

Minutes of the Meeting of Executive Council held on Tuesday, 24th March 2020 at 9.30am in the Council Chamber

Present: His Excellency the Governor (Dr Philip Rushbrook)
The Hon Chief Secretary (Mrs S O’Bey)
The Hon Attorney General (Mr A T Cansick)
The Hon C R Beard
The Hon A A Green
The Hon L A Henry
The Hon D F Thomas
The Hon R K Yon

In attendance: Clerk of Councils (Mrs C C Johnson)
Head of Corporate Support (Mrs C A George)

Apologies: The Hon Financial Secretary (Mr D L Richards)
Head of News (Mrs K Yon)
Head of Governor’s Office (Mr Greg Gibson)

OPEN SESSION

73.1 Welcome

The Governor welcomed all to the meeting. Members of the public were in attendance.

73.2 Small Island Developing State Status (ExCo Memo 26/2020)

The Senior Economist, Mrs Amanda Curry Brown, was in attendance for this item of business.

The Chairman of the Economic Development Committee introduced the Memorandum asking Council to consider and advise whether to proceed with the recommendations in the paper titled ‘Small Island Developing State Status – St Helena’ [Annex A]. The Chairman of the Economic Development Committee explained that most of the benefits of Small Island Developing State Status would come from joining a United Nations Regional Commission. As an associate member of a United Nations Regional Commission, St Helena would gain access to a well-organised network of expertise and peer-to-peer engagement. Members noted that the Economic Development Committee had endorsed the recommendations at its February 2020 meeting.

The Senior Economist explained that this initiative followed on from correspondence received from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Director Overseas Territories, Mr Ben Merrick, to the Chief Secretary dated 27th September 2019, in which he suggested that St Helena might wish to consider declaring itself to be a Small Island Developing State, as Monserrat had done. In response to questions from Members, she explained that there would not be any financial implications for SHG, nor any physical commitment in terms of having to attend meetings etc overseas once becoming an associate member.

The question was also asked as to whether any entrustment was required from HMG before St Helena declared itself to be a Small Island Developing State; the Governor would arrange for this to be checked by his office.

(Action: HE the Governor)

Following discussion, Council advised and the Governor agreed, to proceed with the recommendations set out in the paper at Annex A to the Executive Council Memorandum ‘Small Island Developing State Status – St Helena’ subject to the Governor’s office checking with HMG on the matter of entrustment.

(Action: HE the Governor/Clerk of Councils)

The Governor thanked the Senior Economist for her hard work and at this point she left the meeting.

73.3 Social Security (Amendment) Regulations, 2020 (ExCo Memo 27/2020)

The Deputy Financial Secretary, Mr Nicholas Yon and Statistician, Mr Neil Fantom, were in attendance for this item of business.

The Chairman of the Social and Community Development Committee (SCDC) introduced the Memorandum asking Council to consider and advise whether approval should be given to increasing the Minimum Income Standard (MIS) in line with the current policy and subsequently increasing the weekly payments for both Basic Island Pension (BIP) and Income Related Benefits (IRB); and whether the Social Security (Amendment) Regulations, 2020, should come into force on 3 April 2020. The Chairman of the Social and Community Development Committee explained all the background and Members noted that the Social and Community Development Committee had endorsed the recommendations at its March 2020 meeting.

The Deputy Financial Secretary reminded Members when the MIS had been first introduced and the Statistician explained the methodology used to calculate the MIS, highlighting that the basket of goods used to determine the MIS was different for that used to calculate the Retail Price Index; thus the rate of change in MIS might differ from the rate of general price inflation. It was noted that the Statistics section staff had collected prices from twenty one

stores across the island in January and February 2020 with the price collection indicating no change in the weekly MIS. However, account had been taken of the increase in water tariffs which was to be effective from April 2020. Members noted that some MIS basket items had not been taken into account, due to unavailability of them in the shops.

A lengthy discussion ensued and the majority of Members were of the view that whilst the increase was in line with the policy and any increase, regardless how small, was welcomed, the monetary value proposed was of very little benefit when considering the high cost of living on Island and they felt that this would not send out a very positive message. They questioned whether a rural and urban tier structure of pricing was needed to reflect price changes in different areas.

Members also pointed out that the further work that had been requested in line with this Policy when last reviewed in October 2019 was not completed; this was needed to be brought in line with current trends, bearing in mind it was some seven years since the MIS policy was first introduced. The Chief Secretary advised that recruitment of a Social Policy Advisor was ongoing and this key piece of work could be taken forward when the individual was in post. Members agreed that a review of the MIS should be undertaken as a matter of priority in the next six months. The Chief Secretary confirmed that she would ensure this was taken forward as a matter of priority and resources would be reallocated if necessary and the Chairman of the Social and Community Development Committee agreed this would also be an action that he would follow through with his Committee.

(Action: Hon Chief Secretary/Hon Chairman, SCDC)

Following discussion, Council advised and the Governor agreed, that increasing the Minimum Income Standard (MIS) in line with the current policy and subsequently increasing the weekly payments for both Basic Island Pension (BIP) and Income Related Benefits (IRB) should be approved, with the Social Security (Amendment) Regulations, 2020, (Annex A) coming into force on 3 April 2020.

(Action: Clerk of Councils)

The Governor thanked the Statistician and his team for their hard work and at this point, the Statistician and the Deputy Financial Secretary left the meeting.

73.4 Any Other Business

73.4.1 Public Health Regulations

The Hon Anthony Green raised an issue regarding the Public Health Regulations that had been approved by e-mail and queried a date in the Regulations; the Attorney General said that he would discuss this with the Member after the meeting and revert.

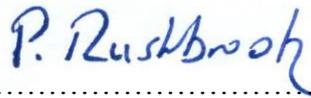
(Action: Hon Attorney General)

73.4.2 Connect – Water increases

The Hon Clint Beard asked if the water fee increases could be delayed because the Covid-19 threat advice was to wash hands more thoroughly and he wondered if Connect could be approached to facilitate a delay; the Governor suggested that this suggestion might not be pursued as Connect Saint Helena had initially sought higher increases in water tariffs.



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Clerk of Councils



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Governor

28 April 2020

Date