

PART 2: RESOURCES (OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS)

3 POPULATION

3.1 Demographic change

GENERAL SITUATION

Guernsey, in common with all Western European countries, has a birth rate that is substantially below the figure needed for a population to maintain its level naturally, without immigration. However, the island's economic success puts a strain on internal resources, so the Government operates a highly selective immigration policy for both individuals and businesses.

KEY FACTS

- In 2007, the estimated total population was 61,811, an increase of 782 people on the previous year. Over the last 35 years, the island's population has steadily risen by 19% at an average rate of 273 people a year.
- The natural increase (births minus deaths) peaked at 140 in 1999, but due to a fall in birth rate fell to a natural decrease of 12 in 2002. Since then the birth rate has fluctuated slightly while the death rate has steadily fallen. In 2007, there was a natural population increase of 132.
- With zero migration, Guernsey's population would decline to just fewer than 45,000 (i.e. equivalent to the population in 1961) by 2063. Net migration of 300 persons per year would grow the population to a peak of 69,937 in 2043 before falling back to just under 67,000 by 2063.
- Based upon estimated population figures for 2007, Guernsey has a population density of 973 people per square kilometre, which is two and a half times higher than the population density of England (387) and 27% higher than the population density of Jersey (760). Malta, however, has a population density that is 56% higher than Guernsey, at 1,518 people per square kilometre. Bermuda's population density is 20% higher at 1,155 per square kilometre.
- The dependency ratio in Guernsey is 49%, compared with 48% in Australia, 53% in France and the UK, and 55% in Sweden. If no net immigration is allowed the dependency ratio will deteriorate to 76% by 2033, with a further deterioration to 89% by 2063. The proportion of the population over 65 is predicted to increase from 16% to 30% by 2033 and 35% by 2063 if no net inward migration is assumed.
- The resident population of St Peter Port was 16,488 in 2001, 361 fewer people than in 1951 when the parish's population was 16,849. Between 1996 and 2001 St Saviour and the Forest saw the greatest increase in resident population, growing by 9.2 and 8.9 percent respectively. Castel, St Sampson and the Vale saw the smallest increases, growing by under 0.7 percent.
- A total of 571 households are currently living in technically overcrowded housing – though as many as 213 of these households (37%) consider their home to be about the right size.
- The annual Business Trends Survey found that 53% of respondents felt that maintaining the current population level would limit business growth potential.

See Key Issues 3.1.1 – 3.1.2

KEY ISSUES

3.1.1 Actual or perceived overcrowding and congestion

As a whole, Guernsey is more densely populated than some of its larger island competitors, but it is less densely populated than some offshore centres with a similar landmass such as Bermuda.

By keeping the size of the population in check, Guernsey has been able to minimise unemployment and homelessness and provide a high standard of education, healthcare, sanitation and drinking water. In the 1960's, overcrowding was a serious problem affecting about 20% of all households but nowadays barely more than 2% of households are affected.

The population density of St Peter Port is broadly the same as it was in the 1950's, yet the population in the remainder of the island has increased by half as much again. At the same time, there has been a massive shift from a predominantly pastoral economy where the vast majority of people earned a living from the land and from tourism in the rural area, to a predominantly knowledge and service based economy where employment is mainly concentrated in St Peter Port. These structural shifts in the distribution of the resident and workplace populations have exacerbated the impacts of traffic congestion at peak commuter times.

Key Issue 3.1.1

How can we address the actual or perceived impacts of overcrowding and congestion?

3.1.2 Working population

The establishment, growth and maintenance of 'high-value' employment and the provision of good quality public services requires a steady influx of skilled employees. The finance sector needs more skilled workers to maintain the sector's momentum, as there is currently a desperate shortage of staff possessing the required knowledge and expertise. Key public services such as health, education and policing need staff with the requisite skills and experience to deliver the quality of services that the island demands. Ultimately, however, there is an upper limit to the level of population we can sustain without a severe drain on resources or serious deterioration in the quality of life. Moreover, an increase in the population of say 3,000 from immigration will not only result in an increase in the workforce of 3,000 because incomers will bring their dependants. However, if the working population is allowed to shrink, as would occur without a net immigration policy, then the burden of funding essential services and infrastructure will fall on fewer and fewer people.

Key Issue 3.1.2

How can we ensure that the availability of a skilled workforce is consistent with the continued success of the economy as well as the preservation of the quality of life and the physical environment?

3.1.3 Ageing population

Guernsey faces significant demographic issues with its ageing population. This highlights the need to ensure that older people are able to make a full and active contribution to the social and economic life of the community. Ensuring active

participation by older people relies upon them maintaining their independence through personal mobility, healthcare and social inclusion.

Key Issue 3.1.3

How can we ensure that opportunities are available for older people to play an active part in the community?