

ST. HELENA
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

THE SPEAKER

Mrs Margaret Anne Catherine Hopkins MBE

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

The Honourable Acting Chief Secretary	-	Mrs Gillian Francis
The Honourable Financial Secretary	-	Mr Colin Owen
The Honourable Attorney General	-	Mr Kenneth Baddon

ELECTED MEMBERS

The Honourable Rodney Garth Buckley	-	East Electoral Area
The Honourable John Gilbert Cranfield	-	“ “ “
The Honourable Cyril Keith Gunnell	-	“ “ “
The Honourable Brian William Isaac	-	“ “ “
The Honourable Bernice Alicia Olsson	-	“ “ “
The Honourable Stedson Graham Francis	-	West Electoral Area
The Honourable Anthony Arthur Green	-	“ “ “
The Honourable Earl Hilton Henry	-	“ “ “
The Honourable Derek Franklin Thomas	-	“ “ “
The Honourable Raymond Kenneth Williams	-	“ “ “
The Honourable Mervyn Yon	-	“ “ “

CLERK OF COUNCILS

Miss Linda Benjamin

PROCEEDINGS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Friday, 14th September, 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
Fr. Dale Bowers

The Speaker –
Next item, please.

3. ELECTIONS TO PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

The Speaker –
I call for nominations to fill the vacancies Public Accounts Committee, are there any nominations to Public Accounts, please? The Honourable Mervyn Yon?

The Hon. Mervyn Yon –
Madam Speaker, I rise in proposing that the Honourable Raymond Williams should be elected as a member of the Public Accounts Committee.

The Speaker –
Thank you, Honourable Member. Is there a seconder, please?

The Hon. Derek Thomas –
Madam Speaker, I rise and support and second the Motion.

The Speaker –
Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Raymond Williams, do you accept your nomination?

The Hon. Raymond Williams –
Madam Speaker, I will accept.

The Speaker –
Thank you. Are there any further proposals, because there are two vacancies? The Honourable Stedson Francis?

The Hon. Stedson Francis –
I propose that the Honourable Cyril Gunnell be a member of the Public Accounts Committee.

The Speaker –
Thank you, Honourable Member. Is there a seconder, please?

The Hon. Earl Henry –
Madam Speaker, I second.

The Speaker –
Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Cyril Gunnell, do you accept the nomination?

The Hon. Cyril Gunnell –
Madam Speaker, it will be a lot more workload for me to carry out, but I'm paid to do my work and I will accept.

The Speaker –
Thank you, Honourable Member. Are there any further nominations to the vacant seats on Public Accounts Committee, please? In which case, I put the question that the Honourable Raymond Williams and the Honourable Cyril Gunnell be duly elected.

Question on nomination of the Honourable Raymond Williams and the Honourable Cyril Gunnell to be members of the Public Accounts Committee, put and agreed to.

The Speaker –
Thank you, Honourable Members. The Honourable Cyril Gunnell and the Honourable Raymond Williams are duly elected to serve as members of the Public Accounts Committee. Next item.

4. ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT

Honourable Members, good morning and welcome to this the second sitting of the fourteenth meeting of the Council. In accordance with Standing Orders, we have had the elections to the Public Accounts Committee. I should like to acknowledge the resignations from the Public Accounts Committee announced yesterday by the Honourable Brian Isaac and the Honourable Stedson Francis. Their resignations are sent to His Excellency the Governor, not to myself. I should like to comment, if I may, a little. I know from conversations with the Chairman, Mrs Lynette Rees-Styles, that she values the contributions made by both members towards the work of the Public Accounts Committee. I took the liberty of asking the former Chief Auditor to offer his thoughts to me and I quote from what he said. "As the former Chief Auditor, I would like to thank Councillors Brian Isaac and Stedson Francis for their

sterling work on the Public Accounts Committee. I joined the Committee some two years ago and over that period I have seen firsthand the commitment from both of them to the role which has resulted in substantial improvements and development of the Public Accounts Committee.” It is clear from the comments I have received that both Honourable Members have given much to the effective work of the Public Accounts Committee and on behalf of this House I offer my thanks to them. Honourable Members have now undertaken the election of two new members of the Public Accounts Committee and have obviously given serious thought to this, hence the suspension of the meeting yesterday afternoon and the introduction of this item of business into today’s Order Paper. For the benefit of the public, I should remind you that members of the Public Accounts Committee can only be elected in a formal meeting of the Council. I’m very grateful to Honourable Members for their serious consideration of this and wish the two new members well in their work. Public Accounts Committee is the only formally constituted scrutiny body of Government and as such plays a vital role in monitoring Government and holding Government accountable. Honourable Members will recall that yesterday you passed a Motion calling on Her Majesty’s Government to look at minor adjustments to the Constitution and one section which was highlighted was Section 69, Public Accounts Committee. However, in the meantime, until we get to the stage of being able to look at these minor adjustments, we have to continue to work with what is in the Constitution now. I am sure that all Honourable Members will reflect upon the need to be very clear about conflicts of interest and to declare such as and when necessary. Thank you. Next item of business, please.

5.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

The Speaker –

The Honourable Chief Secretary?

The Hon. Gillian Francis –

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

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Is there a seconder, please?

The Hon. Ken Baddon –

Madam Speaker, I beg to second.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. The Honourable Mover wishes to speak?

The Hon. Gillian Francis –

Not at this moment, Madam Speaker, I look forward to hearing the comments and views of the Honourable Members.

The Speaker –

I put the question that this House be adjourned sine die. The question is open for debate. Does any Honourable Member wish to speak? I’ll just remind you that, generally speaking,

we have agreed that no member will speak for more than ten minutes during an adjournment debate. Honourable Brian Isaac?

The Hon. Brian Isaac –

Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, I support the adjournment debate and will continue by saying that yesterday and today we have made another step in the history of politics and have addressed issues that affect the wellbeing of the community and demonstrated democracy working in a democratic society. We all are aware that St Helena is experiencing change at a level that has impacted the lives of most of us and we're going through a period that has never been experienced before. Therefore, we, as representatives of the people, elected by the people, must always have the people of this island at heart when passing laws, regulations and the formulation of policies that will affect all of us in some form or the other. I feel very strong on this statement I've just made and with respect to all Honourable Members and officials and with hindsight in mind I will say that we have made decisions in the past with the guidance of professional advisers and in all good faith for the people of the island, but have found that some decisions and some aspects has not always delivered the expectations that was expected. Like all policies, there are always hidden scenarios that do affect expectations and can be easily overlooked during the formulation of such issues and no matter how careful one can be there is always the case that the unforeseen slips through the net. To reinforce what I've just said, I'm a member of the Health and Social Welfare Committee and was very much involved in the recent review and implementation of our Social Security System under the leadership of a highly regarded consultant. In respect of the work undertaken by officials and Honourable Members, we are now engaging the professional support of consultants with York University to again review the Benefits System. At the time, I was convinced that the review of the Benefits System which was proposed would be one that would greatly improve what was in place and produce a better standard of living for those less fortunate and the vulnerable in society under legislation, but there are issues within the policy and regulations that has presented some difficulty with the implementation phase. When it comes to the household allowance that governs the entitlement of benefits, Honourable Members will recall that this matter has been addressed in different forums in respect of concerns raised by constituents where this has impacted on individuals' income and in some cases have broken up families. Another scenario is if a son and daughter is living within the household with the parents who are on Income Related Benefits the policy required that the son or daughter to reveal what is in their own personal savings account. If the information is not revealed, the parents' income is withdrawn. This raised major concerns and has caused stress among families. When it comes to the transitional protection that controls the increase in benefits, whereas a couple living together on Income Related Benefit and the other on Basic Island Pension and there is an increase in benefits, the one on Basic Island Pension will receive the increase and the one on Income Related Benefit would have their benefit decreased, again, raises concerns. The Basic Island Pension has again benefit many but the criteria to qualify is so open ended that as a state pension it appears legally free for all. Once you attain the age of sixty-five and worked some forty years on the island you are legally entitled to apply and if qualified you are also entitled to free medical prescriptions, free health service. You may also be engaged in full-time employment and be in receipt of a substantial income, run a business, or even be a Councillor and your Basic Island Pension will not be affected. The only scenario that prevent anyone from qualifying if you are in receipt of another pension over and above the ceiling of the Basic Island Pension. But when we look at the other side of the coin, this do not present a level playing field when it come to low income pensioners who have no fringe benefits, such as free prescriptions, medical and hospitalisation, which has presented an unbalanced society

where community and family values have been divided. Sadly, I have to make such a statement, but again, to support what I've said, I have been privileged to information where low income pensioners are now having difficulty to meet the cost of their prescription and are taking their treatment on alternative days, when they have been prescribed to have their treatment taken daily. I'm also aware that some low income pensioners are now cutting their tablets in half as they cannot afford the cost when they are only in receipt of £46.00 a week. Do we really want a society where our senior citizens is subjected to this while there are others in receipt of substantial income, Basic Island Pension and free medical prescription. I am aware that work is ongoing by York University as I speak in reviewing the Benefits System, but in the meantime, people on low income are suffering from the high cost of living and with the proposed budget cuts for the new financial year, I fear that St Helena will face a very tough future. Madam Speaker, I am aware that all Councillors are very sympathetic to these concerns and have much difficulty when having to make cuts and increases which will affect all of us, especially the low income families, but we are not alone in these crises as we are often faced with pressures of the outside world, but we must endeavour to protect our vulnerable in society, get better value for money and stronger controls on how projects and services are managed. The British Government financially supports St Helena with millions of pounds each year which are balanced with local revenue. We also receive millions of pounds for infrastructure development and promote a striving tourism industry, but we are a long way before we get to major progress in these areas, but I'm pleased that the refurbishing of the Power Station is very much in progress with related work to the network planned, but there are concerns with other projects within the overall project and one I'm constantly confronted with by the public is the Roads Project which are raising concerns with how the project are delivering. Whilst speaking of roads, I feel it's my responsibility to highlight the difficulty that residents of Lower Sandy Bay who use the road leading off the highway to Unity Cottage and residents of Alarm Forest who are experiencing difficulty in getting in and out of their homes during wet weather. Funding for assistance for such roads which was previously in the budget to support community and district roads has now been withdrawn and I would ask that we as members of the Infrastructure Committee and Economy and Finance look seriously at this matter during the budget process and see where possible savings can be made in The Infrastructure and Utilities budget to support some form of assistance to these residents who have made major investment into the building of their homes and has not become dependent on the state and through no fault of their own are unable to get any help from Government to assist in them having some form of safety access. On a much brighter note, I would like to make a mention of the progress that has been made by the dedication of voluntary, personal staff, trainers and trainees at the SHAPE Centre in Sandy Bay. The production of local crafts brought the Centre a very high standard and has promoted St Helena in the outside world and has given pride to the many of the less fortunate in society. I hope that members in this House today will give serious consideration for the bids made by SHAPE for the next financial year to enable the Centre to continue to operate and to produce high value support to those less fortunate. I will not make a mention of names of those dedicated people who worked voluntarily behind the scenes in the early days of getting SHAPE started; each and every one of you will know who you are.

In concluding, Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate Mr Colin Owen in his position as Financial Secretary and look forward in working with him. I would also like to thank him for the support and training given during the time I served as a member of the Public Accounts Committee. I will also take this opportunity to congratulate the new members voted today to the PAC well in their future endeavours and as they meet their new challenges that lie ahead. Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Cyril Gunnell?

The Hon. Cyril Gunnell –

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I support the adjournment debate. Firstly, I wish to congratulate the decision made by the Honourable Brian Isaac and the Honourable Stedson Francis to resign from the Public Accounts Committee, thereby protecting the independence of the Public Accounts Committee. Madam Speaker, I trust you will remind me if I'm getting near to the ten minute mark, even though I only have one matter to speak about. Madam Speaker, I wish to voice my concerns about the earlier, about the unfair way that funds made available to SHG are being distributed in St Helena among the various Directorates. We are very much aware of the impact the world recession is having on the UK, we do realise what the reasons are for the UK Government tightening its belt and why there is a reduction in grant aid to St Helena, we do understand it is likely that grant aid for 2013/14 will not increase above the 2012/13 level and probably it will decrease and as a direct result of this, the impacts in Directorates' recurrent budgets are being made and at the same time they are told to increase their revenues. But, Madam Speaker, what I can't understand, and I've said this many times before, is why all Directorates are treated in the same way when it comes to making cuts in expenditure and raising revenue. The recurrent budgets for 2013/14 are to be ten percent lower than the budgets for the current year. Now, it does not take a genius to work out that ten percent of a budget, a large budget, in terms of how much money will be a great more than ten percent of a much smaller budget. Finance has determined the budget ceiling for each Directorate and the amount of revenue to be raised. In the case of Health and Social Welfare Directorate, and I don't mind mentioning figures here, and I shall afterwards refer to it as Health, which has the largest budget and for all the right reasons, the recurrent budget is to be cut by a massive £354,745 and that £5.00, Madam Speaker, at the end does matter, less than in the current year. When it comes to raising revenue, Health has to increase its revenue in 2013/14 by £90,147 above the total for last year. On top of all this, the Directorate will also have to cover the increased utilities and transport costs that we know are looming, this is likely to be in the region of £93,000 and we somehow have to find all of that. So this is no easy task, in fact, it is an impossible task, without cutting some services. Yes, Madam Speaker, cut some services. Even so, there are people who say that everyone is in the same boat and cuts have to be equalised at ten percent across the board, but how can everyone be in the same boat when the playing field is not level? The corollary here is that an adequate budget for Health is no more important than anything else. This, in my opinion, is a naïve way of thinking at the way cuts are made, because whereas one Directorate may be able to save some money by delaying work on a less important stretch of road, or delay the purchase of a particular piece of office equipment, for example, when it comes to Health, it is not quite so easy to reduce quality of patient care or social care or don't upgrade emergency equipment or discontinue some services and so on. One size in this situation, Madam Speaker, and we keep on hearing it, really does not fit all. Some people say this can be done and that should be done, I don't wish to be unkind, but they quite clearly they have no real concept about the practical running of a medical establishment on St Helena. The vision that Directorates, such as Health, should not be looked at any differently than any other Directorate is nearsighted. Unlike most Directorates, Health works to an Ordinance; there are statutory requirements to consider and not forgetting unacceptable risks and perhaps later on litigation. These are the problems Health has when it wants to reduce its budget. The predicament Health has is there is hardly anything that can be passed on to somewhere else. There is only one Dental Surgery, only one CCC, only one Hospital, only one Medical Laboratory, only one Social Services Section and so on. They could, for

example, cut out the Food Laboratory, this would save £46,000 but it would be at the expense of Argos not being able to export fish and consequently reduce purchasing fish from fishermen. Or the CCC could be closed, saving even more money. They could discontinue Community Nursing, cut out all outlying Clinics, discontinue the cleaning of public toilets or sweeping the streets on Sunday mornings, to which there would be great outcry, but these are only some examples. They could charge full cost recovery for prescriptions, but many people are not able to afford even minimal increases at the moment, and we are considering, Madam, putting it up by ten pence. I have been told there are people who have to decide which prescriptions to pay for and which to leave and as my Honourable Friend, Brian Isaac, said earlier on, some people are cutting their tablets in half so they're getting the wrong dosage. Recently, a woman rang up and said her pension is £198.00 a month. She hopes to never get sick because she wouldn't be able to afford her medical treatment. Madam Speaker, in St Helena, no-one, and I repeat, no-one, should be deterred from seeking medical attention. The prospect is that eventually they will end up being an emergency case where it will cost more or even have to be medically referred overseas at much greater cost. The other evening, Madam Speaker, a lady e-mailed me and said that at the hospital everything is falling apart. Well, I agree with her, it is falling apart, but not because we want it to fall apart, let's make that clear. And very recently, as a Committee member, I had the opportunity to consider two other draft budgets to achieve the budget ceilings. Both were able to do so with no serious impact. But this is not the case with Health. Myself and my Committee take our hats off to the Director and her team for trying every which way to figure out how the massive expenditure cuts and increased revenues can be achieved. They are doing what they are told to do and provided the figures for Committee's consideration, but the Health and Social Welfare Committee only day before yesterday would not and could not endorse the draft, not in its entirety. We did agree to some minor things, but the majority of the proposed cuts and revenues was too far fetched. We do not mind being blamed for trying to protect the public from rundown services, Madam Speaker.

The Speaker –

Honourable Member, you are approaching your ten minutes.

The Hon. Cyril Gunnell –

Thank you, Madam Speaker, for reminding me. If Health is not to have an adequate proportion of the SHG budget to at least maintain present quality throughout, if providing a sensible Health budget is not to be seen as being important then without a shadow of doubt none of its goals can be achieved and there will be rapid deterioration in standards. Madam Speaker, there is only so much that the Health Directorate can do when it comes to cutting, or any Directorate really, when it comes to cutting expenditure and so everything just falls apart. The only way Health would be able to achieve the budget ceiling and revenues mentioned earlier is to cut some of its services. The decision as to what services are cut should be made by SHG as a whole and not be placed solely on the Health and Social Welfare Directorate. There has to be more joined up thinking. I would invite anyone, anyone at all, to clearly think about the services currently operated by Health and Social Services and see if they can recommend which services should discontinue and this would, of course, be at the expense of some other expenditure. Madam Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Does any other Honourable Member wish to speak to the adjournment debate? Honourable Derek Thomas?

The Hon. Derek Thomas –

Thank you, Madam Speaker, I rise in support of the adjournment debate. Madam Speaker, the main issue for me, which requires immediate priority for this Government, is relating to those persons on Income Related Benefits and Basic Island Pensions. In my adjournment debate in July of this year, I raised concern of the fact that not everybody who is in receipt of Income Related Benefits and Basic Island Pension had received the 4.7 increase with effect from 1st April of this year. The Financial Secretary quite clearly said in his budget speech that all persons in receipt of the Basic Island Pension and Income Related Benefits would receive 4.7% to take account of inflation. He also went on to say that further increases would be awarded to those persons in October of this year to take account of further inflation. This was in support of the worries and concerns elected members had expressed about leaving the vulnerable and poor in society behind. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, we all know this was not the case. I will ask my fellow Honourable Members for their support in ensuring that this issue be given some urgent attention. We cannot sit back and expect to continue to raise revenue, which will be a further requirement from the DAPM team when they visit in November. We can no longer expect two elderly people living in a household to make do on £62.00 a week and to be told you cannot get anymore because you will be above the poverty line. Surely the established poverty line is no longer relevant when we take into account the increases in food prices and essential services, which will continue to rise and we expect the so-called poverty line to stay the same. Certain people are being driven to relative poverty, in certain cases denying themselves of food and medication. We've heard today from Honourable Members and we all know, I had a lady call me last night, she's not able to get any benefits because of her son working, her son has refused to pay for her medical care, she gets twelve tablets a day she's on, she's now told me that she no longer takes her medication, because she don't have any money to pay for it. This is not right, Madam Speaker. We have been told that there has been a delay in finding a Consultant to do a review of the Benefits System. We do not need a consultant to tell us that £62.00 a week is not sufficient for two people to live on and we can no longer continue to hold the so-called poverty line at £62.00 a week in fear that if it is increased those people will be receiving more than low wage earners and encouraging people to stay at home and claim Income Related Benefits instead of working. Surely this doesn't add up. I'm talking about elderly people suffering from illness and not able to work. They have made their contribution in society. I was pleased yesterday, Madam Speaker, to hear that the Health and Social Welfare Committee, the relevant Committee, would finally be making, or will be presenting a paper to Executive Council for consideration in relation to this unpleasant situation that arises at the moment.

I will now turn to our local Government pensioners, Madam Speaker, and I will declare my interest, but many are concerned over the fact that they have not received an increase in their pension since over four years. We all know that money is tight, but it needs to be directed in the right areas. Our Government pensioners have had inflation increases each year like everyone else. Many are not capable and fortunate to earn additional income and their pension is all they have to rely on. The Financial Secretary made a provision in last year's budget for an increase, but it was removed as a result of having to find additional savings. I sincerely trust that this will not be the case next year. It will then be five years and I will ask Members for their support in deciding on our budget allocations and priority. These people have been loyal, dedicated and committed and have done their bit in society and therefore should not be forgotten and left behind.

Madam Speaker, these issues to me, makes it very difficult for development and reforms to continue with the situation we have on our hands.

Another issue of concern, Madam Speaker, is our infrastructure performance and whereas we are able to show some progress on our Power House upgrading, plans for additional Wind

Turbines, progress in Solid Waste Management in support of Air Access, the big issues which worry me is the condition of our roads. We cannot continue patching potholes and resurfacing the roads using our current methods only to see in a few months it is all rooted up again. This is a waste of money. We need to apply new, different methods which take account the heavy increase and volume of traffic on our roads, especially since we now have many large type vehicles frequently using the roads. The asphalt plant machine was brought in to improve the way we repair our roads. We have been told the plant is faulty. Private sector is interested in the equipment and reckons it can easily be made workable. If this is the case, then surely SHG should have the plant properly checked out and rectified to represent value for money. I made a request in LegCo a few months back to the Director for a report outlining what is wrong with the equipment and why it cannot be rectified. We were promised a report but to date I have not yet received it. I would be grateful if the Chief Secretary could follow this up. This is taxpayers money and we need to be accountable.

The Speaker –

Honourable Member, you are approaching your ten minutes.

The Hon. Derek Thomas –

Okay, Madam Speaker. I will just end by saying that with the global world crisis funding is very critical and it should be spent wisely in order to achieve best value. As elected members, we are often reminded that we are not responsible for staffing, but we are responsible for the allocation of budget and I'm concerned about the number of Managers that exist within the Government Service, all having the use of dedicated vehicles as home to duty transport and on the job, 4 x 4's. Madam Speaker, we cannot afford this luxury. A review should be carried out, the money should be brought back as savings, we need to allocate this money in areas where people are facing hardship. I can go on, Madam Speaker, but my time is up. Thank you very much.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Any other Honourable Member wish to speak? Honourable Bernice Olsson?

The Hon. Bernice Olsson –

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, we have been told that there is no extra money for the island and that Directorates have to reprioritise their spending in line with the goals of national priorities set out in the Sustainable Development Plan and alongside that there is a Sustainable Economic Plan, a Development Plan. Health must be of the top priority and yet it is faced with huge cuts in recurrent budget expenditure for the coming three years. How does that fit in with the aims of the SDP? We have been told that the Labour Market Survey that one of the important factors needed to attract Saints who are living abroad back to the island is our improved Health Service. How can we improve our Health Service when it is faced with drastic reductions in budget that will no doubt impact on our day to day services? Will Saints want to return here if our Health Service is unable to develop and improve? It's all very well being told that the Hospital redevelopment will make things better, you cannot run a Hospital without the essentials, such as sheets, blankets, pillows, food, not to mention the basic medical equipment needed on a day to day basis. Madam Speaker, if we want to offer a modern Health Service, we need more funding, not less. Of course, Health isn't just about the Hospital. The Environment Health is another area that is important to ensure good public health and prevent spread of diseases. Will more budget cuts mean more cuts in rubbish collection? Will we need to forget about the Pest Control

Services, completely run the risk of rat infestation? Will food premises be allowed to operate year after year without inspection to ensure good hygiene practices? Where will it end? Who knows the real impact on our health that major budget cuts that we are suffering from now? As a Government, we should be doing all we can to protect our vulnerable people, those in hospital, residential care, as well as those living at home and in the community. Cutting the Health budget, Madam Speaker, includes care for the people in their homes and other Social Services is in receipt for a disaster. I don't know, it's very sad to have to stand here and say all this, Madam Speaker.

Right, let me go on to taxes. Madam Speaker, the current revenues are coming under pressure that the people of the island are seeing a falling in living standards which is causing a vicious circle to be entered and can only go in a downward direction. The Government revenue strategy is being undermined by several factors which we must address. The solution of increasing taxes, Customs duties and increased electricity and other tariffs cannot go on unless these undermining factors are addressed. What are the factors? Wages. Government workers, for example, have not seen an increase in wages for over the last three years and at the same time, the cost of basic necessities has risen along with all goods, as can be seen from the Government's own inflation figures. These rises mainly have been increased costs of imported goods and raw materials, which cost more to purchase. The ever increasing freight charges in order to get goods to the island and the decreasing money being sent back to the island from workers overseas. Madam Speaker, if you wanted to purchase a car from UK it would cost you a thousand pounds. On top of that, you've got to pay £4,000 plus in freight to get it to the island. This is the same for all goods. South Africa is seeing rising prices continuing, as has the UK and once goods are purchased the cost of freight to the island is prohibitive. The result is that with less disposable income people cannot afford the goods. We are witnessing, Madam Speaker, import of cheaper brands in the shop. Ask the retailers why their sales are dropping. Freight costs to the island are a major contributor to the declining standard of living be in food or even a night out. As the prices increase people simply cannot afford to go out and buy as much as they want from the shops. In regards to duty and tax, the Government strategy was to reduce the overall burden on the people, hence the increase in tax allowance, the removal of five percent wharfage on all goods and a major reduction in most rates, i.e. chocolate, chocolate used to be 40%. This was achieved with exemptions and reduced rates from essential items. The Government aims to further reduce, flatten the rates of duty to fifteen percent, but this will see some increase in duty, some items in duty. The Customs duty in the island is only based on the actual price of goods. No duty is charged on freight or other costs. Imagine the cost of the consumer if it was based, like the rest of the world, on all costs being subject to duty. Government has done that part correctly at least. With the consumption base tax system, either the disposable income grows, pay rises, the population grows, that's not happening anyway, or cost price transport costs reduce, that's going the opposite way as well. The world is an economic crisis and St Helena is not immune, but our remote location is not assisting. Pay freezes in the UK, the Public Sector, are only applied to those earning over £21,000. Those under that level are getting at least a small increase in order to maintain their standard of living. Madam Speaker, freight not only affect the shopper, but the farmer. Increased costs for animal feed. Freight have reduced the viability of livestock keeping. Once lost, it will never be recovered. If freight is reduced, more feed can be imported. Home grown products, more local employment, more benefit to the island. Madam Speaker, I'm sad to say the airport boom is having a trickle effect and we require a minimum wage in order to protect the poorest in society. How can a pensioner afford to live on current prices, utility costs etc, without any increase? Increasing spending and stopping the penalisation of savers' withholding tax will improve not only Government revenues but the standard of living for all. By reducing freight, increasing salaries, the spiral

can be stopped and we should look at alternatives to increasing tax burdens on the population in order to achieve the Government's revenue required. Failing that now, Madam Speaker, the severe consequences for the island, not only now, but for the future generations. Decreasing the tax level release money into the economy, increase exports etc, but only when coupled with measures to address wages, benefits and reducing costs. Thank you, Madam Speaker, I've just got one more and this is very important.

Madam Speaker, for four years, the bones of a large number of people have been kept in boxes round at the Pipe Store. They were rescued slaves who were removed from their graves in Ruperts Valley in 2008 to make way for the Haul Road which goes to the airport. The Government has been asked why these people have not

.....be reburied until the airport is finished in 2015, seven years after they were disinterred. In our modern times, Madam Speaker, this is cruel, unacceptable and disrespectful, the way to treat people, especially those who died. We would not treat our own family, our ancestors, in this way. Perhaps we should talk to the rest of the world about this shabby, inhumane treatment. Importantly, the way we treat our dead, especially those who came from overseas, says a lot about who we are.

The Speaker –

One minute, Honourable Member.

The Hon. Bernice Olsson –

I'm nearly finished, Madam Speaker. Can I just have a sip of water? Madam Speaker, we are also missing the opportunity. These people are reminders and symbol of those people who over three hundred years were enslaved, lost their lives in the journey from Africa to the Americas. Slavery underpins so much of American and English development. Today many people living on St Helena and millions of others living in Northern and Southern America are descended from slaves who survived. Many would like to come to St Helena as tourists, to learn about their ancestors, their families and their business of slavery. To benefit from these visits, St Helena could establish an international monument to all those slaves who died, possibly near those who will be reburied. The monument would acknowledge what happened and celebrate the strength of resilience of those who survived. If this happened, St Helena would have the only Atlantic-based slave memorial in the world. It would focus international interest on the island, attract resources and encourage development of a unique tourism industry. Above all, it would make the island far more visible and tangible for the rest of the world. I'm nearly finished, Madam Speaker. So what do we do? Firstly, we need to hold the Government to account. Why has it taken four years to bury these people? Secondly, we need to rebury these people with all the gentleness, dignity and kindness that we can find, making sure that their culture is respected, not in seven years time. Thirdly, Madam Speaker, create an international memorial on the island to all slaves who lost their lives on the passage across the Atlantic from Africa to the Americas. Madam Speaker, there was a bid put in for an Osiary, but Councillors decided it wasn't, I was one of those Councillors as well, who decided that it wasn't high priority. Now, I'm asking Government for a piece of ground to give these people a decent burial. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Any other Honourable Member wishes to speak to the adjournment debate? The Honourable Raymond Williams.

The Hon. Raymond Williams –

Madam Speaker, I welcome the adjournment debate. Perhaps, like all other elected members, I'm happy to see that the road to the airport site is going well despite some setbacks and inconvenient moments with the disruption of electricity to most of the island homes some two weeks ago lasting for about two hours. It's quite a shame when we are told that the system has been and still is being upgraded to the effect that users in Sandy Bay, Blue Hill and Levelwood bears the consequences of an electricity pole being misplaced by cause of an accident at Deadwood. Surely it's time to improve.

As a matter of weeks ago, St Helena, through Enterprise St Helena, saw architects from overseas evaluating Government properties, assessing future use and benefit to the island with a view to encouraging investor support related to tourism.

Information has also reached the media headlines informing the public of overseas teachers for the Prince Andrew School being recruited. This is a major step forward, in my opinion, in providing upgrading of educational standards that our pupils deserve and I hope that all students of today will take advantage of what is being put in place for them to further their knowledge for the future of themselves and St Helena. Raising the educational standard of our children today in the Prince Andrew School plays a major role in the future destination of families. Councillor Buckley yesterday reiterated on the state of our primary schools in which he claimed that some of them are not fit for purpose. Well, I am rather concerned here. This is rather sad as it would appear that we have neglected to provide essential maintenance where and when needed. So then, Madam Speaker, it brings to mind if there has and perhaps still is a lack of maintenance on school building? Is there scope to review the school transport system that conveys our teachers and children; perhaps some of these buses also need replacing.

Madam Speaker, arriving on island on Wednesday from Cape Town was Mr Jonathan Ball and his colleague, Daniel Pullen, I hope I've pronounced it right, the aim of their trip is to gain a better understanding of island and to discuss RSPB's forward role and review their engagement on island matters pertaining to the environment and work of the RSPB. The work of the RSPB has made a major impact on pasture improvement over recent years for sheep grazing as a result of the Wirebird Mitigation projects. I sincerely hope that SHG Directorates and St Helena National Trust will give these personnel all the assistance they need and show our appreciation for previous funding the island has received.

Several weeks have now passed with Directorates involved in forthcoming budget procedures. From what is imminent in terms of budget reductions, I have a particular interest in the future of SHAPE and its budget forecast and wonder to myself how do we finance an organisation which is providing a service for SHG and fulfils all three strategic objectives of SHG. With the increase of clients and staff for the next year alone, some £30,000 extra funding is being sought. Among all the new developments taking place at SHAPE it is worth mentioning that funding has been provided by many donor organisations, including OTEP, UNDP and APEC and many others, including other local businesses and personnel and I often wonder how would SHAPE really cope under the financial constraints and strains that confront them. Perhaps, food for thought would be, as elected members, should ask ourselves what would happen if SHAPE failed to exist or refused to accept any new clients because it is financially unable to raise the required funds. Surely we would not allow this to happen, but instead open the doors wider to the disabled people of working age.

Madam Speaker, may I conclude by thanking Councillors Isaac and Francis for their services to the Public Accounts Committee, and, finally, publicly thank ex Councillor Tara Thomas for her contribution to local politics and wish her well in her studies. Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Any other Honourable Member wishes to speak? The Honourable Rodney Buckley.

The Hon. Rodney Buckley –

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I too, support the adjournment debate, it provides for freedom of speech, which is most welcome on St Helena. Honourable Members, the overnight adjournment most certainly gave me the chance to reflect and respond on yesterday's debate on various issues. I have to say that for me the debate and comments that took place yesterday and again this morning demonstrates even more strongly that our Constitution is a long way short of providing good governance. Honourable Members, it all comes back to who is really in control. So much for the burning desire for continuity and the progress of Government; more likely continuity for the front runner for political suicide. The more the word Constitution is used the clearer it becomes that its structure in relation to electing membership, to put it diplomatically, is quite amateur. The concerns that the outgoing Councillors have on the introduction of this revised Constitution, claiming that it was not fit for purpose and bulldozed through now rings many bells. However, having said that, I am very pleased that members felt able to express views freely. This call for a review is not about individual Councillors own interest, it is about doing what is best for sustaining a future for our fellow islanders as a whole, not individuals. On the future political front, I am well aware that we will come up against some quite strong opposition from the corridors of power. Likewise we have now heard that our members are not convinced that an adjustment is the right way forward and, of course, we can also expect opposition coming from the community. I am also aware that the opposition from the corridors of power will be around that we do not have and will not find the right calibre of people to take on the bigger responsibility in the political arena if there are any changes. Well, Honourable Members, at the end of the day, it is for you as Councillors, representing the people of St Helena, to be guided by the majority of the wishes of the people. Here, I would emphasise, the wishes of the majority. Not a few people in a pub, family interests over a pint of beer, on the golf course or in social circles where a few people are said to be concerned, but where the whole voice of the both young and old men and women of the island as a whole is to be heard. I therefore beg you, Honourable Members, to rebuff any such suggestion that we do not have the right calibre of people to take on meaningful, political responsibility, but to take stock of your thoughts and analyse the calibre of island people who have been Councillors over the past thirty-five years, good people don't fit for no good reason. To me, Members, the answer is quite clear. We humans love a challenge and if the challenge is not rewarded with job satisfaction we move on. Politics in St Helena is a huge challenge, but the structure of our Constitution now, like before, will bring no job satisfaction in its true sense. For me, hiding behind the excuse of not finding the right calibre of people is a sign of weakness to be used to hold on to power and not to disturb one's comfortable little nest either in financial, social circles. Honourable Members, it is my honest opinion that if there is no change to the political structure during the next election term it will cost the island at least another decade of the status quo, just muddling on through.

Turning now to my Education Motion and concerns about costs and priority allocations, I feel I just need to make the point that we really do need to make quite sure that in allocating funds we are getting our priorities right and not just going with the applicant with the strongest voice and influence or territorial power or election votes. In this respect, I have to pick up on a comment made by my newly-crowned partner in crime, who I welcome as our newly-appointed Honourable Financial Secretary, relating to project costs for the Education Reorganisation Project and he said, in relation to costs, 'the Primary Schools would be best in their own communities', or words similar to that effect. I feel I have to place on record that it

is not for this Council or the Financial Secretary to say whether the island in its long-term planning should stay with the status quo, that the three existing schools or the new, that decision is for the majority of the community as a whole to decide, even if there is a wait of twenty years to take its place on the budget list. As to my new Friend's comments, it is with the greatest respect that I have to comment that my understanding is that it is for officials to advise Council on the democratic process of governance and it is their primary role on Legislative Council and not to influence the democratic political decision making and I trust my Honourable Friend will accept my comments in good faith as that is what my understanding is of the role of officials serving on Council.

Madam Speaker, closing on a note of job satisfaction, it will be remiss of me not to officially record, as Chairman of the Education and Employment Committee, my grateful thanks to all the staff of the Education Directorate for more than doubling their output performances in increasing attainment levels over the last academic year. Our most grateful thanks are also to the interim Director, John Sullivan, the two Dishonourable Councillors Tara Thomas and Michael Benjamin for their invaluable contribution of the three to refloating a sinking ship. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. The Honourable Stedson Francis?

The Hon. Stedson Francis –

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members, I am rising to support the Motion for the adjournment sine die and I would just like to publicly thank former Councillor, Tara Thomas, for her invaluable input and the time she has served with us on this Council and wish her well for her future endeavours.

Madam Speaker, I would just like to say that we should be doing more in providing care for our long-term, elderly citizens who requires it and I know there are people at home, some living alone, who require such attention. I am aware that ever since its planning stage, the Community Care Centre, DfID reduced the number of bed spaces from what was asked for at the time and here we are today still short of bed spaces. I understand that the additional accommodation is being provided at Cape Villa for the more able persons, but I sincerely hope that consideration will be given to the Princess Royal Community Care Home for more bed spaces for those in need of full-time care. After all, there is enough physical room to enable a few more rooms to be added on and all the other supporting facilities are already in place.

Madam Speaker, I'd just like to express concerns about the Power Station upgrade. Whilst some might say this is an operational issue, the risk of running the whole island on one generator up until December, with the likelihood of additional consumption during the Christmas period, I would say is everybody's concern.

Madam Speaker, the good progress being made on the Airport Project I would hope that all work carried out so far has been captured on film for the record.

I would also like to say that I still haven't had a reply to my question that was asked at the last formal session of the Legislative Council concerning the Wind Turbines and its individual outputs during the last six months and I hope I can receive a reply soon.

Finally, I would just like to say thank you to those I worked with during the last three years on the Public Accounts Committee under the Chairmanship of Mrs Ethel Yon, Lynette Styles and currently Mr Tony Leo. Thanks also to Mr Colin Owen, former Chief Auditor, for his guidance and support during my tenure and look forward to working with him in his new role as Financial Secretary, and also congratulations to Councillors Raymond Williams and

Cyril Gunnell for being elected to the Public Accounts Committee, I wish them well also. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. The Honourable Mervyn Yon?

The Hon. Mervyn Yon –

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I believe that members of the public, together with elected members, are aware of the upgrading of the Power House in Ruperts Valley, but I also believe there are concerns and questions raised from both parties relating to the progress and risks of the installation and distribution. Madam Speaker, I am not sure how much the information that I am about to give will help to ease some of the fears anticipated from the work that is in progress, but I trust it will help Honourable Members and the general public if they are listening.

Madam Speaker, I will begin by saying that Basil Read has been contracted to carry out the civil works at the Power Station which will include the breaking out of existing concrete and preparing and casting new bases. Outside of the Power House, they will be installing new base oil tanks. The temporary generator that will be installed to provide power to the island during the planned power cut has been positioned at the back of the Power Station and all fuel lines extended, also three of the existing generators have been removed in preparation for the installation of the new ones which should have arrived on the RMS Wednesday morning. It is also pleasing to know that two of the three generators expected to arrive are identical to the temporary one and this will give options to the contractor should there be a catastrophic failure with the temporary generator during the shutdown phase. The third generator is a much smaller one. Madam Speaker, during the shutdown period, Barlow World will be in full control of the power generation but the Energy Division will have their Generation Engineers monitoring the temporary generator around the clock during the work in progress. Also, Honourable Members, to avoid peak loading during the shutdown periods, all people and businesses with standby generators, including the Governor, have been advised to have their generators serviced and fuelled and to use if necessary to reduce peak loading. It is also the intention of the Energy Division to connect Solomons Bakery and Shop at Half Tree Hollow, together with some properties nearby, to a mobile generator to help the reduced loading. An interesting piece of information for elected members and that is to say that as part of the Barlow World contract, they will be setting the switches correctly at Pounceys and Lemon Tree Gut on completion of the refurbishment of the Power House and that the current programme is to bring the Power Station back into service by 30th November, and not by the end of December. I also would like to alert members that there will be an island-wide power outage on Sunday, 21st September from 09.00 hrs to 17.00 hrs to allow the Energy Division to make the necessary changeover to the temporary generator to allow for the commencement of the installation of the new generator sets. Regular updates will be given on progress as work progresses.

Madam Speaker, it was also very pleasing to hear yesterday that the Income Related Benefits and the Basic Island Pension will be increased hopefully from October of this year, as was committed in the 2012/13 budget speech. This is very encouraging for those who are in receipt of IRB and BIP since they are expecting this increase, regardless of the amount. The budget speech also talked about funds being made available to renovate and expand stock of Government Landlord Houses and that eleven additional units would be created during 2012/13. My question, Madam Speaker, how many of these have been achieved?

Madam Speaker, an undertaking was given that after three months of monitoring the mitigation process of the development of the closure of Sandy Bay Clinic a report would be

brought to Executive Council. The three months ended on 31st August, but to date no information has been received whereby no information can be taken back to the constituents of Sandy Bay as promised by their elected representatives. Also, Madam Speaker, the constituents are concerned about what will happen with the Clinic. They're asking if will it become a white elephant standing on a hill. The constituents would also like to have a meeting called by those in authority to explain what is to happen to the Clinic since they do not wish to have any development in that area without they knowing what is planned. They would also like to know why was the Clinic handed over to Crown Estates at the beginning of the mitigation period and not wait until the end.

Madam Speaker, unfortunately, due to the wording of my question on the RMS it was not possible to ask a couple of my supplementary questions. However, I will now raise them in this session. Is it possible for this House to be told who owns the RMS and should the answer be St Helena, then would you agree that when it goes out of commission it should be based in St Helena?

Madam Speaker, I became very disappointed yesterday during the reading of one of the expositions for a particular Motion when it was said that there should only be the best to stand on Executive Council. Madam Speaker, I believe that as Executive Council members we should be working as a united body and not portraying to the public that we are divided and disjointed.

Finally, Madam Speaker, I believe that the Radio Station at Pounceys will finally close on 25th December 2012. How disappointing to close on that day. Are the people of this island going to be deprived of hearing the Queen's Christmas Message and their family and friends Christmas messages from abroad? I beg of whoever is responsible please give consideration to our residents who enjoy the pleasure of listening to Radio St Helena.

And I will also like to end by thanking the Honourable Raymond Williams and Cyril Gunnell for taking up the challenge of being PAC members. This is an important role, but I'm sure they are capable of their responsibilities and it's a big thank you to the Honourable Stedson Francis and Brian Isaac for the time that they served as Public Accounts Committee members. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Any other Honourable Member wishes to speak? Honourable John Cranfield?

The Hon. John Cranfield –

Thank you, Madam Speaker, I'd just like to rise in support of the adjournment.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Any other Honourable Member wishes to speak? In which case, I will suspend the sitting for ten minutes and then we will invite the Honourable Acting Chief Secretary to respond.

Council suspended.

Council resumed.

The Speaker –

Next item, please?

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

Resumed debate.

The Speaker –

Thank you. The Honourable Acting Chief Secretary.

The Hon. Gillian Francis –

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Members this morning for their comments. The theme that seems to be running through this morning's debate seems to be centred around finance and budgeting. However, Honourable Members will be aware that we have a very limited pot of funds that has been made available to us. We are all aware of the global downturn. Honourable Members will know that the UK Government has given St Helena an opportunity to grow the economy. That opportunity, as Honourable Members will know, is through the airport development. And with a very limited budget, we need to make careful decisions.

The Honourable Brian Isaac mentioned the benefits system. I agree that we, as a Government, need to be mindful of the vulnerable. There are issues and anomalies that have been raised already by Honourable Members about the Income Related Benefits System, but Honourable Members will be aware that work is ongoing in terms of looking at those anomalies, looking at those issues, and, as the Honourable Member said, York University has been appointed and is currently carrying out work, but that work cannot be looked at in isolation, it has to go hand in hand with other work streams, such as work that is ongoing or about to be started on introducing a minimum wage for St Helena.

The Honourable Cyril Gunnell raised concern. He said about the unfair distribution of funds within St Helena Government. I understand, however, that Honourable Members as a whole took part in discussions, I think it was in June, when there were discussions held about the medium term expenditure framework when the pot was actually allocated to Directorates and agreed by Honourable Members. There will, however, be opportunity for Honourable Members to make an input in the ongoing budget round discussions that are due to take, well, have already begun with the Committees and Honourable Members will have opportunity as a whole Legislative Council to take part in discussions in determining the end result of that budget allocation. Here again, Madam Speaker, with the limited amount of money there are issues that need to be addressed and work that needs to carry on, like, for instance, the elimination of untargeted subsidies.

If I may go on to just reflect on what the Honourable Derek Thomas said. He mentioned that there is concerns about the Infrastructure Programme, implementation of the Infrastructure Programme, he mentioned particularly the Roads Project. He also talked about a report on the asphalt's purchase. I am not able to say whether a report was done, but I will certainly look into that and find out if one was done, whether it can be made available to Honourable Members.

The issue of transport also came up and the Honourable Derek Thomas mentioned and he queried the need for Managers to be taking vehicles home. That is an issue that has been raised in recent times and I undertake again to look into that matter.

The Honourable Bernice Olsson talked about work that has been taking place on looking at taxes. She mentioned that we should be looking at alternatives. I am sure that the Government would be open to suggestions. It was also mentioned about the human remains that have been stored in the Pipe Store. The Honourable Member will know that the Osiary Project is a part of the Infrastructure Programme, it's still listed as a project, but it was put on hold and the Honourable Member will know the reasons for that. The work that is ongoing in

Rupertsin connection with the airport, it will be probably not timely at this minute to actually go forward with the Osiary, we'd have to work until work is completed there and we can then reconsider whether and when the Osiary can be built, but I can assure the Honourable Member that SHG is mindful of this outstanding work to be done and it is a matter for discussion.

There was mention of raising education standards, and, yes, yesterday's Motion did bring the matter to attention.

The Honourable Raymond Williams mentioned SHAPE, and, again, it goes back to what monies we have available for allocation.

The other issue that comes out very strongly from yesterday's discussion and debate is the need for Constitutional review and yesterday's Motion, the passing of yesterday's Motion in this House, will, I'm sure, set the wheels in motion in terms making some progress in looking at our current Constitution.

The Honourable Stedson Francis talked about, again, the need to be doing more for our elderly. I agree and I understand that in terms of creating more bed spaces for our elderly work is ongoing at the minute and we should in the very near future see additional bed spaces at the CCC.

The Honourable Mervyn Yon mentioned about the Sandy Bay Clinic. Yes, it has been closed for three months; the three-month period was up at the end of August. A report, I understand, was presented to the Health and Social Welfare Committee on Wednesday of this week and that report will come to Executive Council very soon now.

It was also mentioned about Radio St Helena closing on Christmas Day. I can confirm that that is the plan, but it is hoped by that time the St Helena Broadcasting Corporation will be up and running with their radio station.

Finally, Madam Speaker, I would like to also echo what Honourable Members have said in terms of thanking the Honourable Brian Isaac and the Honourable Stedson Francis for their work on the Public Accounts Committee and also to thank Miss Tara Thomas for her valued contribution to the work of Legislative and the Executive Councils. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member.

Question put that the House adjourns sine die, put and agreed to.

The Speaker –

Thank you Honourable Members for your attendance and for your contributions.

Council adjourned sine die

