



Levelwood Constituency Meeting

Silver Hill Bar | Attendees: 10 | Chair Ronald Coleman

Welcomes:

Cllr Ronald Coleman started off the meeting by talking about his renewed commitment to Levelwood. He shared plans to get the community centre up and running and highlighted a recent beautification win for the area, noting a tea party planned with the prize funds. He emphasized that more local highlights need attention not only for tourists but also to improve daily life for residents.

Councillors' Roles and Introductions:

Each council member introduced themselves and briefly spoke about the committees they serve on. There was a strong sense of teamwork and specialization: some focused on health and social care, others on youth, employment, or economic development. Julie Thomas spoke about encouraging greater communication with the public and youth, while Rebecca Cairns Wicks, as Chief Minister, shared that ministers were just settling into their roles and welcomed ideas from the public.

Public Involvement and Accountability:

Locals voiced concerns about how often the council meets and how accessible councillors are outside of these meetings. They wanted to see more frequent gatherings, better follow-ups on questions, and more transparency in how issues are handled. Several councillors agreed and mentioned a new plan to publish meeting notes, ensuring everyone knows what is happening in other district meetings as well.

Police, Crime, and Community Confidence:

A significant discussion focused on local policing. Residents felt there was too much focus on prosecution for minor offences and wanted more verbal warnings, especially for young people, as criminal records can affect job successes. The council recognized frustration with the system, noting a need for clear, positive engagement between police and the community to rebuild trust. It was mentioned that the Police and Crime Panel will meet on the 13th of November and these matters will be raised.

Cost of Living and Economic Pressures:

The rising cost of living was a major topic. Attendees talked about wage increases and economic difficulties, particularly for the elderly and those on fixed incomes. The importance of increasing local food production, stabilizing electricity prices, and considering taxation changes to support residents was highlighted. There were frank acknowledgments of the serious budget challenges facing the island.

Roads and Infrastructure:

There was a lively conversation about the island's roads—many are in disrepair, and constituents want to see more investment and better maintenance. Some frustration was expressed about how resources are allocated and how projects are managed. The council explained that extra funding this year would help improve more roads but emphasized that tough choices must be made on priorities, as a one-year budget does not allow forward planning.

The Public Service (SHG) Employment:

Several constituents expressed ongoing frustration with the way jobs and recruitment are handled by the Public Service. Constituents highlighted that hiring processes often take far too long and that outdated HR systems prevent departments from working efficiently. Councillors explained that, unfortunately, employment matters are largely outside their direct control; according to the Constitution, these issues fall under the new Head of Public Service and not the council. However, they emphasized that they could help raise complaints and push for better performance management, hoping that new approaches will speed things up and make the system more responsive for everyone.

SHG's Budget:

The budget was a big topic at the meeting, with council members explaining just how tight the budget is and how dependent the island remains on UK funding. They talked about the tough choices involved: if money is spent to boost pensions or raise tax thresholds, it must come from somewhere else, like road repairs or social care. Everyone agreed it's hard to balance these needs, and there was a shared feeling that better planning and clear communication about budget realities are essential for the community to understand why certain decisions are made. The conversation touched on fresh ideas for the island's future, including the possibility of recreational marijuana as a new economic opportunity.

Banking Services:

There were concerns raised about money; council members discussed the annual cost of maintaining the island's own currency and whether switching to Sterling would save money or introduce new challenges. It was noted that the island earns around £150K annually from having its own currency, and that moving to Sterling would bring extra costs such as insurance for transportation and ensuring a regular supply, since Sterling can leave the island whereas SHP is only useful locally. People also highlighted frustrations with outdated banking systems and the limited use of digital money, agreeing that upgrading to modern, digital banking would be a major step forward for both locals and visitors.

Transport and Community Projects:

Public transport was described as insufficient, especially for reaching town after hours. The conversation turned to how the community and local government could collaborate on road maintenance and other infrastructure, considering models where resources and labour from residents, prisoners, and government are pooled.

Innovation in Construction and Services:

The group discussed the need for more flexible, modern building regulations and innovation in home construction to manage costs. Several constituents mentioned that government support for home improvement and health care for the elderly should be fair and sustainable. It was stated that ministers are looking to put the allocation for house adaptations back into the budget to allow people to stay in their homes for longer. Quincy Vale has issues with water and dampness; Longwood First school was mentioned as it could be renovated and decorated, the chair will follow up on the points raised with Housing.

Action: Councillor Coleman needs to check the above with housing.

A constituent raised the fence around St Pauls Primary; Councillor Thomas explained the PMO does not have enough scrutiny and is over engineered lack of improvements in PMO.

Telecommunications and Modern Services

There was a focus on the challenges posed by outdated internet and telecommunications agreements. Council discussed ongoing negotiations with the provider Sure, stressing the need to look for long-term solutions that would help the island's development.

Population, Immigration, and Citizenship

The challenges of attracting and keeping younger people on the island were discussed, with some talk about reviewing citizenship policies. The conversation addressed the balance between supporting growth and maintaining fairness for locals.

Renewable Energy and Utilities

Towards the end, the meeting shifted to renewable energy. There was a debate over centralised power versus microgrids and the role of existing utilities in supporting more sustainable, affordable solutions. The council outlined steps being taken, such as working with consultants and reviewing the regulatory framework, but acknowledged more work is needed.

Action: Councillor Leo to check with Minister Thrower about the Half Tree Hallow solar farm.

Meeting Close and Action Points

The meeting ended with an open floor for further questions. Councillors pledged to make meeting notes public, pursue answers to outstanding issues, and continue working on strategic priorities like roads, energy, and communications. Action items were specifically assigned to councillors to ensure follow-through on key concerns raised.