



ST HELENA GOVERNMENT

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
MONDAY 11TH MARCH 2019 – SECOND SITTING OF
THE NINTH MEETING**

ST. HELENA
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

THE PRESIDENT

The Honourable John Gilbert Cranfield

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

The Honourable Chief Secretary	-	Mrs Susan O'Bey
The Honourable Financial Secretary	-	Mr Dax Richards
The Honourable Acting Attorney General	-	Mr Allen Cansick

ELECTED MEMBERS

The Honourable Clint Richard Beard
The Honourable Cruyff Gerard Buckley
The Honourable Gavin George Ellick
The Honourable Corinda Sebastiana Stuart Essex
The Honourable Anthony Arthur Green
The Honourable Lawson Arthur Henry
The Honourable Kylie Marie Hercules
The Honourable Brian William Isaac
The Honourable Cyril Kenneth Leo
The Honourable Christine Lilian Scipio
The Honourable Derek Franklin Thomas

The Honourable Russell Keith Yon	-	Apologies
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CLERK OF COUNCILS

Ms Anthea Moyce

PROCEEDINGS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Monday, 11th March, 2019

The Council met at 2.00 pm
in the Council Chamber, Jamestown

(The Speaker in the Chair)

ORDER OF THE DAY

1. FORMAL ENTRY OF THE PRESIDENT

2. PRAYERS
(Father David)

3. ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT

Good afternoon, Honourable Members and a very warm welcome back to the second session of the ninth sitting of Legislative Council meeting and I trust you all had a good weekend.

I would like to welcome back the Honourable Tony Green from his Conference, I am sure he will share his experience with us at our next informal meeting. I would also like to thank Father David for giving us the benefit of prayer this afternoon; I would also like to congratulate the Honourable Kylie Hercules and her team for putting on an amazing programme to celebrate Commonwealth Day at the airport this morning. We all should be extremely proud. Well done.

So, Honourable Members, I think we should crack on with the business at hand and I will ask the Clerk to announce the next item of business.

4. MOTIONS

Motion No. 1 – The Honourable Financial Secretary

The Speaker –
The Honourable Financial Secretary?

The Hon. Dax Richards –

Mr Speaker, I beg to move that this House resolves that the excess expenditure for the financial year 2017/18 in the Statement of Expenditure in Excess 2017/18 laid as Sessional Paper 46/2018 now stand charged to public funds in accordance with section 106(3) of the Constitution.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Do we have a seconder, please?

The Hon. Susan O’Bey –

Mr Speaker, I beg to second.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Thank you, Honourable Mover and the Honourable Mover you may speak to the Motion.

The Hon. Dax Richards –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, the Statement of Expenditure in Excess 2017/18 presented to this House last year as Sessional Paper 46/2018 has been considered and scrutinised by the Public Accounts Committee. Their findings are contained in their report dated 18th February 2019 laid in this House on Friday as Sessional Paper 1/2019. Section 106 (3) of the Constitution of St Helena provides that on receiving any report of the Public Accounts Committee issued under subsection 2, the Legislative Council may by resolution allow the expenditure or the amount expended but not appropriated stand charged to the public funds. It is the recommendation of the Public Accounts Committee that the excess expenditure for Head 23 – Health, for recurrent expenditure of £10,404k be allowed to stand charged to the public funds; excess expenditure on Head 22 – Education, for capital expenditure of £34, 304k be allowed to stand charged to public funds; the excess expenditure on Head 26 – Environment and Natural Resources, for capital expenditure of £154,190k be allowed to stand charged to public funds; the excess expenditure on Head 29 – Safeguarding, for capital expenditure of £399 be allowed to stand charged to the public funds.

Mr Speaker, this is a process to ensure accountability and a matter of regulatory. Regulatory on expenditure that has been expended in the year 2017/18 for which there was no budget provision. This is good housekeeping and also ensures that we avoid any potential qualifications on regulatory on the 2017/2018 financial statements. Legislative Council is therefore asked to today to allow in full the excess expenditure contained in Sessional Paper 46/2018 to stand charged to the public funds as recommended by the Public Accounts Committee. Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Members, before we continue, I forgot to put in apologies for the Honourable Russell Yon whose wife has taken sick so he had to leave to take her to the Hospital, so he asked to convey his apologies.

Right, Honourable Members, the Motion is that that this House resolves that the excess expenditure for the financial year 2017/18 in the Statement of Expenditure in Excess 2017/18 laid as Sessional Paper 46/2018 now stand charged to public funds in accordance with section 106(3) of the Constitution. The Motion is now open for debate. The Honourable Brian Isaac?

The Hon. Brian Isaac –

Mr Speaker, I rise in support of this Motion and as a member of the Public Accounts Committee I’m very much involved in this public debate. I give my support to it. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Any other Member wishes to debate the Motion? The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I rise in support of this Motion. As my Honourable Colleague has said the Public Accounts Committee is very pleased that this matter is being tidied up and it improve quality of the accounts moving forward, so it's very pleasing to see that the necessary processes are being followed and that qualification will be avoided.

The Speaker –

Any other Member wishes to speak? Do you wish to respond, Honourable Mover?

The Hon. Dax Richards –

Mr Speaker, I'd just like to thank the two members who actually stood in support of the Motion. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Financial Secretary. Honourable Members, the Motion is that this House resolves that the excess expenditure for the financial year 2017/18 in the Statement of Expenditure in Excess 2017/18 laid as Sessional Paper 46/2018 now stand charged to public funds in accordance with section 106(3) of the Constitution.

Question on Motion, put and agreed to.

The Motion is carried.

Motion No. 2 – The Honourable Brian Isaac.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Brian Isaac?

The Hon. Brian Isaac –

Mr Speaker, I beg to move that this House resolves, further to the good practice of good governance, that Sessional Paper No. 05/19 namely the Public Accounts Committee Report to Legislative Council on the Formal Session held on 29th August 2018 is adopted by this Council and requests the responsible member of Executive Council, in accordance with Section 69(9) of the Constitution of St Helena, to advise Legislative Council of the action proposed to be taken by Government in respect of these reports.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Is there a seconder?

The Hon. Clint Beard –

Mr Speaker, I beg to second.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Clint Beard. Honourable Members, the Motion is that this House resolves, further to the good practice of good governance, that Sessional Paper No. 05/19 namely the Public Accounts Committee Report to Legislative Council on the Formal Session held on 29th August 2018 is adopted by this Council and requests the responsible member of Executive Council, in accordance with Section 69(9) of the Constitution of St Helena, to advise Legislative Council of the action proposed to be taken by Government in respect of these reports. The Motion is now open for debate. Does any Member wish to debate the Motion? Oh, sorry, I beg your pardon.

The Hon. Brian Isaac –

That's fine, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, the precedent for this Motion is well established from previous sittings of this Council. The purpose of this Motion is to ensure the House is aware of the findings of the Public Accounts Committee in the formal report laid at this session. Sessional Paper No. 5/2019 summarises the matters arising from the Public Accounts scrutiny of the audited accounts of various public funds for 2016/17. These include the St Helena Currency Fund, the St Helena Bulk Fuel Installation, St Helena National Trust, St Helena Fisheries Corporation and also includes scrutiny of the Corporate Governance of SHG Group Entities Performance. The issue was raised by the Public Accounts Committee and explanations and assurance received from both changes that the stewardship of these bodies are documented in the report, together with recommendations for improvement. When audited accounts of Government and other bodies are laid before this House, Standing Orders require that they are referred to the Public Accounts Committee without debate. This is to allow the Public Accounts Committee to perform a scrutiny and report back in due course. Mr Speaker, we are now at the reporting stage. Accordingly this is the opportunity for elected members to raise in debate of this Motion any matters they wish to hear in respect of the Public Accounts and issues and recommendations raised by Public Accounts for the attention of this House. Mr Speaker, today Public Accounts also laid Sessional Paper 2/2019, UK Overseas Territories Programme and the FCO Good Guidance Practice in Effective Oversight of Public Finance in UK Overseas Territories. As there are important cross references to be made the Good Practice Guides was launched in Miami on February 2017 and it is closely followed by the St Helena Public Accounts. The Guidance set out key responsibilities for public servants, including Managers, Internal Audit, the Audit and Risk Committee, External Audit, the Public Accounts Committee and the role of the FCO. Mr Speaker, the Constitution, Section 69(9) provides for Legislative Council to resolve to adopt the report of the Public Accounts Committee such that Government may respond to the recommendations made within six weeks. Accordingly, Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Member. Honourable Members, the Motion is that this House resolves, further to the good practice of good governance, that Sessional Paper No. 05/19 namely the Public Accounts Committee Report to Legislative Council on the Formal Session held on 29th August 2018 is adopted by this Council and requests the responsible member of Executive Council, in accordance with Section 69(9) of the Constitution of St Helena, to advise Legislative Council of the action proposed to be taken by Government in respect of these reports. Honourable Members, the Motion is now open for debate. The Honourable Financial Secretary?

The Hon. Dax Richards –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I rise in support of the Motion. Mr Speaker, as my Honourable Colleague has said, this is standard practice that we have been employing now for a number of

years. As the member of Executive Council who is charged with the responsibility to respond on behalf of the St Helena Government and to these recommendations, I can provide an assurance that the response will be laid at the next available Legislative Council within the six-week period.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Financial Secretary. Any other Member wishes to respond? I call upon the Mover to respond.

The Hon. Brian Isaac –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. PAC operates a Select Committee of this House and it is tasked with scrutiny of public accounts and audit reports. I would wish to thank the Financial Secretary for his contribution to this debate, because a lot would hinge on his shoulders in working with Public Accounts for the performance to continue. The Financial Secretary also, as the responsible member of the Executive Council will bring the Government's response to the recommendations made in these two Sessional Papers to the next session of this House so that Council can see how these matters will progress. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Members, the Motion is that this House resolves, further to the good practice of good governance, that Sessional Paper No. 05/19 namely the Public Accounts Committee Report to Legislative Council on the Formal Session held on 29th August 2018 is adopted by this Council and requests the responsible member of Executive Council, in accordance with Section 69(9) of the Constitution of St Helena, to advise Legislative Council of the action proposed to be taken by Government in respect of these reports.

Question on Motion, put and agreed to.

The Motion is carried.

Motion No. 3 – The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Gavin Ellick –

Mr Speaker, may we have permission to remove our jackets?

The Speaker –

Yes, by all means. Honourable Members, if you want to remove your jackets? The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I beg to move that this House resolves that Government bring forward, as a matter of urgency, a Bill for an Ordinance and associated Rules of Procedure, which will give the Public Accounts Committee the necessary statutory authority for the effective oversight of the public purse in St Helena and to hold to account those entrusted with the stewardship of the public purse.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Is there a seconder, please?

The Hon. Clint Beard –

Mr Speaker, I beg to second.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Mover may speak to the Motion.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I declare my interest as an elected member of the Legislative Council who was selected by my peers and appointed by the Governor to serve on the Public Accounts Committee, but I bring this matter forward in the public interest and with the full support of the Public Accounts Committee.

The Public Accounts Committee, PAC, is established under Section 69 of the 2009 Constitution Order of St Helena to examine the audited financial statements of Government and other public bodies and report to Legislative Council. The Committee performs an important Constitutional role in the holding to account of those entrusted with the management of public funds. The enabling conditions contained in Section 69 are supplemented by Standing Order 23 of this Honourable House to add definition to the functions and procedures of this Committee so that it may discharge its role properly and effectively. However, Mr Speaker, it is becoming increasingly obvious that the current statutory framework within which the PAC has to operate is outworn and inadequate. Not only does it fail to meet the requirements of current best practice for the British Overseas Territories, but it also prevents the PAC fully addressing increasing public demands for openness, transparency and accountability relating to how all public money is being spent and whether such expenditure is justified, adds value and represents best use of the funding available. The published accounts of Government make clear that the Government has an ownership interest in a wide range of entities. The ownership interest makes it statutory where, for example, the Governor has the power to appoint members of the Board or direct the operations of an entity or where ownership is by virtue of the shareholding interest in a company, whether wholly or majority owned. There are now a growing number of such entities in St Helena where there is a clear ownership interest represented by Government shareholding in the company, giving either whole or majority control in the affairs of the entity. Such companies will include the wholly owned Bank of St Helena, Connect St Helena, St Helena Hotel Development and now St Helena Airport Limited, but also Solomon and Company Plc which is majority owned by Government. However, Mr Speaker, the PAC currently has no express part either in the Constitution or Standing Orders to examine the accounts and annual reports of the Government controlled companies. The PAC report laid before this session of the House sets out in plain terms the Committee's work in examining the public interest in these companies valued in excess of £28m in the 2016/2017 accounts, but have been frustrated by the absence of appropriate statutory provisions. This situation is clearly unsatisfactory, particularly as it is state-owned entities that are currently giving rise to considerable public concern. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Good Practice Guidance for Effective Financial Oversight of Public Finances in the UK Overseas Territories, published in 2017, makes clear that the PAC remit should be sufficiently broad to allow it to investigate the management of public resources in all areas. More specifically, the PAC access rights should cover all public sector assets, liabilities, income and expenditure. This applies where they are incurred or owned by Government or another statutory body and entities where Government or another statutory body is a shareholder. Indeed, Mr Speaker, it

is time to bring forward new legislation and associated rules of procedure which will enable the PAC to perform its functions fully and follow the public pound as envisaged in the published Guidance for the Effective Oversight of Public Finance in the UK Overseas Territories. The new PAC law will need to include specific provisions which develop the enabling provisions in the Constitution and will allow the Committee to consider and report to the Council in the public interest on audited accounts and annual reports of any entity, corporation or company in which Government or another statutory body has controlling interest. Mr Speaker, I recognise there is a substantial Legislative programme before Government, but in supporting this Motion this House has the opportunity today to underline clearly and unequivocally its requirement for proper accountability and oversight of public resources through the functions of the Public Accounts Committee and set a clear mandate and priority for bringing a Bill for an Ordinance before Legislative Council in due course. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Mover. Honourable Members, the Motion is that this House resolves that Government bring forward, as a matter of urgency, a Bill for an Ordinance and associated Rules of Procedure, which will give the Public Accounts Committee the necessary statutory authority for the effective oversight of the public purse in St Helena and to hold to account those entrusted with the stewardship of the public purse. Honourable Members, the Motion is now open for debate. The Honourable Cruyff Buckley?

The Hon. Cruyff Buckley –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I rise in full support of this Bill, it is that there's a bit of a gap in the legislation with regard to the statutory power for the PAC which it should fully have to be able to fully scrutinise the public purse in the correct and right Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Any other Honourable Member wishes to respond? The Honourable Lawson Henry?

The Hon. Lawson Henry –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Whilst I rise in support of this Motion, I am just wondering, given the, especially in respect of SHG State Controlled Entities, that SHG have put in some new management of those entities and I'm wondering whether the timing of such legislation in respect of those entities would be right when we've just put in new management there to see what we would do in terms of going forward with those entities. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Any other Honourable Member wishes to respond? The Honourable Brian Isaac?

The Hon. Brian Isaac –

Mr Speaker, I rise in support of this Motion. As I said earlier, being a member of the Public Accounts Committee I've had the opportunity to have good knowledge of the Motion in the House today. The Motion will be very supportive to the Public Accounts Committee in taking their work forward and I do hope that it receives the support of this House. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Any other Honourable Member wishes to respond? The Honourable Kylie Hercules?

The Hon. Kylie Hercules –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will not take any more time out to repeat my friend, Dr Essex's stated a lot of that Motion and why it's necessary, so I will not reiterate that, but I rise in full support of this Motion and I think it is very crucial to bring in legislation to enable PAC to carry out their functions.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. The Honourable Clint Beard?

The Hon. Clint Beard –

Mr Speaker, I rise in support of this Motion. Being a member of PAC I think it will be a good way forward of allowing PAC to do an adequate and fitting job in scrutinising Government.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Any other Member wishes to respond? Does the Honourable Mover then wish to respond to the debate?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I would just like to clarify that this Motion is an enabling Motion, this Motion is requesting a mandate from this House, this Motion does not dictate what the content would be of the legislation that is developed and is passed and consequently the points made by my Honourable Friend opposite regarding the review of the management arrangements would obviously be taken into account when the legislation is developed because there would be no point in having legislation that is inappropriate for the provisions in place at the time it would come to be enforced. I would like to thank the other members for giving their support to this Motion and I would hope that all within this Honourable House accept that the role of the Public Accounts Committee is a crucial one., We are all going to get pressure from the public in regard to openness, transparency, accountability and so on, Other legislators have a number of other select committees to deal with particular aspects of Government business, the PAC is the only one currently in place in St Helena and I believe that it is very important that it can fulfil its role in accordance with best practice. There is an FCO project being rolled out at this point in time to provide a training routine to PACs, not just in St Helena, but to all British Overseas Territories to try and improve standards of performance and to ensure that PACs are able to fulfil their roles and responsibilities and this Motion today if carried by this House should be one step further in that process. Thank you all and thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Honourable Members, the Motion is that this House resolves that Government bring forward, as a matter of urgency, a Bill for an Ordinance and associated Rules of Procedure, which will give the Public Accounts Committee the necessary statutory authority for the effective oversight of the public purse in St Helena and to hold to account those entrusted with the stewardship of the public purse.

Question on Motion, put and agreed to.

The Motion is carried.

Motion No. 4 – The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I beg to move that this Honourable House resolves that a thorough review of subsidies and other financial assistance provided to businesses in all forms of agricultural production be undertaken, in close collaboration with key stakeholders and the farmers themselves, to ensure that related policies and practices address the key needs of this sector.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Mover. Is there a seconder, please? Honourable Derek Thomas?

The Hon. Derek Thomas –

Mr Speaker, I beg to second.

The Speaker –

Thank you. The Honourable Mover, you may now speak to the Motion.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I first wish to declare my interest as the President of the St Helena Chamber of Commerce.

Mr Speaker, both St Helena's Ten-Year Plan and the Sustainable Economic Development Plan recognise the key roles of local agricultural production in the island's sustainable development and I believe that it is further fully recognised that the agricultural sector needs assistance to enable it to reach its full potential and that such assistance is likely to be a requirement, not only now, but in the medium to longer term. The types of assistance that would be beneficial to farmers, and by farmers I mean all those engaged in any kind of agricultural production, are wide ranging. Some, such as granting of longer license lease periods for Crown land, permission to purchase Crown land on which farmers may retain assets at their own expense, readily available specialist advice and more beneficial retail terms and conditions are also essential and must be addressed, but the focus of this Motion relates specifically to financial assistance.

There are currently two subsidies and three types of grants for which local farmers can apply, but many farmers, although grateful that such support exists, consider that these have inherent problems or in some instances do not target the most pressing barriers for increasing production. As an example, the criteria for public-private agricultural partnership grants that were established seven years ago rule out purchase of some items that are relatively inexpensive, but that are essential to farmers if they are to sustain or let alone increase production. These include agricultural equipment and implements. In order for the current processes and procedures relating to grant funding to be improved and achieve their objectives more successfully these require scrutiny and revision to make them more user friendly. It is also essential that timely and helpful feedback is provided for both successful and unsuccessful applicants and that, if funding is still available, revised applications can be submitted for consideration. It must be ensured that farmers are not denied access to financial assistance simply because their initial bid did not include sufficient detail or an application form was not fully understood. Agricultural subsidies have been a hot topic for years, indeed, my

predecessor as President of the Chamber, wrote in 2011 “It is understood that various models have been tried over the last several years to provide financial assistance to food growers and many models have achieved very little and cost a lot. It is also recognised that while it is likely to be more effective use of funds the successful workable schemes offering subsidy based on production rather than, for instance, the size of plot or number of workers, etc, depend heavily on the farmers providing full disclosure of production and the schemes are also expensive to administer. This problem is further exacerbated by the agency retailing issue. Since then, some attempts have been made to improve, tweak, revise policies relating to subsidies, but eight years have passed since then and it must surely now be time to revisit the benefits and dis-benefits of an output focused subsidy.

An emerging area of concern is the lack of interest in most young person’s regarding going into any type of farming activity. A key reason for this is because it’s not seen as a rewarding or secure career path, but instead one that involves very hard work, high risks and little recognition. Currently few farmers can afford to pay competitive wages as their profit margins are comparatively small and this makes it hard for them to attract workers. This results in some farmers operating with fewer employees than they need to be able to maximise production. Other farmers are in the same position because they cannot afford to employ staff and so work alone which severely limits what they can achieve.

A labour subsidy was paid in the past and was withdrawn, partly because there appeared to be cases of it being abused. If local production is to be increased consideration should be given to the reintroduction of a labour-related subsidy to help incentivise persons to get involved in farming and also increase production, particularly if the budgets of St Helena Government and Enterprise St Helena are under considerable pressure. It is crucial that the financial assistance provided is as efficient and effective as possible and will achieve value for money by actually making a significant difference for the farmers’ productivity. Obviously outputs will require monitoring and if any farmers are found not to be using the financial assistance provided responsibly the support will have to be taken away from those individuals.

In view of escalating freight rates, seed potatoes, animal feed and fertiliser are becoming increasingly expensive to import and ways of reducing the negative impact of this should be investigated. Containers holding food items only are shipped at a lower freight cost and perhaps this could also be applied for items which are directly linked to food production.

The cost of land rents for agricultural purposes also requires scrutiny. Farmers who use Crown land responsibly and upkeep it to a good standard are actually helping St Helena Government to maintain its assets and enhance their value. Therefore, it would seem reasonable that such farmers should receive some reward for so doing, such as a discounted rental charge after an agreed period of good stewardship or a favourable long-term lease agreement.

In the 2015 Budget Speech, the then Financial Secretary stated “Work is required to define what support could be provided for commercial farmers which will result in the best economic output for the island.” Mr Speaker, it is pleasing to note that through the efforts of the Economic Development Committee, the Tax Reform Working Group and relevant officials there has been progress in this area in relation to adjustments to the Customs tariffs that are favourable to farmers. Farmers meeting the criteria are also eligible for the investment tax credit and some of the new tax initiatives due for implementation in the next financial year should also be beneficial to them. However, there is a need for a holistic review of all forms of financial assistance needed by farmers and for the policies, processes and procedures associated with these in all to make sure that these target the sector’s current priorities and that what funding can be made available is put to the best use possible.

Mr Speaker, as members of Legislative Council, we are all painfully aware of the budget constraints within which we have to operate and the farmers themselves understand that funding is tight, but if the aim of import substitution and increased self-sufficiency is ever to

be achieved investment in the agricultural sector is essential and must be appropriately targeted. The review should actively involve those undertaking all the various types of agricultural production as it is their views which should shape how, and for what, financial assistance is to be provided will be allocated.

Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Mover. Honourable Members, the Motion is that this Honourable House resolves that a thorough review of subsidies and other financial assistance provided to businesses in all forms of agricultural production be undertaken, in close collaboration with key stakeholders and the farmers themselves, to ensure that related policies and practices address the key needs of this sector. Honourable Members, the Motion is now open for debate. The Honourable Derek Thomas?

The Hon. Derek Thomas –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I rise in support of this Motion. Our Ten-Year Plan and our Sustainable Economic Development Plan local agricultural production is a key driver towards sustainable development. Agricultural production is not an easy task, it is hard work with no guarantee of the outcome. A few years ago, SHG recognised the heavy costs of our water and put into place a water subsidy for the farmers. I know for a fact that this was well appreciated by the farming industry. However, with this level of subsidy we are still struggling to pay their water bills. We all know that good, regular water supplies is key to farming and if we're reviewing the subsidies this is an area which should be further explored to see what can be done of cheaper water supply. I'm aware this is not an easy task with the constraints we have on the budget but we should explore this particular area in conjunction with other relevant agencies.

Within recent years, self-supporting initiatives have been put into place, heavily recommended and supported by the Economic Development Committee and Environmental and Natural Resources Committee. Again, these initiatives have been well appreciated by the farming industries, but we need to go further where farmers are to save business. Farmers are hands on, hardworking people and therefore our policies and procedures should be revisited to ensure they are simple and much easier to apply.

The Honourable Mover of this Motion has quite rightly highlighted the main areas which are impacting upon local farming production – lands, freight rates, labour constraints and it goes on and on. Mr Speaker, I will support a review with relevant stakeholders, including the farmers themselves, and what should come out of this is perhaps a plan of action to be designed and established to see how best these issues can be addressed in the best interests of our farming industry and in the development. Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. The Honourable Christine Scipio?

The Hon. Christine Scipio –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I'd like to declare my interest because my Dad is a registered part-time farmer and I do not wish to participate in this debate. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. The Honourable Lawson Henry?

The Hon. Lawson Henry –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I would first of all like to declare my interest as well, I'm the Chairman of the Economic Development Committee, also Enterprise St Helena Board of Directors which provides support to farmers.

Mr Speaker, I rise in support of this Motion and commend the Honourable Mover for bringing the Motion to this House. I would like to start by perhaps outlining to the House and for the listening public what support this Government is currently providing to the farming community and I too would like to commend the farmers because I know, as a very young boy myself, that was my first job, to work on the farm and it was a real farm then that even had horses, so I do know that it is really hard work.

I would like to first of all start with Enterprise St Helena. Enterprise St Helena is able to provide both grant and loan funding assistance to businesses involved in agriculture production and reviews funding policies each year in conjunction with local stakeholders and sponsors to ensure that they are tailored to the needs of this sector wherever practical to do so. ESH also works closely with the Agricultural and Natural Resources Department, A&NRD, to ensure that project programme funding that is specifically assigned to support an agricultural development is aligned with the island's National Agricultural Policy and in this respect supports grants to small producers for infrastructure enhancement projects, such as fencing lines and improved irrigation. In this respect, producers may potentially access up to a maximum of £15,000 which translates into two tranches of £7,500 should the producer have access to both private and Crown land. Additionally, ESH are working in collaboration with A&NRD and the sector on components identified as critical by the farming community during the needs analysis and public consultation procured by the A&NRD last year along with continuing to support larger scale DEPD applications and other sector development related initiatives in partnership with A&NRD. I can confirm that in addition to consultation with A&NRD we would under normal circumstances include trade representatives, such as the Farmers Association, the Growers and the Chamber of Commerce. Indeed, such representation has also been an integral part of our Board and sub committee membership.

At a lower level, the business development team do interface regularly with local farmers on an individual week basis and a significant portion of our project programme circa £100k per annum over the last four years, is grant funding to this sector. In respect of policies administered by A&NRD three grant policies are available, namely for pasture, private/public agriculture partnership grants and animal husbandry f..... respect of pastures, an annual financial payment of £130 per acre up to ten acres when funds allow to tenants for clearance of invasive plants on Crown owned pasture lands and to provide a quantity of herbicides for chemical control of invasive plants on this land. With regard to public/private agricultural partnership grants, providing support of infrastructure to the value of £30k per applicant for A&NRD producer partnership project across agriculture production types such as arable, livestock, apiculture, etc. ESH and A&NRD provides funding based on an applicant's project business plan and A&NRD supports eligible infrastructure establishment costs for producers to implement their project. This particular policy is currently being reviewed internally and will involve stakeholder/producer consultation during April 2019.

With regard to the animal husbandryfunds, financial support is available towards the purchase of male breeding animals for all species, that is, rams, billys, t..... and boars and female animals, and to include financial support for pasture rehabilitation work on Crown pasture land. This policy is also being reviewed internally and will involve stakeholder/producer consultation in April 2019.

A&NRD also have two subsidy support policies, one for herbicide and the other is for water for irrigation and livestock production. In respect of herbicides, A&NRD pay 60% of costs

and the farmer pays 40% in respect of control of invasive plants on both arable and pasture lands. Water is paid at the rate of 28p per unit for untreated and 56p for treated water.

The sector is also supported through Customs duties at a lower rate of 5% in respect of a wide range of agricultural products and equipment, numbering eighteen in total. The new Income Tax proposals will mean a 10% deduction in corporation tax and 5% reduction in self-employed tax on profit from agricultural activities alongside other activities.

The new improved investment scheme will also allow people in the agricultural sector, as well as other sectors, to apply for an import exemption and ability to delay import duty payments for capital items for any new investment.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, this Government provides a wide range of support to this key sector, existing policies are regularly reviewed and the sector is consulted. If, however, there are particular areas where we could better utilise existing funding or support then we would be happy to work with the sector in this regard. I would be happy to work with the Honourable Mover to take any specific proposals forward. Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much indeed. Any other member wishes to speak? The Honourable Cruyff Buckley?

The Hon. Cruyff Buckley –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I welcome the.... I declare firstly my interest, Mr Speaker, as Deputy Chairman of the Economic Development Committee.

I welcome Mr Chairman's exposition, which was a very detailed layout of the support that's already being offered by the Economic Development Committee, but I also acknowledge Dr Essex's remarks about perhaps we could do even more. I will say, however, that we've been stronger, Mr Chairman, in terms of the Farmers Association and we recently have, in a situation now whereby we need to reform and have re-evaluation of the Farmers Association Constitution and we need a leader to take the Farmers Association forward, Mr Chairman, so I will speak out to those listening on the radio today, for the farmers collective visions and ambitions, to come together and present a leader and that leader will be the interface between elected government official and the applicants, Mr Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Councillor Buckley. Any other Honourable Member wishes to speak? The Honourable Kylie Hercules?

The Hon. Kylie Hercules –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. First, I must declare my interest as I have many family members who are farmers. Having grown up around the farming sector I have seen first-hand the struggles which farmers are facing and have faced. The advantage of having farmers as family is hearing how the systems are working, could be improved or altered to best suit the needs of this industry and therefore I fully support the Motion and thank my Honourable Colleague for bringing this to the House today.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Any other Honourable Member wishes to speak? Does the Honourable Mover wish to respond to the debate?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker and I would like to thank Honourable Colleagues who spoke in support, in particular, the Honourable Derek Thomas who seconded this Motion, it is very much appreciated. There appears to be a slight misunderstanding, I did not imply that there was no support available to farmers. My contention is based on the feedback that I have received from the farmers who are members of the Chamber of Commerce and also, indeed, some who are not members but who are my constituents, as that they feel that there is need for a comprehensive review to ensure that what support is available is targeting the key priorities. That was the thrust of my exposition. I indicated that they are grateful for the support that is available to them and I think that that needs to be fully understood, not just by those in this Honourable House today, but the listening public as well. We are aware of the grants and subsidies that are currently available, but I regret to say that the majority of the many farmers who speak to me on this topic, do not feel that they necessarily are readily accessible. They feel that they are too bureaucratic in some respects and also that they're not necessarily hitting the key spots that are of priority to farmers at this particular point in time. I am aware that some policies are under review, I personally have a problem with individual policy reviews that tend to end up with a piecemeal output that isn't necessarily nearly as constructive or really as helpful as if there's a comprehensive approach taken with all stakeholders working together and actually developing a clear way forward. One of my Honourable Colleagues referred to a plan of action and I think that would be beneficial in actually teasing out the different streams and looking at how they're going to be taken forward and, indeed, who's going to be responsible for taking them forward. I also believe very strongly that although the framework is in place, communications between farmers and those who are administering grants, subsidies etc is in need of improvement and I'm not suggesting that the farmers do not have a bigger role to play in this as well, I think they do, yet equally I think there needs to be more willingness on the part of the relevant bodies to listen to farmers and to really do something to try and assist them. A few months ago my Honourable Friend, the Chairman of the Economic Development Committee and I were both looking at an issue concerning an application from a young farmer and it was quite clear that he was not getting the level of feedback that was very likely to be of a help to him and I regret to say that that was not an isolated case. There is a need to improve communications overall between those who are actually administering grants and subsidies and those who are potential recipients of grants and subsidies and I feel that if there is an overall review done in a manner that's been suggested by my Motion today that will be a good starting point for actually moving everything forward in a positive way that will be beneficial to all involved. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Mover. Honourable Members, the Motion is that this Honourable House resolves that a thorough review of subsidies and other financial assistance provided to businesses in all forms of agricultural production be undertaken, in close collaboration with key stakeholders and the farmers themselves, to ensure that related policies and practices address the key needs of this sector.

Question on Motion, put and agreed to.

The Motion is carried.

5.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

The Speaker –

The Honourable Chief Secretary?

The Hon. Susan O'Bey –

Mr Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn until 22nd March, 2019.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Is there a seconder to the Motion?

The Hon. Dax Richards –

Mr Speaker, I beg to second.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Members, the Motion is that this House do now adjourn until 22nd March. Honourable Members, you may wish to respond to the debate. The Honourable Brian Isaac?

The Hon. Brian Isaac –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, I wish to take this opportunity in congratulating you on your role as Speaker of this Honourable House, I look forward to working fully with you through your term and my term in office.

Mr Speaker, in speaking to family and friends and members of the public, the topic of the state of our economy, the high cost of living on the island plus the pier fares, freight, utilities and other related issues is always the most stressing point for everyone. The most common topic is the high cost of living and the low income of those people on social benefits. People are frustrated and struggling day by day and behind the many smiling faces we are greeted with on the street is some form of hardship. Many people are thankful and appreciative of what the Government provides in the form of social benefits and basic island pension but the level of pay is made equate to the strength of the economy and with the current state of our economy, Mr Speaker, it's difficult to strike the right balance. The airport has brought much development to the island, but it's not delivering its full potential as there are many unknowns and knowns which require substantial financial funding to have the airport that will promote tourism, the private sector and the island's economy. Mr Speaker, I only spoke on Friday with a couple returning to the island following opening of the airport and was encouraged to return to the island to invest in the prosperity of a stronger tourism industry. This couple was inspired by the many travel shows motivated by ESH through the Tourism Directorate and the meetings with Saints held in various counties in England, mainly with Saints in Swindon. Sadly this couple will be returning to England next week after investing in a bakery in Half Tree Hollow which produced high quality bread and related bakery produce to meet the tourism demand, but sadly, because of the low income of tourists and the state of our economy and the predicted figures not materialising this couple will reluctantly return to England next week. It has been asked if a marketing survey was undertaken by this couple and the response was that they were made to understand with the advice provided through the Tourism Roadshows that the predicted tourism industry numbers would be overwhelming. Unfortunately I share the frustration of this couple and their lifesavings investment which could in some respects be fruitless. This is not the only couple who has invested in the tourism industry and found out the hard way that we are not getting the tourism demand to meet our outputs.

Flight delays is one of the most distressing and costly scenarios that has struck fear in the hearts of many Saints returning for short holidays who has to fit the full cost of returning air fares in certain scenarios if the plane is delayed in respect of weather conditions. Insurance agencies do not really welcome claims made in respect of weather conditions. I was confronted last

week by many stranded Saints here on the island because of the delayed flight on Tuesday which resulted in additional cost of accommodation and related social inconveniences.

Mr Speaker, despite those concerns that affect the wellbeing of most Saints there's another concern that has made the public uneasy and that is the proposal to convert the ex Blue Hill School into social housing. Despite the concern of some Councillors of Legislative Council not to proceed with this proposal in respect of public concern the decision was overruled in a closed meeting of ExCo for the process to continue. I'm not aware of any social impact assessment which was undertaken with the best interests of public perspectives in mind or was the democratic process ignored by the powers to be? It has been proven that in the best interests of public concern, the public is not always listened to and this has been revealed recently in a petition signed by some seventeen hundred Saints does not appear to and the public felt let down by the freedom of expressing their rights.

The island await the announcement of the DFID settlement for the next financial year and the approval of a capital programme for St Helena. Following the withdrawal of the capital programme by DFID the growth of the private sector has declined rapidly and impacted and weakened the economy. More and more staff of the private sector have sought alternative employment, some has left the island and others were forced to seek alternative employment. We also await further information of the optic cable and the PASH connectivity. These two major projects we hope will bring much needed resources to the island but we must ensure that the people of St Helena benefit from this investment and that we are ready to use it efficiently and effectively as possible and to also ensure that the predicted growth are protected by legislation to protect the island against financial benefits of investments going off island.

The recent announcement of increased diesel prices has come at a bad time for the island as the increase in diesel fuel will have a major impact on the island's economy as everything depends on diesel for many commodities and the control of inflation. The question I have been asked by constituents is why the cost of diesel could not be shared with an increase in the cost of petrol.

As I'm speaking of fuel, Mr Speaker, the new Fuel Farm at Rupert's appears to be another white elephant, I've been told of various dates for completion and operations to commence. I stand to be corrected, but I understand that corrosion is becoming a major problem for the maintenance of the farm which will become a demanding factor for St Helena Government. Will we ever see the farm operating to its full potential as predicted with the cost benefits reaching the consumer? In my opinion we are a long way from where we would like to be.

The delay in having a fully operated dock in Rupert's with related infrastructure for cargo operations appear to be a non starter at the moment. DFID and the UK Government should really think seriously of the situation we have been put in by not supporting a breakwater in Jamestown, but saw Rupert's being the appropriate site. The money in transporting containers from Rupert's to Jamestown can be better spent on other related issues that is impacting the island. I understand that the cost of transporting one container from Rupert's is £200. I dare not mention the sea freight. I do not see the service decreasing in cost, but will sadly be increased and beyond the controls of the public purse.

In concluding, Mr Speaker, I wish to take this opportunity in thanking the Prison Warden for allowing the services of inmates of HM Prison to assist in having the Longwood Green put back to its standard, that's welcome and appreciated by all who wish to use the Green as a family environment. Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. The Honourable Cyril Leo?

The Hon. Cyril Leo –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. St Helena is heavily reliant on financial aid from the United Kingdom. Budgetary aid alone for 2018/19 was £27m. I would like to take this opportunity to formally acknowledge the UK taxpayer for providing St Helena with the crucial financial assistance in support of air access through budgetary aid and for funding capital programmes in the past. It was encouraging to meet with the visiting DFID team a few weeks ago in this Chamber to discuss future UK financial aid for St Helena. Thanks to all concerned. It seems very unlikely that the island will have to deal with the frustrations of another rollover budget come the next financial year. The DFID Minister, Lord Bates, has been made fully aware of the social and economic detrimental consequences due to the absence of development aid for capital projects over the last two years. The United Kingdom has an international obligation to take full responsibility for the development needs of the island. The people of St Helena cannot sustain the progress required for achieving the aim of self sufficiency if the United Kingdom refuses to sustain the adequate financial assistance that is crucial to reaching that ultimate objective. At this particular period in time for St Helena there is a desperate need to build on the £285m investment in air access. Providing just sufficient aid to maintain the status quo to help keep pace with inflation or to progress just beyond the status quo should not be an option for the United Kingdom. The island now awaits the Minister's final decision on the financial aid package that the United Kingdom will provide for St Helena. Some eighteen months ago there were serious concerns, frustrations and dissatisfaction with the working partnership between DfID officials and elected members. The people of St Helena are already paying a huge price economically and socially for the failure by DfID to engage and communicate with local elected representatives in the true spirit of the constitutional partnership values and the 2012 White Paper provided by the United Kingdom for the overseas territories. Those two established guidelines, along with Article 73 of the Charter of the United Nations are the principal blueprints for the future development of St Helena. The expectations of the people of St Helena are based on the directive provided by those documents. As a result of the disappointment and the discontent within the community, all twelve elected members collectively used various avenues to try to convince the Minister that the problems with communications and the working partnership must be addressed. Our message to Lord Bates was that a cohesive working relationship between DfID and elected members were of paramount importance to the future development of St Helena. Consequently we are very grateful to the Minister's positive response to our appeals. The related statements made to Legislative Council members by the visiting DfID team have been testament to the improved approach. I therefore take this opportunity to formally thank the DfID Minister and DfID civil servants as we all work in the very best interests of the people of St Helena. Cohesive working within Council that includes healthy debates and constructive criticisms will help ensure best outcomes for the island. Indeed, this positive approach is essential within all sectors throughout our community. To help ensure that all twelve elected representatives are fully informed and properly engaged as we serve the people of St Helena the following will be included as an agenda item for the next informal Legislative Council meeting: Cohesive working within Council, SHG officers and elected members. As we serve the people of St Helena, elected representatives rely on the integrity of SHG officers and SHG administration. With reference to cohesive working at local government level in the best interests of the future of the territory, I believe a Working Group should be established consisting of Councillors of Ascension Island and of St Helena. In view of the close geographical location of the two islands such a Working Group can look into common objectives, shared interests and possible joint ventures that will identify potential long-term and sustainable economic benefits for both of our communities. The directive from the UK Government specifically states in the 2012 White Paper each territory has a unique community and it is for the territory to shape the future of its own community. Ascension, St Helena and Tristan da Cunha make up the one single territory.

Elected representatives have a responsibility to work in the long-term best interests of the people of the territory. We must all seriously consider that it is the residents of the territory who will be directly affected by properly thought through decisions or detrimental decisions that are impossible to reverse once implemented. For example, it is of paramount importance to ensure that decisions that are taken on the fish resources of the territory today will not have a negative impact on the needs of future generations. Thank you, Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much indeed. The Honourable Lawson Henry?

The Hon. Lawson Henry –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, I rise in support of this Adjournment Debate and I too would like to congratulate you on your successful appointment as Speaker of this Honourable House and look forward to working with you for the remainder of my term as a Councillor.

The Speaker –

Thank you.

The Hon. Lawson Henry –

Mr Speaker, I would like to start by paying tribute and add my congratulations to a number of employees in the Health, Education and other Directorates who have achieved international qualifications while studying on island. I would like to pay special tribute to all those involved for this achievement and, in particular, for doing so whilst holding down their respective, full-time jobs. Many congratulations to them all and I wish them all every success in their future careers.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to say something now about another cancelled flight to the island. None of us can control the weather patterns that we experience on this island and safety must come first. I have no difficulty with this at all. The flight was cancelled last Tuesday, but the weather within twenty-four hours was fine and it was favourable for all of last week. My constituents and international travellers are asking me why the flight did not come in on the following days. If we have to be successful in running a tourism-driven economy we cannot afford not to make the best use of the weather patterning, so cancelling the flight on the Tuesday until Saturday when the weather was good enough on the Wednesday is not going to work. There is one thing the travelling public wants and that is certainty. Please may I ask the Honourable Mover to tell the House and the listening public why the flight could not come in the following day. Each time a flight is cancelled St Helena's reputation as a tourist destination is damaged. Then there is the impact on our own people wishing to travel away from the island and, in particular, those Saints who were here on holiday and had to return to their work. Others we know were travelling to be with family and, of course, our important visitors, so my question to the Government is why the flight could not come in on Wednesday instead. What are Airlink's obligations under the contract to the island? What will the Government be doing to stop this happening again in the future or have we once again sold our souls out in another weak SHG contract as if this is the case then what are we going to do to change this as each time it seems like the service provider can simply do what they like regardless of what the impacts of the island and its people? This is not what we signed up to when we went to the ballot box to vote for an airport. St Helena deserves a better service than we have and one where the contract is fair to both parties, not one where one party has all the say. I am therefore calling upon the Government to commission a review of the contract that SHG have with Airlink with a view that where flights are delayed due to weather conditions then the flight

should come when the next window of opportunity in the weather, not simply cancel as was the case on Tuesday and many occasions in the past.

Turning now to the second flight for the high season in 2019 and 2020. The DfID Minister gave SHG approval in December 2018 for the second flight for the high season and SHG announced this and said the details would follow shortly. This was in December 2018. The booking for this flight only became available on Saturday, 9th March, nearly three months later. I've lost count of the number of times that I have raised the importance of this matter and on two occasions, the latest it was on Tuesday, 5th March, we were told that flights would be lowered within twenty-four to forty-eight hours. These deadlines have come and gone. The whole purpose of getting early approval of our second flight is so that the market can plan. Travellers need long lead-in time to plan, that is why it is so important to have this lead-in time, but yet, three months later, SHG and Airlink have once again failed the market that we depend on to bring visitors to the island. This is simply not good enough for the international traveller and if we are serious about a tourism-driven economy then SHG needs to do more as the market is not going to give way on the current fore planning. Again, my strong suspicion is that the core of these delays is down to the poor conditions in the contract that SHG has signed up with Airlink. The impact on travellers cannot and must not be underestimated. We have businesses on the island who have invested in accommodation, encouraged by our Government to do so. SHG itself took a huge risk to invest in a hotel, therefore, we can least afford cancelled flights and fore planning of schedule, nor can we continue to use taxpayers money to prop up the hotel when, in fact, it could be earning money. This fore planning is placing the tourist-driven economy we so much want at risk. I simply do not know what we need to do for someone to take charge of this sorry state of affairs, it is unacceptable and someone needs to be held to account. I'm raising it here today as I have done so on many occasions internally, but this has been to no avail. What I do know is that we need to, as a Government, start to manage this air service so that it delivers the outcomes that it should. Surely SHG should be doing all it can and in a timely manner. In going forward, can I ask what plans does SHG have for building the numbers of tourists coming to the island? Over the past seventeen months so much information have come from the market as to what travellers are looking for and how we can improve on what we are currently doing. One of the major issues that has come forward is what are we doing to test the market on the feasibility of flights from Europe. We are not going to be able to sustain ourselves with the current tr..?.... and this can only change if SHG have a long-term plan as how we are going to go on what we have. I want to remind the House that the service we have is what the DfID Minister told the British Parliament is an interim one, despite what our DfID official told elected members last week that what we have is the air service. I therefore look to the Honourable Mover to tell this House and the listening public what are SHG plans for expanding the service and to confirm that we are, indeed, operating an interim service.

Finally, I would also ask the Honourable Mover in her response if she would undertake a review of the contract procedures signing in SHG with a view that such contracts are scrutinised by Executive Council before they are signed.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I beg to move and support this adjournment debate.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. The Honourable Derek Thomas?

The Hon. Derek Thomas –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, I also wish to congratulate you on your appointment as Speaker and I look forward to working with you.

Mr Speaker, I rise in support of the adjournment debate. There are, Mr Speaker, many challenges and issues facing us and if we take stock and look at the amount of business covered in this session. I will speak on the Bills, some of which resulted in minor errors, tweaking and changes. In terms of going forward, Mr Speaker, we need to be much smarter and better at this. The final bills should be presented in good time to ensure that they are fit for purpose when presented.

Mr Speaker, adjournment debates is where you can let off steam; nothing elected members say is binded by actions unless the respective member decides to follow particular avenues and issues through. Followed up action is what is needed.

Mr Speaker, like my Honourable Colleague, as a nation we are really concerned about our airport. The intended purpose by the British Government was to fund St Helena with an international airport which would stimulate the economy for economic growth and eventually in years lead to getting us off grant-in-aid. Once the airport was built we all know the challenges it faced, a shock to us all. The British Government assisted in finding what they maintained and described as an interim solution, finding a smaller type aircraft suitable to land at our airport. This arrangement will never bring us any meaningful form of economic growth on a regular basis. We need flights from other destinations, especially Europe. We are going into our second year now, still in the interim period. Where is the action plan in terms of addressing the issues and many challenges we face? As our partners and aid donors we need to be pushing the British Government at ministerial level, not junior levels, on the grounds in honouring their commitment to support us in finding long term solutions to the many problems we are encountering with our airport. As I alluded to, Mr Speaker, an action plan needs to be established with timelines where we can see and be shared with the public what is happening in addressing these issues. The ball is in our court in pushing at the right level in order to make progress. It is encouraging to see a recent Press Release that from December '19 to February '20 there will be flights from Cape Town. Whereas this is a good initiative and will be welcomed by the public, we have a long way to go.

Mr Speaker, another issue which needs urgent attention is the lack of emergency funding available to support people who find themselves in desperate situations. Through our income-related benefits system there is an appeal system for persons who do not qualify for the IRB or have their benefits taken away for whatever reason. Having recently supported a number of people, the appeal process I witnessed can take any time up to a month to be resolved. In the meantime people are left with no money and struggle. This is an issue that should not be accepted. I have discussed this issue in detail with the Social Community Development Committee of which I am a member and I will be pushing to have this issue solved. We cannot have situations like this.

Mr Speaker, there is public concern about job opportunities for our local people. On one hand we seem to have policies or are certainly encouraging Saints to return to the island and on the other hand we are making it extremely difficult in certain cases to obtain local jobs. Where we're told that where there's a Saint and an immigrant on the same points then the Saint gets the priority, but what about where there's one point more and the issue where the Saint has fallen down can be addressed through training it means the Saint doesn't get the chance. I do accept in certain cases to obtain local jobs, I do accept and appreciate that persons must have the right skills and abilities to do jobs and that is accepted by everyone, or be able to aspire to achieving such abilities in most jobs. Good literacy and writing skills is essential. Few jobs where I can see where one would need to have 'O' level in Maths and I keep banging on the drum, Mr Speaker, few jobs I see around here where one needs 'O' level in Maths, yet it seem to be a requirement, a standard requirement on most of the jobs being advertised. This is very off-putting and turning people away and I ask that the Administration seriously address this. Mr Speaker, (it seems as though I got my notes all over the place here; bear with me, Mr

Speaker). Yes, Mr Speaker, Saints who are returning who've been away for a number of years they have good skills in many areas, but not many would have 'O' level in Maths, this you'd expect from students turning up from Prince Andrew School, but they do have practical knowledge in most other areas. I will say the Community College has added some real value to people in acquiring some form of qualification and that is good and it might be that need to be addressed in future job opportunities where people have potential to aspire in achieving these qualifications, be encouraged to do so through a programme of learning in the Community College.

Mr Speaker, I finally end by wishing the Conference we are hosting tomorrow, I understand it's starting tomorrow, International Conference, every success and this is a good thing for the island and we hope that we see many more in the coming future, but I also an issue, because I am a member of Executive Council and my colleague, Councillor Isaac, quite rightly expressed his dissatisfaction about the Blue Hill School being used, proposed to be used for social housing and a request was turned down by ExCo members. As a member of ExCo I'm not aware of a request being turned down. What I am aware is that Executive Council members expressed great concern about that facility being used for social housing and asked and urged the Administration to find alternative houses for this emergency case, but not officially turned down by ExCo, so I need to put the record straight here. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. The Honourable Cruyff Buckley?

The Hon. Cruyff Buckley –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I rise in support of this adjournment debate. Mr Speaker, I commend my Honourable Colleague, Councillor Leo, for his exposition on the topic of closer working relationships between Ascension Island and St Helena. Indeed, our Constitution joins St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha together under the one umbrella. Shouldn't our ambitions, ideas and resources also be combined to benefit all those who reside in the vast expanse of the South Atlantic? Having worked on Ascension for a decade I am also aware of the sacrifices made by St Helenians and the significant financial contribution towards our fledgling economy. The need to work together is becoming more and more apparent as time goes on. As we hope to grow St Helena's economy it is realised that our population will no doubt have to increase significantly. Along with this increase will come pressures to increase food production to sustain not only the tourist industry but the local The most obvious resource within these island waters is that of fish and other marine organisms, including lobster and shellfish. Fish and fish products form a significant part of the St Helena diet. How we manage our fish resources across the territories will prove to be of vital importance in the near future and in the long term. There is a real need for collaborative working and open discussions between different territories with the objective of deriving mutual benefits for St Helenians and island residents alike. We can achieve sustainability through supplementing each other thus establishing interlinking trade relationships. It is therefore imperative for policy makers and legislators of both St Helena and Ascension to correctly identify the impact of the proposed marine protected area and the parameters in which it is set to ensure that we do not shut the door on potential development of the fish resources both on Ascension and on St Helena to accommodate an increase in the local population and the long-term sustainable resource needs of the territories. A strong economic and mutual covenant is required to solidify our collective ambitions and ultimately achieve our set goals for future generations to come.

Mr Speaker, it is with great shame that I now have to address a serious issue that is bubbling just below the surface on St Helena. That concern is the St Helena Police Directorate. Following on from the questions I have asked in a previous sitting, I stand here today with the

voice of my constituents and they ask is St Helena becoming a police state? Mr Speaker, there are countless concerns and during these ten minutes I can only outline a few of them. Unannounced recent firearms training exercises at Ladder Hill adjacent to residential areas have caused needless anxiety to the people living there. At 3 o'clock in the afternoon when kids are arriving home from school they are greeted by officers carrying guns. This is completely unacceptable and demonstrates a lack of leadership, coordination, but most of all, common sense. St Helena is not a playground for toy soldiers, I would expect far more from senior officers. Recent so-called raids have left islanders bewildered. Officers approach citizens as if they were guilty until proven innocent. Many raids are unsuccessful and one particular constituent was told it was based on a single, anonymous phone call. Did any real investigation take place? A single, anonymous phone call was enough for almost twenty officers and a riot shield to enter this man's home, turn his house upside down, search through all his wife's clothing, defame his name and cause needless anxiety to his children and neighbours. Sorry is an understatement. Another resident saw numerous police vehicles and officers turn up at his home to search for vehicle documentation, fully dressed in riot gear. Surely, Mr Speaker, a simple search on a database could confirm and clarify this issue, a simple letter could have been sent. Is there something more sinister at play? Overkill seems to be the order of the day. Constituents seem to be at the business end of some kind of over the top training machine and are being used as c..... A concerning number of these incidents have not led to any conviction. What concerns me in particular, Mr Speaker, is the basis on which these warrants are issued and what threshold has to be exceeded to require such. It has been an occasion whereby an officer climbed through a resident's window whilst the resident was absent from the property and then attempted to produce the warrant the day after. Needless to say this person was incensed and refused to accept the warrant retrospectively. Mr Speaker, I read an extract out of the Ten-Year Plan with an update under the heading 'Altogether Safer'. 'St Helena Police continues to make people who have committed offences accountable from robust policing and enforcement. For the period April 2017 to March 2018 a total of 118 cases were taken to Magistrates Court out of which a total of 62 resulted in convictions.' My interpretation of these statistics suggests that almost half of these cases either lacked evidence or shouldn't have been in Court in the first instance. This heavy handed approach is killing the island socially and economically and it's causing much disturbance in our Judicial System and to be blunt is just a waste of the Court's time. During a recent Court sitting, the presiding Judge was deeply concerned about the delays from the Prosecution and/or the Police Directorate before evidence and disclosures can be made available to the point whereby he threatened to take action. It is a regular occurrence within our Court system and it's frustrating for our newly appointed Public Solicitor to do his job effectively. This in turn has knock-on effects with the accused and offenders who have been left hanging; again this has caused needless anxiety. Meanwhile the public have seen CID officers sit in Court practically all day, even when they are not required to give evidence. The public wishes for more foot patrols, like in the old days, traffic is out of hand, it would seem these officers has spare time on their hands or are they training to become lawyers? Mr Speaker, how is this value for taxpayers money? Are there no other cases to be solved? Is there any paperwork to be done? These questions have to be asked. Is evidence being gathered retrospectively? Is the cart before the horse? Is it in the public interest to charge these people without being ninety percent sure of a conviction? The statistics speak for themselves; these ducks are not in a row. It seems to be a rolling of the dice in many cases and career advancement and job validation at the expense of the St Helenian public. People can and will make mistakes, are we incriminating them before we can help them? This case in particular is a fine example. A young man decides to create a tattoo business; he's quite good at it and is doing well. He then tattoos a minor with consent from the parents. He is then approached by the Police and charged with the offence of tattooing a minor.

Under UK law this is not allowed. However, this is not the UK and I'm not going to get into any moral issues surrounding this. He is then cautioned for this offence and now has a blemish on his record which will undoubtedly affect his future job prospects, especially in relation to overseas employment. The point I'm trying to make is the question I asked before, are we incriminating people before we can help them? A proactive approach between the parties, a meeting with a Councillor or note of concern to Safeguarding would have addressed this issue. Instead we have a young, innocent man unaware of his actions and consequences who is left with a criminal record. Why draw your gun when a knife will suffice? Mr Speaker, the level of charging is also alarming. I understand the Prosecution must hold a case in the highest, however, the high falutin level of these charges are seriously damaging St Helena's international reputation. Coupled with international media coverage, to the potential tourist St Helena doesn't seem like the island paradise we all know it to be. On one side of the coin we are promoting economic development through tourism and on the other side we destroy the island's credibility with outrageous charges that perhaps won't even stack up. Mr Speaker, I am all in the pursuit of justice, but let's not allow individuals mistakes tarnish an entire nation's reputation. We need to be more realistic and align our strategic objectives. Mr Speaker, the public are disgusted at the recent behaviour of the St Helena Police Force, many are threatening legal action and the full extent of the liability due to these unsuccessful raids are soon to be realised by this Government. This unprofessionalism is taking its toll on St Helena, we have seen young officers leaving the Police Directorate and recently officers have been stood down, recruitment could potentially become an issue. I am sorry to say the St Helena Police Directorate is at an all-time low. Whatever happened to the days of policing for the community? It would seem it is all now about convictions, but there is no prevention of crime, only reaction. St Helena has a relatively low crime rate yet we seem to make mountains out of molehills, we are turning the people of this community into monsters and it is showing. To gain respect you have to give it in return. Mr Speaker, I feel it is high time for an independent review of the St Helena Police Force, there have been complaints submitted in relation to certain officers and then there are others who feel there is no one to turn to in fear that they themselves will become targets. This is the reason I am speaking today, Mr Speaker, I speak for those who cannot, for those who are in fear, for those that are innocent and are being harassed unjustly and whose homes are being raided with little or no evidence other than an anonymous phone call, without any apology or acknowledgement they were wrong and because they are in a position of authority think that they can get away with it. Mr Speaker, this cannot continue, we need accountability for these actions for they are in breach of the rights of the individual. When you have police officers who abuse citizens you erode public confidence in law enforcement that makes the job of good police officers unsafe.

Mr Speaker, I will finish with a quote I found online and I think it is somewhat telling of the cultural difference across the Atlantic – “In America the policeman is a working class hero, in England the policeman is a working class traitor.” Are there traitors on this little island of St Helena? Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I declare my interest as President of the St Helena Chamber of Commerce.

Mr Speaker, I don't think it will come as a surprise to my Honourable Colleagues that once again I have to draw attention to the length of time that it takes to see action taking place in a number of key areas. This saddens me. Sometimes even after formal decisions have been

taken nothing seems to move and I'm even more unhappy that in some cases the ground has to be covered more than once. I know my constituents feel the same way and most are extremely disheartened by a lack of progress in some key areas. This is particularly distressing because there are positive things going on, but the fact that issues that are of particular significance and importance to the public are still not being addressed, tends to outweigh their perceptions of what progress is being made. A key area that is causing considerable delay, confusion and frustration relates to successful delivery of St Helena's legislative programme. At times this seems to be as unpredictable as a game of Snakes and Ladders. When you think progress is being made and we are nearly there we land on the snake as it emerges that the drafting or detail of new or amended legislation is not, in fact, fit for purpose and so we drop back to close to square one again after hours of time and effort have been expended. If it were a game, this would be acceptable and, indeed, it might even be quite exciting, but it is not and therefore the implications are serious. Progress is impeded, public confidence is lost and St Helena and its people have to put up with the consequences. Mr Speaker, on several recent occasions, serious flaws in relatively new legislation have been identified following staff changes within the Attorney General's Chambers. A prime example is the Road Traffic Ordinance 2016. It is fortunate that this has not, in fact, been enacted in its current form, but some of its key provisions are badly needed and have not yet been able to be brought into force although slow progress is now being made towards this. Not long ago this Honourable House was called upon to pass retrospective legislation to address a serious gap in the provisions of the 2017 Marriage Ordinance. It is now coming to light that there are procedural flaws in the recent revised Code of Conduct for members of Legislative Council and that this document is likely to have to be revisited. Mr Speaker, I could go on but I will just leave this Honourable House with a flavour of the situation. Partly because of having to devote time to rectify defects, such as those outlined above, there was a considerable backlog of important new or substantially revised legislation requiring development. The extent of this is daunting, particularly as much of it is needed urgently to address changing needs to St Helena. As an example, it was hoped to introduce a Work Scheme to enable some of the growing number of unemployed to carry out part-time work on the roads, but this could not be implemented within this financial year because an amendment to legislation was necessary and it could not be undertaken in time. Hopefully this will be addressed soon in order that a robust scheme can be implemented to help those without work in the current austere economic climate. On behalf of my constituents I ask that the Honourable Chief Secretary and the Honourable Acting Attorney General and his team to do all in their power to ensure that the adequate number of competent, suitably experienced and appropriately qualified legal professionals are in place to enable these situations to become a thing of the past and to ensure that the legislative programme can be delivered on target going forward. Furthermore, development of a publicly accessible time bound action plan to accompany the legislative programme would be a helpful tool for open and transparent tracking of progress. Other causes of delays includes staff turnover, particularly of contract officers and lack of input from individuals contracted to undertake or complete work streams following their departure from St Helena. The risk of the latter should be able to be reduced if appropriate contractual arrangements are put in place that are output focused and contain penalties for non-delivery. These are public service matters and thus not within the remit of elected members, but the resulting problems have a direct bearing on the development and implementation of policies for which we do have responsibility. As a case in point, public consultation on a revised draft Land Development Control Plan was due to have taken place in mid 2018, almost a year ago. However, the then Chief Planning Officer, who had been fully engaged throughout the review of the entire existing document and was making an excellent contribution, left her post. Since her departure she has had other commitments which have impacted negatively on her ability to complete the draft, although

she has kindly expressed willingness to continue and has submitted some further work. Now a delay of at least a year from the planned timeline is inevitable although other officers are assisting where possible. This is most unsatisfactory as the need for a revised Plan is becoming all the more urgent as those private individuals and investors are awaiting its finalisation. In a recent exercise, members of the Chamber of Commerce identified land related issues as one of the key barriers to private sector development. This reinforces the importance of being able to complete the revised LDCP as speedily as possible. At this point in St Helena's development it is crucial that there is a robust and fit for purpose framework in place to inform planning and other land related decisions and that there is stability both within the Planning Section of the Environmental and Natural Resources Directorate and also the Land Development Control Authority. It is pleasing to note that the other members of staff within the Planning Section are developing their professional skills and showing considerable potential. It is important that clear career paths are established for those individuals so that they can continue to progress and see their efforts rewarded. The recent successes of staff in the Health and Education Directorates provide proof of what our local staff can achieve if given the opportunity. The individuals concerned are a shining role model and I add my congratulations to those extended by my Honourable Friend, Councillor Henry.

In some cases, delay is also caused by apparent lack of appropriate cover arrangements during periods when officers are temporarily away from their desk for valid reasons. I have raised this issue in this Honourable House previously. Surely decision making and work streams should not have to go on hold just because an officer is temporarily absent, except, obviously, in exceptional cases such as emergency specialist surgery. If sufficient delegation and work scheduling is taking place surely this needn't happen or if acting up and sharing additional responsibilities is not appropriate for some reason, cannot delegation upwards take place?

Before concluding, I wish to express my concern regarding the Honourable Chief Secretary's statements during Friday's proceedings that it is only legal to give preference to a St Helenian candidate for a job if he or she is on a tied score. My Honourable Friend, Councillor Thomas, has already made reference to this. This means that if there is a high scoring local candidate, but a non-local candidate's score is even marginally higher the local candidate would be unsuccessful. Someone who probably has no intention to remain on St Helena for more than a short period could obtain a post that would start a local person on a career path or provide a well-earned promotion opportunity for a St Helenian who has already demonstrated his or her expertise. Surely this is not in the interest of continuity, consistency or sustainability? This is not to suggest, and I emphasise this point, that expatriates should not be employed where necessary - we are well aware that their expertise is needed as Doctors, Dentists, etc, and even where there is an insufficient amount of labour available- nor that St Helenians should be appointed to posts for which they are not suitable. That would not be in their best interests or the best interests of St Helena. However, after elected members received a mandate from the public to pursue constitutional change to enable prioritisation of St Helenians as is practised in other British Overseas Territories in order to protect their local inhabitants we were given legal advice that constitutional change is, in fact, not necessary to do so. This advice was very welcome, but conflicted with that given previously. However, it now appears that the parameters of what is legal are so narrow as to be almost worthless. As I've stated in this Honourable House two years ago, why should St Helenians be disadvantaged in comparison with the local populations of other British Overseas Territories? Does not perpetuating this inequality and treatment amount to discrimination? I leave that thought with this Honourable House.

I will hold most of my fire regarding a new capital programme until its value, timing and content is known at which point I fervently hope that I will be able to say the battle was won and it has been a battle!

The Speaker –

Can I just remind the Honourable Member that you've got one more minute for your n minutes.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much indeed.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

I fervently hope that I will be able to say the battle is won, however, it would be wrong not to take this opportunity to re-emphasise just how much the private sector, in particular, the construction industry, is struggling as a result of its prolonged absence. The businesses most heavily impacted are to be congratulated for their innovative ways and for their courage and determination to carry on however bleak the situation may look. This has demonstrated their commitment to St Helena and its future. It is of vital importance that St Helena Government does not underestimate the contribution of the private sector to the island's economy and future development. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you. The Honourable Clint Beard?

The Hon. Clint Beard –

Mr Speaker, I'm in support of this Adjournment Debate, it's been a time to reflect on what is going on, the good and not so promising. I hear a lot of 'what are we doing' and I take that question away and wonder what have I really done. I know I have not sat quietly in a corner and said nothing in meetings or voiced opinions or asked questions being asked of me from constituents, but the reality has been achieved and another comment used quite a bit is 'more lies', I'm not sure where this is coming from but maybe we should investigate this. The cable is on its way and I hope the island and its people will see the benefits of this. I'm not sure if the timeline is still on track for completion in 2020, not much news being fed so we hope all is still on track for 2020 or thereabouts. Renewable energy and an entity named PASH have shown interest but I think the finality of signing the contract is still to be finalised. Why is it taking so long? The date has moved quite a few times in relation to this completion process. Airlink and SHG have had a successful year in partnership and at least some profit so well done to them and I think we should also appreciate the locals that have taken up the opportunity as I think they have made the most advantage and full seats and spend on island as tourist numbers have not been as it was hoped, but we certainly hope this can be improved and numbers will increase. Access will always be tricky, but I still feel we need to expose ourselves to cheaper airfares, it will attract locals and make it more affordable and also a better rate for tourists which could possibly allow for more economic activity on island. We've got the service, now we need to put our heads together to make this work. There needs to be looking at flights from Europe in the mix to create as much potential for the airport and access to be successful now and for the future. Private Sector is holding on and for how long I wonder. No new projects are popping up and no capital funding increases the strain on our private sector and their capabilities to stay afloat and support staff that they have. I really hope there will be some reprieve soon. That will be the positive news we need in our market place as the economy right now is heading into a negative spiral if we do not get activity very fast. This will create serious social inequalities and pressures, this is something that we are supposed to be avoiding

and working collectively to minimise. It is one more triumph for budget sign off. On what we got in stall will be up to what DfID took away and relayed to Ministers. It must be favourable as we need the boost in our figures to keep pace with inflation and other increased services and commodities. I would personally like to see at least 20% increase for a few years to get infrastructure and other services capacity increased to allow for the prospective growth we are anticipating. Without funds we will have more people tapping into services and infrastructure and no capital to expand, maintain or manage the present infrastructure we have and also other services we need to keep us on par with growth margins we are anticipating. Sustainability for the island, what does that really mean for me? It is using what we have on island and growing and expanding with island industries, being agriculture, fisheries, and livestock. As we say we want less importation, but if we do not focus on these areas we will continue to import and never lower imports and thus passing on savings to the island so that we can increase our funds with other services. Funding and grants need to be monitored and public funds that are given we need to make sure there are favourable outcomes and yields from those growing asthese are essential should be passing these down to the public market place so that the community can at least get the benefits of good prices with the added advantage of the island having to lower its importing imprint and to let the collaboration between all stakeholders are needed at all times to make this initiative successful. Food prices are increasing voyage upon voyage, yet our wages are not reflected on those increases. How do we combat these increases? Do we allow some form of shipping subsidy on freight coming in? Are we sure that it will be the only way of reducing costs? Do we need to look at other ports to get goods from? Do we need to create a price fixed model on certain items? Do we need to give more support to farmers, small and large-scale, agricultural producers and fishermen? But if we want more growth we will have to as SEDP looks at less goods being imported, also for me, it is useless enticing more numbers if we do have the fresh commodities to service the local market, so all industries to me have a key role in boosting our growth of in island trade and the world market. I now see the cost of fish is approximately £5.00 per kilo, this is still affordable prices worldwide but with the way it's structured here it is now starting to become a costly item to purchase. With some goods being imported and transhipped costing less per kilogram than fish. Why?

The health, to me, has improved in lots of sections, but we all have to be mindful that the aim is for health to allow patients and family members the assurance that the service delivered is and will always look after the best interests of the people and their wellbeing wherever they are, in our local hospital or overseas referrals. There has also been a focus on healthier living initiatives and a phased approach is what we need as there are costs involved with healthier lifestyle changes, but I do think the initiatives are good and I hope people will go out and support it.

Education is the element that holds lots of keys for the island. I believe the investment we make in our youth will benefit this island in years to come and we will all support our students from all avenues, parents, family and the community, we need to make the tools available to our schools and make sure we have the joined thinking and assist our teachers and staff as they drive our youth to achieve. Succession planning is a key role on island, it is important and will show willingness and inspire those in school to achieve the best possible results they can and open doors of opportunity for their futures.

How much more increases do you think locals can absorb and this is what is happening more and more, focus on every generation, but how can this be done in our economy is virtually not vibrant enough. Private sector is battling and prices are becoming more and more challenging to cope with. What is it that we need? New industry? Capital programme? We have so many people leaving the island and with good reason as they want to improve themselves and create opportunities, but the other thing is that those that are left behind will have to create the ever dropping tax numbers that tax can be collected from, so how long can this continue and when

do we have to create more opportunities for locals so that they can stay and have a fruitful career on St Helena? If this can be achieved it will also be more spent on locals on island and inevitably more revenue and economic stability on island as increases in taxes are just another form of revenue generation to stay afloat, but times are hard so can we burden more increases on the community?

The island is preparing for those attending the St Helena Conference and I think again of the folio on the world stage will get a boost and I hope the week will be good for all delegates who enjoy this annual and all delegates will enjoy their stay on St Helena.

We're just out of Commonwealth celebration and we again put up a great day and hope that all enjoyed the day and as we need to highlight the asset that we do have, being the people and access, this time using the airport and how these two elements need to be used to stimulate our economy. There has been an official announcement that Cape Town will have a few weeks of having direct flights from there with Saturday flights still from Johannesburg. We hope that this will be beneficial and those wanting to book from Cape Town now have the opportunity so please go out and book your ticket and the island will see you soon where you can enjoy the marvel and the beauty of St Helena.

Finally, just a congratulations to the Speaker for your election. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much indeed. Any other Honourable Member wishes to speak? The Honourable Tony Green?

The Hon. Anthony Green –

Thank you Mr Speaker for the opportunity to join this session on the second day.

Mr Speaker, I support the adjournment, but first of all may I congratulate you on your appointment and I will continue to work with you as I've done over many years.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, I'm looking forward to it.

The Hon. Anthony Green –

The fact that you faced strong competition clearly shows that we're not short of competent people to fill these important roles.

I'd like very much to first thank my Colleague and Deputy Chairman, Councillor Leo, who so ably deputised for me whilst I was away and seeing the St Helena National Trust Bill safely through this House on Friday. As you all know, Councillor Leo, with the valued support of the SCDC Committee members, did sterling work while I was away attending the 17th European Union and Overseas Countries Territories Forum in Tahiti. Suffice to say that the journey was gruelling but well worth it. Fuller details will be available soon, but I take the opportunity to make a few key points, five in fact, and first to tell you that during the Conference there was unanimous support from all other overseas countries and territories, for the UK Overseas Territories to continue to have a presence in OCTA, OCTA is the Overseas Countries and Territories Association. Secondly, that in the event of an orderly Brexit, EDF11 will be secured up until December 2020. Also the Commission, the European Commission, was very pleased with the progress being made on the EDF11 programming. Now, a new Overseas Association and Greenland Decision does leave a window open for UK Overseas Territories in the event of Brexit to continue regional cooperation; and the final point is really that there was extremely strong support to continue ongoing cooperation between all OCTs even after Brexit. But I would say that we must bear in mind that any close cooperation with OCTA will only be

possible and will satisfactorily if the UK makes a financial contribution. Those were the few points I wish to take the opportunity today to make. Our delegation will be making a report available shortly. And I wish to thank Kedell, our UK Representative and Dax, the Financial Secretary, for their support during our journey. Mr Speaker, I support the adjournment.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much indeed. Any other Member wishes to speak? No? Honourable Mover, do you wish to respond to the debate?

The Hon. Susan O’Bey –

Thank you, Mr Speaker and I thank all of the Honourable Members for their contribution to this debate this afternoon. I take on board the points made by the Honourable Derek Thomas that this is an opportunity to vent and I sincerely hope that all of the contributors took that opportunity and feel better for the vent. Having said that, I acknowledge that a number of very pertinent points have been raised as a result of that so whilst I make the comment, please don’t misconstrue what I’m saying, I fully endorse and take on board concerns that you have made. As you were talking I tried to group what you said because obviously I think concerns raised are felt, I would say, by a number of you sitting around this table, so I tried to group them into themes or areas and I will try to address most of these, I can’t promise that I’m going to be able to address all of your concerns this afternoon because I am sure that you will want to be able to get to bed sometime tonight.

First of all I would like to address the concern regarding high cost of living. I don’t think that comes as any surprise to us in the House today, it has been spoken time and time again, both by yourselves, we see evidence of it in newspapers, it’s on media reports and we know that people are feeling the difficulties. Unfortunately there’s not a lot that we can do except to say that we continue to ensure that safety nets are in place to protect those who are most vulnerable and I can assure the listening public that many elected members advocate on behalf of the vulnerable most strongly and at every opportunity. We constantly and regularly review our Basic Island Pension, our Minimum Income Standards and, of course, Minimum Wage and whenever there is a major increase these are usually taken into account and particularly Minimum Income Standards. We saw examples of that this year when the increase in the cost of tariffs in communication and I believe also in terms of the water increases, they were factored into the MIS. I’d also like to reassure everybody that there is emergency funding for people who are falling between stools or who become unexpectedly dependent on either our Minimum Income Standard or our Basic Island Pension and this funding is actually administered by the Safeguarding Directorate and it is available for two weeks, so that is there, and, of course, we will continue to make sure that we take care of those who are most in need. The other big issue, of course, is cancellation of flights. I think we all expected that with the weather being warmer, we are, of course, in our summer season, we didn’t expect that we would have to see a flight cancelled quite so early at the beginning of this year. Of course we won’t say the real reason, but we do know that it was to make sure that we get our Councillor Green and our Financial Secretary back to share some of the Legislative Council meeting which is why we delayed the closure of the meeting to allow them both to be here today. Actually, again I’m being flippant, what I can say is that my understanding is that the reason why the flight was cancelled and people were booked on to the Saturday flight was that on Wednesday there was an issue in relation to crew and for Thursday and Friday there were issues in relation to availability of the plane. Now, this, of course, is not necessarily going to give you any comfort, because what it does is it reinforces the issues that Councillor Henry has raised. What I can say is that we are in the process of establishing a Working Group to take these issues forward, a Working Group that will look at the, how we’re managing the current Contract, it

will look at what we need to do in terms of expanding our service and it will look at how we can use the service to capitalise on the investment of the airport. We all feel the pressure when a flight is delayed, we all feel the pain when we have to fork out additional money to reschedule essential holiday plans, so we don't take it lightly, we understand how you feel and I give a commitment today that these issues will be looked into and we will feed back to members once we have a way forward. In actual fact I would hope that there will be at least some representatives from this House on that Working Group.

With regard to the delay in the uploading of the additional flights, my understanding is that part of this delay, I'm not going to say that this was the full reason for the delay, but part of this delay was attributed to very late notice of the possibility of a trial period which will take place early in 2020 to fly directly from Cape Town. This opportunity will of course allow us to collect valuable data to be able to assess whether this is going to be a workable solution going forward.

The Legislative Programme, again, we all understand the frustrations in relation to this. I can assure Members that we are giving priority to recruitment; I have to say that the members of the Attorney General's Chambers are extremely overworked and I don't think that that's an understatement, they are called into every committee and they are involved in every piece of legislation and on top of that they also have to deal with the unexpected issues which arise from time to time and I have to say that the business, the Basil Read Rescue Programme, placed a huge burden on what is already a very stretched team. I can also say here that the priority that you attach to this by agreeing that the Attorney General's Chambers recruits an additional Legal Draughtsman is also going to help to address this situation. Again, I give you my assurance that we will continue to make this a priority.

Concerns about the Police and I think Councillor Buckley was very, very eloquent in his expressions today. All I can say here is that I will endeavour to ensure that these concerns are brought to the attention of the Director of the Police Force, the Chief of Police, but I think it will also be very helpful if you could list those concerns; unfortunately I couldn't keep up with you as you were talking, but if you could give an indication of what your major concerns are and then we will address these.

Of course I did give on Friday an update in relation to the unannounced Firearms Training in Ladder Hill and I did indicate that there are a number of lessons that we've learnt from that incident, including communication and that will be addressed going forward.

With regard to the employment of Saints, I apologise if I again gave the impression that we treat Saints, or that in not considering the need to be able to address some of the issues in relation to St Helenians perhaps not having the required qualifications for particular posts, again, I can assure you that it is our policy that wherever possible we want to employ St Helenians and I would like to think that recent actions have demonstrated that, particularly in regard to succession planning, I think we already see evidence of that and even around this table today with my Honourable Friend, the Financial Secretary and myself, taking on TC roles, we will continue to do that. Please don't take it as literal that if somebody has an identical number of points in a recruitment exercise that we're going to adhere to that or if somebody falls short by one or two points that it means that we won't consider a St Helenian, we do have to have a benchmark in place, we can be challenged in the recruitment process and we do have to make sure that our process is able to stand up to that challenge, but the underlying commitment is there to ensure that wherever possible we employ St Helenians. I also, in my response to Councillor Beard's very relevant question about employment of St Helenians and employment initiative generally, I gave a commitment there that the recruitment process will be reviewed and the points that were raised will be taken into account.

On the cable I think it was said that there has been very little news, I just want to say that we do have elected members sitting on both the Programme Delivery Group and the Working

Group and, indeed, Honourable Lawson Henry chairs the St Helena Connective Group, so there is opportunity to feed back. Whenever we have key milestones we try to make that information known and it was very encouraging to hear from Councillor Green this afternoon that we have met our milestones and that this has been recognised by the European Union, I think that, again, is credit worthy of the work that is going on in the background.

Staff achievements, a number of you today paid tribute to the achievements of staff. We've heard very recently of a number of staff in both the Education Directorate and also the Health Directorate who've been studying towards international qualifications and have achieved these qualifications and, again, we recognise the huge amount of work that goes into that, we recognise that when you're studying and carrying out a full-time role, as a number of us have done around this table, it is never easy and so it is even more to be a credit that they've been able to achieve the kind of results that they have and I can also say here that before the Governor leaves we do intend to recognise these qualifications and these achievements more formally with a ceremony to mark such good work.

I think it was Councillor Isaac who raised about the Fuel Farm and asked if whether it was a White Elephant. I would just like to remind members, I think the Acting Financial Secretary in his feedback to a question that was asked I think on Friday, did give a very full and comprehensive account of where we are with that. It certainly isn't a White Elephant, but everybody knows the state of play in relation to the Basil Read Rescue Programme and the impact that that has had on the remainder of the Airport Project, please bear with us, we're doing everything we can. The Airport Directorate staff are extremely busy as you all know, some of them are having to deal with not just ensuring that the work can take place, they're having to deal with creditors, they're having to keep everybody in the loop, so it's the throw away comments like this can sometimes have a detrimental impact on staff morale and I will just ask that that is borne in mind.

We're very fortunate this year that we've had an indicative settlement from DfID which includes an uplift, so it means that there will be no rollover this year. We will be able to go to our budget session Legislative Council meeting as originally planned and this, I have to say again, is testament to the hard work that has been demonstrated by both yourselves in terms of the commitment that you've given, in terms of the MTEC process, particularly the Directors and the staff of the Directorates who have also pulled out all the stops to make sure that we were able to get the information required and, of course, the Financial Secretary and his team in Finance Department who I know have put in an incredible amount of long hours in order to be able to get us to this point and our colleagues in DfID who have worked with us. We started the budget process much later this year than originally intended, but, again, I think we've done a good job in terms of pulling it out of the bag in terms of working together, and I'm not going to steal the Financial Secretary's thunder, because I know that in the budget session he will also want to mention some of the things that I have, but I think we're in a very fortunate position this year if we compare with this time last year, so I take this opportunity to thank you all for your contribution to that.

I think it is, as I said, I'm not going to be able to touch on everything that we've spoken about today, I hope I've touched on the main points, but I think it would be a useful point to end with and that is to say, picking up on the theme of today's Commonwealth Day which is connectivity and the various speeches that were made this morning as a part of the Commonwealth ceremony, but I also want to say a very big thank you to a visitor we have with us today Mr Mark Pollard, who is a member of the Legislative Assembly on the Falkland Islands and in, listening to his closing remarks this morning, I think he summed up what we're all trying to do here which is about working together. We've spoken about connectivity, we've spoken about the three South Atlantic territories which make up St Helena and its dependencies, but we also have the Falkland Islands, a very key player, a number of St Helenians are working on the

Falklands and having had the opportunity to talk with the Honourable Mr Pollard at various stages between yesterday and today it was actually really good to hear the desire to want to work together and to explore how we can be better connected, how we can build on the work that has already taken place and how we can share more of our learning. I think the natural capital assessment work that has been done has been a tremendous piece of work and it is going to apply to decision making going forward and the Conference that is taking place I think is a very pertinent example of working together. It really sums up teamwork and it shows what can be achieved when we all come together, sit around the table and talk about our mutual goals, so I apologise if I haven't managed to answer or address all of the issues you've made, I hope that if you feel strongly about these and you would still like to have some response, please do feel free to forward those to me and I will do what I can to address them, but Mr Speaker, I would like to say thank you again to everybody who has contributed to the debate. Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much indeed, Honourable Mover. Honourable Members, as we have now concluded our business for this session I will put the question then that this Council do adjourn until 22nd March 2019.

Question put and agreed to.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much indeed,

Council is adjourned.