**EXCO MEETING OF 16 OCTOBER 2012**

This morning I welcomed back to EXCO Councillor Tony Green, who had been away attending conferences in Sri Lanka and Greenland; and also our Chief Secretary, Owen O’ Sullivan  recently  back from annual leave. And I thanked Gilly Francis, an outstanding public servant, for her excellent performance as acting Chief Secretary during the past few months.

Today we had before us four papers seeking a decision. The first paper proposed that we should adopt a policy to deliver a ‘public-private sector partnership in agriculture’.  This would see SHG and Enterprise St Helena sharing with the private sector the financial risk attached to enabling a significant increase in the local production of agricultural produce.  Noting that the policy had been approved by the Natural Resources Development and Environment Committee, Councillors supported the proposal and directed that work should be taken forward to give effect to the policy.  Publicity for the policy, explaining how it will work, will follow shortly.

Our next paper described an interesting and innovative proposal to establish a commercially operated campsite in the Thompson’s Wood area. The venture would require almost 5 acres of land to be excised from the national Forests Estate near Thompson’s Wood and Councillors were asked to approve this.  Councillors welcomed the proposal which they viewed as offering an attractive and ‘green’ alternative to traditional hotel style accommodation.  Another positive aspect of the proposed development was that the two individuals behind it, one from the UK and one from St Helena, had considerable experience of operating camp sites in Europe.

Next up we reviewed a paper which sought to tackle a problematic and complex issue related to increases to IRB and BIP.  Pending a full overhaul of the payment of benefits the University of York had agreed to assist with looking at the options available to SHG to deliver an increase in IRB and BIP rates in October, as heralded earlier this year following the increase of 4.7% made in April.  Councillors reviewed the options but after some discussion it was recognised that the Attorney General’s Chambers would need to recommend how the proposed increase could be made for those genuinely in need without infringing the regulations governing benefit payments.  We asked the Attorney General to report to the next meeting of EXCO how this might be achieved. In the meantime, Council was concerned to ensure the least well off should receive an appropriate uplift to their benefits payments and that it should be backdated to 1 October.

The final paper was simply a matter of correcting the Customs tariff classification of lime from 20% to 5%. This followed an oversight when the tariff was introduced in April 2011. The intention had been for both cement and lime to be set at 5% to encourage the use of lime in the restoration and maintenance of traditional buildings.  Councillors had no difficulty in agreeing to set the tariff for lime at the lower rate of 5%.

And with that we concluded our EXCO meeting today at just after 11.15.

Finally*,* many of you will know that tomorrow, Wednesday, we have a by-election in the East Constituency and I would once again urge as many of you as possible that are entitled to vote, to please find time to cast your vote.  This is important. It is about your government. So please take part and make your choice; exercise your right to vote to select the candidate that you judge will represent you as you would wish to be represented.

Thank you as always for listening and a very good afternoon to you all.

**Mark Capes**

**Governor**

**16 October 2012**