

## **Public Engagement on Alternative Governance Systems**

A Feedback Report summarising the public engagement and information sessions held during September 2020

### **Purpose**

This report was prepared to assist elected members in deciding upon a further motion on 9<sup>th</sup> October to:

- Agree to set up a time-limited Progress Committee (ideally including elected member(s), SHG official, AG representative, an independent St Helenian involved in the recent governance public engagement, and a Governor's Office representative) to finalise the structural arrangements for each governance alternative;
- Review a draft constitutional amendment (if ministerial system selected);
- Finalise the consultative poll question;
- Prepare details on the financial implications of the alternate governance options; and
- Authorise the AG to liaise with the FCDO on the draft constitutional amendment.

Thereafter, the Progress Committee will provide to the Legislative Council the specific design of each governance option, taking into account this Feedback Report; a poll question; and draft constitutional amendment for a decision to proceed to a constitutional poll.

The period prior to a poll (if approved subsequently by the Legislative Council) would provide further opportunities for public discussion and consultation.

### **Context**

On 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2020 the completed report from the Governance Commission was passed the Legislative Council members. That report detailed the independent work they undertook between May and July to tailor the two alternative governance systems identified by Professor Sarkin. Subsequently, on 28<sup>th</sup> August the Legislative Council agreed a resolution to invite the Governance Commission members to undertake a wide-ranging public engagement exercise to seek public views and comments on the Revised Committee system and the Ministerial system.

This engagement took place between 3<sup>rd</sup> September and 28<sup>th</sup> September and included:

- Nine evening community meetings
- A special evening event for youth members (16 to 25 years old) of the community
- Five workplace engagement meetings
- A dedicated meeting of the Chamber of Commerce
- Four special Q and A programmes on Saint FM

- Radio discussions on a SAMS FM scheduled programme
- Several newspaper articles on the topic of alternative governance options
- Widespread distribution of a summary leaflet through the Public Library, clinics, supermarkets, community centres and various workplaces
- A reference copy and subsequently additional copies of the Governance Commission report in the Public Library
- Copies of the Governance Commission report and summary slide presentation downloadable from the SHG website
- A dedicated response email address was advertised for the receipt of written views and observations.

This report to the Legislative Council provides a summary of the extensive, wide ranging and perceptive feedback gathered by a note taker from comments made at each public meeting.

### **Principal Findings**

Turnout at individual evening community centre meetings varied from many to a few. Taken together the broad range of public engagement events permitted views to be gathered from a large number of people. Collectively, a diverse set of views were expressed and a concerted effort has been made to capture the points raised. A list of comments and questions from members of the public are presented in Annex A.

Key points for consideration:

1. There was a distinct and predominant theme in public opinion to progress ahead with governance reform. The Present Committee system was not viewed by most participants as operating effectively and only a few believed it was sufficient for St Helena in the future.
2. It was stated frequently by participants that they did not understand how the Present Committee system reaches a decision but regarded it as not clearly demonstrating who was responsible at a political level for taking decisions or accountable for the performance of public services.
3. A minority of participants did not believe the Present Committee needed to be changed or if demonstrated it was necessary then change should be contemplated over a longer timescale varying between six months to two years.
4. Those younger participants, who expressed an opinion, sought change immediately. Older participants in some parts of the island were more sanguine about the need for change or achieving change quickly.
5. A modest majority of opinions expressed, based on the information available, favoured the Ministerial system over a Revised Committee one. It is cautioned this is only a qualitative view. No quantitative information was gathered.

6. A few people suggested substantial changes to the Constitution should be undertaken now. They accepted this may take several years to achieve and this was taken to imply they would prefer a major constitutional change and not a limited amendment focusing on system of governance relating to Part 4 of the 2009 Constitution.
7. In the Revised Committee it was suggested why the changes had not already been put in place but some questioned if giving a Chair executive decision making powers would undermine the committee system.
8. The notion of a Chief Minister in the Ministerial system was well understood, although a view of many participants was the public should have an input into the choice rather than the choice being between Legislative Council members alone.
9. Several participants were concerned the greater level of responsibilities of a minister would require training and candidates with specialist knowledge. Others believed there are appropriate capabilities available in St Helena providing good candidates could be encouraged to stand for election and once elected, supported by a reformed public service.
10. There was widespread acknowledgement the workload of councillors and ministers would increase under the alternate governance systems and remuneration levels needed to be greater than the present levels to ensure they are sufficient to retain effective people and attract new candidates.
11. Many participants viewed the establishment of scrutiny committees for the Legislative Council members, under the Ministerial system, as an important balance to the increased powers conferred on ministers.
12. The concept of a manifesto to set out a Chief Minister's objectives for a term of office was seen as a positive feature although there were differing views if a manifesto should be issued before or after a Chief Minister is selected.
13. A large proportion of participants favoured the Legislative Council agreeing to stage a consultative poll to decide which governance system should be adopted in the future.
14. Some participants expressed a view the poll question should include an option to retain the Present Committee system. Others expressed no distinct opinion. Little public interest was expressed in a formal consultation approach.
15. Opinion varied on the nature of the Governor's role under a Ministerial system. Specific changes to be suggested to Part 4 of the Constitution need to be more explicitly defined and discussed with HM government.