

ST. HELENA
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

THE SPEAKER

Mrs Margaret Anne Catherine Hopkins MBE

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

The Honourable Chief Secretary	-	Mr Owen O’Sullivan
The Honourable Financial Secretary	-	Mr Paul Blessington
The Honourable Acting Attorney General	-	Mr Frank Wastell

ELECTED MEMBERS

The Honourable John Gilbert Cranfield	-	East Electoral Area
The Honourable Anthony Arthur Green	-	“ “ “
The Honourable Cyril Keith Gunnell	-	“ “ “
The Honourable Brian William Isaac	-	“ “ “
The Honourable Bernice Alicia Olsson	-	“ “ “
The Honourable Tara Thomas	-	“ “ “
The Honourable Michael Anthony Benjamin	-	West Electoral Area
The Honourable Stedson Graham Francis	-	“ “ “
The Honourable Derek Franklin Thomas	-	“ “ “
The Honourable Raymond Kenneth Williams	-	“ “ “
The Honourable Mervyn Yon	-	“ “ “

The Honourable Rodney Garth Buckley	-	(On leave overseas)
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CLERK OF COUNCILS

Miss Gina Benjamin

PROCEEDINGS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Tuesday, 27th March, 2012

The Council met at 9.00 am
in the Court House, Jamestown

(The Speaker in the Chair)

ORDER OF THE DAY

1. FORMAL ENTRY OF THE PRESIDENT

2. PRAYERS

The Right Reverend Bishop Fenwick

3. ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT

Good morning Honourable Members, welcome to this the fourth sitting of the twelfth meeting of Legislative Council. The only item on the agenda for this morning is the adjournment debate and I would just respectfully remind Honourable Members that we have an unwritten agreement that no Member will speak for more than ten minutes during the course of the adjournment debate. Thank you. Next item of business?

4. ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

The Hon. Owen O'Sullivan –

Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this Council do now adjourn sine die.

The Speaker –

Thank you, is there a seconder, please?

The Hon. Paul Blessington –

Madam Speaker, I beg to second.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Does the Honourable Mover wish to speak to the debate?

The Hon. Owen O'Sullivan –

I will let the Honourable Members speak first.

The Speaker –

I put the question that this House should adjourn sine die. The question is open for debate, does any Honourable Member wish to speak? The Honourable Michael Benjamin?

The Hon. Michael Benjamin –

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, due to a recurring medical problem, I have decided to resign from being a member of our island's Legislative Council. My resignation will take effect from 31st March. At this time, I would like to thank the people of St. Helena for giving me the opportunity to represent them and I sincerely apologise for not being able to complete the full term. I would also like to thank the Administration, my fellow Councillors, including yourself Madam Speaker and the Deputy Speaker, for the shared advice, knowledge and friendships I have enjoyed over the past two and a half years. You have all provided me with some wonderful memories. I thank you very much.

In my resignation letter to His Excellency the Governor, I made it known that even though I will no longer be a Councillor I will always do my part to ensure that St. Helena reaches a position where it has a vibrant and sustainable economy. I firmly believe that this is possible. It will require a team of dynamic leaders and I trust that this and future Councillors and Councils will be brave enough to make the tough decisions that will be necessary to lead St. Helena away from its dependence on budgetary aid. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. I think, on behalf of all Honourable Members, I should just like to acknowledge the input you've had into the Honourable Council during your period as a Councillor. I'm sure that they will echo my thoughts that we regret that your health causes you to resign at this point and we would all wish you well for the future.

Honourable Members –

Hear, hear.

The Hon. Michael Benjamin –

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Stedson Francis.

The Hon. Stedson Francis –

Madam Speaker, I rise in support of the adjournment sine die and in doing and with your permission I would just like to say that I feel that a lot of ground has been covered in this budget session with a lot of important issues being dealt with, including five very important Bills, and Madam Speaker, whilst we all are aware that our overall budget remains much the same as last year, the Public Health Directorate has had to make additional cuts to the tune of £200,000 as imposed by the DfID Team.

The closing of the Sandy Bay and Head O'Wain Clinics was probably inevitable because of low numbers and the cost and could it be justified for keeping them open. Madam Speaker, this might have been more acceptable if people were informed earlier and reasons given for its closure. I was given assurance that if those Clinics were to close at the very least the Dispensary Bus would make monthly visits with prescriptions and I hope this is still the case.

Madam Speaker, again I fully understand with a tight health budget it is necessary to explore all avenues and get best value for our medical referrals and I don't have a problem in looking at alternative hospitals in South Africa, but only if the standards are no less than we currently receive and I have spoken to people who have been to Tygerberg Hospital on medical and urge the authorities to take a closer look before signing up.

Also, Madam Speaker, it would be nice to know what are the benefits for divesting utilities?

Finally, I would like to thank Councillor Michael Benjamin for the time he has worked with us; sorry to see him go, but I would like to wish him well for the future. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. The Honourable Tony Green?

The Hon. Anthony Green –

Madam Speaker, I support the adjournment. Just a few items to mention, if I may, please. Firstly, this Council has less than two years to complete its term of office. Before the last General Election, I voted for two constituencies, I now feel that it's time for change and that we should have a single constituency next time round. This would mean that the whole island, or more precisely, everyone who is registered as an elector at the time, would vote for all twelve Councillors. I suggest that this be an agenda item for our constituency meetings next month as I'm sure our Honourable Acting Attorney General will confirm there would be no need for a change to the Constitution. It may though be a good thing to start thinking if there are any other constitutional changes we may wish to think about, particularly if we want to move our democratic process forward.

My second topic is to suggest to all elected members that we need urgently to sit down with officials to sort out who is responsible for deciding which services are provided for within in the budget. We know that holding a position as an elected member that we will get criticised for decisions we take, I have no problem with that. It does not though sit comfortably with me if officials take decisions, like closing the Sandy Bay Clinic and Councillors get the blame. Yesterday morning, we heard the Honourable Cyril Gunnell point out that the ultimate decision to close the Sandy Bay Clinic was not discussed with the Public Health and Social Welfare Committee. Yet also yesterday, the Honourable Chief Secretary said that core services are decided by the Directorates, together with the Chief Secretary and Councillors. Even if that were the case, that combination I feel would be too woolly and would lack to address the key question as to where does final accountability lie. Since yesterday's LegCo meeting, we've learnt that the constituents of Sandy Bay are asking for a meeting this week to discuss the decision to close their Clinic. Would the Honourable Chief Secretary be willing to attend that meeting to explain the decision?

My third topic is to refer to last year when we were all enthusiastic about starting up a Youth Parliament. One of the intentions were that members of the Youth Parliament would have the opportunity to meet with Councillors and, amongst other things, bring forward issues that are of concern to the constituents. I raise this now as we are in an exciting time in the history of St. Helena and we need to continue to raise the profile of our young people.

And finally, Madam Speaker, it is sad to hear that our colleague, the Honourable Michael Anthony Benjamin, has had to resign due to health reasons. An inimitable character who has brought some very witty comments, particularly to our informal discussions. He has a passionate interest in tourism and I trust there will be some way for him to continue to contribute to this very important topic. I wish him well for the future. Madam Speaker, I support the adjournment.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. The Honourable Raymond Williams?

The Hon. Raymond Williams –

Madam Speaker, I welcome the Adjournment Debate. Perhaps I should first start with my hot potato. Perhaps I should first start by trying to explain the consequences of closing the two Clinics in the West Electorate as a result of the Administration instructing the Director of Health & Social Welfare to do so after the so-called “Deep Dive” in order to re-prioritise funding. This measure was not the instruction of the Health & Social Welfare Committee. However, if this is part of a deal to reduce costs by some £200K there must surely be some alternatives to overcome this grim situation among our sick and elderly people. We are given to understand that the Community Nurses will play a larger role, or enhanced role I should say, in visiting the sick and elderly in need of help. A more robust use of the Public Transport System should be introduced immediately and my personal view is to reduce the ticket price to the sick and elderly, or free when attending the Clinic. The Health & Social Welfare Committee, through its Chairman, has called for urgent measures to be taken to overcome the distasteful approach of closing two Clinics within such a short space of time and without prior warning.

Our budget session will reveal many cuts in the funding for 2012/13. There will be many changes in the system for SHG: staff reductions, divestment of non core operations, possible redundancies, redeployment of personnel and so on, all in the interest of the Private Sector who I would encourage to grab up the opportunities that could exist to become more self sufficient.

Also, with effect from 1st April we will see the amalgamation of Tourism and SHDA personnel, forming the new Enterprise St. Helena, which will enhance the activities of future development for St. Helena. With the shortfall of funding for Fisheries and Agriculture it would seem most obvious that Economic Development will play a major role in improvement within these areas of concern.

Madam Speaker, I fully support the Motion brought to the House by Councillor Francis in recognising the importance of Civil Society and their important role they play in the future development of this island, and I thank those in recognition of this. Whilst mentioning Civil Society, supporting SHAPE financially with a Service Level Agreement is much appreciated, but I’m sure as they in SHAPE wish to expand, so have we as Elected Members, need to provide additional funding if we are to support all of their efforts in respect of the unfortunate people in our society.

A Motion presented by Councillor Gunnell on future shipping. I’m sure the RMS can remain in service without DfID subsidy and used to the advantage of St. Helena as and when required. Savings will consist of travelling on one engine to Cape Town; 50% reduction in crew and crew emoluments, realistic passenger fares and the ship can be anchored in island waters until she is needed. Ship’s crew would only be paid when working onboard, as per the job we say. Why should we revert to the days of the Clan Lines when we say a freighter with 12 passengers will suffice when we have our own ship which can be used to the advantage of St. Helena under new management with a different mind set? Why aren’t we opening up the tourist trade using the RMS to charter passengers to and from St. Helena or are we offering the RMS to St. Helenians to purchase? If a St. Helenian businessmen or consortium decides to operate the RMS in St. Helena, will SHG accept a business plan? If the Ascension Island Base does not open up to civilian flights, how do we get St. Helenians employed in the Falklands and Ascension to return home? Do they fly from Ascension to Cape Town or Namibia and then fly to St. Helena? Assuming we get a freighter that can carry 12 passengers, are we not looking at a reduced number of family members from Ascension and

the Falklands over the festive seasons? Surely we should cater for offshore islanders who support our economy in many ways than one. Why can't we charter our ship under a different flag, maintaining the island and its needs and to continue the purpose in which it was originally built for? I feel we should do some research on the Devil we know, than the Devil we don't know and I'm also convinced that SHG should start thinking now of all the possible objectives before 2016.

Madam Speaker, I've been told recently that our students of the Prince Andrew School makes regular visits to the Community Care Centre to spend time with the elderly and misfortunate residents. I have great admiration for this activity by our younger generation to find time for those very same people who have led the way forward for us and to the standard of life we accept today. They call it the Enrichment Programme. I'm sure it must be a relief to sit and chat about the old days, have tea together, play card games and dominoes, read and sing together. Prince Andrew students, please keep this up. Perhaps in your school holidays you should take other steps towards helping those residents at home, think of the errands you could do, perhaps make a cup of tea or shopping, think about it. Well done.

Finally, Madam Speaker, I feel it's my duty to extend a big thank you to Councillor Michael Benjamin for his invaluable input into island politics. As Councillor Benjamin moves into resignation as of Friday of this week, may I wish him well in his future career. Thank you, Councillor Benjamin. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. The Honourable Brian Isaac?

The Hon. Brian Isaac –

Madam Speaker, I support the adjournment debate, but before I touch on some of the concerns which I will raise in the debate, I would just like to say, as a member of the Executive Council, that I am involved in many areas of the process, but firstly I would like to give comments on the main business of this formal sitting of Council which was to give political endorsement to the Appropriation budget for the next financial year. This financial year will start, not like in previous years, when business was as usual, but will start at a critical point in the history of this island's development. The Sustainable Development Plan and Economic Development Plan have set the road map for St. Helena to become more self sufficient as the economy develops. Along with the newly set up Enterprise St. Helena Directorate to promote and develop a tourism-driven economy for St. Helena, the island is progressing. All of these plans are underpinned and supported by the Land Development Control Plan which is supported by the local Housing Strategy overviewed by the Memorandum of Understanding monitored by officials in London and the Strategic Policy Unit here on the island. This is also supported by Consultants, professional advisers, Economists, Engineers and the Legislative Council. How can we get it wrong this time? With a £250m contract approved to construct an airport with an additional £10m to operate, it is also envisaged that a modest number of 500 to 900 visitors to the island a week and the proposed construction of a three corner stone tourist development and Broad Bottom, Ladder Hill and High Knoll Fort. Daily flights will enable St. Helena to access the world's largest and fastest growing tourist market, focusing on high value tourists with required world class services. All of this is recommendation and will become achievable within ten years of the Economic Development Plan. My Honourable Colleagues, I feel very positive that now that the construction of the airport has commenced and the local economy has been given a kickstart, but my real concern starts here in this House with the budget process. Yes, we have had a good settlement with DfID for this financial year, but like everything else, it comes with a price and in the scenario it will impact mainly on the low income and vulnerable families. We have seen major cutbacks in services recommended by SHG, our Health and

Education system has also suffered. Island support has been disrupted, redundancies are expected, reducing the footprint of SHG has proved impact on existing staff, and the list goes on. I strongly feel that we are moving in the right direction, but I also feel we are striving to take the people of this island along with all the major developments. Yes, it is written that Government has given a commitment that no-one would be left behind, but I see the difficulty with this in reality. This has clearly been demonstrated when having to prioritise savings during the budget process. We now have to demonstrate our commitment to the people of this island that along with inward investment we strongly support private sector development and that Saints have a fair piece of the pie. But in all of our plans and reports, there seems to be a missing link, which is to restore our heritage sites. Funding for the renovation of High Knoll Fort seems to have fallen off the radar, fortifications and boundary walls around the island have turned into piles of stone, Postbox walks have become so dangerous that the Tourist Office has been asked to stop advertising. The EDP front page states "Small footprint – huge step forward". Will we be displaying these on the sign at the start of Postbox walks to warn people of the unsafe paths? Mundens is out of bounds to the public, for years cracks in the tower walls at the Castle has become a concern and is now propped up with planks of wood to stop it from falling, Banks's Battery is falling into the sea, and, again, the list goes on. I am unable to answer many of these important concerns when questioned by the public on how our heritage needs to be renovated or alleviate the terrible state where many of our important sites have disappeared. Yes, Madam Speaker, St. Helena is experiencing major change and we do have the support of DfID, but are we living up to the expectations? During the recent visit from DAPM, the Infrastructure Consultant, Amanda Duff, they were not convinced that SHG were capable of delivering the £5m project for infrastructure on time and had to revise the programme. Why was this not communicated to DfID that there were problems in meeting deadlines before they arrived on the island? What is happening to the Asphalt Plant and all the associated development at the depot at Donkey Plain where thousands of pounds were spent to build massive concrete storage bins for storage of grit and dust to be used by the Asphalt Plant, along with the development in Half Tree Hollow School to support the Roads Project? Madam Speaker, I feel at times many of our problems are the result of the lack of communication, openness and transparency and most important, local advice. Madam Speaker, I also take this opportunity to wish Councillor Benjamin all the best in his endeavours for what he choose to do. I would like to say that he was also a real good working colleague and friend during the time he served on Legislative Council and always brought humour to the group. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Any other Honourable Member wish to speak? The Honourable Tara Thomas?

The Hon. Tara Thomas –

Thank you, Madam Speaker, I support the adjournment debate. Madam Speaker, as my other colleagues have indicated, it's been an intense few days for this House, deliberating significant pieces of legislation. The majority of the Bills have been connected to finance issues and I'd like to thank the Financial Secretary and his team for their support and sheer dedication to progressing each of these significant areas of pensions, tax reform and the budget. It's not been an easy feat, but it shows that the St. Helena Government can get on and get things done.

During the last sitting of Council in February, I responded to a question from the Honourable Mervyn Yon regarding the old Technical Trades School and I would like to offer a correction to the House on this matter, Madam Speaker. I have been advised that the old Technical Trades School had only accepted male students into a few areas of training, when, in fact, the

old Technical Trades School did, indeed, support both male and female students. I'd like to apologise on behalf of the Directorate for any confusion or offence that this might have caused. I should make clear though, Madam Speaker, that the Education and Employment Directorate has no intention of establishing a separate facility to what we currently have for training in Vocational and Technical Trades. Our existing facilities have progressed significantly over the past few years and as I have advised in this House previously we hope to extend the courses on offer to textiles, electrics and plumbing. The Adult and Vocational and Education Sector team are also investigating how this might be complemented with an apprenticeship scheme. Members of the Education and Employment Directorate have been investigating other details about the old Technical Trades School. Unfortunately there are no records, but staff have been speaking with previous tutors and students to determine how we might enhance the provision at Prince Andrew School. We will also be organising an Away Day at Prince Andrew School so that Members can tour the existing facilities and learn more about the additional courses we hope to introduce.

Madam Speaker, I empathise with Members concerns about the closure of the Head O'Wain and Sandy Bay Clinics and I maintain the view that the Health and Social Welfare Directorate, along with other respective members of the Public Service, should work together to ensure that adequate transport arrangements and access to the Dispensary Bus are put in place to support patients in these areas.

In concluding, Madam Speaker, it is with great sadness that I must end my adjournment debate with a farewell to the Honourable Michael Benjamin. He has served as my Deputy on the Economy and Finance Committee since we joined Council in November 2009, he has offered tremendous support to the areas of reforms for investment and more recently as a member of The Education and Employment Committee on which we both serve. However, I take great comfort in knowing that this Council's loss is the private sector's gain and wish him well in his future endeavours. Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. The Honourable John Cranfield?

The Hon. John Cranfield –

Thank you, Madam Speaker, I rise in support of the adjournment debate, although I have just one question, Madam Speaker. Now that we have established that the Tourism Department sits with the Chief Executive of Economic Development with oversight of the operations of that Directorate coming under the umbrella of the Economy and Finance Portfolio, does that mean, Madam Speaker, that the Tourism and Leisure Portfolio ceases to function? And I'll end, Madam Speaker, with it is with much regret that we have learnt of the resignation of Councillor Michael Benjamin. Michael has contributed positively to the political arena and I wish him every success for the future, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. The Honourable Mervyn Yon.

The Hon. Mervyn Yon –

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, since the signing of the contract to build an airport in St. Helena and the commencement of the work relating to it, it has become evident that there has been an impact on Departments and the private sector regarding staffing. This, Madam Speaker, was predicted even before work started. What has happened is it has brought a new life to the island. I trust that further employment will be needed for Saints when the airport proper gets underway, but will the construction of an airport encourage Saints from overseas back home will be left to be seen.

Madam Speaker, the reforms that had to be put in place for the MOU, Memorandum of Understanding, most have now been implemented but not without some impact on the island's wellbeing and health. For example, Madam Speaker, it is becoming frustrating to advise the public how certain elements of Government operate, more so since the MOU with its subsequent policies and reforms now in place. It has become clearer, although it must happen, that because of these policies and reforms, changes within Departments such as the Health and Social Services, the A&NR Department and the Department of which I am Chairman, has taken its toll by the reduction of staff, thus reducing the level of essential services within the Departments. Example given, the head count on rodent control operators, less refuse collection in two of the most populated areas of the island, Longwood and Half Tree Hollow areas. By cutting back on these essential services could expose the public to serious illnesses.

Also, Madam Speaker, another serious issue is the closure of the two Clinics, Sandy Bay and Head O'Wain without putting any other measures in place to help the people of these areas to receive their prescriptions. This, Madam Speaker, is restricting access to health, especially the low paid and elderly who cannot afford to hire a taxi to convey them to Half Tree Hollow, Levelwood or Jamestown Clinics. It would appear, Madam Speaker, that it is more important to make savings within our budget than to think of someone's health. Surely, Madam Speaker, there must be other ways of finding savings. We were told during the budget speech that SHG is setting up a new group called the Economic Development Planning and that it will involve quite an extensive sum of money to kick-start it. It will be interesting to know what will be the exact number of staff and the true amount of funding that will be needed to set this group up to provide an efficient output without hindering the quality of life to the community. The question I am frequently asked, Madam Speaker, is what was the level of the budget for the Health and Social Services Department and A&NR Department five years ago and what is the percentage reduction of their budget since then for each of the years to date. Madam Speaker, health is very important and we must not lose sight of Government's obligations and commitments to ensuring that human rights to health. We should also not forget that primary health needs of the world's population are to the goals of sustainable development and primary environmental care. Human health and quality of life are at the centre of the effects to develop sustainable human settlements making particular efforts to rectify inequalities relating to social and economic conditions without distinction as to race, national origin, age or disability, is able to participate fully in social, economic and political process of human settlement and the right to public health, medical care, social security and social services. These are all equal before the law.

Madam Speaker, I cannot present this adjournment debate without voicing my disappointment to some of the responses I received to my supplementary questions last Friday. I expected more professional answers than what was given.

Finally, Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Michael Benjamin for his time he has been a member of the Legislative Council, but due to health reasons has to resign. I wish him well for the future. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Any other Honourable Member wishes to speak? Honourable Derek Thomas?

The Hon. Derek Thomas –

Thank you, Madam Speaker, I rise in support of the adjournment debate. Once again we have completed a very busy and intensive session of Legislative Council with the passing of some essential and important Bills. We have passed the Income Tax Bill, which is designed to encourage business investment and support our MOU commitment to open the economy

with inward investment. The Bill contained five effective investment incentives designed to promote and encourage businesses. Another important Bill which has been passed is the Pensions Bill. This Bill is designed to ensure that SHG can afford to pay a decent level of pension to staff on retirement without placing a massive burden on future taxpayers. The Bill is designed to set the pathway for the long-term requirement of the island. The third step of the scheme is to introduce an island-wide contribution scheme, which can only add value to the development of private sector economic growth. I understand that work will commence from April of this year as to how to progress the scheme with a view of having the scheme up and running before the opening of our airport.

In holding the water tariffs at the current level for six months in recognition of the water quality problems shows that the Government cares. This should be well appreciated by the public.

Madam Speaker, I will now turn to some concerns which face the general public, the number of increases which will be effective. Such increases are unavoidable due to our heavy cost of inflation and services being heavily subsidised. The only way to improve on this over the years is to try and grow our economy. Some sensible measures will be put in place to protect those on Income Related Benefits and Basic Island Pension by increasing their levels of pay to 1st April and provide a further increase in October. However, there is still concern over our Government Pensions, especially those who are on low pension and our low wage earners in society. The Government is intending to introduce a minimum wage limit from October of this year to try and address this issue and I will do all I can to ensure that this happens.

Another issue of great concern is the withdrawal of the clinic services in Head O'Wain and Sandy Bay. Whereas it might not be cost effective to keep these clinics open, some measures should have been put into place to assist the elderly and poor people in those communities to the nearest clinic or hospital. A lot of these people are only in receipt of Income Related Benefits of £41.60 or the Basic Island Pension of £45.00, just barely enough for them to live on let alone finding money to get them to the Hospital. I am concerned that Council has had to take the blame for this decision. When this decision was taken, not even the Public Health Committee was aware of it. Madam Speaker, I have no problem.....

(Break in recording)

.....some arrangements in place to assist those poor people from Blue Hill and Sandy Bay in getting them to see the Doctor. I will not accept that nothing can be done. If necessary, I will be pushing hard in ExCo for a solution to this problem.

Madam Speaker, there was also some concern about cutting back on our refuse collections in larger districts; Longwood and Half Tree Hollow to once a week. Madam Speaker, I have to view this to have serious consequences on our environment. The purpose of our airport, Madam Speaker, is to grow our economy through the tourist industry, attracting tourism through the island's natural beauty. In reducing the refuse collections, we are setting ourselves up to damage and ruin and destroy our natural beauty. This decision, Madam Speaker, needs to be revisited. It will have a huge impact, I can see, on society.

Madam Speaker, in the budget session, I raised concern over the high level of the farming support that has been removed from Agricultural. This will do very little to support and encourage our local farmers and I see we will have to rely more and more on imports instead of encouraging our local farmers to produce fresh products.

Madam Speaker, in our budget session, the Honourable Councillor Cyril Gunnell quite rightly raised concern over the island's Disaster Management capabilities in readiness for the opening of our airport. Madam Speaker, the Home and International Committee has political oversight over disaster management and one of the Committee's objectives is to ensure that the island has in place comprehensive and fit for purpose disaster management plans before the opening of our airport. Through the assistance of Technical Support funding, plans are in place for a Trainer to visit and support the Emergency Services with training needs and

disaster management preparedness plans. The £7,000 which was in the Police Directorate for Disaster Management is seen as adequate for the coming year, it provides for two Practical Training Sessions and to support any unforeseen circumstances that may occur which will need funding and will have to be handled under a Disaster Management setting. Again, we have no control over disasters and should a disaster occur whether this sum is sufficient nobody knows, but if need be, it certainly is sufficient for training needs, but in the event of disaster then we will have to address the issue and funding will have to be found.

Madam Speaker, finally, it is sad to hear that the Honourable Michael Benjamin has to resign due to health reasons. I have thoroughly enjoyed working with him as a Councillor. He has made some valuable contributions, especially in relation to tourism development, which I feel is very much dear to his heart. I wish him the very best of luck for the future. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Councillor Cyril Gunnell?

The Hon. Cyril Gunnell –

Thank you, Madam Speaker, I support the adjournment debate. I'd like to say a few words first of all about the closure of Sandy Bay and Head O'Wain Clinics, it seems to be dear to everyone's heart. Now, yesterday I explained to the House that Health and Social Welfare Committee had no real involvement with closure of Sandy Bay and Head O'Wain Clinics as the decision to close the clinics resulted from an operational business analysis identifying further efficiency savings and it was deemed an operational rather than strategic issue. Yesterday, a colleague gave the impression, which was picked up by the public, that there had been some prior discussion where it was felt that clinics could remain open if Health and Social Welfare Directorate would transport patients to the clinics. Madam Speaker, the Directorate does not have adequate funds for routinely transporting patients to clinics. To be able to find money for that it be further reprioritisation in the Health and Social Welfare's budget and haven't they had sufficient of that already? Madam Speaker, the Directorate does not, as I say, have sufficient budget for that, but I think we need to understand that the residents in Sandy Bay, their wellbeing is not just all Health and Social Welfare to worry about, in fact, it is the whole island and we have a massive budget and something can be taken from the massive budget to support transporting if that would be the thing to do, not just the Health and Social Welfare Directorate, but certainly it ought to be looked into. It would be a shame, Madam Speaker, if, as I said in an e-mail to the Honourable the Chief Secretary, the reason for people not being able to afford to get to a clinic was because they couldn't afford it and therefore they would be deterred from seeking help, medications and so on, but Madam Speaker, when the clinics do close the Community Nursing Service operating in the area will increase home visits to those who need them. How long this will go on for, Madam Speaker, I don't know, because, as I said, there is no money, and this will include the elderly or infirm at home do get their repeat prescriptions.

It was very pleasing to hear my friend, the Honourable Tony Green, talking about Government accountability. I think some more needs to actually be said about that and isn't it a shame we don't know what is operational and what is policy. The lines are becoming very blurred, Madam Speaker, and there needs to be serious discussion about that.

Madam Speaker, one of the most successful uses of Government subsidy over recent years, in my opinion, has been the assistance given with public transport; I have for some time felt that the present system is crying out for review though. An improved system, in my view, would be more frequent runs criss-crossing the island coinciding with shift workers and also consideration should be given to the provision of bus passes for elderly folk; that certainly

would help people also to get to clinics, wouldn't it. I understand SHG is well poised to carry out a review of public transport as an urgent priority.

Madam Speaker, there are genuine concerns being expressed by people looking for Government Landlord accommodation. I am in possession of additional information over and above what I was able to relate to the House on Friday. Therefore, I would now like to make that information known. The Honourable the Financial Secretary in his budget speech on Friday said that funds are being used to renovate and expand the stock of Government Landlord housing and that work is currently being carried out to create eleven additional units during 2012/2013. Also, there was a question from the Honourable Stedson Francis who asked about funding for Government Landlord housing and what is the delay in building. I was approached outside the House for more details. According to Crown Estates staff, works are, indeed, progressing additional stock to the Government Landlord Estate. In lower Jamestown, there is to be one additional bachelor flat, in Levelwood there will shortly be two bachelor and one two-bedroom unit, at Deadwood there will be an additional two-bedroom unit, at Ladder Hill there will be an additional three-bedroom unit. The Infrastructure and Utilities Directorate are also working on proposals to create two additional bachelor flats in lower Jamestown and three additional two-bedroom units in Levelwood. I understand the quality of existing housing stock is to be improved as a matter of priority and that £1.1m in total have been approved for addressing backlog maintenance over the next three years. This is on top of the usual recurring maintenance budget, Madam Speaker.

And my Honourable Friend, Derek Thomas, talked about Disaster Management. Yes, I am concerned that the Police Directorate may not have sufficient funds at its disposal for disaster management. £7,000.....(*break in recording*).....and communication in disaster preparedness mitigation and response. As a performance measure, an annual disaster management exercise is to be carried out in 2013, I'm only quoting from the papers I saw yesterday. I am not an expert in disaster management but I do recall a Disaster Management Consultation some years ago, which the Honourable Derek Thomas would be aware about, advising that Disaster Management is not just an exercise carried out once a year, rather exercises should vary and they should be frequent. I understand from budget discussions yesterday that Police have taken advice and the £7,000 spend on a single or annual disaster management exercise is adequate, but one has to wonder if the Police, or, indeed, the public at large are really comfortable that an exercise carried out annually would be adequate preparedness, mitigation and response in the event of real disasters or even multiple disasters occurring. I would respectfully ask that a review is carried out to determine if St. Helena is doing sufficient in this area of public safety. Perhaps the Chief Secretary will find it convenient to give a response in his summary, although I do understand that this is a responsibility of the Home and International Committee. I'm certain they will have another look at it please.

Madam Speaker, who is, what is, when is St. Helena Government? Who gets to decide the definition of St. Helena Government? I have heard four versions - Executive Council is the Government, all of the Councillors are the Government, the Governor and Administration are the Government and a combination of all of the aforementioned is the Government. I am inclined to believe that the latter is nearest to being correct. Everyone has their own views on this, but I believe St. Helena constitutionally should have a definition that is final and unable to be questioned.

Madam Speaker, are we doing sufficient for our elderly and infirmed people? I think we do a great deal in St. Helena to look after our elderly and infirmed, but do we let them have sufficient money to live on? Madam Speaker, you know the answer is no. And I will keep on saying that until the benefits that are given to people who need them are increased, Madam, significantly. Giving people an extra one pound or two is, well, I'm trying to find the right word for it, Madam Speaker, but what can it buy. Can it buy more than a box of

matches? I don't think so, because the way things are going, the box of matches will cost about two pounds in the not too distant future. We have to bring people along with us, Madam Speaker. Years down the line, people will look back hopefully at this generation of people and say they laid the foundations for what we have today, but, Madam Speaker, what are we doing to look at the people that laid foundations for us years and years and years ago. I was talking to somebody up at Half Tree Hollow Supermarket only Saturday gone and, Madam Speaker, he used to be working for Government and he earned a decent salary, but now he is on pension and he was saying to me that he has had to get rid of his television. Now, if he has to get rid of his television because he can't afford it, then what about people who are on very low pensions, as quite rightly the Honourable Derek Thomas mentioned earlier on, some people are on very low pensions and some actually have to be topped up to the IRB level, sorry, the Basic Island Pension level. Now, we are not, Madam Speaker, looking after our people, our most vulnerable people in the way that I would like to see happen, so Madam Speaker, we need to sit down and see how we can actually, I realise I'm approaching time, Madam Speaker, we have to really sit down and see how it is we can help these people. It is an insult really, Madam Speaker, when you talk of a budget the size that we do have in St. Helena, that we choose to give people a miserable two pounds. Thank you, Madam Speaker, but I would like to end by saying I too would like to thank the Honourable Michael Benjamin for his very valuable input over the last two and a half years, thank you Michael, you have grown on me over the last two and a half years and you do make me laugh I have to say, but his reason for leaving, Madam Speaker, is to be applauded, because there is nothing more valuable than good health and I wish him well in his future endeavours. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. The Honourable Bernice Olsson.

The Hon. Bernice Olsson –

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I had no idea that I was going to stand up and talk to the adjournment debate, I think I did enough moaning and groaning yesterday and I don't want to bore the people of St. Helena. A lot has been said about Sandy Bay and Head O'Wain so, and I think I put that in my budget speech yesterday, so I don't want to stand here and repeat myself.

There was one sad thing that happened I think about a month ago. I got an e-mail from the Legal and Lands and that e-mail stated that the people living in Ladder Hill, if Ladder Hill Fort is sold, they would have to move out of their homes. I had a phone call, because all the people up at Ladder Hill had that kind of e-mail as well. I had a phone call from an old lady. She moved to Ladder Hill when she was two years old and now she's up in her eighties and what she said to me, is the airport that important to St. Helena that I have got to move out of my home for somebody to build a hotel or a casino? Madam Speaker, I listened to Honourable Brian Isaac debate speech and in there he more or less said something "are we paying the price of having an airport" because we're being told if you don't do (a) you won't get (b), that was what the MOU was all about, but it does sadden me when people like that who have made their home, lived there for years, and being told, oh, accommodation will be found for them, but they don't know where, and it's said when somebody makes a home, bring their children up and are being told if somebody decides to buy that you will have to move, but they got no idea, they might even put them out at Levelwood or somewhere and like the old lady said, it's my home, I've made it my home and now I'm being told I could be turfed out. And I just want to say another thing. Here we are, I listened to all the speeches, everybody is all excited, the airport's coming, here we're going to be self sustainable, but I think some of you Councillors need to go around this island and talk to the people, because a

lot of people out there are so demoralised by what is going on. The increases, Madam Speaker, I went round the shop a couple of months ago with three old ladies. One old lady only getting £33.50, not everybody getting £41.00, not everybody getting £45.00 Basic Island Pension, I don't know, our system at the moment, we've got all these people here to help us, we've got Economists, everybody and yet our people are still suffering and it saddens me. I became a Councillor for the people, not for the Government, but sometimes when I listen, I just think, what on earth is going on. Madam Speaker, I would just like to say to the Honourable Michael Benjamin it's been a pleasure knowing you and I want to say thank you for your input of two and a half years on Tourism Committee and maybe I'll stop being slapped as well. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. I think we will suspend the sitting for ten minutes.

Council suspended.

Council resumed.

Adjournment Debate resumed.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Chief Secretary.

The Hon. Owen O'Sullivan –

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to make this short response. We have had a long three days and as Honourable Members have already indicated it has been very successful in getting through a number of items of business.

I would like to first wish Michael Benjamin the best of luck in his future, it's very sad news that he's decided to leave Council, but it's totally understandable given his health reasons.

I would also just like to give a summary of the themes that have happened over the last three days. There has been a lot of talk, in both the budget debate and the adjournment debate about prioritisation, how there are a number of priorities and limited funds, but I would like Honourable Members to remember that we have to make tough choices and that these tough choices aren't as tough as in other countries. For example, last week, £250 was taken off five million pensioners in the UK, each and every pensioner lost £250. Hospitals are shutting, Police are being cut. We, on the other hand, are prioritising with rising expenditure. This is actually a end of the world position to be in.

In November last year, the airport decision was announced and this was the catalyst for change. Change is never comfortable and rarely straightforward. However, change within St. Helena is necessary. I mentioned earlier that SHG employs 40% of all the working population, which is one of the highest in the world; this needs to change. Over 56% of all funds provided by HMG; both from a point of self determination and financial independence, this needs to change. Only by radically restructuring the way SHG and the private sector operates will the economy grow. As the Honourable Financial Secretary mentioned in his budget speech, we need to invest in growing the economy. Honourable Members here have concerns about the money being re-prioritised from other areas. HMG made it clear to myself and to the team that if this money wasn't invested in economic development it would have been lost, so it's not robbing Peter to pay Paul, it's paying Peter to actually invest in the future of St. Helena. As the Honourable Michael Benjamin said in his speech, we have to be brave enough to make the tough decisions.

I will now go on to specific points raised in the debate. I would like to give Members' some reassurance that the accountability and responsibility topic that has been mentioned is being looked at. It makes it clear in the Constitution that Councillors are responsible for the policy direction and strategic monitoring. This boundary though does need to be defined and clarified and, as I have mentioned, once the dust settles from the Legislative Council I'll be looking at a paper on roles and responsibilities.

A number of comments have been made about the clinics and their closure. This decision was made at Directorate level as part of the re-prioritisation. Although the closure has been raised with Health and Social Welfare Committee in the past and, in fact, I have heard about the closure of the clinics being **mooted** since I arrived. The main reason for this is the very low turnouts. I have some figures here – Sandy Bay had 8.8 patients per clinic in 2006, 9.3 in 2007, and then in 2010 it goes down to 7.1 patients per clinic and 2011, 6.5. Head O'Wain, in 2010 had 3.4 patients per clinic and in 2011 1.7 per clinic. Both of these clinics are massively under utilised and very very expensive. My understanding is that Head O'Wain it costs over £200 per patient to see them in the clinic because of the operational overheads and in Sandy Bay £71.00 on top of the cost of the Doctors and Nurses. If friends and family cannot provide transport for people to get to the clinics, public transport does operate from Sandy Bay into Jamestown on Fridays when clinics are operational and also more visits will be made when the clinic closes, more home visits, as the Honourable Cyril Gunnell mentioned. As part of, well, an aside to that, but we are conducting an urgent review of public transport, I am not convinced that we are utilising public transport capacity most efficiently and effectively and a team is being set up to review this and they will report by the end of May.

The only other point I would like to mention is that the reference to Disaster Management and a review. We are expecting to get a Disaster Management Expert out on TC and I think it would be most appropriate if he or she was the person who looked at the whole picture since he or she will have the operational, professional expertise. Thank you very much for the opportunity to adjourn the debate.

Question that the House do stand adjourned sine die, put and agreed to.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Members. Just to remind you that we have an informal LegCo meeting at half past one this afternoon. Thank you.

Council adjourned sine die.

