



St Helena
Government

ST HELENA GOVERNMENT
PROCEEDINGS OF LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
THURSDAY, 25TH MAY 2023
FIRST SITTING OF THE TWELFTH MEETING

LAYS UPON THE TABLE 27 MARCH 2025

ST. HELENA
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

THE PRESIDENT

The Honourable Cyril Keith Gunnell

EX-OFFICIO MEMBER

The Honourable Attorney General, Mr David Ballantyne

ELECTED MEMBERS

The Honourable Rosemary June Bargo
The Honourable Gillian Ann Brooks
The Honourable Mark Alan Brooks
The Honourable Ronald Arthur Coleman
The Honourable Corinda Sebastiana Stuart Essex
The Honourable Martin Dave Henry
The Honourable Robert Charles Midwinter
The Honourable Christine Lilian Scipio
The Honourable Julie Dorne Thomas
The Honourable Andrew James Turner

OVERSEAS

The Honourable Karl Gavin Thrower
The Honourable Jeffrey Robert Ellick

Clerk of Councils

Mrs Connie Johnson

PROCEEDINGS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Thursday, 25th May, 2023

The Council met at 10.00 am
in the Council Chamber, The Castle

(The Honourable Speaker in the Chair)

ORDER OF THE DAY

1. **FORMAL ENTRY OF THE PRESIDENT**
2. **PRAYERS**
(The Rt Reverend Bishop Dale Bowers)
3. **ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT**

Honourable Members and ladies and gentlemen present in the Council Chamber at the Castle Jamestown, a very good morning to you. Good morning also to all those listening to this live broadcast of the proceedings of the 12th meeting of St Helena Legislative Council, since the Council was formed in 2021. Welcome one and all. Our last formal Legislative Council meeting was held on 4th of April 2023 in the St Helena Community College. This was during my absence from the island, and I am grateful to the Deputy Speaker for presiding over it. Not present this morning is Councillor Karl Thrower, who departed the island last Saturday to attend the C24 seminar held in Bali, and Minister Jeffrey Ellick, still on personal business overseas. Deputy Speaker Cathy Cranfield isn't basically with us once again, but I'd like to think she is listening via the radio. We welcome back to the island His Excellency, Governor Nigel Phillips and Chief Minister Julie Thomas. Both returned last weekend having attended the Coronation of King Charles III, and, 2023 Joint Ministerial Conference. Legislative Council Office Assistant, Miss Shanice Phillips and I returned on 15th April, from our participation in the Commonwealth and Overseas Territory Speakers conference, held this year in Anguilla. Once I have made a report about this productive and informative conference to Elected Members, I will make a report, also to the general public via the radio. Elected Members were circulated the agreed Speakers Conference Communique prior to my arrival, so they will be aware of some of the detail my report is likely to entail. I extend grateful thanks to Bishop Dale for leading the prayers this morning, and SAMS for broadcasting these proceedings live, and Mr Merlin George for delivering the Mace. The Order Paper for this meeting comprises of two sessional papers to be laid, 12 questions to be answered orally, one motion for debate and adjournment debate where Honourable Members can speak on a range of island issues. Also included are four questions for written answers, together with responses. Honourable Members the public have, and rightly so, been asking for advanced information of what is to be discussed at formal LegCo meetings. I am happy to record we achieved this, this

time round. Approved questions and motions was made known to the local media on 16th of May and posted on the SHG website the same day, with an annotation saying the Order Paper will follow. Although this is good progress, members of the public without access to the internet would also benefit if questions and motions could be published in the local newspapers, but I mean, for one, there is no budget for this. The Order Paper for the meeting today Honourable Members was released only yesterday. Thank you Honourable Members. There is significant amount of business for us to deal with today, so let's get started. I call on the Clerk to announce the first item please.

4. PAPERS

SP 14/2023 The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex

The Speaker –
Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –
Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to present Sessional Paper 14 of 2023 entitled Report to Legislative Council on the formal session of the Public Accounts Committee held on 13th of April 2023 and with your permission, I wish to make a short statement.

The Speaker –
Please go ahead.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –
As a Member of the Public Accounts Committee, I am pleased to present Sessional Paper 14, which covers the Public Accounts Committee scrutiny of Sessional Paper No. 6 of 2023, entitled St Helena Government Expenditure in Excess for the financial year 2021/22 in accordance with section 162 of the Constitution. The Public Accounts Committee recommends that these funds do stand charge to public funds, and Legislative Council may, by resolution allow this. The Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development will present a motion later today in respect of this. However the Public Accounts Committee has also made other recommendations aimed to reduce the risk of expenditure in excess occurring in future. It is hoped that the relevant Ministers and Portfolio Directors will ensure that positive action is taken to address the contents of the Sessional Paper in the interests of sound financial management and good governance. Thank you Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –
Thank you, Honourable Member.

Ordered to lie on the table.

SP 15/2023 The Honourable Chief Minister

The Speaker –
Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I beg to present Sessional Paper, 15 of 2023 entitled Government of St Helena, Proceedings of the Legislative Council, Thursday 25th of August 2022, First sitting of the Seventh Meeting.

Ordered to lie on the table.

The Speaker –

Please, Chief Minister, thank you very much. Members in accordance with Standing Order 2, Rule 6, I put the question that if the Members are satisfied with the verification of the Clerk that the draft record of the proceedings of the Legislative Council held on Thursday 25th of August, 2022 be confirmed.

Question put and agreed to.

5.

QUESTIONS

Question No. 1 - The Honourable Ronald Coleman to ask the Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development.

The Speaker –

Honourable Member Ronald Coleman.

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, can the Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development inform this House that, since we are desperately in need of additional government landlord housing, how is the government intending to address or alleviate the situation?

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you. Mr. Speaker and I'd like to thank my Honourable friend for his question. Mr. Speaker while I do agree with my Honourable friend that there is a need for additional social housing, it's not just purely the case of building more. So since becoming a Minister, and under this new government, I've taken the decision to stop the sale of social housing, preventing further loss of this valuable resource, and I've taken or instructed the team to take a more robust approach in the management of the social housing stock, which includes prioritising applications on the Housing Register according to their housing needs, and where possible we will request evidence of this. We're also taking the action where tenants are not complying with their tenancies, for example, going off island and sub-letting their homes, living elsewhere but still keeping the tenancy agreement. And this approach has enabled us Mr. Speaker, to recover three properties in the last six months, with some are also being processed through the recovery process. Mr. Speaker, we will also be shortly taking a more robust action in collecting rent arrears. So together with other portfolios, we will continue to explore how to improve the approach to providing housing for those who find themselves homeless, which, when all this fits together, it should make more social housing available. So finally, I turn into the question about building more homes. So during this financial year we are seeking tenders, and it will depend on the price of those tenders coming in, if it's affordable, but we will look to start

building four, two bedroom houses at Bottomwoods, sorry, four, two bedroom flats at Bottomwoods. Furthermore Mr. Speaker, within the next few weeks, tenderers will be invited to refurb these, (Mr Speaker for the winds blow my papers), to refurbish the three properties in the RE Quarters in Ladder Hill. Once complete, these properties will then be available for government landlord housing. The housing team updated the register of applications in need of social housing on an annual basis, and currently Mr. Speaker, there is 24 households on the register. So in summary more homes are certainly needed Mr. Speaker, but I think in the short to medium term, better management of homes and the register will provide some of the much needed housing and help us to more utilise the stock that we got. As we all know, constructing new homes on an average of £80,000 a home, we just don't have the money to keep building new homes. So back to management of our housing stock, is the stance that we are taking in a short to medium term. So thank you, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for their question.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Member Coleman.

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, can I just ask you, to where funding come from for this type of entity?

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

It comes from the Capital Fund from the Housing fund. So yes, it's a part of funding that basically, you know, with rent and stuff that comes in and the properties that we sell, and of course, we try to build new houses with that. But of course housing today, Mr. Speaker, cost a lot more than years ago. And you know, it's very limited house, and that you can get out the money that we do have. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Its 80,000 pounds for a three bedroom house or two bedroom house, or what?

The Hon. Mark Brooks

That's the average Mr. Speaker, based on government building, was it two bedroom houses? Building two bedroom houses out at Bottom Woods.

The Speaker –

Thank you for that early information. Honourable Ronald Coleman.

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, can I just ask how much money is in this fund?

The Speaker –

The Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Yes, Mr. Speaker I'm happy to report, and I've just had an update from the Deputy Financial Secretary that there's about half a million, so £500,000 in the fund at the moment.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Any further questions, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, how many privately owned properties are currently being used as Social Housing?

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for her question. However, I don't have that number, with me today, I can find out from our Housing Officers and report back to my Honourable Friend.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

I thank the Honourable Minister for his response, and I would ask that when the Honourable Minister seeks that information, he also seeks some clarity as to whether it is cheaper to, in fact, use rented accommodation or to build units which will be owned by government. So my question is, can you also please clarify that when you send the response?

The Speaker –

Thank you, Dr Essex. Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, just to confirm that, yes, I will seek that clarity as well. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Can the Honourable Minister also state when the recently upgraded government landlord property in Main Street is going to be fully occupied?

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Minister Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Mr. Speaker, I like to thank my Honourable Friend for her question, but again, I don't have that detail here, when it will be available for government landlord houses. But again, I can get an update from the Property Maintenance team and see when that will be available and report back to my Honourable Friend, thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, can I ask the Honourable Minister if any action is being taken to encourage the private sector to develop low cost rental flats?

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Yes, we are trying to encourage private sector development within, you know, providing government landlord houses or rental accommodations, and there is some in the pipeline. But I can't confirm here that anything has come to fruition and something will be starting soon, or I know that it is in the pipeline, and I believe that there is no, actually, I'm not going to say that, because I don't know for sure, Mr. Speaker, but my understanding is we will try to encourage that wherever we can. But at the end of the day, it is down to the private sector, whether they take on this initiative or not.

The Speaker –

Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just think to support Minister Brooks, I'd like to say we have to be careful how we encourage private sector to do these things, because if it then doesn't reach fruition, we are then holding the blame as to the private sector claiming that we don't have the business that they're looking for and the purpose for it. So I think it would be better that they invest broader than just looking at government landlord houses.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Chief Minister. Taken as a point of clarification you wanted to make. Thank you very much. Andrew Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you Mr. Speaker. Can the Honourable Minister say whether he or any of the other Members of the Ministerial Team have considered making it part of planning policy, to make it almost automatic, that when there are large housing developments, that planning gain in the form of government landlord houses will form part of such a decision?

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. The Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure, and Sustainable Development.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, so I like to thank my Honourable Friend for his question, and my understanding Mr. Speaker is with any CDAs, or Comprehensive Development Areas that is part of the agreement is that, you know, you have this opportunity to build houses, but in return, we need something back from it. So basically that is our stance to do with CDAs. Obviously, if we are selling a single plot, we can't answer that. But whenever we're selling a development or a cluster of plots, then we can basically ask that, and we're still working through the policy. But I think the principle is that sort of 30% of what is available is either for government landlord housing or government landlord plots. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister tell us when likely is the assessment on the social housing will be completed, to deem if it's being used as intended purposes or you can free up any homes to other people in need?

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Minister, can you answer that?

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

So as I said to my Honourable Friend, Ronald Coleman, who originally asked the question, that work is being carried out now. So we've taken their approach to look at our Government Landlord stock and to make sure that the stock is being used for intended purposes. Like I said before, we don't want to have a stock where the people are not living in there, they're living abroad, but still carrying out the tenancy. So things that we are sort of tightening up on and taking the approach that we need these properties for the most needed, and those who don't need it, or who is so called abusing the system, we are going to take a more robust approach, because we feel that that is probably, in the short to medium term, the best way to get more properties on the Social Housing Register, for the much needed people who requires them. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you for that clarification. I think the question has been answered fully. Next question, please

Question No. 2 - The Honourable Rosemary Bargo to ask the Honourable Chief Minister.

The Speaker –

Honourable Rosemary Bargo.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, will the Honourable Chief Minister tell this Council what is the current staff compliment at Prince Andrew School, and how does this compare to required staffing levels in order to operate effectively?

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank the Honourable Rosemary Bargo for her question. The current staffing compliment in Prince Andrew School is 55 staff members. Our required staffing level is 61 staff members. I will assume here, but you can stop me, Honourable Bargo, if I'm going off on one here, but is it that you're looking for teaching? Yes. Okay, so the staffing cohort has 31 teachers, including the Head and Deputies. They are supported by three vocational instructors and a cover supervisor. We currently have 6 vacancies, of which 3 are TC recruitment in it for teachers, and one for our Head Teacher, where we need two local teachers for Math in it as well, and one TA. It is necessary to note that one of our Math TC teachers is currently off island due to compassionate reasons, and is not scheduled to return to the island until August of this year. The school can operate with seven teachers down, but this

is heavily dependent on the area or areas where the staff are absent. So if it's within our core services, Math, English, Science, it becomes an issue. Some areas are easier to cover than others. We rely heavily on distance learning in the upper year groups to cater for lessons where we do not have the expertise in school. However, it is pertinent to note that this is an astronomically expensive service on us due to our current bandwidth and the costs associated and just a reminder for the listening public, approximately 50% of our educational budget is spent on IT services, so it is extremely expensive.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Rosemary Bargo.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you, Chief Minister. Can the Chief Minister, say if all the core subjects are currently being able to be taught by qualified teachers?

The Speaker –

Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are teaching all our core services. However, if you were to ask me if it's at the best level and at the quality, it can be questionable, because, as we just said, we are looking for two IT teachers, and if we don't fill the post by the new school year, it will present a problem, because we'll then have those that are still in training having to provide some of those core functions. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Chief Minister. Thank you. Any further questions on that? No, next question please.

Question No. 3 - The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex to ask the Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development.

The Speaker –

Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, before reading the question, I wish to notify the House that I declare my interest as President of the Chamber of Commerce, so noted because the three oral questions that I'm asking today emanate directly from the Chamber.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Will the Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development, tell this Council what policy and/ or guidance is in place regarding the use of Chief Secretary Houses, and equipment within them, for commercial purposes?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for her question. My understanding, there is no written policy as such, or guidelines, but this is taken care of within the tenancy agreement. It specifies that no trade or professional businesses can operate, but SHG will review applications to carry out commercial activities from Chief Secretary Houses on its own merit. All the costs of utilities, and that, are those of the tenant's responsibility. Just to add that in Mr. Speaker, but like I said, if there is an application, so what I'm trying to get at Mr. Speaker is that we don't want to have policies in place to prevent people from carrying out a service to the community. If we think about all the types of services that can possibly operate, it could be craft work that is carried out, it could be a young mother that wants to start a business, I don't know, arranging flowers. It could be someone who wants to start an internet business. So this is all things that we want to encourage, but we also want to protect our properties. So we wouldn't want to see somebody starting a heavy industrial or a garage, but I think that is why we've taken a stand to look at applications in their own merit. So I hope that's answering my Honourable Friend's question Mr. Speaker, but that is what I have, sir.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Can the Honourable Minister state, is there a set criteria against which these applications are judged?

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister?

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

No, there is no set criteria like I said. They're judged on their own merit. My understanding is that we don't want to present an advantage from anyone operating from a government house, but again, we don't want to prevent anyone from starting a small business. So yeah, it is looked at on its own merit.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Thank you very much. Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Will the Minister state whether the necessary change of use applications are made to the Land Development Control Authority in respect of any ongoing use of such premises for other than domestic purposes?

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Mr. Speaker, no, I'm not aware of that, that there's any applications being made, like I said, I think it is dealt with from the housing team themselves. And like I said, it depends on the nature of the business. If there's something that doesn't need, you know, is big enough to be of concern

the relevant authorities, then, like I said, that will then be reported on, but yes, so I don't have anything else. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Will the Honourable Minister undertake to check whether in fact the Property section is making necessary applications as and when they're required?

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Minister again, please, yes.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

I will undertake to check but I can confirm that I know recently, there has been applications that's been received and approved.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Will the Minister state how many Chief Secretary Houses are currently being used for commercial purposes? Thank you.

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister, Mark Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Mr. Speaker, I can't confirm the actual number, but I know, like I said, there is some applications have been approved. So I believe it's very low number, but not a high number, sir.

The Speaker –

Okay. Thank you very much. Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

The Honourable Minister made reference to utilities in his initial response. Will the Honourable Minister confirm whether or not the relevant allowances usually payable to those renting Chief Secretary houses are reduced or removed, if certain commercial activities are taking place here in order to preserve a level playing field with the local private sector?

The Speaker –

Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure, Sustainable Development.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, just to confirm that no allowances given to Chief Secretary Houses, they're actually rented on a private basis. Thank you.

The Speaker –

All finished before the next question. Members who might like to take off their jackets, please do so, or you can do so if you want to. Thank you, next question please.

Question No. 4 - The Honourable Robert Midwinter to ask the Honourable Minister for Health and Social Care.

The Speaker –

Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, will the Honourable Minister for Health and Social Care tell this Council what plans are currently in place for visits by medical specialists during this financial year.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Minister for Health and Social Care.

The Hon. Martin Henry –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for his question. There is a rolling plan of visiting specialists this financial year, and we have already started with the first visit of the Orthopedic Surgeon, of a follow up visit planned in October to conduct further minor surgery and to consult with a further group of patients that might require orthopedic referral. We have also just had a very recent visit from the Audiologist this month, and they are still here. New to the list this year, and on the back of our JSNA results, which highlighted the significant risk diabetes has on the current population, health and social care services, now and in the future, we have a Diabetic specialist doctor as well as a Diabetic specialist nurse that will arrive here at the end of August. The visit is intended as a starting point for a long term collaboration with the initial visit plan for patients with more complex diabetic problems, especially those with type one diabetes, but the main focus will be on up-skilling our own team and planning for the future. This will include updating our GPs on new drugs for managing diabetes, improving in-house treatment protocols, as well as to help us decide on the new drugs, technologies and preventative methods that would be appropriate and affordable for St. Helena. The Diabetes specialist nurse will be working with the community and hospital nurses to improve our understanding of diabetic care, with the particular emphasis on foot care. She will also accompany the community nurses on home visits and country clinics to observe current practices and methods. We have a Gastroenterologist arriving in September 2023, to continue the work with the high frequency of health issues on the island associated with the digestive system, such as stomach, small intestines, colon, pancreas, gall bladder and liver functions and disease. In October, we will have our normal annual visits of the Eye surgeon, followed by the ENT specialists. However, these dates are yet to be confirmed, and just to add on to the back of that, you know there may be some movement in dates, etc., as well as an added specialist, if the budget will allow. So we are working within our capacity to try bring in as many specialists as possible, given the high frequency of needs in those particular areas. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you Honourable Member. Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the Honourable Minister for his very comprehensive response. Can you say what is being done to support patients with ongoing treatment, in particular with the provision of ophthalmic care between specialist visits?

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Minister for Health and Society.

The Hon. Martin Henry –

Can you repeat the question, and can you explain what you're talking about?

The Hon. Robert Midwinter

Yes, certainly happy to do so can, can the Honourable Minister say what is being done to support patients with ongoing treatment, in particular with the provision of ophthalmic care between specialist visits, and just to elaborate, he mentioned about diabetic nurse coming and the ongoing care being provided there. But in some cases, so for example, patients with glaucoma, other eye disorders where they do need ongoing nursing care, what's being done to support those patients?

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Martin Henry –

Thank you. I've just got an update from the Portfolio Director, and yes, what we have in place at the moment is screening, is currently being undertaken by one of the specialist nurses in the hospital, and all of that information will be fed in to the two Eye Specialists that we have. We actually have the two specialists coming back to back, which we normally do at the end of the year. So the sets of information can be then passed on in case there's further requirement for patient's needs. So screening is ongoing throughout the year.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker and I thank the Honourable Minister for his further answer. Can he say if any ongoing support is provided for patients that need things like eye injections or the application of drops or anything like that?

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Martin Henry –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for Honourable Member for his question. And the answer to date is yes, it's currently being done on island.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Thank you very much. Next question, please.

Question No. 5 - The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex to ask the Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, may the Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development tell this Council in what ways the St Helena Government intend to utilise funding from the £500,000 within the aid settlement to enhance local capacity and skills?

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for her question, Mr. Speaker, a Project Board is being established to oversee the implementation of the Tourism Development Fund. The terms of reference have been drafted, however, the Board is still to review and approve the final program of activities for 23/24 under the Tourism Development Fund. And that is because some of the key work officers within this Tourism Development Fund, as you know is, it's been a month where we've had some of the officers away. The Tourism Manager is away on one of the shows. The Portfolio Director is away on leave, and Head of Sustainable Development is away on personal business. So we do have some catching up to do, Mr. Speaker once they get back. But however, Mr. Speaker, some work has taken place, some primary discussions have been undertaken to prepare the draft program, and I am able to outline briefly how current plans intend to enhance the capacities and skills on the island. So Mr. Speaker, it is envisioned that there will be a dedicated resource for the hospitality, training and business support, largely to deliver training and support and advice to the private sector businesses. Training of staff currently working in the St Helena hospitality sector is seen as the most direct route for improving the skills and knowledge on the island. On the island's hospitality sector, moreover, it is likely that the skills and knowledge gained by the existing staff will be leveraged, as new workers has joined the hospitality industry and learned from their peers. So what I'm trying to get at here, the type of training we want to bring to the island to train the staff will not only be just training, but it will be training in a way where they themselves will be trainers, and they will be able to pass on those skills. For instance, if we train 10 people, and those people pass on the skills to just two other people, then we have 40 people trained. So that is the idea, to try and get sort of maximum benefit out of spending this money. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, it is hoped that the funding may be allocated for tour guide training as well, and Sustainable Development team has and will continue to work with local experts and a range of tourism stakeholders to develop and roll out a tour guide training and accreditation program. And finally, it is possible that some allocations may be made for a tourism and marketing staff, so that is trying to increase our capacity in those two areas as we build our tourism numbers coming into the island. So that is envisioned, that will come from our local capacity as well. But I just wanted to add something here, Mr. Speaker, and like I said before, a lot of this still need to be finalised, and I will be consulting with my Ministerial team and the Chief Minister on this funding, because like I say, it's quite small, if you think about it, on the scale of, you know, trying to develop our tourism fund. So we want to get the best out of this money. So just to give a bit of perception, so like a tour guide training. So even here on this little island, there could be specialist areas that could be focused on. So you could have Napoleon, Conservation, the Cloud Forest, the Peaks National Park, the Slave and Liberated African legacy, the Boer and Pseudo legacy, the Marine Environment, the Post Box Walks, the military history and the fortifications, the East India Company, Plantation House and even Jonathan the tortoise could all be tour guides in their stalls. So I've just mentioned about 14, possible new little businesses that could be set up on a part time, but like I said, we want to train people so that we're delivering a constant and an almost like, I lost the words Mr. Speaker, but we're trying to build our tourism sector, so that's right, it is diversified and consistent. That

is the word. Thanks my Honourable Friend there for finding that with it I couldn't find. So, Mr. Speaker, there is more that we want to do with this part of funding, but as my Honourable Friend had only alluded to local skills and capacity, I can only give this for now because, development is fine, and there's still a lot more work to go into there to approve it. But I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for her question. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

I'd like to thank the Honourable Minister for his encouraging response. Can he give an indicative date as to when the proposals are likely to be able to be finalised?

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for her question. As I said, we do have a lot of that to catch up on, but we hoping to have those completed by the end of June.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

The Honourable Minister stated that a Project Board has been appointed. Can he please state the composition of this board?

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

This is still a discussion ongoing, Mr. Speaker, but I envisioned it will include some of the key personnel within the tourism sector that is working for government, like a Tourism Manager, Head of Sustainable Development and so on. But as I said, once this is finalised, when we have our first meeting when everyone is back on island, then I'll be able to update the composition of the Board to this House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

So just on the point of clarification, the Project Board has not actually been formally appointed as yet?

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Mr. Speaker, no, the Project Board hasn't been formally appointed, although, like I said, some of the teams, some of those key personnel who will either be informing the Board or advising the Board, has had some discussions around the outlying spending of this money, so work is

on ongoing. Like I said, it just means everyone to come together to be able to finalise these details. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Ronald Coleman had his light on first.

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, as the Minister just said about the setting up of the Board and the plans for spending this money, is there still a timeline when this £500,000 have to be spent by, Honourable Minister?

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for each question, and yes, there is a timeline we need to spend this money in this financial year. So it doesn't mean that if, like I said, there is some sort of infrastructure project under this money that needs to be completed in this financial year, just the money needs to be spent in this financial year.

The Speaker –

I see. Okay. Thank you very much. Honourable Dr Corinda Essex, if you still want to.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister say having your key personnel all off island during this critical time, I would say, as we don't have many months before the end of the financial year, does that, you know, hamper us being able to get things in place as soon as possible?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister, response please.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Yes, some of my key personnel is off island for personal reasons and that can't be changed. I mean, it is what it is. As I said earlier, we do have a lot of work to do, so I will be pushing my team to finalise this by the end of June, and stick in that deadline because as I said, it is now starting to eat into this financial year, and we want to have this money spent. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Minister Christine Scipio.

The Hon. Christine Scipio –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I just wonder if I could just point of information as members know that we haven't approved the budget for 23/24 and we are anticipating that to be approved by the late June. So of course, the money can't be spent until this money has been appropriated.

The Speaker –

Thank you for that, next question please.

Question No. 6 - The Honourable Rosemary Bargo to ask the Honourable Chief Minister.

The Speaker –

Honourable Rosemary Bargo.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, will the Honourable Chief Minister tell this Council, what immediate steps is government taking to address the disciplinary problems at Prince Andrew School to ensure the safety of both the students and the staff?

The Speaker –

Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a school environment, it is normal to have some issues in relation to students displaying challenging behaviours. Currently in Prince Andrew School, we have a small number of students who are presenting some challenges, approximately 4% of the school population, which equates to 10 children approximately. To manage behavior, schools have the following support or management systems in place. We have a School Positive Behaviour Management Policy, Anti-bullying Policy, School Information Management Systems to monitor, track and assist with analysis of behaviours, Inclusion service that supports students with special educational needs and disabilities and social, emotional and mental health requirements. We have the pupil referral unit, the multi-agency support network, through our children's support teams meetings that includes Head Teachers from all four schools, the Police, Health and Social Care representation, nominated staff to give additional support to students experiencing difficulties. That is pastoral staff, emotional literacy support assistance known as Elsa, single educational arena, and additional learning needs, teachers, access to support programs such as Lego therapy, play therapy, anger management sessions. In addition to this, staff have received training in behaviour management, de-escalation techniques, various social education, sorry, special educational needs and disability specific training sessions, such as strategies for managing students with ADHD, autism, etc., and training in positive handling techniques. It should be noted that the portfolio was seeking to procure a professional experience in training staff in managing behaviours in the last financial year. However, due to restrictions on budget spending, this had to be redirected to other more pressing areas within the portfolio and could not be undertaken. We are currently working on work streams being progressed or planned to support our staff and students, and they include the alternative education provision for those who cannot gain the normal educational program; review of the Education Ordinance, which is going to be a lot of work, because we need the policies in place to underpin it, Special Educational Needs policy, a Teacher Protection policy, reviewing the guidance from the Department for Education UK in relation to suspensions, exclusions and behaviour in schools to inform our policies and ordinance and education around children's rights and responsibilities, with the support of the Human Rights Commission, and finally, working with multi agencies and other organisations to address behaviour concerns, both in school and the community. I can advise my Honourable Friend that was in the UK. I was very fortunate to meet with the Minister for Head of Schools, and he's put me in touch with a lady that is very good in in the area, both in the UK and internationally, with regards to special educational needs and disabilities, but also in raising mental health awareness. And she's very keen to work with St Helena, which, if we can get it, will be beneficial. She understands our bandwidth and the problems that that brings to it, but she believes that there is some interventions that can be done that will help our schools at this time. I just hope that that gives you an understanding of what we're doing thus far.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Hon Rosemary Bargo.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you, Chief Minister. But can I just ask, can you say if the current policies, or I know you made mention of a teacher's protection policy, do you think the current measures you have is adequate enough to allow teachers to provide the discipline if required, to students and feel comfortable about it?

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we wouldn't be doing a review if we felt that everything was in of the right quality that we need. It is an ever changing environment, education, and even the needs that we are now becoming more and more aware of, so I think it's an ever changing world. Hence, we are revisiting the Education Ordinance and all of the policies. To be perfectly honest, thus far, teacher protection policy has never existed on St Helena, and I'm not entirely sure if it's actually accessed anywhere else, because we have been doing some research into that. So although we are working towards it, towards a teacher protection policy, I think we have to be very careful that the balance is there for both student and teacher.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Rosemary Bargo, thank you.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you, Chief Minister. Also, can I ask if, whilst devising this policy, would you be having the collaboration from other sectors like Safeguarding please, everyone to feed and help you devise this policy?

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've mentioned in one of my responses, we do have the multi-agency groups, so they are being consulted on all of that as well, which includes Police, Health, and Social Care. And we'll bring in Human Rights, like I mentioned, as well, so that we get a policy that is very balanced on both, in the view of the teacher and the student.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Rosemary Bargo? Thank you, Chief Minister. Thank you Honourable.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Mr. Speaker, may I ask the Chief Minister? I noted that a lot of reference was made to pupils, teachers, and multi agencies. I didn't hear any mention of parents. So I do ask the Chief Minister, what action is being taken to engage with parents and ensure that they are taking their responsibilities seriously?

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Midwinter for your question. I think Education is always trying to engage with parents through the Parent Teacher Association, etc., when we are going to be building on these policies, especially if it talks about the behaviour of a student, then there will be engagement with the parents throughout, because they need to understand it as well. Unfortunately, as is the case with communication on St Helena and probably wider, ensuring that the parents engage with us is a difficulty. We do get some engagement, but most times, if not the engagement we need from those students who we're having the difficulties with. So we will continue to do that. And I know the staff of Prince Andrew School in particular, when we talk about this, are engaging with the parents regularly, but there are gaps whereby we've had situations, for example, whereby we've got a problem and the parents aren't even on an island and we don't know anything about it.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Rosemary Bargo.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Can the Chief Minister tell us when the last PTA meeting was held at Prince Andrews School?

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister –

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, I can't provide that level of detail. I can find out, but it's not something that would normally come to me. I can just check with the schools.

The Speaker –

Thank you.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you. And can you forward the response once you get it first, please. Thank you.

The Hon. Chief Minister –

Happy to do so.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Next question please.

Question No. 7 - The Honourable Robert Midwinter to ask the Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, will the Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development tell this Council what developments have taken place regarding the disposal of the St Helena's government's interest in Solomon & Company (St Helena) since their shares were publicly advertised, and if you will, make a statement regarding the future intent in respect of these shares?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for his question, and just for the benefit of the listening public, I'll just give a background. So an exercise to seek expressions of interest for the purchase of SHGs shareholding in Solomons and Company, either in full or in part, was launched in November 2020. A number of expressions of interest was received. However, given the impending General Election in 2021 no decision was made by the previous Government. So since this new Government has been elected Mr. Speaker, the high priorities and the main focus was on COVID and basically all the arrangements necessary for opening the island up. We also focus on some other big key issues with regards to telecoms, shipping and also air access. Mr. Speaker, however, the future of SHG shareholding in Solomons is now, or will very shortly, be considered by Ministers. Mr. Speaker, I'm not prepared to make a statement on the future intent after, in respect of the shares, until such time that Ministers has the opportunity to fully consider this matter or the options available, as this decision is not mine to learn, it will be a collective one made by Ministers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Member Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the Honourable Minister for his response. Can he say to what extent other shareholders, aside from the St Helena Government themselves, have been consulted on the matter of changing the Articles of Association?

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

I'm not aware of anything, as I said, Mr. Speaker, Ministers will very shortly be considering this matter, so if there is any information this will come to Ministers then, if anything that was discussed. So at this time Mr. Speaker, it's just too premature for us to talk about this because like I said, with all other priorities we've been dealing with, which has not had time to consider this yet.

The Speaker –

Okay, thank you.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you. Mr. Speaker, can I therefore ask, because this has been a long time, it's been over two years now, can he give a commitment that during the progressing this matter, that communications will be held with other shareholders and that other shareholders will be consulted on this matter?

The Speaker –

Honourable Member, can you answer that?

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Again Mr. Speaker, it will depend on what decision Ministers take because if we take a decision not to do anything, then there's no need to consult so I can't really say it will depend on decision.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to add a point of information. I think also Ministers will consider this, but it will be very much left to the Solomon's Board and how they communicate, because although we have shares, it is Solomon's Board that will ideally have to do the communication. We'll just talk about what we're going to do with SHG shares.

The Speaker –

Okay, thank you for that. Nothing further. Next question, please.

Question No. 8 - The Honourable Andrew Turner to ask the Honourable Minister for Environment, Natural resources and Planning.

The Speaker –

Honourable Andrew Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, will the Honourable Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning, tell this Council what plans are in place to deal with the island wide issue of invasive plants, and in particular, white weed, which is taking over large areas on the island?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning.

The Hon. Christine Scipio –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at present, there is no overall plan to deal with the Island wide issue of invasive plants, in particular for white weed. Mr. Speaker in 2017 project funding was secured through the Darwin plus to provide the basis for a plant management framework, as invasive plant species are one of the biggest challenges and affects all sectors, including private land ownership, agriculture, forestry, national conservation areas and our endemics. Prior to this project, there was no strategic leadership for invasive plant management, even though a number of sections within the Environmental, Natural Resources Directorate at that time undertook activities towards the management of invasive plant species. The adoption and a use of the plant management framework Mr. Speaker was highly dependent on a dedicated central government, invasive plant management team, being operational with adequate budget to lead and implement the framework since the end of this project. In 2019 attempts were made through the recurrent budget process to secure funding to undertake the practical invasive plant control work, but this was not seen as a priority, amongst priorities reallocation within the portfolios budget for dedicated and sustained invasive plant work. It also has not been possible due to various service priorities that are required to be funded. Mr. Speaker, although an invasive plant species management framework is in existence as outcome of the project, it has not been possible to secure funding to undertake an action plan for invasive plants overall, not even by a particular species, such as white weed, through a planned and coordinated approach that will bring lasting results on the ground and provide value for the money spent. The success of any meaningful plan to tackle invasive plant species will require sustained funding to achieve an effective level of control and management. Last year, a bid was made to the Darwin plus fund for invasive plant control across our forest estate, but this was not supported. So Mr.

Speaker, I just want to highlight that although funding hasn't been made, we have been trying to make it into secure funding.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Andrew Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, while it's somewhat disappointing to note it wasn't at the time, considered a priority among the priorities, this is a problem that is quite literally growing. So can I ask what monitoring is in place to make sure that it becomes the priority among the priorities before it's simply too late to do anything effective about it, or have we already reached that stage?

The Speaker

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister for Environment, Natural Resources, and Planning.

The Hon. Christine Scipio – 1.09.00

Mr. Speaker, as we're talking about priority, several priorities, of course, the listeners will be say is entirely up to members how they prioritise the funding. So it is our responsibility, and of course, you know it is a shame I've been out with the team on a number of occasions, and even looking at our own estate and how disappointing this because I can compare it with when I was a child growing up, how the estate now is overgrown by a lot of evasive plants. And of course, as my Honourable Friend will recall, through the EDIP project process, that we did manage to secure 380,000 pounds to try to develop and improve the government's estate, and out of that 380,000 pounds, there was pastures were cleared, were identified and of course, they were identified through consultation with very key stakeholders on the island, including the members of the Chamber of Commerce and pastures were cleared, which was a total funding of just over 35,000 pound so we managed to do that. But we as a government, if we see this more higher priority that is up to us to make sure that funding is allocated into it, and we hope that you know the members themselves are private land ownership won't try to help us as well, because, as you know white weed, the flowers that blow all over the place and everything else. So there's no dedicated team who's monitoring this at the moment, because we don't have the funding to be able to do so.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Next question, please

Question No. 9 - The Honourable Ronald Coleman to ask the Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development.

The Speaker –

Honourable Ronald Coleman.

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, will the Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development, give an update to this House on what is happening regarding the proposal to upgrade the drainage system in the Half Tree Hollow area so that people can get on with building their much needed houses?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I like to thank the Honourable Member for his question. As the other Member alluded to this, Half Tree Hollow sewage treatment, and Jamestown sewage treatment is an EDIP project, and the EDIP Team goes out and do regular updates in consultation with the public. So a lot of the background is already known, and I'm not going to get into that at the moment Mr. Speaker, but what I will give is the date, up to date information that I know, as the Minister. So Mr. Speaker, the Half Tree Hollow and sewage system, at the moment is at 100% capacity, and it also discharges untreated sewage into the environment. So all in all, not so good. The project to resolve this problem in both Half Tree Hollow and Jamestown has been approved as a strategic priority under the EDIP program. So yes, it has been identified as the need and it is one of the high priorities. With that said Mr. Speaker, EDIP is working with Connect St Helena on this project, simply because they are the experts on the island for managing sewage, which they have been doing so for the last 10 years. But we're working with them to ensure that a suitable and sustainable solution is implemented and as quick as possible. So Mr. Speaker, some new information now that probably the members of the public are not aware of, but we have finalised Terms of Reference for a Design Consultant, and we have launched that tender. It was launched in March 2023 however, Mr. Speaker it is disappointing, but there were no tenders received. So what are we doing next Mr. Speaker, so like I said, this project, if we think about it on the scale of St Helena, most will consider this a large project, but when we think about it on the scale globally, this is a very small project and a very specialist project, and it's been difficult trying to attract those companies that specialise in designing and building sewage treatment systems to actually be interested in this, what they would refer to as a small project. So the Project Board decided to make some minor adjustments to the terms of reference, and then we will go out on a further exercise, and hopefully this will start very shortly now so those amendments has already been sort of suggested and agreed. What we're also trying to do is seek out companies that we feel would be interested or have the expertise to build this. Like I said, it's very specialist, and globally, not many people know where St Helena is, more or less know about the contracts that is happening on the island. So we do have some people in the UK that used to work for government here on island, and those people are still very keen on the development of the island, and they've said that they are now working in an industry that has contacts for people that could possibly, or companies that could possibly undertake this. So we're reaching out directly to a few companies and saying, look, we got a tender out would you be interested in it? Because they said the first round was very little interest so Mr. Speaker that is where we are now. It's disappointing that we didn't get a consultant in the first bit, because now we will be in that negotiation phase with them to sign a contract and hopefully get on with the rap. But because of delay in that it does delay the project. So I could, I will give my Honourable Friend just an outlying sort of the time scale we're looking at now. But we have to take into consideration that there's many factors at play here, so we're hoping to have now the new design out, like I said, very shortly, a new terms of reference out very shortly, for an expressions of interest for any companies, and we hope that we can appoint one of those companies or a consultant by September this year, and if they have a success. For then we're hoping that these designs will be produced by March 2024, so next year, and if they were successful, then we hope to obtain sort of planning permission, development, pushing permission, all of that, and then start the construction. And hopefully, Mr. Speaker, have the construction complete by 2026 but like I said, Mr. Speaker these time frames are based on a number of factors, which all could play a part in delaying this project. But what is important

Mr. Speaker, and going back to my Honourable Friend's question about people, about so that people can get on with building their much needed houses, is that Executive Council agreed that construction in Half, could continue on a condition that the building cannot be occupied until such time as a commercial sewer system or an alternative approved system is installed and in operation. So what I'm trying to say here Mr. Speaker, is if anyone is waiting on this and wants to build a house because of obviously, we all know that prices are going up globally and things are getting more and more expensive, we are not stopping anyone from continuing to build their house. And if you think on the way we build houses, on average here, it could be two or three years for us to build a house, and we're looking at maybe two or three years to get the sewage in place. It might be an occasion, if someone gets a contractor to build a house, that the house will be finished before they can connect into a sewer. But there is like I said, alternative means to that, but it will come at an actual cost to probably the developer or the person who owns the house, but again, it would help those people who has the money to spend now and don't want to wait. Just in case, you know, prices start to creep up. So Mr. Speaker that is the important thing to note to the public, that anyone in after help, who is waiting to build can continue to build. They just can't connect into a sewer system yet. Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I like to thank the Honourable Member for his question.

The Speaker –

Thank you Honourable Member. Ronald Coleman.

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, just to thank the Honourable Minister, but I would just like to ask if the ExCo decision to allow people to build, does it apply to CDA areas?

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This particular decision was just made on its own merit to do with the Half Tree Hollow. Because obviously, we know that Half Tree Hollow have the problem with the sewage. Yes, if there was a similar situation in other CDA areas, I don't think that there will be an issue to allow people to build it just makes sense. But yes, we have said that with Half Tree Hollow, then we've got say, we've agreed this that that can go ahead if someone wants to build a property, let's say in a different area, we have to look at their own area.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, and Honourable Member, thank you very much. Next question, please.

Question No. 10 - The Honourable Robert Midwinter to ask the Honourable Minister for Health and Social Care.

The Speaker –

Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, will the Honourable Minister for Health and Social Care tell this Council, what plans or strategies are being put in place to ensure that the island can continue to provide care for increasing numbers of elderly people, and in particular to assist those individuals who wish to remain in their own homes?

The Speaker –

Thank you Honourable Member. Honourable Minister for Health and Social Care.

The Hon. Martin Henry –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for his question. The Health and Social Care portfolio will continue to deliver some area care to vulnerable members of the community within their own homes, subject to assessing needs. The needs of all people in receipt of the service is subject to a holistic Social Work assessment. Care packages are also subject to further scrutiny through the team manager and via a resource allocation panel. There is a constant increase in demand, in conjunction with an aging demographic and the overall health profile of our community, which has and will continue to have an impact on the social care budget and the service that we can provide. Staffing within social care by means of recruitment and retention, is the most important area in terms of a strategic approach, as this particular service requires a directly proportional ratio, increased care packages equals increased carers. This area will always be challenging, but we are endeavouring alternative approaches versus with the support of Human Resources and the Financial Secretary. I just like to add here that the strategy of keeping our elderly adults in their homes for longer, is not just a social care, it's a crossover strategy across quite a few boundaries, and I'll just add one extra here. You know, the long term strategy and power and policies regarding this area, in an area such as building regulations that was brought up to date some years ago with some amendments and changes, took into account the required needs to assist the elderly in living in their own homes for longer. These include standard heights for sockets, light switches, pews, boards, in case a person later on in life is confined to a wheelchair. However, we recognise that far more is still required in this area and others to improve the overall infrastructure to support our elderly population who wish to maintain their independence.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Member.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the Honourable Minister for his response. Can you say what the current staffing shortfall is within Adult Social Care and what is being done to address this shortfall?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister for Health and Social Care.

The Hon. Martin Henry –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you Honourable Member for his follow up question. There's an estimate between 20 to 25. I can't put my finger up on that specific number right here, but there is a large number of, there's a large shortfall currently.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, so can the Honourable Minister answer the second part of that question in terms of what is being done to address this shortfall.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Martin Henry –

Sorry, I remember I only put up on the first part. So yes, there's a number of avenues we are currently using, which is casual staff, which we are trying to now in some cases, bring them over to become permanent staff. But there's also the issue which we all are aware of on St Helena, with our economically active people in terms of numbers, and there's a number of complexities around that, but we are also investigating, you know, whether we look at bringing in staff from offshore as well. And I just like to make a statement here, Mr. Speaker, which is the fact that care is my primary focus here. So while there are many opinions on how we provide that care and where we get it from, we must always start with, we need to provide the care and talk through the other bits underneath that. So the primary focus is providing that care.

The Speaker –

Thank you.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Minister for his response, and I couldn't agree more. Can he say whether there is a waiting list for residential care, and if so, how many people is on this waiting list residential care?

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Martin Henry –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank the Member for his follow up question. Again, yes, there is a waiting list. Again I can't give you the exact numbers, but this, as I said earlier, what we also facing is the complications of poor health outcomes at a later age. So there is now the need, almost to have a nursing home, which is something that we don't have at the moment. So there is, right now, we have a rating that could be discharged from hospital to a nursing home facility, or to the CCC. However, the CCC is at capacity at the moment, so there is definitely needs in the system that is harder to address but when we can't discharge people to the CCC, then what we do is, then we follow up with the domiciliary care, as I just mentioned earlier, so we can safely discharge people back into their homes where possible.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, is he able to give an indication of approximately how many people are in need of these facilities?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Martin Henry –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, thank you again for your question. I remember, again I cannot give an exact number, but there is a couple of areas. So as I mentioned, that is the hospital that needs to be discharged. There's also members now that are in our sheltered accommodation, and to

the point that we may have to look at re-partisan these accommodations to make them more like the CCC, simply because the sheltered accommodation was set up as a halfway house where people can still help to manage themselves with some support, but because of the caring, because of the needs now it's becoming more of a full time caring complex. So unfortunately, I can't give you numbers today, but we are over capacity.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and just because the Minister isn't able to give those figures today, if he would follow up with those figures, but Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister made reference to trying to ensure that people stay in their own homes as long as they can, and I fully support and endorse that. So can he say a funding consideration will be given during the current financial year to assist conversion works at properties of individuals who wish to remain in their own homes?

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister?

The Hon. Martin Henry –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, as another Minister mentioned earlier, and the Chief Minister may have mentioned, I can't give funding commitments at the moment because we as a Council has not allocated the budget. But there is also, and there's always, well, currently ongoing support in that area. However, this is literally limited by the funding as well, as you know, some of the outcomes when we upgrade these places, doesn't necessarily result in, sometimes the long term, what we envisage, but you cannot make these assumptions before. It's a hindsight sort of view of things, but there is funding that's always put against that budget line to support this.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Can you confirm you will be able to follow up with figures?

The Hon. Martin Henry –

Sorry Mr. Speaker? I can confirm I can follow up with the figures however, the issue around that is, that that can change on a weekly basis as we manage to discharge people throughout the week in some cases.

The Speaker –

Thank you for explaining.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I fully recognise and appreciate that it is too early for the Honourable Minister to actually say your funding will be allocated. I merely wish to recognise that consideration should be given, because at the end of the day, there is a balancing act to play here between the cost of additional care facilities and people staying at home. So I'm really asking if consideration will be given to that balancing act.

The Speaker –

Can consideration be given to that balancing act Honourable Minister?

The Hon. Martin Henry –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Honourable Member. Yes, consideration will be given to the balancing act. But there's also, like I said earlier, wider things at play here. There's also, you know, looking at properties where people are, as we've mentioned, on a number of times, asset rich and cash poor, and whether they can convert some of that funding to support doing their homes, etcetera. But it's a much, much bigger and more sort of complex issue than just social care. But this is a subject that I think we need to address as an entire Council. It's not just a social care issue, putting in, like I said earlier, regulations that people build their houses that allow them to upgrade bathrooms, etc., simpler when they become older, is something that we can do as a government.

The Speaker –

Okay. Thanks very much. Honourable Andrew Turner.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and yes, just to again thank my Honourable colleague for that further information, I couldn't really agree more. Thank you very much.

The Speaker –

Andrew Turner, do you still want to ask a question?

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to ask if the Honourable Minister or Ministers have considered working with their state owned entity, the Bank of St Helena to introduce schemes such as equity release loans that, as Martin sort of touched on earlier, would allow people to liquidate some of the equity that's built up in their properties that they own. They're typically available to people aged 55, or over. We can get the money from home equity with having to sell it, and then that would normally then be taken back when the property is sold or transferred on to a new owner. Is this something that is being considered?

The Hon. Martin Henry –

I could try answer that. First of all, I think Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Mr. Chairman.

The Speaker –

You want to have a try at this?

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you very much. Yes Mr. Speaker, thank you. I will have a try at this, because a while ago in our Advisory Board, we did have this very discussion, and it was sort of suggested that the Bank could possibly play a part in this role, as do with other jurisdictions in the world. And what we did is, well, what actually the Head of Property did was he'd held meetings with the Bank and try and discuss if this could possibly be something that the Bank considers going forward. However those meetings and discussions was generally unsuccessful. So, Mr. Speaker that is where we are. We are still trying and looking for different ways and means of how we can mitigate the cost on government as we, you know, as the population grows older and depend on, have specific needs, but so far, we haven't really found a solution to equity release on the island. As you said, there's only a very few means of doing this, and so far, those means have been tested and been unsuccessful. Thank you very much.

The Speaker –
Next question, please

Question No. 11 - The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex, to ask the Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development.

The Speaker –
The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –
Thank you. Mr. Speaker, will the Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development tell this Council what are the current situation and next steps regarding the bulk fuel installation in Rupert's Valley constructed as a component of the airport project?

The Speaker –
Thank you very much. Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –
Thank you. Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for her question. Mr. Speaker, the bulk fuel installation project encompasses all the fuel systems which were designed and installed under the airport project. This includes the ship to shore, the Bay-side facility, the pipeline, the storage in upper Ruperts and also the airport fuel facility. Mr. Speaker, determination of the design build, operating, handling contract with Basil Read, allowed for a pause in the construction works to determine if completing the new fuel infrastructure to the original design is still the best solution for the island. A technical independent review was undertaken in 2019 which recommended changes to the method of fuel delivery and subsequently design changes. A further social, environmental and economic impact assessment was conducted in 2021. This latest assessment focused on how the different methods of fuel delivery could impact the community, including the relative fuel costs. The mechanism to take the project forward has now been agreed with funding for the initial phase already confirmed. The first phase is to secure a project management consultant with the relevant expertise to come and actually visit St Helena and see the current setup for themselves. Then they would undertake a feasibility study considering economic, technical, logistics, environmental and safety factors. The output from the study will be used to inform the second phase that is the production of the design for completion of the facility. Later phases of the project will see the procurement and mobilisation of a main works contractor to complete and commission the first facility. The time frame for the procurement of contractors, designed to design it and build it and do the testing and commissioning is estimated to be another two and a half years. So a tender documentation has now been produced. Issues for procurement, for the project management consultant, they are undergoing now, relative time, the final legal checks and the procurement checks ahead of launching this again, to our global sort of industries that, sorry, launching this globally so that we can track those kind of specialists we need to deliver this project. So again, Mr. Speaker, I know this question has been asked on a number of occasions. I know this government and the community is keen to see this project finish and hopefully see some benefits from a reduction in fuel costs by having longer storage or more stabilised in fuel costs. But Mr. Speaker I have said it is a project that basically is being funded by the British government, and we need to work with them on how we deliver this project. And again, we

need to look at our needs going forward to make sure that what was started round there is still the best for the island and its future needs. Thank you, Mr Speaker, okay.

The Speaker –

Thanks very much. Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Will the Honourable Minister state when the mechanism for going forward was agreed?

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister?

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my Honourable Friend for her question. I am talking from memory. I don't have details here, but I believe it was around sort of later part of last year. However, though I like I said I can get this information and pass it on to you, but I'm pretty sure from my memory, that is around the time, sir.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Honourable Minister. From your exposition, I gather there is now going to be a need for two more consultancies, is that correct? Can you clarify please?

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister. So put your light on, please.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, there is phases in this project. So phase one is the Enable and Work. So basically that is, we do the feasible study and to find out what is the best method, is the store the right way to go. Well, it will cost and so on, then once that is agreed, then we need to design it. So there will be somebody to design the works or how to finish this project. And then there will be following phase where procurement for the main works contractor is undertaken. And then phase three will be the mobilisation of the main works contractor. So that is obviously getting any equipment, materials to the island, all what is needed. And then phase four is the construction. So that's when the actual work will start to happen. And as I said earlier, we are expecting this. And actually, Mr. Speaker, just going back to my Honourable Friend's original question, or the first question, about when this was agreed and I did say around later part last year. I actually do have it on my notes, Mr. Speaker, and this was agreed in August, so my memory was certainly correct, sir. But yeah, so those are the four phases that need to undergo. And as I said, I gave a time frame of two and a half years to complete this project. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

The feasibility work that the Honourable Minister referred to has been done previously. So why is there a need to repeat this?

The Speaker –

I can see where you coming from. Thank you very much. Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Yes, the feasibility wrap was done, but I think there was a number of concerns about that feasibility, and I think it was agreed to look at it again, simply because things have moved on a bit since 2019 and we felt that under this current government and under our current vision, and obviously the whole islands vision, the move forward, going to more renewable energy, a lot more focus need to be around our needs. So I agree that we should do another one just to bring us right up to date. Yes I know it's probably delaying the project, or it's probably taking time, but at the end of the day, for a project of this size and nature, we really need it to be right for the island's needs. Thank you, sir,

The Speaker –

Thank you. Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Is the Honourable Minister aware that the longer that this project drags on, the more deterioration and depreciation there will be on what is already in situ?

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Minister. I'll give him a chance to answer these questions first.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I like to thank the Honourable Member for her question. And yes, I am aware that the longer it drag on, that it will deteriorate however we do have members of the team around there, sort of keeping up with the maintenance of the current infrastructure. So it's not like it's just sitting there rusting away. There are continuous maintenance happening with the existing infrastructure so that it deteriorates at a much slower rate.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Chief Minister, you wanted to rise on a point.

The Hon. Chief Minister –

Yes, Mr. Speaker, I think I just would like to reassure the Honourable Dr Corinda Essex that this came up in some of the conversation I had with our FCDO colleagues when I was in the UK, because, like you and like all of us, I think around the table, BFI has been a bit of a sore subject for St Helena. For some time I've been given the assurance that they will continue to support us with the existing setup, because they understand that the new BFI, if I can call it that, is obviously being delayed constantly. So now that I'm back on island, I'm hoping that we can get an update and then send that back to FCDO to better understand what it is that they're trying to do. I will echo what Minister Brooks has said, however, that I have said to them, they need to take in mind our desire to move to more renewable energy, and whether the new BFI is actually fit for purpose, for the future of St Helena.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you. I thank both Ministers for their responses. However, the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Treasury and Sustainable Development indicated that there is constant repair work and maintenance work being done on the installation. What was the cost of that please?

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I like to thank the Honourable Member for her question. Right now, I don't have those figures to hand. Mr. Speaker we can find that out and we try and put some cost factors together so that we can present it to my Honourable Friend. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Can the Honourable Minister clarify whether those costs are also being met by HMG or St Helena Government?

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

They'll be met by HMG. Mr. Speaker, thank you.

Question No. 12 - The Honourable Ronald Coleman to ask the Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development.

The Speaker –

Honourable Ronald Coleman.

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Thank you. Mr. Speaker, can the Honourable Minister for Treasury Infrastructure and Sustainable Development give an update to this House on any work which is being carried out thus far to improve International Banking and Insurance options, to make St Helena more attractive to the outside world and particularly Inward Investors?

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development, please.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for his question. Mr. Speaker, the Sustainable Development Team has been working to improve International Banking and Insurance options to make the island a more attractive place for Inward Investors. Mr. Speaker, recently, the Sustainable Development Team succeeded in providing local businesses an option that allows them to accept Visa and MasterCard payments from customers. The ability to now accept Visa and MasterCard provides security and convenience for the customer to pay for goods and services, and will make it easier for businesses to accept payments both on Island and for their overseas customers. It will also make it easier for tourists

and visitors to spend money on island. Mr. Speaker, I just want to talk through some of the benefits of this, but not get into too much detail, unless we be here for a year, because there is a lot of benefits from this, and it is important that we bring the island up to up to a more modern sort of way of accepting Visa and MasterCard payments. So bringing these MasterCard payments to St Helena will help boost the island's economy by increasing consumer spend. And Mr. Speaker, my team have done some initial you know, some background and some research on this. And they found that numerous studies will show that consumers are more likely to shop with somebody that accepts Visa and MasterCard than if they didn't. And consumers that accept, sorry, and the shops that accept the Visa or MasterCard tend to generally get more business and more spend within their businesses. So it also would help to attract new businesses and inward investment, as Visa and MasterCard payments are a sign of modern and development economies by offering Visa and MasterCard payments. St. Helena will be an attractive place to new businesses, and it also hopefully will increase tourism now. Visa and MasterCard payments are by far, around about a billion people around the world use either one of these, and by offering a Visa and MasterCard payments on St. Helena, it would hopefully extract more money from tourism, and what springs to mind here is when the cruise ships sort of call to St Helena, and we have like sort of a couple 100, or even a couple of 1000 coming shore on a daily basis that, you know we are capable now, or the shops very soon, will be capable of accepting their Visa MasterCards. So some of the other work that is being carried out by my portfolio is just reviewing St Helena success regulatory framework, and this is all around the financial sector. We are also trying to promote St Helena as a potential financial St. Helena government. So this government is working to identify niche areas that could be used to promote St Helena as a niche financial center. In addition Mr. Speaker, we are also working to improve the island's infrastructure, including telecommunications networks. This will make it easier to attract financial services and businesses on Island. We are confident, Mr. Speaker that these measures will help to make St. Helena a more attractive and desirable place to live, work and invest. My portfolio was also working with an investor that wants to offer a wider and more broader insurance package for the island community, and we hope to see some traction in this regards, very soon. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I think that is answering my friend's question, and like I said I'm very pleased that our Sustainable Development Team, or in particular, our Financial Services Development Manager, was able to find a solution for the business on the island in such a short time, and it is a testimony to the work that he's done in taking up his role, but certainly in the government. So thank you Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much Honourable Member. Honourable Ronald Coleman.

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, just to thank the Honourable Minister for that reply.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much.

6.

MOTIONS

Motion No. 1 - The Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure & Sustainable Development

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House resolves that the excess and expenditure for the financial year, 2021/2022 in the Statement of Expenditure in Excess of 2021/22 laid as SP 6/2023 now stand charge to public funds in accordance with section 106(3) of the Constitution.

The Speaker -

Thank you, Honourable Member. Is there a seconder? Honourable Chief Minister

The Hon. Chief Minister -

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I beg to second.

The Speaker -

Thank you very much. Thank you, Honourable Member.

The Hon. Mark Brooks -

I really wish to speak to the motion, speak further to the motion. Mr. Speaker at the March 2023, formal meeting of Legislative Council, a statement of expenditure in excess for the financial year, 2021/2022 was presented as a Sessional Paper 6/2023 in accordance with section 106(1) of the Constitution. The statement reported that Head 15, Safety, Security and Home Affairs had excess capital expenditure of £524 for the purchase of a replacement compressor, where there was insufficient capital budget to cover the transportation costs for the shipping agent. Mr Speaker also under Head 22, Education Skills and Employment had excess capital expenditure of £4094, which related to the installation of a fire alarm system for the Community College. Mr Speaker under Head 23, Health had excess expenditure over the appropriated recurrent budget for the amount of £400,914, this related to an additional cost for overseas Medical Referrals for the 2021/2022 financial year. And Head 29 finally, Mr Speaker was for turn in Adult Social Care. They had an expense excess in expenditure of the appropriated recurring budget of £55,930, which related to additional unbudgeted employee costs for the Community Care Centre. The Statement of Expenditure in Excess of 2021/2022 has subsequently been scrutinised by the Public Accounts Committee under section 106(2) of the Constitution and they have reported back to this House today via Sessional Paper, 14/2023, recommending to this House that the excess expenditure for the four Heads, expenditure totalling £461,462 pounds stand charge of public funds. And as my Honourable Friend alluded to earlier, there is some recommendations in this report too. But Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say that they have given this Sessional Paper, has been laid. So I beg to move. Thank you.

The Speaker -

Thank you very much Honourable Member. Honourable Members, the motion is that this house resolves that the excess expenditure for the financial year, 2021/2022 in the statement of expenditure in excess 2021/2022 laid as Sessional Paper 6/2023 now stand charged to public funds in accordance with section 106(3) of the Constitution. The motion is now open for debate. Any Member wish to speak.

The Hon. Christine Scipio -

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I support the motion because, as the Minister mentioned, that the majority of the expenditure relates to the Public Health and of course, we don't know about the unknowns when we talk about forecasting and budgets and everything else in that particular area. But Mr. Speaker, I would ask the mover if one consideration will be undertaken for the recommendations that was proposed by the PAC, because I note that there was a recommendation talked about having a discussion within our Cabinet, so with all Ministers. So

I'm asking the Mover if there is going to be any action in relation to the recommendations made by PAC.

The Speaker -

I will ask him to respond afterwards. Does any other Member in the meantime wish to speak? The Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks -

I'll just respond to my Honourable Friend. Yes, what I would say is that the report has just come out, so we have not had the chance to even look at the recommendations. But yes, if there is recommendations in there, and we feel that needs a Cabinet discussion around us, then yes, I will undertake to do that. Obviously, whatever we can do to improve the situation and not always having these excess and expenditure obviously will help the whole of public funds and help us manage it a lot better. So if there is any recommendations, then, yes, we will work towards these recommendations. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Any other Members wish to speak? Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

I would like to rise on a point of information.

The Speaker –

Please do so.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and a point of information, the Public Accounts Committee tracks all its recommendations and what action is taken by St Helena Government in response to those and that monitoring is done on a regular ongoing basis. Thank you.

The Speaker -

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister. Do you wish to make further response?

The Hon. Mark Brooks -

No, Mr. Speaker, just to thank everyone for their support. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Okay, Honourable Members, the Motion is that this House resolves the excess expenditure for the financial year, 2021/2022, in the Statement of Expenditure in Excess, 2021/2022 laid as Sessional Paper 6/2023 now stands charge to Public Funds in accordance to section 106(3) of the Constitution.

Question put and agreed.

7.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

The Speaker –

Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister -

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn sine die.

The Speaker -

Thank you. Is there a seconder for this Motion, please?

The Hon. Minister Scipio -

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to second.

The Speaker –

Thank you. The motion is that this House do now adjourn sine die. The motion is now open for debate. The Honourable Ronald Coleman.

The Hon. Ronald Coleman -

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we don't need to be told that the expectations of our people are high and they always expect more over the 18 months ago and soon there will be two years have passed. During the election campaign, we promised to improve the quality of life for all and also leaving no one behind. Are we looking after our people, especially with the high cost of living? Are we doing enough to lift our people out of poverty? Mr. Speaker, where is the budget for 2023/24? We always blame others for not having a budget on time. We had the budget at the end of March, Mr. Speaker. What is the hold up so that Directors can get on with their plans to make St Helena a better place, because the arrangements at the moment is not good enough, as it restricts spending to get things done. Our budget, yes, we are waiting to see if there is any way that we can also help our students, the much talked about finance, who has worked hard over the years and now looking forward to going to the UK to qualify themselves in the fields they have chosen to make St Helena proud, like many before us. Are we able to support them? As time is fast running out, students you have my full support. What is the situation on student finance? What about migration? One of our main policies was to revise the land disposal policy. The aim was to widen the definition of first time buyers for those who are offshore wanting to build a house on St Helena, their home. This is still not materialised, and why is it taking so long? Then there's the Immigration Policy. When will this be finalised? Why is this taking so long? We were told that this policy has been going on for several years and still no end in sight. Mr Speaker, every day I bump into drivers who are over 70 years of age. Yes, you guessed it, the Road Traffic Ordinance, which would make better provisions for drivers over 70 for their medical tests. This has not also happened after many years of promise. Why is legislation taking so long? We are legislators, Mr. Speaker, but in the last 18 months, we've only had the Communications Bill. We were promised the legislative framework, but still nothing. What's going on Mr. Speaker? Mr. Speaker, I now just see that there's been a written response to this, but this response needs to be got out to the members of the public who have their concerns. Mr. Speaker, our shipping service, not very good at the moment. Over six weeks turns into now most eight to nine weeks. Finally, the ship is due to arrive this evening. I wonder what it's carrying on the second trip. The island has been out of eggs, so finally we have our one day old chicks. Mr. Speaker, Maestro is gradually arriving. I am so concerned about the tight completion date. And thank God for air freight, some merchants took the initiative and brought in the much needed cheese and butter, some fresh fruit and also drinks. Even for some the butter was seven pound a packet, and a canned drink was 1.75 but it did kept some of us going. Then we have the fish factory. What I have heard and seen, things don't seem to be going too good for fishermen and the industry. Thank you Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to focus attention on just one topic today, and that is the predicament of the young persons who were led to believe by seeing annual cohorts of fully funded students leaving St Helena to study overseas, that they would have scholarships provided to enable them to commence university studies this year, but have recently been informed that this is almost certainly not going to be the case. In my intervention in the adjournment debate last October, I asked, and I quote, “what progress has been made in determining whether or not local students will, in fact, be eligible under Britain's student finance scheme. We have highly intelligent students who achieve well at any level who are aspiring to go to university next year, and they need to know sooner rather than later, what their prospects are”. I was assured the clarification was being sought and would be forthcoming. Now almost eight months later, the situation appears to be becoming increasingly less clear, although the students will need to leave St Helena within the next three months or so, if there are to take up the university places that have been offered to them. The latest blow has been that Student Finance England has indicated that the young persons are not even eligible for tuition fees under the Student Finance scheme, although they were previously informed that they would qualify for these, and it was only the travel and maintenance costs that would have to be funded from other sources. This is seriously concerning, as it potentially jeopardises the possibility of some of the students being able to afford to take up their placement. I am aware that both the Honourable Chief Minister and the St Helena Government United Kingdom representative, have been, and are still, doing all they can to find out precisely what Student Finance will support and if other funding streams can be identified. I hope that the Honourable Chief Minister will provide a brief overview of progress in her response to this debate. I am also aware that the Education Directorate is actively pursuing establishment of a Scholarship Trust. This was first proposed in 2019 when I was a Member of Education Committee, but, for reasons explained in response to my question on today's Order Paper, it has not yet been set up. A number of key actions remain outstanding, and it is very unlikely that these will be able to be settled in time to assist the present cohort before they commence their studies, although there is a possibility that a Trust could provide them with support in future years, depending on its terms and conditions. Even if the matter is finally resolved satisfactorily, the young persons and their families have been placed in an extremely stressful, unhappy and uncertain state through absolutely no fault of their own. They are victims of systemic failures and contradictions for which they were unprepared, and they deserve all the assistance that they can get. I am not attempting to apportion blame, but it is frankly unacceptable that the situation has arisen and St Helena Government arguably has a moral duty and responsibility to mitigate its negative impact upon the future of the young persons concerned, all of whom have expressed willingness to return to St Helena. We are painfully aware of the budget constraints facing us, and that very difficult choices will have to be made between competing priorities, but surely it must be possible to allocate some financial assistance to these young persons, even if the full scholarship costs are clearly unaffordable. Such assistance could be supplemented by private sector sponsorship and other possible sources of funding. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Ministers are currently in the process of finalising the budget for 2023/24. I am aware that an undertaking has been given to consider the scholarship issue in this process, and I wish to emphasise the importance to St Helena Government of making some contribution. Under the current circumstances, failure to do so is extremely likely to cause St Helena Government to

be perceived as uncaring and unsupportive, resulting in serious reputational damage and loss of public support and confidence. Mr. Speaker, I support the adjournment.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter -

Thank you. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the adjournment. Firstly, Mr. Speaker, I wish to formally welcome back His Excellency, the Governor and our Chief Minister. I look forward to hearing how their various engagements on behalf of our island went and what results were generated from such engagements. I am particularly interested in hearing how matters raised at the Joint Ministerial Council were received and responded to by His Majesty's Government, such as the maintenance elements of student finance, and also the possibility that UK state pensions paid here in St Helena may be index linked against inflation in the future. Mr. Speaker, I next wish to congratulate the St Helena Football Association, the Anglican Diocese, our uniformed youth groups and all others involved in organising last Sunday's festivities, for an absolutely wonderful St Helena's Day. And also the working group for the King's Coronation and all involved in making that weekend so special. It is through events such as these that we get to see that the St Helenian Community Spirit is still alive and kicking, both here and overseas. It was also really good to see the Health and Social Care Portfolio recognising International Nursing Day with a special event at the hospital. And I was very pleased to attend the special service at St Michael's Church in Rupert's earlier this month that commemorated the official establishment of our Community on the fifth of May 1659, and also recognizing the role that this community played in the abolition of slavery, both of which I believe are important for us to remember. Mr. Speaker, whilst it is my intention to keep what I have to say brief today, I feel that I must note that I am repeatedly being approached by constituents who feel disillusioned in respect of how the island is progressing thus far under a Ministerial form of government, and in particular the lack of progress being made in respect of bringing key items of legislation to this House. Mr. Speaker, the written response given to this house in respect of my question regarding the legislative program is the type of typical non answer that we have become used to hearing about draft policies and legislation, and in the space of nine months, we have gone from a commitment to this program being shared with us within the coming week, to pretty well no commitment at all. Indeed, whilst in the UK, an outline program is given by the Head of State when Parliament commences each new session, here in St Helena, it has taken 19 months thus far, and we still have no sign of that particular baby. So I hope that our own government are not birthing another elephant, as the written response given suggests that a mammoth task is currently being undertaken. Mr. Speaker, another key area of public concern is the allocation of budgets and what this will mean in practice when it comes to delivery of key services such as Health and Social Care and Education. So I look forward to participating in detailed discussions regarding the budgets with the Ministerial team and officials before these are brought before this House for our endorsement. And I sincerely hope that during the forthcoming year, we will not see precious money being wasted on frivolous items, such as rubber wristbands to promote on island community events when we are trying to encourage a move away from single use plastics, in order to reduce landfill waste and also protect our marine environment. Mr. Speaker, to be quite frank, the public is getting fed up with certain issues that seem to be dragging on and on without any light at the end of the proverbial tunnel, and raising questions that never seem to get answered in any meaningful way, such as what is happening right now with our fishing sector, and how we as an island can move this forward in a manner which finally contributes to our economy. Mr. Speaker, last week, a reception was held at the Palace of Westminster to

celebrate our Island's Blue and Green agenda. And it is wonderful that our island is being showcased in such a manner that said, Mr. Speaker, the press release which followed made reference to our internationally recognised sustainable fishery. However, I doubt that any of our local fishermen would consider our fishery sustainable under the current circumstances, and they are calling for us, their elected representatives, to start taking action to change this. Thus noted Mr. Speaker in closing, I would simply ask our Chief Minister if she will tell this House what actions her Government is willing to take in order to address this current situation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker,

The Speaker -

Thank you very much. Honourable Rosemary Bargo.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the adjournment. Mr. Speaker today, my questions raised in the House address the concerns we are facing today within our education system. And one of the concerns is the behavioural issues of a few students that cause, in some cases, distress amongst our teachers and students alike. We as a Government have a constitutional responsibility to provide an educational environment that enables our teachers to teach and our children to excel. We need to urgently update and where needed implement legislation and policies, along with providing the necessary training to enable our teachers to teach without unnecessary anxiety. The knock on effect of not having effective policies to protect our children, teachers and all staff in our schools will bring about a breakdown of an esteemed education system that took years to build. As Children's Champion, I was privy to a letter from teachers about the issues that they were currently facing at Prince Andrew School today. It appears that our teachers are at their wits end, as they have no clear direction and training on how to handle or cope with children that present serious behavioural issues. And I'm happy to see that the Education Department are now addressing these issues, and hopefully we can get these policies through as soon as possible. We stand to lose our teachers, and one of the contributors to that is the increasing challenging behaviours of students. In a wider context, I'm hoping that Education is able to source the required budget to address issues our schools are facing today, such as extremely slow recruitment processes, lack of budget to improve teacher's salaries, to hire additional staff and engage more TC officers as and when required, which is coupled with competitiveness of salaries outside of SHG, decreasing skills and St Helena's labour force. When recruiting locally, people do not have the required skills and or they are put off by the increasing challenging behaviours of Students who does not make teaching attractive. It took decades to develop an Education system which we could be well proud of, and we need to ensure that this vital basic human right is not compromised in any way. I would like to recognise the continued struggles in trying to access financial support for maintenance fees, for a current cohort of students who are hoping to attend university this year. I know that Mrs. Kedall Worboys and the Chief Minister are working extremely hard to address the current situation these students are facing, and I hope they are able to source an acceptable outcome in the upcoming days, if they haven't already. I want to thank them both for their relentless efforts. Mr. Speaker, everyone now have had the ability to apply to universities and not just a select few, but it is now an opportunity open to all, which is an amazing accomplishment for our island, and I hope we can get a win, win situation, and the sourcing of affordable maintenance finance for those who wish to go to Uni., I do believe that having affordable opportunities for students to attend university will also help in retaining our working population on island, especially those who have children that are aspiring to go to Uni. but they do not have the financial means themselves to do so. Having such opportunities can assist with not losing our working population, for better opportunities for their children elsewhere, Mr.

Speaker, we as a Legislative Council, St Helena Government, teachers, parents, children and the community as a whole have a responsibility to ensure that our education for our children is not negatively impacted upon and increased financial resources must be considered so that legacy work, and recent works done by others, are protected, thus enabling our education system to continue to have the ability to thrive. Our Island has serious economic and social issues to face, and I'm sure that the upcoming budget, which I'm looking forward to seeing early next week, reflect support to these issues. I also share the concerns of my fellow Legislative Council Members, the lack of a legislation program, which is a major tool in prioritising legislation for review and implementation and in providing a plan to ensure that we can deliver in good time. This does not have our islands issues, nor puts us in good light with the public. Our economy depends on vital policies such as the immigration policy and the land property disposal policy, which we all know is taking an excessive amount of time to get over the line. They, in my opinion, are vital to help address the issues we face such as our declining working population and prevention of further outward migration, and the ability to attract people of working age back to our island, whilst opening an island to other potential investors. The delay on such policies put our economy in further jeopardy. On a more positive note, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank our key personnel, such as teachers, nurses, social workers, carers, police and fire service, to name a few. They are doing an excellent job in such worrying times with limited human and financial resources. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Minister Brooks and Dion and his team and the Works Department for enabling my request for the works to the New Horizons building to recommence earlier than planned, which I believe is happening this week. I also would like to welcome back the Chief Minister and the Governor and I look forward to the Chief Minister's report in due course of a recent trip overseas, where she attended the Coronation of the King and the Joint Ministerial Conference. Mr. Speaker earlier this month, the working group for the King's Coronation put on a fun full day for everyone, and I would like to recognise and thank them for a job extremely well done. And also special thanks to the St Helena Football Association and especially our International football team, who took the lead in organising St Helena this day on Sunday, and I want to wish them a successful upcoming football tournament in Guernsey. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Member. Is there any other Honourable Member? Honourable Minister Scipio.

The Hon. Christine Scipio -

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I just want to for the benefit of our listeners to share some information. I don't want our listeners to think that, since we had an indication from Her Majesty Government about what our envelope would be and of course, we all around the table and the officers in the building here welcome the increase of 4%; but I don't want listeners to get the impression that we as Ministers or even Elected Members haven't done anything since that announcement in late March, because of course, Ronald Coleman mentioned, what is the delay? Why is it taking so long?

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Can I raise a point of order?

The Speaker -

Please do. Please be seated Minister. Please proceed.

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Just checking if the Minister is responding now to our Adjournment Debate, or it's going to be left for the Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister –
(*Inaudible*)

The Speaker -

Okay thank you. Thank you very much. Sorry, Honourable Minister please continue.

The Hon Christine Scipio -

My understanding Mr. Speaker, if you like to correct me, that an Adjournment Debate gives the opportunity for Elected Members to speak.

The Speaker -

I actually control the Adjournment Debate Honourable Minister.

The Hon Christine Scipio -

So Mr. Speaker, I've stood up and referring to the Honourable Ronald Coleman's statement, what about is happening. Because in the last three weeks, as the entire community is fully aware, I was Deputy Chief Minister. Hence, the reason I'm standing up to provide that, like I said, information to the community. So, Mr. Speaker, if I may continue?

The Speaker –

Are you on your feet Honourable Member? Well that's what you're there for.

The Hon Christine Scipio -

Thank you. So, Mr. Speaker, since the increase in the budget envelope, which we all appreciate and grateful thanks to Her Majesty Government for that. When we presented the budget, or when we agreed for a submission to be made to Her Majesty Government last year, circumstances has changed, because that was, the discussions were held in September, October, November, and circumstances has changed, because quite a few number of months has passed. So Ministers had to look at the budget, because we need to ensure that the budget reflects the Minister's mission. And the discussion was held with all Elected Members on the fifth of May, which is quite recent, and an update was given to all Elected Members, where we are, with the budget. And during that time I was Deputy Chief Minister, I gave an undertaking to provide a further update to all Elected Members this week, the 23rd of May, but we recognise that in discussions with the Portfolio Directors, as in we, Ministers, realise that the other work streams still need to be undertaken, and that was relayed to the all Elected Members. And I agreed that a further discussion to bring all Members up to date for a session to be held next Tuesday, the 30th of May. So, Mr. Speaker, there is a deficit, and I'm certain that all Members and in the community would want us to present to the House at the end of June a balanced budget. So hence the reason why there are further discussions to ensure that we can close the gap. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker -

Thank you Honourable Minister Scipio, and I certainly would like to thank you for your time as Acting Chief Minister. Anyone else wish to speak otherwise call on the Chief Minister. Chief Minister.

The Hon Chief Minister -

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, I'd like to thank everybody for your contributions today. I will admit that I'm not going to be able to answer everybody today, I've been away for three weeks, and it may not seem like a long time, but in politics, it can seem like three years instead of three weeks sometimes. So there has been some comments made which, I have to be honest, as soon as I got back into work on Tuesday, the full day was budgets. So I haven't even had the opportunity to have updates from my Ministers on a one to one basis. So there's a few things that I won't be able to provide you with updates with, particularly today, I would like to thank Minister Scipio for once again, being the Deputy Chief Minister in my absence, and I thank you for giving the update on the budget, because I know that obviously we are having that crucial discussion next Tuesday. And I would hope that it would be very enlightening to all Elected Members, because as much as these areas that we'd all like to see get addressed, I think the shocking news is, and I need to just remind you of this as well, we were asked to do three scenarios when we were getting ready for this budget, 4% decrease, a flat line and a 4% increase to get to a flat line budget. Or dare I say, if we had got to a 4% decrease, we were taking out whole services, because we wouldn't have been able to do it in a flat line budget. So I think what I need all Elected Members to remember, and also the listening public, thank you for the 4% increase, and that has been conveyed to His Majesty's Government and to all the officers in the UK. And I'm sure I've thanked the officers here for their support as well, but a 4% increase actually gives us the ability to put back some of the key services that we've all made reference to today. I've heard Councillor Turner talk about the invasive species, for instance, we've heard about education and how we'd like to help that. There's been mention of assistance given for those in our community who would like to stay in their homes longer. All of those things are actually things that we're considering putting back because they were being considered taking out because we wouldn't be able to balance a flat line budget. So I think that would give some flavour for the difficult decisions that will need to come by the end of June, but dare I say it, next month, next week, sorry, when we all start talking about it. So that is our budget. Always recall what the vision is for this government. And it is immigration, it is shipping, it is sea access, actually, it's both air and sea. We've always said we wanted to move to renewable energy. Telecoms was another big factor. Because I stand firm on the fact that renewable energy and telecoms is the key to stabilising St Helena, because it is such costs that affects businesses and the domestic community all in one. If we can then reduce that, St. Helena Government would also see some savings, and then could reinvest that money into other areas that we'd love to support right now, but just simply can't. I do agree, however, that there are areas that we could do better in. I'm not going to claim that this Government has/is doing everything that it demonstrates the best and effective way of doing business. Our students, you are correct I can't wait to find time to be able to feedback on what I've done in the UK in the last three weeks. I did try, I have to admit, to update everybody via Facebook. I do understand everybody doesn't have access to that. And thanks also to the Press Office team for keeping Kedall and I on our toes to try and push out information and photographs to demonstrate what is happening or what was happening in the UK. It was a positive experience, and I have to be honest, coming back today and to hear the negativity or the loneliness of St Helena, we need to keep our spirits high and fight hard to keep St Helena on the agenda for the UK, not suggesting that it isn't there. But like us, the UK have also got their constraints. They've got huge problems. Education is no stranger to having their difficulties in the UK as well, trying to sustain teachers, to sustain nurses. I'm sure everybody looks at the news and the issues that's going on there. That impacts St Helena, as well. Our students, we all want to fight for our students. And I can tell you at every platform, and I'm sure if the Governor was here, he'd say it is correct, at every chance that I had to push for our students maintenance loans, I did it. Not just in JMC, with our CDO, with our Minister for Overseas Territories, even in our Overseas Territories Conference, which is the first of its kind. And I must say, a huge thank you to the Speaker of the House,

Lindsay Hoyle, for allowing the British Overseas Territories to have the voice in which it did. And also for the St. Helena, All Party Parliamentary Group. For those who don't know, and I think this time because JMC actually happened, whereas last time I went, it was cancelled, our UK Representative, Kedell Worboys does a sterling job in putting St Helena on the map. All the meetings that I had in the margins with Ministers would not have happened if it hadn't been for Kedell. She knows those corridors very, very well, and now having the Overseas Territories have a room in Parliament, will actually improve that understanding. So I would say to us to keep pushing onwards, but we need to have clear messaging. We can't say we want renewable energy, telecoms, access and four or five up to, and then come in with other different things, because it then gets all muffled into exactly what it is that we want. I know it's difficult, and I understand that. Our students, and I just like to add, actually, because a lot of emphasis was placed on the UK Rep Kedell, which is indeed, she is doing a lot of work, she's our spokesperson in the UK, and myself. But I'd also like to extend that to Wendy, our Director for Education, and all the staff at Prince Andrew, because we are all trying to work together to get this. The only commitment I'm going to make today is that everybody who needs to know, that we are struggling with the maintenance loans, knows it. The mention that Dr Essex made about not having access to tuition, this is the nonsense, if I can call it that, because that's what Kedell told the students when she was here on island, emails that they will get. We've had it with the first year, and we had it even prior to student finance, where they just don't understand that St Helena is the British Overseas Territory, so they'll ask for proof of residence in the country for three years. I can almost assure you that Kedell will push that, and tuition fees will not be dampened because of not understanding that we won't have residence in St Helena. Our Minister is pushing extremely hard, and I have to say, I had a lot of support from all the other Premiers. In respect of the Maintenance Loan, what I cannot give is confirmation to the students that we will be able to provide maintenance funding for them for this year. We never did give it. And whilst we go through the budget process, I will actually open the floor to other Elected Members to tell me where that funding is going to come from, because with the 4% increase, I just don't see it at this present time, I will agree with Dr Essex, however, that we need to now look at the Scholarship Trust and private sector support and sponsorship would be greatly appreciated. We do need that. However, I think the students also need to look at the Education system. There are pitfalls and shortfalls within the Education system for those students that is our core priority, if I can put it that way, from the ages of nursery all the way up to a level whereby we are not catering for our students with special educational needs and disabilities. We aren't catering for those with social, emotional and mental health issues. So there are also gaps there, and like Councillor Bargo has rightly pointed out, there is issues with regards to the right policies. But I will give a call to all students and teachers alike that we need to be able to breathe almost and accept that not only the students are to blame here, it could be the way in which we present ourselves as adults to the students as well, because going into the schools, you'll hear the students then complain to about the way they are addressed as young adults as well. So I think there's a lot of balancing acts that we need to do, and the policies are going to be key there. Without pushing blame onto the Attorney General, he and his team is very much pushed when it comes to legislation as well. So we've got a lot of work to do with policy, but then we turn into the AG and his team for assistance in getting the Education Ordinance right. But as Councillor Midwinter said, not in your adjournment, but we do need to include everybody, students, teachers, parents, the lot, but we need engagement, and we can't slow it down to wait for people who don't want to engage when the time is right. So I'd encourage everybody to do that. Yes, I did present on our Blue and Green agenda in the UK, and I can tell you that was one of the most uplifting events I've ever been to in my entire life, to be perfectly honest with you, to be surrounded by people who genuinely care for St Helena and the Blue and Green agenda, but there were people there who said we'd like to add culture and

heritage to that. And I said, well, we would too, but we just don't have the funding to be able to do it. So hopefully it's opened doors for opportunities there as well. However, our fish factory and the fishing industry, and whatever it is that we've all mentioned here today, it is a sore subject for me to talk about, because one minute, I have to declare an interest, and then now I'm being asked to give an update on it. So all I can say, and I think all Elected Members know this, as a team we need to talk about the way forward for our fishing industry. And other than going any further than that before someone says there's a conflict of interest, I think we need to look at our legislations, and we need to better understand what it is we do to protect our local people, because, if not, and the supply of fresh fish to the island and the export market, because we need the revenue generation if we ever want to change the trajectory that St Helena is on. I know that Minister Gillian Brooks is very new in her role as Safety, Security and Home Affairs. I don't want to make any commitments as to what's going on with the Immigration policy, but I know that there's some updates that she's ready to give to the Cabinet next week, and I don't want to pre-empt that, because I probably would be out of date in what I'm giving as an update there. I am hoping, if time allows that my on my own, or with the Governor, we will go on radio very soon to talk about our visit to the UK, because I think that's the quickest way to get it out there to the community. I had hoped that that would have been done on Friday. I think there's more meetings now that's being held on Friday that's going to make that extremely difficult. But I want to reassure the community that you will hear from us, if not, this week early next. I would just encourage everybody, as we go forward now, to always remember that there is a budget limitation to everything that we do. And I'd ask all Elected Members to have a look at this budget next week, and we then need to as a team present at that when approved, to the community of St Helena, so that everybody understands why we can't fix everything and why our priorities are our priorities. Because in the long term, it will deliver the best interest of St Helena. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Chief Minister. Oh Attorney General, I do beg your pardon, I didn't see your light, please.

The Hon. Attorney General –

I would just like to make one or two comments, if I may, particularly on the legislative program. This has been a long standing issue, and it is time it got drawn together, and that is the process that is currently under way to my understanding. The current stage is that the mechanism to produce the program has been accepted and agreed, and it consists of two things, one a list of legislation, but more importantly, the template that justifies that legislation and enables the government, my colleagues, Ministerial colleagues, led by the Chief Minister, to determine the priorities. It needs the structure and it needs the priorities and once we know that, we can assess the demand and we can endeavour to meet the supply side of the equation. So while I know it must be frustrating to have had this history, we're trying to accelerate it in a structured way that everyone can understand and that is sufficiently flexible to take account of changing needs. That is as much as I really want to say. The issue is with the Chief Secretary right now, she has marshalled the Portfolio Directors to, as it were, set out their stall on a policy level, in order to ascertain which pieces of legislation should be accorded priority. And that, of course, is a decision for the government of the day. They have to settle that, and when we know what the agenda is, we will be on it. In the meantime, we are dealing with issues that do arise from time to time. One example is recently, which I can give you, our adjustments to the Telecommunications Ordinance to make arrangements to implement the Maestro project so that access to property can be guaranteed to fix poles and lines. Therefore that will be coming to this house in early course in order to expedite that particular project. Just two other small

points, if I may, by way of information Mr. Speaker, thank you. We have got a situation in the Chambers where we have less than our compliment for various reasons, historical, and you're probably familiar, and I'm not going to go into detail. However, we have a good core, and we have a committed team who are, if they need anything, it's to be restrained from time to time. And that's a very good way in which to have a team. However, we do not have enough to meet demand. We are facing quite an amount of litigation, which we are endeavouring to get under proper management, having been in abeyance for reasons, again I am not going to go into. We are making assessments of potential liability in order to sort the wheat from the chaff, and that's a work in progress to help us with the overall work of Chambers. Procurement is a huge issue for St Helena, and we need to have increased capacity so pending longer term solutions, the immediate answer we have come to is that we will recruit on a short term local basis. Junior Crown Council from the UK who spend their summer holidays, perhaps not doing as much as they might want to assist with the workload. That is one initiative, and we are hopeful that we might bring, perhaps, to Crown Council. We have, apparently four who are interested in early course to spread the load. Finally, the Chambers only works when the front office works. And we've had a vacancy, and I just want to finish on this note that vacancy has now been filled by the recruitment of a school leaver, and we are investing in the young, because that's where the future is, and that's all I wanted to say. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much Honourable Attorney General. Thank you very much for that very valuable input. Honourable Members, thank you. That now concludes the business for today. Thank you all for your contributions. There is an important Sessional Paper that needs to be laid earlier on the table at a formal Legislative Council meeting. We would have attempted that today, but, you know, we took a vote and you wanted to have carry on with the adjournment rather than to have lunch. So we have to leave that for another time. I am aware that you have an important meeting later on this afternoon, so we don't want to miss out on anything there, and you will want to have some lunch before that. But we do have a formal meeting, another formal meeting arranged for next week. Following that meeting, we will be able to have the important item I am talking about. And this is an essential paper I am referring to. It can be done then, it will be just a one item piece, right? So we can do both on that day. So thank you all very much. Enjoy the rest of today.

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Chairman

27/3/25

