



**St Helena
Government**

ST HELENA GOVERNMENT

PROCEEDINGS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL –
FRIDAY 15TH JANUARY 2021 – FIRST SITTING OF THE
TWENTIETH 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 Attorney General	-	Mr Allen Cansick

ELECTED MEMBERS

The Honourable Clint Richard Beard
The Honourable Gavin George Ellick
The Honourable Jeffrey Robert Ellick
The Honourable Corinda Sebastiana Stuart Essex
The Honourable Anthony Arthur Green
The Honourable Lawson Arthur Henry
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

The Honourable Cruyff Gerard Buckley - On leave of absence

CLERK OF COUNCILS

Mrs Connie Johnson

PROCEEDINGS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Friday, 15th January, 2021

The Council met at 10.00 am
in the Council Chamber, Jamestown

(The Honourable Speaker in the Chair)

ORDER OF THE DAY

1. FORMAL ENTRY OF THE PRESIDENT

2. PRAYERS
(Deacon Ernest Fritz)

3. ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT

Honourable Members, ladies and gentlemen and radio listeners, first of all I'd like to inform Members that Councillor Cruyff Buckley is not able to make it this morning, his Dad died sometime through the week and he's asked for leave of absence and the Honourable Secretary, if you could pass on our condolences to him and his family, please? Thank you.

Good morning and welcome to this first sitting of the 20th meeting of the Legislative Council. I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a Happy and Peaceful New Year, 2021. I would also like to thank Deacon Ernest for opening the meeting with the benefit of prayer and I would like to thank him for his support given to this Council today and on previous occasions. It is also pleasing that Mr Merlin George has responded so willingly once again to perform the ceremonial duties of Mace Bearer and for that I express my thanks. I also express my thanks to the staff members of SAMS Radio for providing support to our listening audience at this meeting.

Honourable Members, I anticipate this to be a short meeting as we have on the Order Paper two Sessional Papers, four Questions for oral answers and one Motion for debate. Our meeting will conclude with the traditional Adjournment Debate and I wish Honourable Members well in your deliberations. I would also like to thank the staff at the Castle for making sure that everything is in place for our meeting today and they work very hard behind the scenes and they need to be thanked, so without further delay, I will call on the Clerk to announce the next item of business, please.

4. PAPERS

SP 1/2021 – The Honourable Financial Secretary.

The Speaker –
The Honourable Financial Secretary?

The Hon. Dax Richards –
Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I beg to present Sessional Paper 1/2021 entitled St Helena National Trust Annual Report and Financial Statements 2019/2020.

Ordered to lie on the table.

SP 2/2021 – The Honourable Anthony Green.

The Speaker –
The Honourable Anthony Green?

The Hon. Anthony Green –
Mr Speaker, I beg to present Sessional Paper 2/2021 – Governance Review – Progress Committee, December 2020.

Ordered to lie on the table.

The Speaker –
Thank you. Next item of business, please?

5. QUESTIONS

Question No. 1 – The Honourable Jeffrey Ellick to ask the Honourable Chairman of the Public Health Committee.

The Speaker –
The Honourable Jeffrey Ellick?

The Hon. Jeffrey Ellick –
Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Honourable Chairman of the Public Health Committee tell this Council what testing regime is in place for frontline workers dealing with people arriving at St Helena?

The Speaker –
The Honourable Derek Thomas?

The Hon. Derek Thomas –
Mr Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for his question. Honourable Members will be aware that currently St Helena is in the very fortunate position of being free from Covid-19. This means that the only risk of exposure to Covid-19 will come from arrivals to the island who will have travelled from countries contending with Covid-19. For example, Mr Speaker, the passengers that arrived on island from the UK earlier this week were tested prior to their

departure, again tested on arrival to the island and they will be tested again at Day 14 and only released from quarantine if they test negative at that point. This demonstrates that there is a robust testing regime in place for arrivals to St Helena. Given that there are no Covid-19 cases on island, given that the only source of infection can come from an arrival to the island, and given our confidence in our testing regime for passengers, we have not yet had occasion to test any of our frontline workers. There are robust procedures in place for frontline workers, setting out how they should approach each task and the personal protective equipment, PPE, that must be used. We are confident that every step possible to reduce the risk of exposure is being taken. We only test frontline workers in the following scenarios: First, if a frontline worker presents with symptoms; Second, if an arrival to the island presents with symptoms or tests positive for Covid-19 and the frontline worker is identified as a contact.

Mr Speaker, robust plans are already in place for these scenarios. If there were reason to believe that an arriving passenger had exposed others to Covid-19, the Health Directorate would work closely with the Police Directorate to contact trace and to test those persons identified as contacts. Thankfully, Mr Speaker, neither scenario has occurred to date, all arriving passengers have tested negative for Covid-19. This means that to date our frontline workers have not been exposed to Covid-19 and there has been no reason for frontline workers to be tested. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Councillor Ellick?

The Hon. Jeffrey Ellick –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. So, will the Chairperson of Public Health tell this Council there is no proactive measures in place for testing frontline workers then?

The Speaker –

Honourable Derek Thomas?

The Hon. Derek Thomas –

Mr Speaker, as I alluded to, there is no reason to test frontline workers at this time.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Councillor Ellick?

The Hon. Jeffrey Ellick –

Thank you, I have no further questions.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Any other questions, Honourable Members? Okay, thank you. Next question, please?

Question No. 2 – The Honourable Christine Scipio to ask the Honourable Financial Secretary.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Christine Scipio?

The Hon. Christine Scipio –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, will the Honourable Financial Secretary tell this House what is the total expenditure to date for the interim arrangements for fish processing and the operations of the fish factory?

The Speaker –

The Honourable Financial Secretary?

The Hon. Dax Richards –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for her question. SHG has managed the fish processing plant at Ruperts since February 2020. The total expenditure incurred from February 2020 to December 2020 is £205,000. £33,000 was incurred in the financial year 19/20 which was February and March of 2020 and £172,000 for April to December to date. Maybe if I can give a little bit more additional information in terms of the breakdown of some of those numbers it might help the Member with her line of thought for further questions?

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member.

The Hon. Dax Richards –

So, the budget provision for the fish processing plant for this period was approximately £222,000 which gives approximately an average spend of around about £20,000 per month. What we've found is actually the expenditure on a monthly basis is approximately £19,000 per month. During the period, we generated £16,000 from the sale of ice and the fish processing and packaging which means overall the cost to the Government is around about £189,000. Ice sales were £8,000 and fish processing and packaging revenues were £8,000. There are currently 14 members of staff employed at the Fish Processing Plant and when you compare against the previous year's budget, the previous year's budget for the subsidy to the St Helena Fisheries Corporation was £350,000, which is approximately £29,000 a month. That expenditure for SHG for the period between February and December 2019 was totalling £363,000. The budget for 2020/21 financial year is £182,000 so when you compare the expenditure to date, it's a small underspend as at the end of December.

The Speaker –

Thank you. The Honourable Christine Scipio?

The Honourable Christine Scipio –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, will the Honourable Financial Secretary tell this House what type of service is being provided during the period February 2020 and December 2020 that he alluded to?

The Speaker –

The Honourable Financial Secretary?

The Hon. Dax Richards –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. At present, the Fish Processing Plant offers ice to the fishermen and the general public and they also receive and process the fish from the fishermen which is then given back to the fishermen who are then responsible for either selling or holding on to that fish.

The Speaker –

Thank you. The Honourable Christine Scipio?

The Honourable Christine Scipio –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, the Honourable Financial Secretary made reference to 2019 - £363,000 as a comparative for what he just explained as the service provided for the interim arrangement at the Fish Factory between February and December, prior to that when he mentioned about previous years, was that the service the same?

The Speaker –

The Honourable Financial Secretary?

The Hon. Dax Richards –

No, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you. The Honourable Christine Scipio?

The Hon. Christine Scipio –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. So, Mr Speaker, on 28th February 2020, St Helena Government announced that an investor had been endorsed to undertake fish processing within 3 to 4 months, how much longer is it anticipated that the interim arrangements will continue as the four months has long passed?

The Speaker–

Okay, is that a question?

The Hon. Christine Scipio –

My question is, how much longer is it anticipated that the interim arrangements will continue as four months has long since passed?

The Speaker –

The Honourable Financial Secretary?

The Hon. Dax Richards –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, I'm not quite sure that is directly related to the question; however, I can confirm that we are making budgetary provisions for the interim arrangements to continue to the end of the financial year.

The Speaker –

Okay, thank you. The Honourable Christine Scipio?

The Hon. Christine Scipio –

A point of information, Mr Speaker, I'm more baffled as to why the Honourable Financial Secretary stated that he don't understand how it relates to the question, because my question talks about the interim arrangements for fish processing and the operations of the fish factory. He mentioned that the budget that was approved for this financial year goes up to December 2020, the months has lapsed so hence the reason I asked how much longer is it anticipated that interim arrangements will continue, so that's for information.

The Speaker –
Thank you.

The Hon. Christine Scipio –
So, Mr Speaker, can I ask the Financial Secretary what will be the additional costs for the extended services and what pot of money will this be funded from?

The Speaker –
The Honourable Financial Secretary?

The Hon. Dax Richards –
Thank you, Mr Speaker. The additional costs that we estimated would be for the remainder of this financial year is around about £50,000 and at the moment it would be covered from a virement within other areas within Corporate Finance.

The Speaker -
Thank you. Next question, please?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –
Mr Speaker?

The Speaker –
Oh, sorry, the Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –
Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Honourable Financial Secretary please supply us with a direct comparison of the cost heads that are comparable between the previous financial year and this financial year such as electricity costs, staffing costs, etc, excluding the previous costs that were associated with exports and other services that are no longer being provided?

The Speaker –
Thank you very much. The Honourable Financial Secretary?

The Hon. Dax Richards –
Mr Speaker that information should be available to be shared. Obviously, the information from the previous financial year was done under the auspices of the St Helena Fisheries Corporation, so that information is already publicly available, but we will make available to Members the breakdown which I have here of all of the different costs associated with the operations of the current fish processing plant.

The Speaker –
Thank you. Are there any other questions? Next question, please?

Question No. 3 – The Honourable Jeffrey Ellick to ask the Honourable Chairman of the Economic Development Committee.

The Speaker –
The Honourable Jeffrey Ellick?

The Hon. Jeffrey Ellick –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, will the Honourable Chairman of the Economic Development Committee tell this Council what new initiatives will he be putting forward to assist in stimulating St Helena's economy in light of the serious global economic downturn?

The Speaker –

The Honourable Lawson Henry?

The Hon. Lawson Henry –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, I also thank the Honourable Jeffrey Ellick for his question. In order for St Helena's economy to grow wealthier, the island must export more and import less. I quote directly from the Sustainable Economic Development Plan that opening up a new shop on the island isn't a marker of a good economy if it just means that the same money is spread between more retailers. The key to economic growth in St Helena is to grow industry which ensures that more money enters and is retained on St Helena. St Helena's biggest export is tourism with visitors spending in a normal year between five and six million pounds. We were seeing 12% year on year growth in visitor numbers until March 2020 and we had seen our most successful February ever in terms of arrivals largely due to diving tours. We have not been able to have a normal tourist season this year due to travel restrictions that we have prudently put into place to safeguard the health of the population, but we have provided support to restaurants and accommodation providers over the course of the financial year to help them to continue to employ their staff. We understand that some restaurants have chosen to cease to operate during part of 2020 and 2021 and the problem for many is lack of tourists. Therefore, the most compelling thing we can do as a Government is when it is safe to do so is to pursue a strategy for recovery which is tourism friendly and allows for a buoyant tourism season at least from November of this year, but ideally earlier. I reiterate that timing of this is important, the provision of the vaccine for those on island and world-wide vaccination programme may be an opportunity for positive change at the global level. The ability to encourage tourism travel again would need to be carefully discussed on an operational level over the coming months and would need to be risk based in order to protect our community. Our tourism recovery strategy, which was endorsed by ExCo in November last year, will focus on armchair tourism, maintaining and enhancing St Helena's current products and post recovery readiness. After tourism, our next biggest exports are fish and coffee. We are hopeful to see the reform in the fish processing sector to begin soon and as Members are aware, we are dedicating up to £500k to upgrade our factory to stimulate the sector. This investment will also be good for SHG finances as the enterprise will mean that SHG will no longer provide an annual operating subsidy to the factory to operate. The reforms will enable fish to be exported again and help the island to earn new money. As for coffee, we continue to see private investment in this sector as more coffee trees are planted. Coffee is a long-term investment with results taking five to seven years in some cases. To support the investment in coffee, SHG, through its improved investor status, provides import duty reductions and exemptions to help business looking to kick-start or expand growing. This approved investor scheme is available for anyone looking to invest and expand in St Helena and I urge potential investors to look at our investment strategy to find out more. We also continue to provide tax reductions for our SEDP sectors. In the case of a company, this is a reduction in tax rate from 25% to 15%, self-employed workers in those sectors also receive a 10% tax reduction. We do this to encourage people to work in sectors which will generate more revenue for the island and there are opportunities for new sectors to develop. We have been paving the way for a modernised company registry and can soon begin to advertise St Helena's registry services, not only for

companies, but for ships too. The cable will be landed in only a few months' time and we can kick-start the growth of our digital sector which includes the hosting of satellite ground stations. In the rest of the world, Covid-19 has normalised working from home and many think this change is something that will stick in the new normal. Once St Helena has superfast broadband, there is nothing stopping professionals working globally to base themselves here on the island to bring their job with them and to spend their earnings in the local economy. These are the kind of things the new SHG Treasury and Sustainable Development team intend to focus on after the team comes into force in the new financial year.

It was John Maynard Keynes who advocated for Government investment as a tool to promote long-term growth and resist recovery during recession. Our additional micro economic policy is to support private sector activity through infrastructure spending. The Rockfall Protection Project last year added approximately £255k to £273k to St Helena's economic activity over the six-month period. The project paved the way for the construction of cargo handling facilities in Ruperts later this year which will continue to employ St Helenians, especially in the construction sector.

Other projects funded by the Economic Development Investment Programme have included expansion of the Court House and capital investments funded through the micro projects budget. St Helena has been prepared and adverse to taking risks when it came to Covid-19. Although we are a grant-aided territory, relying on UK subsidies because we don't yet have well-developed export sectors here, we have done the best we can in terms of support for what is such a small island, but we have to be realistic, tourism is our biggest income generating sector and right now it is closed, we need to work together as a Council to ensure that our people vaccinate and stay safe, that we have regular and reliable access to the island and that we encourage tourists to come to the island. We are sitting on a huge opportunity here once a tourist has undergone the required checks and balances to ensure they are Covid-free, they are able to live in a normal existence on St Helena. For some people in the world, this is their third lockdown, some people are fed up and St Helena can provide a safe haven. Regaining access and promoting safe tourism is absolutely necessary for our businesses to thrive again, the economy to be stimulated and all to share in the revenues. We are conscious that SHG need to be flexible and adaptable to the global economic impacts. We have in the past heard from various sectors when they are in need, whether it be retailers regarding freight rates or the hotel industry regarding off-peak demand, we continue to do this and respond appropriately to particular challenges when they present themselves. Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. The Honourable Jeffrey Ellick?

The Hon. Jeffrey Ellick –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, I'd just like to thank my Honourable Friend for his comprehensive reply, but this was not what I was looking for, I was looking for new initiatives and I only heard about the shipping registry, everything else is pretty much the same sort of thing, so I'm gonna ask another question, will the Honourable Chairman of the Economic Development Committee tell this Council what initiatives he took from a meeting held with the Governor, Chief Secretary and Members last year at a working dinner at Plantation where Members put forward ideas and plans for stimulating and sustaining the economy of St Helena?

The Speaker –

The Honourable Lawson Henry?

The Hon. Lawson Henry –

Could you be more specific in what ideas in terms of economic development?

The Speaker –

The Honourable Jeffrey Ellick?

The Hon. Jeffrey Ellick –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I'll probably go on to another question then, will the Honourable Chairman of the Economic Development Committee tell this Council if the suggested initiative of cultivation of hemp/cannabis to export to produce CBD oil that is used for medicinal purposes and which could have potential significant economic benefits for St Helena has been considered?

The Hon. Lawson Henry –

Certainly not by the Economic Development Committee.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Jeffrey Ellick

The Hon. Jeffrey Ellick –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. And why not?

The Speaker –

The Honourable Lawson Henry?

The Hon. Lawson Henry –

As I understand it, Mr Speaker that will require change of legislation and the existing legislation does not fall to the Economic Development Committee.

The Speaker –

Okay. The Honourable Jeffrey Ellick?

The Hon. Jeffrey Ellick –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Honourable Chairman of Economic Development tell this Committee why didn't they consider it, it's not in legislation at the moment, but it should be considered, because we can always change legislation?

The Speaker –

The Honourable Lawson Henry?

The Hon. Lawson Henry –

Thank you. If the Member wishes to put forward a proposal to the Economic Development Committee, we will certainly consider it.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much indeed. The Honourable Jeffrey Ellick?

The Hon. Jeffrey Ellick –

Thank you for that, Mr Chair. I thought that was the whole point of having these meetings so that we can put ideas forward for the Economic Development Committee to take forward.

The Speaker –
Are we asking a question or.....

The Hon. Jeffrey Ellick –
Just making a statement there.

The Speaker –
Okay, thank you. The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –
Thank you, Mr Speaker. Does my Honourable Friend still consider that import substitution should also be a main focus for economic activity? Reference was made in your intervention relating to exports, but local produce should, in my opinion, be a priority for the island, increasing local production and I now seek an assurance that that would be the case?

The Speaker –
The Honourable Lawson Henry?

The Hon. Lawson Henry –
Mr Speaker, yes.

The Speaker –
Thank you. Any other questions? The Honourable Derek Thomas?

The Hon. Derek Thomas –
Not a question, Mr Speaker, but is it possible to remove our jackets, please, for those who wish to?

The Speaker –
Okay, Honourable Members, you may remove your jackets, I know it's our summer months and it is quite steamy outside, so.....
Thank you. Next question, please?

Question No. 4 – The Honourable Christine Scipio to ask the Honourable Financial Secretary.

The Speaker –
The Honourable Christine Scipio?

The Hon. Christine Scipio –
Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, will the Honourable Financial Secretary tell this House what will be the implications to St Helena Government if the Bulk Fuel Installation Project proves unfit for purpose?

The Speaker –
The Honourable Financial Secretary?

The Hon. Dax Richards –

Thank you, Mr Speaker and I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for her question. To be quite frank, I found this question very difficult to give you a very clear answer, so I will do my utmost to be able to give you an indication of what we've been doing rather than directly answering the question, because it's more of an opinion rather than a formal answer that I could give you in relation to that. So, here goes.

The Hon. Christine Scipio –

Mr Speaker, can I ask a question before the Financial Secretary answers? Can he give me some advice, if the Financial Secretary is giving me an opinion if I still can ask questions on his opinion?

The Speaker –

Attorney General?

The Hon. Dax Richards –

Sorry, just to be clear, I was saying that I'm not going to give an opinion....

The Speaker –

Oh, you're not going to give an opinion.

The Hon. Dax Richards –

I'm going to try to give some factual information, but if I was to answer the question directly it would be me giving an opinion on whether I think something is going to prove to be unfit for purpose.

The Speaker –

Yeah, okay. Go ahead, Financial Secretary.

The Hon. Dax Richards –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. So, the Bulk Fuel Installation Project encompasses all the fuel systems which were designed and installed under the St Helena Airport Project and includes the ship to shore bay side facility, the pipeline, the storage in Upper Ruperts Valley and the airport fuel facility. Following the termination of the design, build, operate and hand back contract with Basil Read, an independent review was undertaken in order to determine the best way to commission the fuel infrastructure. The review recommended some changes to the method of fuel delivery to the island and changes to the design of the BFI. Whilst these recommendations were accepted by the Airport Project Board, it was decided more work was required to ensure the full impact of the proposed changes are assessed. To this end, with the support of the St Helena Government, the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office are currently undertaking a tendering exercise for a Social, Environmental and Economic Impact Assessment for the recommended changes. This assessment will look at how the differing methods of fuel delivery could impact on the community as a whole. Both reviews form part of the commitment by SHG and the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office to ensure St Helena has a fuel infrastructure that meets the island's needs and is fit for purpose. From a finance perspective, the funding for the project will continue to be provided by Her Majesty's Government and once fully commissioned the cost of managing the fuel facility will form part of the recurrent budget as has been done so since the fuel management contract's inception.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Christine Scipio?

The Honourable Christine Scipio –

For information, if I can rise for information, Mr Speaker, is that I now understand why the Honourable Financial Secretary say that he is unable to provide the answer to my question, and, of course, the listening public is also wanting to know the answers to my question, so it's gonna be difficult for me to ask questions, but I will make an attempt, Mr Speaker, because that is what my constituents have asked me to do so.

The Speaker –

Okay.

The Hon. Christine Scipio –

So, will the Honourable Financial Secretary tell this House when is it likely that the Bulk Fuel Installation Project will be commissioned?

The Speaker –

The Honourable Financial Secretary?

The Hon. Dax Richards –

Mr Speaker, at this point in time I can't confirm exactly, but once the review is completed, it is anticipated a minimum of two years is gonna be required before the full works for the commissioning of all of the fuel facilities can be completed.

The Speaker –

Thank you. The Honourable Christine Scipio?

The Hon. Christine Scipio –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, from the independent investigation that was carried out previously, can the Honourable Financial Secretary say if any part of the Bulk Fuel Installation Project is no longer required for storage and supply of our island's fuel?

The Speaker –

The Honourable Financial Secretary?

The Hon. Dax Richards –

Without being able to go into the detail, Mr Speaker, the report does make a recommendation that part of the upper valley site is not used for the aviation fuel.

The Speaker –

Alright. The Honourable Christine Scipio?

The Hon. Christine Scipio –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, the Honourable Financial Secretary will know that for the past year I've been asking to sight this report that he has referred to, so may I ask, can the Financial Secretary tell this House when will this report be made available to elected members?

The Speaker –

The Honourable Financial Secretary?

The Hon. Dax Richards –

Mr Speaker, as I've also responded to the Honourable Member over the last year, this report is a DfID report or was a DfID report at the time and it is under a commercially sensitive cover. However, as I've said previously, a hard copy can be made available for review, but can't be taken away.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Christine Scipio?

The Hon. Christine Scipio –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, it's pleasing to know that a hard copy will now be made available for review by elected members and hopefully that is not gonna take another year for that to be made available. So, Mr Speaker, can I ask the Honourable Financial what work has been done to publish an expected timeline for resolving outstanding design issues or whatever is the issues if the project is not fit for purpose so that the public can be prepared for any future changes in fuel prices?

The Speaker –

The Financial Secretary?

The Hon. Dax Richards –

Mr Speaker, as I said in my exposition, we don't know that until we have the reviews completed, so it would be very difficult for me to publish a timeline for the expected completion of the facility until we know which direction of travel we are choosing to do. They are fundamentally different if we choose to do ship to shore facility or whether we continue to er or whether we use the tank tainering option as one of the options available as well.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Christine Scipio?

The Hon. Christine Scipio –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, so may I ask the Honourable Financial Secretary what information has been issued to keep businesses and the public adequately informed about this project?

The Speaker –

The Honourable Financial Secretary?

The Hon. Dax Richards –

Mr Speaker, no information has been issued and until we have a clarity of the direction of travel it does not make any sense to give any information to the businesses because we don't know what the impacts of that is going to be.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Christine Scipio?

The Hon. Christine Scipio –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, will the Honourable Financial Secretary tell us when will the Social and Economic Assessment be carried out that he referred to earlier?

The Speaker –

The Honourable Financial Secretary?

The Hon. Dax Richards –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, my understanding is, as I mentioned in my exposition, is that the procurement is underway at this point in time so we would hope it would be done, ideally the original intention was to have that completed by the end of March, but I think the reality of it, because of the tender process is still commencing that it is unlikely to be before the start of the new financial year.

The Speaker –

Thank you. The Honourable Christine Scipio?

The Hon. Christine Scipio –

Mr Speaker, will the Honourable Financial Secretary say who will be funding this assessment?

The Speaker –

The Honourable Financial Secretary?

The Hon. Dax Richards –

Yes, Mr Speaker, that is being funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office, it is their report as well and it isn't an SHG report.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Any other questions, Honourable Members? The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Will the Honourable Financial Secretary tell this Honourable House what input St Helena Government has had in drawing up the terms of reference for the reviews and associated assessments?

The Speaker –

The Honourable Financial Secretary?

The Hon. Dax Richards –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, the Access Team has had an input into the drafting of the terms of reference for the Independent Economic Social Assessment.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

May I ask the Honourable Financial Secretary why there hasn't been wider involvement in the drafting of these terms of reference?

The Speaker –

The Honourable Financial Secretary?

The Hon. Dax Richards –

Mr Speaker, I don't have a clear answer to be able to give the Member on that specific issue, however, even though when I say the Access Office, they would have been the drafters of that, but it would have been also reviewed by the senior management in SHG, but at the moment, if you're referring to whether elected members involvement in the drafting of the terms of reference, there has been none to date.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

As this topic is one that is of key importance to the island as a whole, may I ask why there has been no political involvement?

The Speaker –

The Honourable Financial Secretary?

The Hon. Dax Richards –

Mr Speaker, it is a normal practice for us, and I appreciate Members view about it being a critical topic, but it is a normal practice for elected members to be involved in the drafting of the terms of reference.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

On a point of clarification, I was not referring simply to the drafting, although I know I did use that term, but also the approval and the finalisation of terms of reference.

The Speaker –

Thank you.

The Hon. Dax Richards –

And if I can just clarify, Mr Speaker, I did mention before, it is also a FCDO procurement, so whilst we would have had some input to it, ultimately the decision what goes into the terms of reference would have rested with them as well.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Members? Right, next item of business, please?

6.

MOTIONS

Motion No. 1 The Honourable Chairman of the Social and Community Development Committee.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Anthony Green?

The Hon. Anthony Green –

Mr Speaker, I beg to move that the Legislative Council resolves that a consultative poll be taken in February 2021 and that two questions be balloted as follows:-

- (a) Do you want the current system of governance to be changed?
- (b) If the public will is for a change to the current system of governance, should the governance system be changed to:
 - (i) a revised committee system of governance; or
 - (ii) a ministerial system of governance?

The Speaker –

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

The Hon. Derek Thomas –

Mr Speaker, I beg to second.

The Speaker –

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

The Hon. Anthony Green –

This Motion of Government business I'm presenting as a member of Executive Council as provided by Standing Orders.

Mr Speaker, Members will be aware that on 16th October 2020, Legislative Council resolved that having considered the report on the public response to public consultation on the two alternative systems of governance, that a Progress Committee should be established. This followed the original resolution on 28th August when Legislative Council agreed to the Governance Commission undertaking a wide-ranging public engagement exercise to seek public views and comments on the revised Committee system and the ministerial system. The Legislative Council resolved that the Progress Committee should consist of representatives from elected members, the Office of the Speaker, the St Helena Government, the Attorney General's Chambers, the Governor's Office and from the public who are not employed by the St Helena Government. Legislative Council resolved the functions of the Progress Committee should be as follows:-

- (1) Finalise the structural arrangements proposed for a revised committee or ministerial system of governance;
- (2) Instruct the Attorney General's Chambers regarding the constitutional and any other legislative amendment necessary to effect the two alternative systems of governance;
- (3) Provide options for the question regarding the changes to the system of governance in St Helena that could be considered and decided by consultative poll;
- (4) Consider the financial resources necessary in respect of this endeavour;
- (5) Liaise with the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office to agree the foregoing.

In regard to finalising the structural arrangements, the Progress Committee scrutinised the comments and queries raised by the Governance Commission feedback report. Discussions in the Progress Committee substantially agreed with the changes to the present governance arrangements suggested previously by the Governance Commission and work by Professor Sarkin and developed these further. In assessing these, likely workload on Ministers and the Chief Minister, the Progress Committee concluded there should be five Ministers in addition to the Chief Minister. The Committee produced an Annex to its report, a table comparing the three governance systems. The starting point of instructions to the Attorney General's Chambers for constitutional arrangements was the work in the Governance Commission report on a ministerial system. Instructions were further developed from finalising the structural arrangements. The Committee was also able to draw from a draft Constitution from 2005 which detailed a ministerial system for St Helena. The Attorney General's Chambers had prepared a first working draft of the amendments. The FCDO undertook a generic review which has not at this point raised any insurmountable concerns. Only after an expression of public will can the negotiation with FCDO for the amendments begin. The Committee did not consider constitutional amendments would be needed for a revised committee system. The Committee recommended that a consultative poll be held with Legislative Council then endorsing the outcome. In terms of arrangements for the consultative poll, persons whose names are included in the Register of Electors effective from 1st July 2020, along with any others who have applied to have their names added to that register since its publication, and such publications have been publicised in an Extraordinary Government Gazette Notice, will be eligible to vote in the poll. It is intended also to offer an opportunity to take part in the poll to others not included in the Register of Electors who meet the criteria to be registered as an elector as set out in the Elections Ordinance 2009, that is, have St Helenian status, be ordinarily resident in St Helena and aged 17 years of age or over. Those who do not wish to be listed in the Register of Electors may apply to have their names included in a supplementary list which will be utilised for the purposes of the consultative poll only. This will include eligible persons who are temporarily absent from St Helena for employment purposes in the Falklands or Ascension Island who will be required to nominate a proxy in St Helena to vote on their behalf. In regard to financial arrangements, the Progress Committee identified that any decision to move away from the present committee system should be cost neutral. Costs for operating additional offices in Directorates for Ministers and for improved office facilities and clerical services for Councillors on Legislative Council should be covered through a redistribution of existing financial resources. In terms of the levels of remuneration for Ministers or Councillors, it was recommended that these should be decided by an independent panel as per the Constitution. Regarding the question for the consultative poll, the two-part ballot question was chosen as it fairly provides all the choices to the public. It allows the public to express their view on if there should be a change and if there is what change should be. The type of change will only be relevant if the public express a will for change. It also rightly allows those who don't want a change, should they want to, to still have a say in the type of change if there is to be one. This was considered correct. To only have the second question as part of the poll was considered wrong as it would not give the public the option of no change. A three-choice question ballot was also considered unworkable as it may not lead to a majority for one option, there may not be a fifty percent plus one. It is recognised that the two-part ballot question would need to be explained comprehensively to the public. In regard to liaising with the FCDO, this has been undertaken on the constitutional arrangements as earlier detailed. Discussions have also taken place with the FCDO regarding the question and no issues have been raised on the two-part format. If the Motion carries, it is expected that elected members and the Office of the Speaker should advise on the delegation of tasks in preparation for the consultative poll. This should include delegating responsibility for the organisation and logistics of the poll and

also delegating responsibility for providing further information to the public in the build up to the poll.

In summing up, Mr Speaker, the purpose of the Motion is to seek Councillors' endorsement to proceed with the consultative poll on governance reform with the question for the public being as detailed in the Motion. Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Member. Honourable Members, the Motion is that the Legislative Council resolves that a consultative poll be taken in February 2021 and that two questions be balloted as follows: -

- (a) Do you want the current system of governance to be changed?
- (b) If the public will is for a change to the current system of governance, should the governance system be changed to:
 - (i) a revised committee system of governance; or
 - (ii) a ministerial system of governance?

Honourable Members, the Motion is now open for debate. The Honourable Cyril Leo?

The Hon. Cyril Leo –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Democracy can be likened to a special fruit tree that started life as a seed. Democracy must be nurtured, protected, and, when necessary, defended. It must be encouraged to grow from strength to strength and thereby produce the fruits of democratic process and progress for the people. Our local democracy has yet to blossom and flourish. This Motion is a significant step in the development of democracy in St Helena. The option of voting for a revised committee system of governance or a ministerial system of governance will provide the opportunity to establish greater local democracy, and that in itself, is democracy at work. I hope all elected members will give their full support to the Motion and in so doing, will give the people of St Helena their say in enhancing the democratic governance of St Helena. Mr Speaker, I support the Motion and beg to move.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much indeed. The Honourable Derek Thomas?

The Hon. Derek Thomas –

Mr Speaker, I rise in support of this Motion to proceed with a consultative poll to the general public (a) do you want the current system of governance to be changed, and, (b) if the public will is for change to the current system of governance should the governance system be changed to (i) a revised committee system of governance, or, (ii) a ministerial system of governance. Mr Speaker, from previous consultation covered by Professor Jeremy Sarkin and then the Governance Commission, a lot of ground was covered and there seem to be support for change in that the current system needs to be strengthened in respect of political leaders taking ownership for decision making and a quicker process for decisions. However, Mr Speaker, leading up to the consultative poll, the public needs to be absolutely clear and have a clear understanding on the revised committee system of governance and the ministerial system of governance. If we expect to have good public buy in, which is extremely important to the governance of this island, then the public needs to fully understand what is being proposed. It

would appear from previous consultations certain members of the public are claiming that they are still not, they're still seeking clarity around a number of issues, especially in relation to the ministerial system of governance. For example, there is concern out in the public, will the Governor still chair Executive Council? Clearly this should be the responsibility of the Chief Minister unless the system will simply fail. The role of the Governor and the Chief Minister must clearly be defined. What constitutional changes are needed? A clear thought through process is needed and, again, it is important that this exercise is not rushed and be given sufficient time for the general public to be well prepared, Mr Speaker, and fully understand the systems that is being proposed leading up to the consultative poll. Mr Speaker, I support the Motion.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much indeed. The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I welcome this Motion as it is essential that the people of the island have the opportunity to show conclusively what governance model they would like to see in place. However, it is equally essential that they know enough detail about the options to be able to make an informed choice. As I stated in this Honourable House last year, the consultative poll process must not be rushed because of elections are due in mid 2021. It certainly would be untidy and inconvenient to call two General Elections within a fairly short space of time, but I believe firmly that this would be preferable to having the outcome of a mandate that results from a hurried and relatively uninformed poll. I have been assured that if this Motion is carried, a major public awareness campaign relating to options will take place, but both the original Commission and the Progress Committee were task and finish groups that have completed their terms of reference and it is therefore unclear how the campaign would be organised and driven. It is of the greatest importance that the campaign does not just provide a superficial overview of the alternatives, but also give us an indication of the likely resource requirements, constitutional changes and financial implications associated with each. The public needs to understand these aspects if they are going to be confident and able to make the correct choice. We all know the saying about buying a pig in the bag and the public must know enough before they vote to satisfy themselves that that is not what they may in fact be doing. Governance models are complicated and there is still a lot of misunderstanding of the roles and responsibilities within the present Committee system although it's been in operation for decades. Indeed, the Honourable Attorney General has just issued a paper to elected members clarifying these today. Therefore, it is essential that the information provided to the public regarding the alternatives is presented in layman's terms, in clear and concise language and furthermore that there must be ample opportunities for the public to ask questions and receive answers before being expected to vote. Indeed, they should be encouraged to ask questions and gain full understanding before they go to the poll. It is crucial that the public participate fully in any consultative poll and prepare for this by taking part in the awareness campaign and gathering as much information as they can before thinking deeply about it and making their decision. The result of the voting will have a huge impact on the future of St Helena for many years to come so it is absolutely essential to get it right. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. The Honourable Brian Isaac?

The Hon. Brian Isaac –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Honourable Members will be aware that I haven't been involved with all the public consultation and the process leading up to where we are with the Motion today. I was able to follow all the processes via the internet and other information shared with elected members. I have previously been involved with constitutional reforms and the former ministerial government that was proposed and very conversed with the workings of both options that are made available to the public and I would also support the comments made by the previous speakers around the table, because I've heard and I do share the same concerns, but I do rise in support of this Motion and wish that all the points raised today will be taken into consideration and the public concerns are paramount in this whole process. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you. The Honourable Jeffrey Ellick?

The Hon. Jeffrey Ellick –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I have concerns about this Motion as it currently stands. In respect of the Progress Committee's findings regarding financial arrangements, I feel that their view on the costs for a new system to be cost neutral is unrealistic at this time, especially when St Helena is unclear of what sort of budget settlement they will receive amidst the global pandemic and economic downturn that goes with it. If we take time to study the Government budget, it really shows that with an ageing population, there is more demand on both Health and Children and Adult Services, which means there will be an increased cost year on year. Therefore, it's my view that opposed to rushing this process, we must first see what the indicative costs for a new system will look like and wait for a budget settlement to see if this Government will be able to afford a new system of Government, if that is the will of the people. If my colleagues agree, I would suggest the Motion be changed and only one question balloted in February – do you want the current system of governance to be changed? If there is more in favour of no change, we stop the process. Should there be a will for change, we then need to see if we can afford to have the change. If we cannot afford the change we wait until such time that it is affordable, then pose the question of the type of system people would prefer. I feel that under the current economic climate people might be influenced to vote against change, not because they don't want it, but because of how services could be impacted if further efficiencies need to be made. Also, for clarity, Mr Speaker, is the Mover suggesting that there will be six Ministers? Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

The Speaker –

Thank you. The Honourable Financial Secretary?

The Hon. Dax Richards –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Maybe if I can rise on a point of information, the Honourable Member referred to how this would be funded. Whilst the Commission has said that it should be cost neutral, we understand there will be additional costs associated with the new system and at the moment the proposal is for that to be funded through efficiencies that will be generated through the, for the future programme.

The Speaker –

Thank you.

The Hon. Dax Richards –

And that has been our stance on this right from Day 1.

The Speaker –

Okay. Any other Member wishes to speak? The Honourable Russell Yon?

The Hon. Russell Yon –

Mr Speaker, I rise in support of the Motion that Legislative Council resolves that a consultative poll be taken in February 2021 and that two questions be balloted on the future government systems for St Helena.

Mr Speaker, I am fully aware that for some years now the public has been questioning the current system of governance and whether it is the right system for the Island. To support this Motion will now give the public the opportunity to take a decision on the questions that will be on the ballot and I hope that with the correct information provided to the public prior to the consultative poll, it will be sufficient for those who will see this as an opportunity for change and allow them to make a decision on the future direction of the Governance of St Helena. With regards to the process and information provided to the public, it is understood that there are still some unanswered questions that was asked by the public during the initial discussions, and bearing this in mind the public should also be informed of the financial implications to the current budget that any changes will have and the impacts on funding Public Services. It should be noted that although not part of this process, St Helena Government is also undertaking a fit for the future review of all of its services and this will have impacts which will reflect on any change to approved Governance changes for the Island. Mr Speaker, I support the motion and beg to move.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much indeed. The Honourable Councillor Scipio, please?

The Hon. Christine Scipio –

Mr Speaker, concerns have been raised from constituents that questions raised during the engagement sessions by the Governance Commission during 3rd September and 28th September, where 77 members of the public attended, answers would be provided with a follow up meeting which I raised in this House in October last year. At these engagement sessions, participants stated that they did not understand how the present committee system operates. Is this their fault as they may choose not to understand or is it that not sufficient information has been made available to assist their understanding?

Mr Speaker, will the Honourable Mover say when will an examination of the complete system of governance be undertaken so that the community is fully aware of the relationship between council and the administration to help them to establish if they would want the current system of governance to change? Can the Honourable Mover say if the necessary ground work is completed and fully understood prior to asking the community if they would want a change?

Mr Speaker, the Progress Committee report stated that an animated power point presentation with audio soundtrack was prepared explaining the structure and operation of the present committee system and this is being broadcast via the SURE promotional channel. Can the Honourable Mover say if a public announcement was made to that effect and how were those persons not having the SURE television service, informed of the present committee system?

Mr Speaker, will the Honourable Mover say how will the public be informed about the two-part ballot question as it is confusing? If the voter states that they do not wish change, will it be made clear on the ballot paper that you do not answer the second part of the question? Can

the Honourable Mover say if the ballot paper would be void if the voter says no to the first question and tick a box for the second question?

Will the Honourable Mover say if the 50+1% will be determined from the number who turn out to vote or from the number of people registered to participate?

Mr Speaker, you note that I have lots of questions, just like my constituents. It is perceived that this process is being rushed, the public does not fully understand of what is at stake and it is hoped that this will be fully addressed before a consultative poll is taken. This is no time to apportion blame, the community should be given the opportunity to voice their opinions. I sincerely hope, Mr Speaker, that we are not just ticking boxes because being called a MINISTER sounds more important. I beg to move.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. The Honourable Lawson Henry?

The Hon. Lawson Henry –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I, of course, rise in support of this Motion. I, along with my colleague, the Honourable Cyril Leo, sat on the Progress Committee. There was considerable work done by that Committee, but I just want to refresh Members' minds, because several Members have spoken about the need for further information and in the Honourable Mover's exposition, he said if the Motion carries, it is expected that elected Members and the Office of the Speaker should advise on the delegation of tasks in preparation for the consultative poll. This should include delegating responsibility for the organisation and logistics of the poll and also delegating responsibility for providing further information to the public in the build-up to the poll, so that to me signal that Legislative Council will be asked to delegate those responsibilities and, of course, I would hope that Members themselves will be part of that delegation in helping the general public to understand what they have been asked to do. I should also like to thank my colleagues who work in the Progress Committee, they gave up their time on behalf of this House. They was asked by this House to perform that task outside of their ordinary duties and I hope Members will recognise that in their deliberations today.

So, Mr Speaker, I support this Motion and that is that Legislative Council resolves that a consultative poll be taken in February 2021 and that the two questions be balloted as follows: Do you want the current system of governance to be changed, and, (b) if the public will for a change to the current system of governance, should the governance system be changed to (a) a revised committee system, or, (b) a ministerial system of governance? Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much indeed. The Honourable Clint Beard?

The Hon. Clint Beard –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I rise in support of the Motion. As the public will need to decide what they see as the best possible way of taking governance forward that will equip those with a sound ability to improve governance and have a course of high levels of scrutiny and accountability. All I will mention now is that the public needs all information to make an informed decision and provided in a timely manner. Considered what I see as an indicative financial structure to whichever model is chosen, as it was mentioned that if any move to a new system it will be cost neutral and the public needs to know what these will be and all the other implications associated with these. Questions and answers will need to be completed and answered and fed back to those. The information must be of a high quality and as much as possible in layman's terms. We need to make sure that the Government keeps the main role is

to deliver services. We also need to remember that partnerships between all stakeholders are important for this to work, if there is no partnership, this will never work, whatever system you put in place, current and future. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

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

The Hon. Anthony Green –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, it is indeed my pleasure to do so and thank Members for their support. As Members know, that I'm presenting this as Government business and there are questions that have been raised which I will feed back and will provide information. I think the Honourable Lawson Henry rightly pointed out that in my exposition I mentioned that if this Motion is passed we will task, and I take it upon myself to make sure that it's arranged with some speed, that elected members and the Speaker's Office will liaise to ensure that we provide a process for the delegation of tasks so that this can be taken forward. There are other questions that came up related to finance, which I thank the Honourable Financial Secretary for contributing some clarification on that, there's been comments about unanswered questions when the public was actually spoken to by the Progress Committee, all those can be addressed in any public information campaign that goes forward, but I do thank Honourable Members, because I do understand the need for sufficient public education sessions and also for people to be fully informed about the process, but I would pass back to the Progress Committee and to all those concerned, and obviously these things will be taken on board by elected members when we will actually debate quite shortly what needs to happen, so my overall assessment, Mr Speaker, which I anticipate will reflect in the voting, is that Members generally support and hopefully the concerns will be addressed through the next stage in the process, so, Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much indeed. Honourable Members, the Motion is that the Legislative Council resolves that a consultative poll be taken in February 2021 and that the two questions be balloted as follows:

- (a) do you want the current system of governance to be changed, and,
- (b) if the public will is for change to the current system of governance should the governance system be changed to
 - (i) a revised committee system of governance; or
 - (ii) a ministerial system of governance.

Question on Motion, put and agreed to.

The Motion is carried.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. The next item of business, please?

7. 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 29th January 2021.

The Speaker –
Thank you, Chief Secretary. Is there a seconder to the Motion, please?

The Hon. Dax Richards –
Mr Speaker, I beg to second.

The Speaker –
Thank you. The Motion is that this House do now adjourn until Friday, 29th January 2021. The Motion, Honourable Members, is now open for debate. The Honourable Christine Scipio?

The Hon. Christine Scipio –
Thank you, Mr Speaker, Mr Speaker, on 2nd December 2020, St Helena Government announced that Greg Gibson to be sworn in as an Acting Governor. Can the Chief Secretary advise the listening public why St Helena Government Gazette dated 12th January 2021 details this individual as Governor?

Mr Speaker, the Financial Secretary stated earlier that £220,000 was approved for this financial year for the processing of fish and the operations, the interim arrangements of the fish processing and the fish factory with an additional £50,000 for the period January to March this financial year making a total of £270,000. Mr Speaker, the Honourable Financial Secretary did went on about a lot of figures so I’m not absolutely certain if that is the correct figure. If it is the correct figure, Mr Speaker, £270,000 for this particular financial year, it was a rather expensive service for a reduced service I must say of just providing ice and fish processing whereas the budget book states that £350,000 was included for the financial year 2019/20 that provided a service of sea freight, air freight, processing of fish for the domestic market and ice preparation. In this House in June 2020, the Assistant Financial Secretary gave an undertaking to provide elected members with a breakdown of the expenditure for the interim arrangements of the fish processing and the fish factory. Mr Speaker, to date, we are still awaiting. I beg to move.

The Speaker –
Thank you very much indeed. Any other Member wishes to speak? The Honourable Jeffrey Ellick?

The Hon. Jeffrey Ellick –
Thank you, Mr Speaker, I rise in support of the adjournment. Mr Speaker, despite my efforts to get the IEG to engage and communicate with elected members and the public, I just feel at times I’m being ignored, hence the reason for putting questions in the House to the Chair of the Committee I sit on. Based on the answer to my question on testing of frontline workers, clearly this Government is in a reactive mode rather than a proactive one. Mr Speaker, by and large our island seems to be doing okay when it comes to Covid-19, but there is more proactive measures this Government can take. Our sea port is officially closed, I have asked the IEG to look at tightening security at our sea port as currently there is only security there during normal

working hours and when the ship is in port. I implore the IEG to take this matter seriously and ensure that we have adequate security in place. We have vessels arriving and this Government appear to have more trust in people they don't know and appear to have less care for protecting and reassuring the population of St Helena and the people they do know. I have put this issue forward and presented a suggestion for dealing with this matter, but I still have not received a reply.

Mr Speaker, another issue I raised was testing of persons in quarantine. This helps with early detection of Covid and is also in place in other countries and territories. This is not the time for this Government to be resting on its laurels but to act proactively in the battle to prevent Covid from getting to St Helena and if it does get here to quickly detect and contain it. Again, Mr Speaker, I implore the IEG to take these matters seriously.

Mr Speaker, another point in issue is the criteria for allowing persons to travel to and from St Helena. At present, as I understand it, Saints are not allowed, or at this time, sorry, Saints are not allowed or at the lower end of the scale if they wish to return for a holiday, as this is not considered essential travel. However, non-Saints on the island are allowed to travel back to their countries for a holiday and then return to St Helena and this is considered essential travel. Mr Speaker, I agree that holidays whether spent on or off St Helena is not essential travel, but it must be applied to not just one category of people.

Mr Speaker, I support the adjournment.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Any other Member wishes to speak? The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, as we start a New Year, it's clear that it's one that is likely to be even more challenging, unpredictable and demanding than usual. Therefore, the resilience, fortitude and resourcefulness of the people of this island will be required to see it through so that the difficult period can be overcome with minimum lasting negative effects. In order for this to be able to happen, it is of the greatest importance that St Helena Government works proactively to build public trust and confidence. Mr Speaker, the feedback that I received from nearly all constituents is that they feel that Government is largely out of touch with the views and concerns of the public and in some instances is not prepared to listen to these. Such perceptions are clearly counter-productive and in some cases are exaggerated or not even correct. However, these are the perceptions that exist and therefore they have to be recognised and there is a real need to build bridges to address them and identify the root causes and eliminate those as far as is possible. Some issues, such as the global economic climate and the resulting downward pressure upon financial aid to those British Overseas Territories still in receipt of budgetary support, are realities that are basically totally beyond the control of SHG, however, many of the public do not believe how hard elected members and officials push to try to get an improved settlement every year. This is something that is just not recognised at all and in a way one cannot blame the public because although elected members may tell constituents what we do and how many hours we spend debating, negotiating, discussing, etc, when official statements relating to the final budget settlement are put into the public domain they do not reflect that SHG pressed for a settlement of X million but the United Kingdom Government could only provide Y million for the following reasons. This is the reality and to state it is not putting blame on the UK Government, but merely explaining the whole process in an open and transparent manner that will enable the public to see that SHG is really trying its best to obtain what it knows will benefit St Helena. That is just one example of many that I could cite.

On other issues, the public feels that SHG has not learned from the past and that although circumstances may have changed to some extent there are still potentially high risks involved that seem to have been ignored for just overlooked. The recent decision to sell SHG's shares in Solomon & Company is a case in point. There is considerable public concern about the possibility of Government's entire holding being purchased by one individual or a single company who would then be the majority shareholder. Given the history of why it became necessary for Government to acquire the majority shareholding in the first place, some public explanation regarding the reasons for SHG's change in stance, if there has been one, and any checks and balances that would be put in place to reduce the risk of history repeating itself would have been very helpful. Furthermore, on behalf of the constituents who have raised this issue, I ask that SHG considers very carefully the potential risks and how these can be managed to prevent impacts detrimental to St Helena if, indeed, one or more applications to purchase the entire holding are received.

Once again, Mr Speaker, I bring to the attention of this Honourable House the need for more openness in the way SHG communicates with the public. There still seems to be a reluctance to admit when something has not worked or a target has not been achieved, although in most instances this is no secret and the public are aware in any case, but they may well not be aware of the justifications and the reasoning around it. If SHG is to build a reputation that will actually increase public confidence, it needs to be prepared to tell it as it is instead of being seen to sanitise information when it is not positive. I'm not suggesting that SHG should be spreading gloom and doom, some of its detractors are already doing far too much of that and frequently without any justification at all, but SHG's focus should always be on communicating the full facts in a balanced manner if public perceptions are going to change.

In order to improve public perceptions further, SHG also needs to demonstrate that it is listening to the concerns of the community and where possible is taking positive action to address these. Quite small steps, such as acknowledging and responding to correspondence or telephone calls in a timely and constructive way can make an enormous difference. If someone has raised an issue and then waits weeks for an initial answer it's hardly surprising if he or she loses confidence in SHG and starts to feel resentment towards it. Similarly, when public consultation takes place, it is important that those attending are made to feel welcome and that their contributions will be valued. I recently attended a consultation meeting at which the lead official did not even greet those present let alone welcome them until I requested him to do so. What kind of message is being given by this type of occurrence? Certainly not one that is beneficial to the image of St Helena Government.

Mr Speaker, I am flagging these issues because they're undermining the relationship between SHG and the public and the need for a good and mutually supportive relationship has never been greater than it is now and is likely to become even more imperative in the coming months which are almost certain to test St Helena and all of its people to its limits.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. The Honourable Lawson Henry?

The Hon. Lawson Henry –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, I rise in support of this Adjournment Debate and wish to make the following points. 2020 was an extraordinary year, not only for us all on St Helena, but for the whole world in respect of the pandemic Covid-19. Given what happened in the outside world during 2020, and still is, St Helena is very fortunate that we are still free of this deadly virus and long may it remain. This has been in no small way because of the measures this Government put in place and continue to do so to prevent the virus from reaching the island.

In this respect, I would like to pay tribute to all those involved, in particular, our Health staff and all other key frontline workers, far too many to mention by name. I believe they are a great credit to this island for the service they provided and continue to do so.

Economically it was not a good year for many of our businesses, in particular, our tourism sector. They continue to be impacted. SHG was able to provide support to many of the businesses and still are. This was made possible by additional funding provided by Her Majesty's Government to support the island during these times of crisis. I have to say, however, St Helena has not done too badly and many other places were much worse affected and still are.

The private sector was also able to benefit from the contracts awarded locally from the EDIP programme and this year will be no exception, in particular, as the Ruperts cargo handling and R2 projects have been approved and it is hoped that the tenders will be awarded locally shortly and these works commence in the coming months which will further stimulate our fledgling construction sector. I would like to pay tribute to the staff in the Programme Management Unit and others involved for their hard work in bringing these projects forward in a timely way, not only bringing Ruperts closer to become operational as a port, but providing much needed work to the private sector. Recognition also goes to Her Majesty's Government for providing the funding for these two major projects.

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

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. The Honourable Russell Yon?

The Hon. Russell Yon –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, I rise in support of the Adjournment Debate. Recent events have left many of us feeling despondent, demoralised or even at breaking point. From anarchy in America to issues here at home, our world seems to become more chaotic with every passing minute. The world around us has rarely felt as chaotic as it is over the last few weeks and while we watch and listen to all the chaos and deal with the issues at hand, we still can walk our streets, greet one another, party together and work and play together. Here at home, Covid-19 pandemic is still our main concern, amongst several other issues. No one thought that when this Coronavirus raised its head in late December 2019, that it would have caused so much destruction across the world. As the world continues to battle the pandemic and the amount of new cases and loss of lives due to the identification of two new variants and people's reluctance to follow the guidelines provided by their governments, we can count our blessings that we have not detected a case here. In this room, we are not the experts with the knowledge as to how we can address the pandemic from reaching our shores, we can all chip in by using the information that we have obtained, but the experts amongst us with their capacity to tap into the broader information available to them will provide us with that security. We rely on those with the remit to relay that information to us so that we can fully inform the public in a timely manner and deliver the correct messaging to them. The process of not providing all the correct information in a timely manner has led to breakdowns in communications amongst us and unfortunately it is causing an alarming discomfort. It is important for us all, even as the last few months of our tenancy tick away, to work in harmony and pull together to ensure we do what is best for our island and its people. Mr Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to commend all involved who have until now kept this Island safe and long may it continue and also to convey thanks to the UK Government for allocating the 100 vaccines to the Island. It is a start and hopefully the process of administering this vaccine to our front-line staff will continue soon and like everyone else I look forward to seeing the next batch of vaccines arrive on the Island in the hope that it will add some normality to our everyday lives.

Mr Speaker, I know off and understand the process of St Helena Government receiving financial aid from the UK Government, but, again, with all the uncertainties at the moment in the UK, I am concerned that again our budget for the fiscal year 2020/21 will be delayed and will hamper this Government from delivering the viable services support needed for the public. This Council has on several occasions expressed our concerns to our Colleagues within FCDO the need to have timely budgets. No doubt this year we will be told that due to the continuous support the UK Government is having to provide to its citizens at home and abroad the budget will be somewhat delayed again.

Brexit has now come and gone and the UK is finally on its own, able to negotiate the best trade deals across the world that will suit the UK and their counterparts. Much has been made of Brexit and how it will impact the UK and its European neighbours and it is still too early to raise any alarm bells. It will no doubt have an impact on St Helena and other UK Overseas Territories as funding from the EU will somewhat diminish to aid the future projects of the Overseas Territories. To that we should also be grateful to the EU as St Helena has benefitted immensely from this sort of funding over the years and continue to do so as we speak as the island ready itself for the incoming Fibre Optic Cable project which I believe will have huge benefits to this island, not just socially, but economically also. Mr Speaker, I hope by now our Friend across the table, The Financial Secretary will have all the tools at hand to look at other possibilities for seeking funds to support projects on this island outside of projects that can only be supported through the recurrent budget. Maybe it is time to speak to the World Bank to seek the challenges there for St Helena to acquire some funding.

Mr Speaker, during the latter weeks of last year I was able to participate in three Virtual Conferences. During the conference with the Greening the Island Foundation I was able to make contact with the CEO of the Greening the Island Observatory. This is a platform where this group has support based personnel to identify member Islands across the globe who would be able to qualify for support from the Greening the Island Foundation. It was pleasing to note that during one to one discussions a week later, that St Helena would be welcome to register and to become a member. Of course, there is certain criteria to be met, but this is food for thought so I will be passing that information on to the relevant officials at a later date in the hope that they will be able to advance this invitation. We might not be able to get funding based on the options we choose to sign with the Foundation, however, they have an abundance of experts on board that we could tap into to assist with environmental, farming, recycling and climate change projects, to name a few.

Mr Speaker, I would now like to turn my attention to works closer to home. A huge pat on the back should be given to the technical team of the I&T Directorate for the professional technical and field work they provided in the layout for the CDA at Bottom Woods. This was not an easy task given the limited staff available, but they have come through with flying colours and it is a compliment to them and the Directorate of what can be achieved when working together with other stakeholders and contractors. For those of you who have not yet been on site to see what has been achieved to date I would suggest a visit be arranged so that you can digest this for yourselves. This has been accomplished alongside of other large projects that SHG has deemed important to include in their works for the Landing Cable Station at Ruperts and the Marine Centre at the Wharf in Jamestown, both of these projects are time bound. In undertaking these large projects some smaller projects have been placed on the back burner, but it is envisaged that these will now be pursued again so that they too can be advanced or completed. Just to add, Mr Speaker, that it is envisaged that by the end of this month some of the housing plots at the Bottom Woods will also be advertised to the public.

Mr Speaker, declaring my interest, as my Sister works at the Programme Managing Unit, but I would also like to give that team a pat on the back also as they oversee the Economic

Development and Infrastructure Program (EDIP) projects. They too have worked relentlessly in getting these projects up and running and although the process is not easy, they have overcome obstacles and the Island will now see the progress of this work, be it in the form of the micro projects or the larger projects like developing Ruperts, Field Road or Side Path Road. What is pleasing on the eye is that these projects are being shared and undertaken by local contractors.

Finally, Mr Speaker, I would just like to advise this house on an update from Connect with regards to the PASH Contract for the wind turbine farm. I can confirm that a technical team is undertaking further due diligence work with the bank to support this project. Connect was requested to provide more operational wind data. PASH are trying to mobilise their EPC team to visit the Island on the February flight but they will need to return in March so that flight needs to be confirmed and then they will be able to utilise their work streams. However, that also depends on the changes surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic. The supply chain generally is being affected by Covid-19 also, with slow or non-existent responses to enquiries and PASH is seeing similar results where everyone is working remotely and trying to communicate with consultants and suppliers also working from home which is far from ideal. However, it is hoped that works will commence soon with the hope of reaching the completion deadlines. Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much indeed. The Honourable Clint Beard?

The Hon. Clint Beard –

Mr Speaker, 2021 is here, it doesn't seem that way, it seems that we're hitting the ground running again, so I hope that around the table whatever is put in front of us we can work together to get everything over the line. We have a few months before we go into a budget and we have also a few months before we have a new Council, whichever form that might take. We also have the schools that have returned this week, so they've been in school for a few days and I hope that they all had a good break, the staff as well as students. With regards to Education, we also have four more staff that have completed their studies and have achieved the Level 4 certificate in teaching and learning, so we're well on our way to progressing and having well trained local staff, which I think is one of our objectives. We also had a good response to the Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition and we had some good awards and we had some good achievements and well done to everybody that participated. We're also looking at results and as you know in the UK at the moment we're not sure what the Exam Boards will be doing so I'd like everybody at the moment, parents, teachers and students to take this opportunity to work hard in whatever mock exams they are busy with, coursework, because I think it's fundamentally important that they have and they really push hard, push themselves hard to achieve here, because we don't know what the Exam Boards will decide, so thank you, Sir.

The Speaker -

Thank you very much indeed. The Honourable Derek Thomas?

The Hon. Derek Thomas –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I rise in support of the adjournment and I will take this opportunity to thank the general public for their attending the recent public consultation exercise on the proposed changes to our Immigration legislation. I am pleased to say, for such

an important issue, public attendance to our meetings were well and the public made good, valuable contributions at the consultation meetings. Those members of the public who made recommendations will receive feedback, I would also like to thank the Working Group for their high level of commitment and hard work, including the Administration for their contributions. This work will now follow the correct process and it is hoped that the revised legislation can be presented to this Honourable House within the coming months.

Mr Speaker, I think it would be remiss of me not to say, but I will echo what some of my colleagues have said that 2020 has been a real difficult and challenging year and sometimes we tend to focus on the negative instead of looking at the positives. I can say that many of our people within the various services have worked extremely hard in putting together measures to protect our island this far and sometimes all of that will go amiss through negative comments. Some of my colleagues have said there are frustration within the community and sometimes we have to ask ourselves is that through our own doing and might be, Mr Speaker, that this coming year we need to take stock of ourselves and work together as a team and show real leadership and support to our community, so, thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you. The Honourable Cyril Leo?

The Hon. Cyril Leo –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Constituents have voiced serious concerns reflecting a lack of public confidence in the ability of their twelve elected representatives to collectively work in the best interests of the island at Council level. Through democratic process, the Electorate voted twelve elected representatives on to Council to work in the island's best interests. Collectively, the twelve elected representatives selected the five colleagues to serve on the Executive Council (ExCo). Now, having observed the factors that led up to the motion, tabled at the last formal Legislative Council meeting, relating to the dissolution of Executive Council, we can understand the constituents' concerns. With this in mind, all twelve elected representatives may want to reflect and consider the advantages and the importance of the "meeting of minds" approach, in Council forums, to find common ground, for the common good, and thereby achieve the best possible outcomes for the local community, before attempting to dismantle local Council.

All twelve elected representatives have the community's best interests at heart, and thereby the loyalty of each individual elected representative to the electorate is not in question. However, what is being questioned is the apparent inability of all twelve elected representatives to first exhaust all meaningful avenues of communication and work more collectively, through positive debate, in Council forums, particularly on matters relating to major items such as Covid-19 and the protection of the local population.

Constitutionally, the five ExCo elected members make up the principal decision-making body of local government; accordingly, ExCo stands to be scrutinised and held accountable for the decisions that are taken. However, collective preliminary caucusing, by all twelve elected members, can make a positive contribution to executive considerations and deliberations leading up to the ExCo decision making process. More than ever, this challenging period in time for the people of St Helena requires a sustained "meeting of minds" approach at Council level.

Speaker and Deputy Speaker, during this very challenging and difficult period in time, I request that you encourage the people's elected representatives to work together, in Council forums, to solve complex disagreements between elected members. In this way we can constructively work through our differences of opinions, at Council level, in the best interests of the island.

So, in the interests of restoring public confidence, you may want to convene an informal Legislative Council meeting and focus on the following proposed agenda item: *Utilise a “Meeting of minds” approach at Council level to include constructive and healthy dialogue and debates to help secure successful outcomes.* Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much indeed. Any other Member wishes to speak? Okay, thank you, Honourable Members. The Honourable Mover, do you wish to respond to the debate?

The Hon. Susan O’Bey –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I’d like to thank all Members for their very helpful contributions to this particular debate. There’s not a lot for me to actually say here because I think Members have actually covered all of the areas that I would have wished to do so, however, a couple of observations, if I may, well, actually a St Helena couple, so there might be more than two. But I would like to thank those Members who have highlighted a number of areas where the Administration needs to be working to improve upon and what I will do is to take your points forward and make sure that the respective areas act upon the concerns that you have raised. A point of clarity for the Member who queried the numbers that the Financial Secretary gave in relation to the amounts spent on fishing. It was actually £182,000 plus £50,000 which made up the £132,000. I will also endeavour to check the Gazette details in relation to what you’ve raised in relation to the Acting Governor.

Points raised in relation to IEG will be taken forward by IEG, I won’t comment on those here, but I would like to take this opportunity to thank those Members who have highlighted and paid tribute to the huge amount of work that has taken place and continues to take place within the Administration and the relevant Directorates. As I indicated at the last meeting, formal meeting of Legislative Council, 2020 was a very difficult year for everybody and I think sometimes it’s easy to focus on things that haven’t been achieved, however, what I will say is that those Officers worked to ensure that the practical considerations to implement the strategies set by IEG to keep the island safe were taken into account. A huge amount of work was done and that work was done on top of trying to keep normal services in operation and I would like to add my thanks to all of my staff who I feel have done and continue to do a sterling job. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the UK Government and particularly our colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office for their ongoing support in helping us to combat the impacts of Covid-19 and also to help us to continue to keep St Helena Covid free so that we can go about our normal daily business unencumbered, which is in stark contrast to many, many countries in the rest of the world.

I’d like to just perhaps reflect a little bit on what still needs to be done and, of course, various Members around this table this morning have talked about the importance of setting out our strategy for recovery and for sustainable social and economic development and I can give my assurance here that Officers are supporting elected members, particularly the Economic Development Committee to come up with an array of options to be able to consider for endorsement in terms of how this very important work and this very important area can be addressed in a post-Covid scenario.

I’d also like to say that, of course, whilst 2021 has started with the impact, if you like, of what’s happening elsewhere in terms of the increased levels of Covid-19, particularly in the UK and in other areas of the world, it also has started with an air of optimism, particularly in relation

to vaccines and the number of countries now that are rolling out vaccine programmes offers, I would like to think, a ray of hope that as we progress throughout this year, 2021, and I don't want to jinx anything, but I'd like to think that 2021 will become a much better year and it's important that we recognise that. I'd like to say that people will be aware that we have received a limited number of vaccines on this last flight which are going to be used to ensure that our frontline workers, those who are responsible for keeping us safe, that they will in the first instance be kept safe themselves, so that they can continue to carry out the sterling work that they're doing to support us and I'm also going to say, and, again, without jinxing anything, but we're fairly confident that on the next flight, God willing, that we will receive a batch of vaccines that will be used to roll out to the general population of the island, and, again, our colleagues in the Public Health Directorate are working extremely hard to put in place and develop the programme for implementation with a view to ensuring that those who are most vulnerable and most at risk will be addressed first as a part of that programme.

So, in summing up, Mr Speaker, again, we still have a long way to go in certain areas, as highlighted this afternoon by our Members around the table, but we still need also to recognise the amount that has been achieved and the ongoing work that is happening and taking place in difficult and challenging times, so, Mr Speaker, I reiterate, I thank Members for their contribution to the debate and look forward to 2021 with optimism. Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much indeed, Honourable Chief Secretary. Honourable Members, that concludes our business for this session and I thank you all for your contributions and participation. I now put the question that this Council do adjourn until Friday 29th January, 2021.

Question on adjournment, put and agreed to.

Council adjourned until Friday, 29th January, 2021.

Honourable Speaker

Date