



St Helena  
Government

## ST HELENA GOVERNMENT

St Helena Government – Proceedings of Minister's  
Question Time – Tuesday, 24 June 2025 – Twenty First  
Sitting

Laid Upon The Table 24th October 2025



**ST. HELENA**  
**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

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**THE DEPUTY SPEAKER**

The Honourable Catherine Harris-Cranfield

**ELECTED MEMBERS**

The Honourable Gillian Ann Brooks  
The Honourable Mark Alan Brooks  
The Honourable Ronald Arthur Coleman  
The Honourable Corinda Sebastiana Stuart Essex  
The Honourable Robert Charles Midwinter  
The Honourable Julie Dorne Thomas  
The Honourable Karl Gavin Thrower  
The Honourable Andrew James Turner

**OVERSEAS**

The Honourable Cyril Gunnell (Speaker)  
The Honourable Jeffrey Ellick  
The Honourable Martin Henry

**ABSENT**

The Honourable Christine Lilian Scipio  
The Honourable Elizabeth Knipe  
The Honourable Acting Attorney General, Mr Andrew Dawson (Ex-Officio Member)

**Legislative Council Office Assistant**

**Miss Morgan Thomas-Henry**

## **PROCEEDINGS OF MINISTERS QUESTION TIME**

Tuesday, 24 June 2025

The Council met at 10.00 am  
In the St Helena Community College, Jamestown

**(The Honourable Deputy Speaker in the Chair)**

### **ORDER OF THE DAY**

**1. FORMAL ENTRY OF THE DEPUTY SPEAKER**

**2. ADDRESS BY THE DEPUTY SPEAKER**

Good morning Honourable Members. Welcome from the Community College, where the last MQT meeting is being held today. We have apologies from the Speaker, Minister Jeffrey Ellick and Minister Martin Henry, who are all off Island. We also have apologies from Minister Christine Scipio and Councillor Elizabeth Knipe, who are both unwell. This is the 21st meeting of Ministers Question Time, and the final one for this Legislative Council. I would hope members of the public are able to live stream or listen via SAMS Radio One. The final topic for this morning is 'Achievements made against the St Helena Government vision and strategy' April 2022 to March 2025. The duration of the session will be one hour from when the first question is asked. The Clerk and timekeeper today is Miss Morgan Henry-Thomas. I beg your pardon, Miss Morgan Thomas-Henry. Before we proceed, I would like to read a message from the Speaker. Dear Honourable Members of St Helena Legislative Council, I write very briefly to you from the Elizabeth Manor Guest House in Johannesburg, where I am being accommodated awaiting surgery on my eyes. Nothing would please me more than to be with you presiding over the last Minister's Question Time for this term of Council. But alas, I have been receiving medical treatment in Johannesburg. The medical procedure this week will be the second of two arranged for me by the Health Portfolio in St Helena and ER 24 in Johannesburg. I am extremely grateful to both. The first Minister's Question Time was held on the 24th of March, 2023. Up until May 2025 there were 20 sittings. This one arranged for today is the 21st sitting. This is a great achievement by the Council on behalf of the people of Saint Helena. In fact, Ministers Question Time is one of the most significant developments by the Council in the last four years. Asking questions and questioning the answers, is a healthy and important process of Parliament on behalf of the people that this Parliament represents. I wish you all well in your endeavours today. It is unfortunate I cannot be there with you physically, but rest assured, I'll be thinking of you, and I'm grateful to the Deputy Speaker, Cathy Cranfield for standing in for me. I know you will

agree that health has to come first, God willing I hope to be among you before the Council close. Honourable Cyril Gunnell, Speaker, St Helena Legislative Council. That was from the Speaker in Johannesburg.

I'll now ask the Clerk to announce the first question, please.

### 3. QUESTIONS

#### *Question No 1 - The Honourable Robert Midwinter*

The Deputy Speaker -

The Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter -

Thank you Madam Deputy Speaker. Madam Deputy Speaker, will the Honourable Chief Minister tell this House what reforms have been made by her Government to the island's Tax Regime during their period in office?

The Deputy Speaker -

The Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister -

Good morning, Honourable Deputy Speaker, and thank you for the first question. As this question relates to the tax regimes, I will hand over to my Minister for Treasury and Economic Development, because I'm sure he will be able to give a more informative answer, and I'll support him if necessary.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you, Chief Minister. Minister Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks -

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for his question. Madam Deputy Speaker, I do have a cold this morning, so there might be a little bit of sniffing and sneezing going on, so I do apologise in advance. So to address the Honourable Member's question, there has been a number of tax regimes during our term in office. I think if we all cast our minds back to very early in our term, in 2022, after just coming out of COVID, we did respond to the island's needs by introducing a cost of living policy, and that was basically to target essential goods, to take them from what was some 20% or 5% down to 0%. And of course, this would help the cost of living throughout the island and specially targeting the most vulnerable. We also made some changes recently to stamp duty, and that is to help with the cost of acquiring land and buildings, and basically it is targeting more the first time buyers, and offering a 0% stamp duty relief on purchases up to 100,000 pounds. So it is a tax change, but it is mainly designed to encourage St Helenians to make St Helena their home and those living abroad to return and make St Helena their permanent place of residence. Also Madam Deputy Speaker we did change once I find out what the position was for import duty on heavy machinery, including lorry cement mixers and so on, they were set at 35 and 45%. Obviously, I took the initiative to reduce that to 5% with the aim of trying to encourage investment in those very sectors, mainly the construction industry Madam Deputy Speaker. We've also improved, as you know, we've made changes, we do this annually in relation

to alcohol and tobacco. And there is a policy that we tend to apply each year, which is the increases in both alcohol and tobacco by inflation plus 1%. And we have, over the years, introduced some tariffs on alcohol to more define or target low percentage alcohol drinks, and obviously reducing the amount of tax we apply to them, encouraging people to drink more low alcohol beverages. We've also made some changes to improve the tax compliance. So those who pay taxes might know that they've been getting extra letters reminding them that their due date to pay taxes is near, and we've seen a result of that Madam Deputy Speaker, with better collection of taxes. Obviously this goes back into government revenue and then is dispersed among essential public services. So those are the main big areas of tax changes that we have made over the past four years Madam, Deputy Speaker. I know there's a lot more that we wanted to do, but obviously, given the budget and the constraints and the pressures that we faced over the whole of the four year term, we weren't able to make any additional tax changes that would incentivise in economic development. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you, Minister Brooks. Councillor Thrower, Midwinter, I beg your pardon.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter -

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. And I'd like to thank the Honourable Minister for his very detailed response, and he did touch on towards the end there what I was then going to ask, because I'm well aware that it has been an aspiration of this government to increase the level of basic rate income tax that the tax threshold there, and I think you did touch on it towards the end there. But can you, for the benefit of the listening public, say why that hasn't come to fruition?

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you. Minister Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks -

So as my Honourable friend alluded to, he's quite right. We did do some initial work on looking at the tax thresholds, the tax brackets. This was led by our Economist but unfortunately, we lost our Economist and we've been struggling to replace that Economist ever since. I think all Members will obviously be aware of the constraints we have had over the past four years in terms of, in Economists. And we really supposed to have two, and we've been struggling even to have one. So a lot of that work would have been done by the Economist and taken into effect the loss of earnings that that would have on the recurrent budget in terms of tax collections. Nevertheless though Madam Deputy Speaker, we have done some initial work, and I am sure that the new government will pick that up, and hopefully at the same time, we will have a substantial Economist in post. As members will also remember we did set some money aside in last year's budget for a consultancy to look at tax compliance and the tax regime overall, including pensions, so we haven't recruited that consultant yet. I know that was in progress, and hopefully with the recruitment of that consultant, we can have someone to specifically look at this area in terms of going forward and what is the best way to increase thresholds, but also to maintain some sort of government revenue in terms of the budget pressures that we face going forward. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you. Councillor Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter -

Thank you. Madam Deputy Speaker, a final one from me, because the Honourable Minister did make reference to the cost-of-living policy when he started off. And we are all mindful of what's going on in the Middle East at the moment. So whilst I appreciate that the Chief Minister is not in a position to talk about what policies could be put in place in the future, can she confirm whether or not she is in discussions with the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office regarding the current situation and the impact that could have on St Helena?

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you. Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister -

Thank you, Honourable Deputy Speaker. At this time, no, there's been no conversations directly with me. I'm guessing, as we can all say, it's a case of changing overnight at this particular time. But I'm sure when they know exactly, a little bit more information as to what impacts that will have, no doubt those conversations will take place.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you. Next question.

#### ***Question No 2 - The Honourable Gillian Brooks***

The Deputy Speaker -

The Honourable Gillian Brooks.

The Hon. Gillian Brooks -

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Will the Honourable Chief Minister tell this House of any specific and robust programmes that SHG currently implements, or plans to implement, to actively promote farming as a viable small business opportunity for young adults and school leavers; to assist young entrepreneurs build skills, access land and resources, to bring high-value agricultural products to local markets and support our food security systems?

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you Honourable Member. Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister -

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker and I thank the Honourable Gillian Brooks for her question. Just for the listening public, as the Honourable Deputy Speaker has said, Minister Scipio is unwell today, so I am covering the fort while she's away, but I'm hoping that I can answer some of what you've done, both from ENRP perspective and I know that Minister Brooks will speak about the Economic Development and of course, I'll speak about Education as well. So to start, from the ENRP perspective, currently, ENRP does not have any programs that specifically targets young adults and school leavers. However, the Agriculture Division have given priority to young adults in some of their assessment of applications for arable land over the last three years and supported a group of young adults working together in a livestock syndicate to access pastureland. Going forward, as part of the development of the new Agriculture policy, we are including a policy option that will enable some of the larger assets to create smaller land plots for access, specifically by young people. Any Support Scheme arising through ENRP's limited budget from the

Agriculture Policy, including service provisions, is being proposed by the portfolio to make provision for young people alongside prioritising access to land. And so that is from the ENRP and if I can give you a little bit from Education. At Key Stage Four, the Harper site is actively used by the school to deliver agriculture as part of the options block for students. This program consists of locally developed qualifications aimed at providing practical and relevant pathways into farming, animal management and related fields. The curriculum is supported by the AQA unit Awards, which recognise student achievement in specific agricultural competencies and knowledge areas. In addition to this, the school has received approval to deliver the BTEC agriculture qualification. This represents a significant development in expanding and formalising agricultural education on Island, offering students a recognised vocational qualification that can support progression into employment or further education in the agricultural sector. These educational programs are designed not only to build technical skills in farming and animal care, but also to introduce young people to agriculture as a viable career, a small business opportunity. They align with wider efforts to enhance food security and promote sustainable local food production. Through the use of the Harper site and qualifications like BTEC agriculture, the school is actively contributing to the development of a skilled future workforce that is better prepared to access land, use resources effectively and contribute to high value local food products. In addition, post 16 are given the opportunity of doing their work placement in agriculture, if this is their choice of placement. I will ask Minister Brooks, Deputy Speaker, if he could speak on the Economic Development.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you. Minister Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks -

Thank you Madam Deputy Speaker. Yes, I just like to touch on one specific project that we are overseeing through the Economic Development in relation to high value agriculture. So a project is on its way with SHG conducting a strategic value chain analysis of the entire St Helena coffee sector. This baseline analysis has been completed. And the consultant Redberry SA, or some of you might remember if you cast your minds back to the Showcase event, there was a guy on Island called Dylan Cummings, I think his name was, but don't quote me on that. Anyway, because of the Showcase event, Dylan visit the island and was able to have a proper detailed look at the coffee production on Island, which resulted in this initiative taking ground. So as well as identifying key opportunities for investment, innovation, capacity building and infrastructure development, the intent is to foster job creation, gender inclusion and climate resilience across the entire coffee value chain. This is the ultimate aim of encouraging St Helena's gold, global branding positioning as a premier coffee origin. So part of this project is to understand current land under production, as well as identifying other suitable land for coffee that meets criteria of sustainable development. Key to this will be the development of a farmers network, which includes on-boarding, training, mentorship programs for new, local and international participants, encouraging more young entrepreneurs to work and thrive in the sector, and this is key to the expected training programs across all roles associated with the industry, and this will be absolutely sort of necessary for this whole strategy to work. Next up for the project is to align all stakeholders, from farmers to funders, every voice does matter. The findings of the strategic value chain analysis will be presented to stakeholders shortly, to foster dialog and consensus. Ongoing communication and collaboration will be the central of this engagement process. This is a significant piece of work, which, if successful, will increase skills, labour employment, as well as benefiting the island as a whole. Sorry, ma'am, sniffing and the words won't come out at the same time. So this Consultancy project is expected to be completed quarter three in this year. Thank you.



The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you Minister Brooks. Councillor Brooks.

The Hon. Gillian Brooks -

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Chief Minister you may not have this sort of statistic at hand. But I was wondering if you have any idea of how many students we actually have, and this may be something you don't have at hand?

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you. Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister -

Thank you, Madam Speaker. No, I don't have figures with me here today. I know that we would hope that there would be more, but obviously it is the choice of the students if this is an area that they would like to focus on. But now, with qualifications in place, we can only hope that that will encourage more students to show an interest in sectors such as this. But I don't have the numbers with me here today.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you, Honourable Chief Minister. Honourable Gillian Brooks.

The Hon. Gillian Brooks -

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker and Minister Brooks, and my apologies if you did mention this, but you both gave very detailed responses there. But did you mention any funding into this consultancy, did you mention any funding?

The Deputy Speaker -

Minister Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks -

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. No, I didn't mention anything about funding. But just to answer your question, the consultancy and the strategic analysis work was paid for out of my innovations budget. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you.

The Hon. Gillian Brooks -

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker -

Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex -

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Can the Honourable Minister state why this coffee project has not had more publicity and when indeed it was first launched?

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you. Honourable Minister Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks -

I believe, sorry, just thinking of the date, it would have been just over a year now, I think when it's been launched, but as far as I know, all coffee producers have been engaged in this project. Part of the requirements which I gave this consultant is that he needs to get at least 80% of the coffee producers on the island sign up to this initiative, which was basically the choice in funding the project. So put it in other words, I said to him, if you can get 80% of the producers on board, then we will fund this project through the innovations budget. I believe he's got more than 80% of the coffee producers on board. So he has engaged with all stakeholders that is in, either thinking about producing coffee or is actually currently producing coffee. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you Minister. Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex -

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. For clarification, when I said publicity, I did not just mean engagement with coffee producers and potential coffee producers. I was talking about wider public information regarding the fact that this has been launched and will be being developed going forward.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you. Minister Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks -

So, no I don't think there's have been any wider engagement. We have target the sectors that obviously this would be a benefit to. As Ministers, we've talked about this project a few times, including our In-scope program several times, once with all Ministers when we talk about our achievements over the term and also with Sustainable Development, when we talk about the achievements through sustainable development. So no, to answer your question, there hasn't been wider public engagement, it has been very much a sector target engagement. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you. Next question, please.

***Question No 3 - The Honourable Ronald Coleman***

The Deputy Speaker -

The Honourable Ronald Coleman.

The Hon. Ronald Coleman -

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Will the Honourable Chief Minister tell this House what progress has been made in improving financial management and reducing budget deficits for an effective, efficient and accountable Public Service?

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you. Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister -

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker and I thank the Honourable Ronald Coleman for his question. No doubt this is going to be a tag team on this particular one. But obviously when we came into this government, there was a lot of emphasis being put on effective, efficient and accountable Public Service. Obviously, we continue to work and strive to be the best that we can be as a government in its entirety, but you will have heard a number of times mentioned how understaffed Finance was when we first came into our positions. I am really pleased to be able to say today that huge progress has been made, and I'll share with you some of the things that is now being produced on a more regular basis. So budget execution report showing comparison between budget and actuals are produced on a monthly basis. Management accounts, showing the financial performance of the government as a whole, including trading accounts and projects funding and financial position of the government in terms of assets and liabilities are produced quarterly, giving a clearer picture of how the finances are being managed and used. Forecasting takes place each quarter and allows SHG to project the expected outturn to the end of the financial year, better allowing for early measures to be put in place to mitigate the risk of overspends. Overseas medical treatment, TC and air services losses are re forecasted each month because they are demand led and can change quite quickly month on month and obviously change quite substantially month on month. It has allowed us to take action much earlier than has been in the past. Overall, these major measures have allowed us to plan better in respect of the use of scarce resources, to ensure that we protect government finances, but also ensure that essential services continue to be provided to the public. We are also up to date on producing our annual financial statements for SHG, having cleared the backlog, with the 2024-25 draft financial statements already produced and will be submitted to the Audit by the 30th of this month, which is within the three months of the year end. This is a substantial reduction in the production time and provides an opportunity for better decision making. And I would personally like to congratulate the Finance team and all the staff within Finance on their achievements, because this is something that we've been pushing for, for a very long time. So it does demonstrate that when you've got the right amount of staff and the skills in house, we can achieve. So well done to you. Further, we have implemented the strategic outcome framework, which provides a clear process for the prioritisation and allocation of funds. The use of this process has allowed us to present a sound evidence-based case to FCDO for this year's financial aid settlement, which included the 13.5 million capital funding resulting in a considerable uplift in financial aid. Through this process, we have been able to articulate the needs of the island in a different way than has been presented before, particularly those areas that have contributed to budget deficits in the past. Our ability to invest in the government workforce through the public sector pay increase, will help to support the retention of skilled and experienced staff, particularly in the areas of financial management. Confidence in SHG's financial management system is crucial to this, and the work to improve financial management outputs and outcomes over the last two years has certainly had an impact. And one that we'll be very familiar with is the implementation of the new Procurement Regulations that took place in November 2024, which incorporates ExCo consultation on procurements that is of a high complexity, and in the national interest, cross cutting and it increases the limits for recognising procurements, making the process more efficient and more onus on the Portfolio Directors to manage low complexity procurements. So that is some of the work that's been done. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you Chief Minister. Honourable Ronald Coleman.

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Just to thank the Chief Minister. I thought you said that the Minister for Finance was go add a bit, but nothing? Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you. Next question, please.

***Question No 4 - The Honourable Karl Thrower***

The Deputy Speaker -

The Honourable Karl Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower -

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Will the Honourable Chief Minister outline the specific measures this Government has taken during its term to support and stimulate growth in the private sector and indicate whether there are any measurable evidence, or is any measurable evidence? Sorry.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you. Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister -

Thank you Madam Deputy Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Karl Thrower for his question. On this one, I will ask Minister Brooks to take the lead, and if there's anything that I can add, I will do so.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you, Chief Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks -

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. So I would, I will touch on five main things that we did to help support or stimulate economic growth on St Helena. So I think I've mentioned this before, but you will all remember I talk a lot about the TDP, so the tourism development project, and under that project, we provided training for hospitality, customer service, tour guides, etc, anything that supports our tourism product on the island. As a result of that training, we were able to upskill by handing out over 230 certificates. So there's a great number of locals that has been now upskilled in the whole tour guide training. I think most of you all will know that when the cruise ship comes in, and Solomons' has buses put on for the cruise ship, they often employ people to be the tour guides on those buses, and a lot of those people were trained under the TDP. Another scheme we launched wasn't, I think, as successful as I would like it to be, but it was a reward scheme to try and generate greater presence on social media, including Facebook, Instagram, Tick Tok, things like that. What we did, we offered a reward for businesses that support tourism to make their sales more visible. So by increasing your social media presence, you could have been in receipt of, a relatively low sum of money, but still help towards your business initiatives. The Approved Investor Scheme, so many of you will know about that, that was in situ before this government, but over the term of this government, we have approved 14 new businesses overall, we approved six only in the last year, which total up to be 770,000 of additional investment through those six businesses. And overall, over the four years, there's a pledge of 6.6 million of investment through the approved investor scheme from local entrepreneurs, as well as international businesses. Some of you all

remember the Cannery proposal, I think we're all familiar with that. That went through the scheme and of course, if that is successful, that will not only create new jobs, new forms of revenue, but also help with exporting fish from the island, as they can tuna product. I talked before a little bit Madam Deputy Speaker, about the coffee analysis that we did. We also work on a, with the bee product, the bee sectors I should say, the bee producers, that's right, who produce honey, and looking at a second value added product in the form of royal jelly. And that work is on the way, and we've sent some of the bee producers off for training, all paid for again from my Innovations budget. We also actually pilot the initiative for the St Helena to be the first way of interacting with international payments through the RYFT card system. So with the initiative by SHG personnel, we were able to partner with RYFT and offer a payment machine that obviously can take payments for MasterCard and Visa. There's quite a few shops I know that is using now, Thorpe's retailers is one of the big ones that are using it, and more is coming online. I would also like to say that for the first time, Tristan Da Cunha will be taking up this initiative and requiring a RYFT machine so that when the cruise ships call in at Tristan, for the first time ever, they will be able to take international payments for those cruise ship visitors. And that was all through the initiative by Economic Development, in terms of getting this important financial, I don't know what's the word Madam Speaker, but financial means up and running. So those were some of the things that we did throughout our tenure. So thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you. Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister -

Thank you Honourable Deputy Speaker. I think also it is necessary to remind ourselves, because we can easily forget these things, because they get taken for granted after they're implemented, I guess. But this government has also focused our priorities on projects to either offer longevity and sustainability. So we've now got in place long term access, via our shipping contract with MACS. Obviously, we've got a longer-term contract and service from Airlink, as air and access to the island is very important when we talk about economic growth for our island. We've had improved connectivity. I know we'd like to do more, but that only happened, not even quite two years ago. We continue to subsidise and provide support in subsidising the barging from Rupert's to Jamestown and look forward to the port development in Rupert's being completed soon. Obviously, we would like to have done more or made more progress with regards to renewable energy, and I won't go into too much detail, because I know it's a question coming. But renewable energy, the agriculture policy, has been talked about here today, and of course, we are now undertaking reviews on how we can improve our banking services. So that's all to help with the private sector development.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you Honourable Chief Minister. Honourable Minister Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks -

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. And sorry I didn't touch on the last part of the question, was to indicate whether any of these are measurable by evidence. So I would say that obviously the improve investor scheme is very measurable, because to go through that scheme, you have to provide your forecast, your forecast for your business going forward, and if you are an existing business, obviously we do take information from existing businesses as well, to determine whether the business proposal would be successful or indeed meet the criteria of the improved investor scheme. As for things like the RYFT

payments, I guess there's no way of actually measuring the success of that, but I'm sure that if you speak to the businesses that are now offering those services, they will indicate that they've seen an increase in takings because of the RYFT payment services. I've spoken to them myself, but of course, I don't have evidence on paper to present today. And as well as the other initiatives that we talked about, in terms of opening the island and reinstating air access and shipping. Well, how do you measure that? I think we can all measure that in our own sort of opinions of whether that is good for the island or not. For me, it will definitely be yes, a big tick in the box, and in terms of some of the other stuff that I talk about, well, it's too early for anything to be measured in terms of the success of those innovations. So we hope that in the future, there will be some measurable evidence to suggest that those initiatives and projects has been successful. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you Honourable Minister Brooks. Councillor Midwinter sorry, Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower -

Thank you, Deputy Chair. Would the Honourable Minister be able to say whether they've reached their goal of having an increased tourist numbers when compared to before COVID?

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you. Minister Mark Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks -

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. And yes, that is an easy one, because I have stated before, but yes, our Tourism Recovery Strategy, which we set in the ending part of 2022, the objective of that was to meet pre-pandemic levels of tourism on the island. And I must congratulate all the efforts that not just this government, but the whole public service, tourism has put into this, including everyone in this room who I know has always promoted St Helena when they travelled abroad. And yes, we have surpassed that target just by a bit, but nevertheless, we did achieve what we set out to do. And I can also say there is a little bit of light at the end of the tunnel. March of this year, the Airlink service saw a small profit for the first time since before COVID. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you Minister Brooks. Next question, please.

#### ***Question No 5 - The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex***

The Deputy Speaker -

The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex -

Thank you Madam Deputy Speaker. Will the Honourable Chief Minister tell this House if St Helenians currently living abroad who wish to return to St Helena to take up employment in shortage occupation areas, are eligible for relocation packages commensurate with those offered to persons from other jurisdictions and if not, for what reason?

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you Honourable Member. Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister -

Thank you Madam Deputy Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Dr Corinda Essex for the question. I must first say that my response is based on a draft International Recruitment Strategy, so it hasn't been endorsed at this time. But if all goes well, that should be done before we leave the Council. St Helenians currently living abroad, who apply and are successful for employment in shortage occupation areas, will be eligible for a support package applicable to the specific grade of post. The package for returning St Helenians will, in general, be commensurate with the package that is being offered to persons from other jurisdictions, save that travel will be one way only, and if they have their own accommodation on Island, they will not be eligible for a rent allowance. Again, this is extract from a draft international recruitment strategy, so it's not in place at this time. The support package will comprise the following elements: travel – travel for migrant workers will be funded from country of origin to and from St Helena at the start and end of the contract; travel for returning Saints will be one way only, class of travel will be at economy rate. Relocation allowance – the relocation allowance ranges from 1000 to 2000 pounds and is designed to assist the employee in settling into life on St Helena. It is assumed that they will be used to cover costs such as rent deposits, telecoms and to enable the purchase of some personal effects whilst on island. These employees will not have a contractual benefit which covers the cost of shipping personal effects. Rent allowance – the primary reason for the rent allowance is that evidence suggests that at the lowest level, salaries could not reasonably support an individual who is required to rent a property at current market rates. This is recommended in order to attract international recruits to lower paid roles in St Helena. But as I said, whilst the international recruitment strategy is targeting key shortage areas and specific labour markets, St Helenians abroad who apply for such roles and who are successful will be eligible for relocation packages as advertised for each role. In addition to the key shortage areas, all adverts for local recruitment, carry the following note to applicants, which states, the St Helena Public Service welcomes all applications from across our whole community, including our St Helenian diaspora, wishing to return to St Helena. If you are a St Helenian currently living and working overseas, please contact us at [recruitment@sainthelena.gov.sh](mailto:recruitment@sainthelena.gov.sh) to discuss how we can support you. But as I said, I would caveat that to say it's not in place, well, that particular part is but the actual international recruitment strategy is still in draft, but it is anticipated that it will be approved before we finish our time in office on the 30th of June.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you Honourable Chief Minister. Honourable Minister, I beg your pardon, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex -

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Chief Minister for her response. Can she please clarify whether in fact, individuals from other jurisdictions are already benefiting from the relocation packages?

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you. Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister -

As far as I know for this particular international recruitment strategy, no, because, as I said, it's still in draft. But I do know that there is some recruitment, international recruitment, that has taken place because

of shortages, for instance, in the care settings, but that is similar to what is going to be considered under the international recruitment strategy, but it was done outside of the scope of this due to the urgency.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you Honourable Chief Minister. Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex -

Thank you Madam Deputy Speaker. May I ask why St Helenians in the diaspora were not eligible to benefit from the scheme that is already in place for persons from other jurisdictions?

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you. Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister -

All I can say to that is, it's still in draft, so it will be included when the international recruitment strategy is put in place, St Helenians will be incorporated. The actual piece that I said is already in place was done under urgent need.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you. Next question, please.

#### ***Question No 6 - The Honourable Andrew Turner***

The Deputy Speaker -

The Honourable Andrew Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner -

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Will the Honourable Chief Minister tell this House what improvements in the provisions of renewable energy on St Helena have been achieved under the Ministerial vision?

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you. Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister -

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Andrew Turner for his question. Again, with Minister Scipio not being here, I'll do my best to give you updates from an Executive Council perspective and no doubt Minister Brooks will be able to shed some light as well, because this is very much an EDIP project now, the renewable energy. So as far as I am aware, we are still hoping that we will be able to achieve our 80% renewable energy by 2027-28. Connect is progressing the modelling and design, phase two procurement process, for a new contractor to complete the work. At present, I'm told that all three potential pitches, bidders, sorry, are on track to submit their bids by Monday the 30th of June. Connect plans to hold the evaluation meeting during the course of that week, with the aim that the Project Board would be brought in on evaluation results and decision on preferred bidder early the following week. And as you all know, we've been very successful in obtaining funding from Green Overseas (GO) and we've had consultants on Island recently, known as ECA, I think you all met with them as well. So



just to give you an update in respect of their work, which is more around the regulatory framework. So they visited the island in mid-May to present and undertake consultation on their first draft documents with key stakeholders. Progress on this work stream has been delayed as a result of a number of issues. Connect and Connect Board of Directors were not able to respond with their comments to the draft licensing and legislative documents, provided by ECA UK until late June, due to the internal work priorities and an issue experienced with accessing their legal support provision until mid this month, to assist them with their review. Obviously, we all know AG Chambers advice and comments on all of the draft documents has not been possible due to work pressures at the Chambers and a period of leave for one of their drafters. No opportunity to seek approval from ExCo before purdah for a new interim utilities license without legislative reforms included, as had been originally planned, the plan, sorry. The above has resulted in a delay in the delivery of a second draft of the documents from ECA for review by key stakeholders and action in respect of the utilities license. However, in the meantime, the Utilities Regulatory Authority (URA), have provided their comments on all draft documents, and AGs Chambers returned comments on the overarching policy memorandum. ECA has secured an extension of time on their contract with Green Overseas for the work and an accept date for completion of work will only be determined once the full extent of the comments from the first round of draft documents is known by ECA. A draft grid code has been received and distributed to Connect and the URA for their comments. Next Steps: Connect is to return comments on the draft license and legislative documents by, well that should have already been done now, 20th of June; AG Chambers Drafter to advise whether comments can be sent to ECA on the individual documents by the end of this month; and the URA is next to provide comments on the draft grid code by the 4th of July; and ECA to update first draft license and legislative documents provisionally by the end of this month, taking into account all comments received on the first draft. So that's where we are with renewable energy at this time. So as I said, though, based on a few delays in the process, we haven't been told that the completion date has moved from 2027-28.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you Honourable Chief Minister. Honourable Minister Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks -

I'll try and add some, but I think the Chief Minister did a good job in explaining all that's been done, even though it's not within any of our portfolios. I think just to cast our minds back under this Ministerial Government, we did agree and approve a policy to get us to that 80% renewable energy. So that was done a long time ago, thinking about, oh, it seems like now. And also, the utilities provider, if we cast our minds back, some work was initially done by them before the model and design was actually undertaken by a consultant, just to understand the current infrastructure. So they did a power system study and also a grid stability report. So those are the things that all played a part in actually getting us to what will hopefully be planned going forward in generating 80% renewables by 2027-28. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you. Honourable Andrew Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner -

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, I'd like to extend my thanks to both Ministers for what's an extremely comprehensive response and it certainly sounds like there's an awful lot of bits of paper flying backwards and forwards between all the various parties. So just for clarity sake, does that mean there's been no actual sort of physical works yet undertaken on any kind of investment in the actual infrastructure?

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you Honourable Turner. Honourable Minister Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks -

No other than work, Madam Deputy Speaker that we talked about, power system, studies, the grid stability report, there has been no actual physical improvements to the infrastructure. However, Madam Deputy Speaker, we have identified what could be some possibly low hanging fruit in terms of battery, energy, storage solutions. And we are waiting for the consultancy to confirm, but we are thinking that we can possibly, within this year, go ahead and order some of those components that will make up the renewable energy project going forward. So primarily it was wind and solar, with energy stored through battery storage. And maybe a bit too early to say, but we are thinking especially through EDIP where there's funding available that we might be able to make some purchase or put in some orders for some battery energy storage solutions. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker -

Honourable Andrew Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner -

Thank you Madam Speaker, I'm very glad to hear that, actually, because obviously battery storage is potentially part of unlocking the renewable energy we're generating already. And on that note, I honestly, I know the Honourable Minister Scipio isn't here today, but would either of the two Ministers who are available, be aware if we are generating more or less energy renewably than we were doing when we started, at the beginning of our term?

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you. Honourable Minister Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks -

So I can 100% say no, we aren't. It's unfortunate, but some of the current windmills that is currently in situ is beyond their economic life. Connect did make an attempt to refurbish some of those windmills and keep them going longer but I think that didn't go as planned. And many of the listening public will know that if you drive past Deadwood Plain, it is likely that you will only see one windmill turning at this time. It is unfortunate that we weren't able to extend the life of those renewable solutions until we make progress with our newer renewable energy project, but that's where we are, Madam Deputy Speaker, and like I said, it was a disappointment all round, but we did get some good, I think it was 12/15, years out of those windmills, so they have been serving us well over the years. Unfortunately, we couldn't extend that a bit longer.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you. Honourable Andrew Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner -

Thank you Madam Deputy Speaker. Just one more from me, hopefully. The Minister stated in his one of, I think his first answer, that, of course, the goal is now 80% from renewable sources. But of course, a lot

of us will remember when we came into Council, the previous government has set a goal of 100%. I just think for the listening public, it be good to explain why there was the shift to a lower goal.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you. Honourable Chief Minister, Minister Brooks.

The Hon Mark Brooks -

So I think when we say 80%, we mean minimum 80%, so I think the goal is always to get to 100% but we have to be realistic here. There might be sometimes when there is no wind, there is no sun, and we might still have to use a component of generation from diesel. But as we said, our aspirations is to be 100% but I think we have to be a little bit cognisant that, in terms of our isolation and the need for maybe components to keep systems running, we might be at a time where, for instance, a windmill is down, and we might have to top that up with diesel powered generators. So, there will always be an element of diesel power generation within the new system, for periods of unexpected shutdown of the renewables. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker -

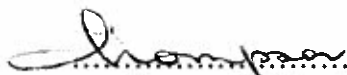
Thank you. Honourable Chief Minister.


The Hon. Julie Thomas -

Thank you. I think the only thing I would like to add is the cost of investment, because that's another thing. I'm not suggesting that diesel is cheap, but you know, the cost of investing in any big pieces for projects is massive, so we need to make sure that we don't throw the baby out with the bath water, if I can put it that way.

The Deputy Speaker -

Thank you, Honourable Members. Unfortunately, the Honourable Elizabeth Knipe is not with us, so her question falls away, and that draws our question time to a close. So, I would just like to thank Honourable Members for your contributions. The questions raised and the answers given throughout our tenure have demonstrated the shared dedication of this Council. Thank you to Ministers for your responses and Councillors in the spirit of inquiry and accountability throughout. Thank you also to our Clerk and timekeeper, Morgan Thomas-Henry. Finally, I would just like to close by wishing you all a rewarding and successful day. Thank you.

  
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Honourable Speaker

  
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Date

