



Opening of the New Custody Suite, Coleman House

I am extremely pleased to be here with you today. A particularly special day. It is a day that we have all been waiting to arrive for a long, long time. It is the day we can finally say good bye to the antiquated arrangements for placing someone in police custody and welcome in a modern era of holding people in more appropriate and civilised facilities, designed and built for the purpose.

It has been a long road and about which many will be unaware of what went on out of the public spotlight.

On the Police and Prisons side, it was Heidi Murray's job to go looking for funds to get the project off the ground. St Helena was fortunate that Andrew Munday, the FCDO's Police Advisor, visited the island in 2019 to see for himself the old and tired custody facilities in the Prison. Never forgetting a promise to assist, Heidi enlisted his help in seeking the quarter of a million pounds needed to build and equip this facility. Remember, at this time, early 2020, with the pandemic was just starting to take its toll on the UK and the world, so it was touch and go as to whether we would be able to secure the funding. But, with our assurance we could complete the project within the last financial year it was agreed that the funding would be granted from the CSSF. It should not be underestimated what a significant commitment this was from the UK Government.

So, with the money guaranteed, how did we achieve this fine building here? Not without a few dramas, most of which I will leave for the memoirs of others. The one that has most impressed me was coping with the little time available to complete the project. Due to start in April 2020 and take 12 months, but the project finally started in September last year with completion still required by April 2021, i.e. in just 7 months. The race against time was an ever present thought in everyone's mind. But, collectively we did it. The team succeeded not only in bringing the project in on time but also under budget by the sizeable sum of £12.80. Now, that is what could be called good budgeting.

I wish to pay tribute to the many people who have made today possible. In particular, to:

Heidi Murray, our Prison Manager, who has been a driving force in bringing much-needed improvements to the way those in custody are housed and treated. We will miss her when she leaves us shortly. Please take with you the sincere thanks and appreciation from the Governor's Office and your colleagues for the massive improvements you have achieved in your three years on the island in the old prison, its more humane custody regime and for developing robust plans for a future prison;

David Price, our Chief of Police, for his vision in seeing the weaknesses in what we had. He has worked continuously with the SHG administration and Governor's Office to achieve the changes he knew were required.

Sam Cherrett, our CSSF Programme Manager in the Governor's Office. She found the way with our CSSF colleagues in London, the UK Ministry of Justice Prisons Advisor and the FCDO Police Advisor to finance the construction of this essential facility. I have to explain that this is unsung, behind the scenes work but absolutely vital in public service to get the approvals and resources we need for St Helena. Even more impressive when we recall her efforts and hard work took place during the disruption of the merger of FCO and DFID;

All involved in the on time and on budget design and construction work, including ProArc, Isaac Construction, Ambledale, SHG Procurement and Planning Teams;

To Adam Sizeland and Museum staff whose watching brief turned into a call for assistance during the site excavations;

After 7 months of noise and disturbance to the police, immigration, probation and control room staff during construction I hope your working lives will continue to be busy but at least a little more quieter;

Lastly, my thanks to Chief Inspector Mark Calland from the Wiltshire Police Service, who has been commissioning the new custody suite and training our officers to use it to the best possible standards in the months and years ahead. I hope we have fulfilled your expectations, you have certainly fulfilled ours.

The opening today of this new custody suite at Colman House is a good news story for St Helena. It is a huge boost that takes us one step further towards completing all of the improvements in the pipeline to bring our prison and custody arrangements up to 21st century standards. Next on the list is the conversion of the old custody rooms in the prison into long term cells. Then the big prize, an entirely new prison in the Bottom Woods area.

It gives me great pleasure to open officially the new custody suite and the ancillary facilities at Colman House. These are essential facilities in a modern society that respect British values in treating those in custody with respect. It is my hope in our overwhelmingly peacefully and law-abiding society of St Helena there will not be too many visitors to this new suite.

Philip Rushbrook
Governor of St Helena
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