

**OPEN AGENDA PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

Copy No: 1

No: 51/2017

**Memorandum for Executive Council**

**SUBJECT**

**WAYS TO IMPROVE OPENESS AND TRANSPARENCY**

Memorandum by the Acting Chief Secretary

**ADVICE SOUGHT**

**1. Council is asked to consider ways and means of improving openness and transparency and to advise whether the proposals outlined in paragraph 6 should be pursued.**

**BACKGROUND & CONSIDERATIONS**

2. There is a perception that SHG conducts its business in a shroud of secrecy despite the fact that there are many publications, reports and press releases that are released for public information which would counter this claim.

3. However, it goes without saying that it is in SHG's interest to be able to explain, clarify and justify its actions so that the public can better hold SHG to account for the services that it provides. Greater access to SHG information should lead to greater accountability, better quality of services and improved governance in the longer term.

4. The Code of Practice for Public Access to SHG Information was published in September 2014 and has to some extent laid the foundation for the development of Freedom of Information (FOI) and Data Protection legislation which Members are actively pursuing. This in itself should provide a catalyst for changing mindsets and encouraging more openness and transparency.

5. Within the last ten years or so, SHG has made considerable effort to keep the public informed through various means including issue of Press Releases, Newsletters, radio discussions, public and constituency meetings, surgeries with follow up one to one meetings if requested and more recently, social media provides daily news to the public which they can comment on. In addition, a number of documents such as the Rolling Procurement Plan and Contracts Register are also published online. Executive Council and Council Committees also conduct some of its business in open session with a report on the Executive Council meeting broadcast on radio and published the same day. (It is noted that the Council Committee (Rules of Procedure) Order, 2010 states '*Meetings shall be held in public except where, in respect of any item of business, the Chairman directs or the Committee resolves that the public should be excluded because the nature of that business is such that it ought to be treated as confidential*'). The Governor has just recently given

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Councillors an authority to be more open in the information they provide to the public. And there will be a Register of Members' Interests published on line. Formal meetings of the Legislative Council and Public Accounts Committee have for many years been open to the public and broadcast live.

6. However, it is important to continue with the 'open government and transparency' agenda. In going forward, the above measures/practice could be supplemented by the following:

(a) publishing memoranda and/or supporting papers and minutes for the open sessions of Executive Council and Council Committee meetings, with memoranda and papers being published in advance of the meetings. It is noted that some Council Committee minutes are already published and that the Council Committee (Rules of Procedure Order), 2010 states *'It shall be the duty of the Chairman to ensure, either during the consideration of each item of business or as a separate agenda item, that each meeting specifically addresses the question which (if any) items of business should be the subject of publicity and whether any of them maybe publicised in advance of the minutes of the meeting being approved.'*

(b) including a standing 'publicity/consultation' agenda item for each meeting and thereafter publishing a report.

(c) recording and broadcasting the open sessions;

(d) changing the meeting times to allow those who are working during the day to attend;

(e) changing meeting venues to encourage better attendance;

(f) publishing minutes of constituency meetings, public meetings, and the results of consultations;

(g) making a presumption in favour of publishing any commissioned reports.

(h) making more use of social media eg development of a Councillors' Facebook page – this will have to be managed with perhaps just one or two persons responsible for the page . There could also be more use of the SHG's YouTube channel.

(i) producing short and snappy summaries of monthly Council committee meetings in a press release within 24 hours of the meeting. (Some Committee Chairmen and Directors have already started to provide summaries via the SHG Press Office).

(i) allowing members of the public to suggest a topic for debate in formal Legislative Council meetings and if there is enough public support for the same, then the matter has to be debated. This would be line with UK practice where matters petitioned on line have to be debated if there are sufficient 'on line signatures'. This

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could be another way to stimulate interest in the workings of the Legislative Council.

7. Information also needs to be conveyed in a way in which it can be absorbed and used easily, including for the media. The SHG website will therefore need to be revised to make it more user friendly and easier to navigate. The possibility of an 'alert' system so that new material can be easily identified can also be explored, as well as using podcasts/recordings of selected items from open sessions for uploading on SHG website. Methods of communication will also need to be considered. An open and inclusive Government will need to ensure continual dialogue with the public at all levels including children and young people and underrepresented groups, which is very important. It should be borne in mind that everyone does not have access to the internet.

8. Whilst SHG should conduct its business on a presumption of openness, there will be exceptions. For example, information relating to sensitive matters concerning individuals, national security and matters that are commercially sensitive should not be released or discussed in public. Due consideration will also need to be given to timing and the language used so as to avoid any unnecessary scaremongering and angst for the public.

### FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9. There are no direct implications arising from this paper. However, there will be costs associated with publishing documents in the newspapers and for hard copies to be made available in public places. Recording and broadcasting meetings will also cost but the media could possibly be encouraged to do this at their own expense. Revamping the SHG website will also incur additional expense.

### ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

10. There are no economic implications arising from this paper.

### CONSISTENCY WITH INVESTMENT POLICY PRINCIPLES

11. More openness and transparency will be conducive to investment and will support Investment Policy Principles:

1. *Make St Helena a desirable and competitive destination to do business by removing barriers to investment.*
2. *Support an economy which is accessible to all potential investors and promote investments across the economy.*
4. *Promote fair, consistent, timely and transparent decision making.*

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**PUBLIC / SOCIAL** 12. More openness and transparency should have a positive

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**IMPACT** public/social impact and will likely instil more trust and confidence in SHG.

**ENVIRONMENTAL  
IMPACT** 13. Nil.

**PREVIOUS  
CONSULTATION /  
COMMITTEE  
INPUT** 14. Other than an e-mail exchange with elected Members about the need for improved openness and transparency, there has been no prior discussion in Committees. Comments received were generally supportive of the need to improve current practice/procedure. The need for timeliness and follow up was also highlighted.

**PUBLIC  
REACTION** 15. The public is likely to welcome any initiatives by SHG to be more open and transparent.

**PUBLICITY** 16. Publicity will be covered in the ExCo report and associated broadcast. There should also be a separate Press Release to let the public know what information will be made available and where it can be found.

**SUPPORT TO  
STRATEGIC  
OBJECTIVES** 17. Openess and transparency is key to achieving the national goals set out in the 10 Year Plan.

*GAF*

**OPEN /CLOSED  
AGENDA ITEM** 18. For discussion in the Open Session.  
Corporate Support  
Corporate Services  
*DATE OF MEMO*

12 September 2017