant representative on this expanded Housing committee, giving tenants a voice in how the system is managed.



Public Sector Housing



I sit on the Housing Allocations Committee, and it was this role that led me to get so deeply involved with Government's planned reform of public sector housing on the Island.

During my time on the Commission we have seen a decrease in the length of the housing waiting list, as well as extra properties being purchased.

It is unfortunate that the properties purchased were originally intended to be "first time buyer" homes, but the houses were good value for money and added desperately needed properties to the Commission's housing stock.

Whilst I am opposed to local authorities purchasing homes designated for first time buyers I can understand the difficult position the developers are in. Government's first time buyer scheme is flawed, and new homebuyers are struggling to access financing from local banks. In this climate it is inevitable that fewer first time buyers are in a position to buy houses and so the Commission stepped in to keep these houses in the "affordable" end of the market, and that is something that I can support.

Since 2012 Public sector rents have been increased by Government by around 40%, but there hasn't been any consideration of whether people can afford these increases.

Every year I have fought against rent rises in Commissioners housing until a fair system of means testing is introduced. I know that rents in Commissioners housing need to increase to a sustainable level, but there should have been a mechanism put in place to protect those on the lowest incomes who may need extra assistance to keep up with these rent rises.

Waste Management and Recycling



Currently waste disposal in Ramsey is paid for out of our rates. Unfortunately, this system isn't particularly fair as it doesn't take into account how much waste a household throws away.

There's also no incentive to recycle, and when all of our waste goes through the incinerator it's cheaper for everyone if we send less waste to be burned, as well as being better for the environment.

A lot of waste doesn't even burn, but we're still paying for it to be shipped out to the Energy from Waste plant.

There must be a better way and I support the Commission looking into alternative charging methods for waste collection, as well as looking for extra sites for recycling bring banks around the town.

Because of pressure put on government by local authority representatives from around the Island the proposed "escalator charge" which planned to increase waste disposal costs has been frozen and a new waste management working group set up to explore options.

Local Commissioners play an important role in shaping national policy and standing up for our constituents and this role will only get more relevant as government plans to reform local authorities get underway.

You may be aware that discussions are ongoing about the future management of the Northern Civic Amenity site. I support the northern local authorities taking over management of this site, after all we're paying for it through our rates so we should have a say in how it's run.



Local Authority Reform



Local Authority reform has been a hot topic over the last few years, although it doesn't look like a final decision will be made until after the House of Keys election in September.

It's important that local authorities have the capabilities to deliver local services at a local level and can start to act more as local government and less as simply vehicles to collect rates and pass the money over to Government.

Ramsey is in the enviable position of already being large enough to stand on its own, but also with enough scope to provide local services for the Town.

We've already seen how successful this can be with the Registry now being provided by Ramsey Commissioners, and I'm eager for Ramsey to provide more services from the Town Hall. If people and businesses can access more services here in Ramsey then there is greater opportunity for them to live and work in the Town, providing much needed economic activity.

With more and more services looking to be devolved to local authorities it's essential that Commissioners are willing to step outside their comfort zone and grasp the future with both hands.

It's equally important that they go into this with their eyes open, and carefully scrutinise any proposals from a Government who are primarily interested in cutting costs, moving responsibility for providing services away from themselves but without providing additional financing to cover the cost.

I have fought hard against additional costs being put on the rates as a result of the services transferred so far and will continue to do so should I be re-elected.



What's next?

There are likely to be a lot of changes coming in the next few years and we have no way of knowing what they will be.

With Government under increasing financial pressures, especially with the public sector pensions which are likely to seriously impact departmental budgets by 2020 there will be much more incentive for services, costs and charges to be passed on to local authorities.

Ramsey needs representatives at both a local and national level that will make sure any transfers of services are fair and transparent, that they are by agreement and with the consent of the taxpayers and ratepayers, and that changes aren't just forced on us.

Ramsey has a number of housing developments in the pipeline, both private developers and public sector housing. These will need careful planning to make sure they are fit for purpose and provide Ramsey with the housing it needs.

Ramsey has such great potential and we've never had a better opportunity to see it fulfilled. It's time for local and national government to work together to promote the town, to bring more businesses to Ramsey whilst working hard to protect what we have, and what makes Ramsey such a great place to live.



What's Next?

It's been a difficult four years and I'm looking forward to taking up the challenge again.

I've been asked by a lot of people if I'm considering standing for the House of Keys in September. In all honesty, it's something I'd like to do but I don't see the Commissioners as a "stepping stone" or as any less important to our Island.

There is still a lot of work to do in the local authority and I'd hate to miss the opportunity to play my part in this pivotal time because of what might happen further down the line.

I've never been afraid to make myself heard, and will not sacrifice my principles in the name of expediency. Quite often I've been the only dissenting voice on the Commission, but I won't "go with the majority" if it goes against my beliefs.

The next administration will very likely see the new face of local and national government forming and it is more important than ever that we have clear thinking representatives to help shape this new structure.

Do we want greater representation or less, more transparency or more decisions being made behind closed doors, more locally delivered services or greater centralisation?

These are the choices that will be facing our next Commissioners and MHK's and now is your opportunity to elect those who will deliver us a progressive and forward looking government.

In Summary



- Four years as a Commissioner, with the last two as Lead Member for Finance, General Purposes and Establishment.
- I support local authority reform. Local authorities should be willing to take on more responsibility from central government. Local services should be provided by local authorities.
- I've overseen taking on additional services, such as street cleaning, gully emptying and hedge trimming without any increase in rates.
- I support regional administration of Public Sector housing, under the control of local authorities.
- No further rent increases in public sector housing without first introducing a fair system of means testing to protect the most vulnerable
- We need continued investment in public sector housing to increase the number of available properties. Continue to lobby government to improve the first time buyers and affordable housing schemes.
- The Northern Civic Amenity site should be managed by local authorities – after all we pay for it through our rates.
- To set up more places to recycle in Ramsey, and to look into ways to incentivise more recycling.
- Support reform of the rating system, to develop a fairer way of raising funds to pay for local services
- More promotion of Ramsey as a place to live and work, led by our new Town Centre Manager



**Don't forget to use your vote on the
28th April.**

**If you won't be on Island on the 28th
April absent voter forms are available
from Ramsey Town Hall**

**If you would like to keep in touch
with regular updates, you can sign up
to my website at
www.lhooperiom.com**