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29th November to 1st December 2022

Forum Purpose & Overview

The purpose of the Oversight of Public Finances and Good Governance forum was to provide an opportunity to explore topics of interest to the UK Overseas Territories that related specifically to public finance and good governance. Included were items relating to a number of internationally topical themes, such as Partnerships for Good Governance; Effective Scrutiny in Practice; and Leadership and Public Engagements.

This forum was organised by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) UK, together with the National Audit Office and the Governmental Internal Audit Agency, and acts as the flagship peer-to-peer learning event for committee chairs, members, clerks, and public auditors within the UK Overseas Territories.

The delegation from St Helena consisted of Councillor Robert Midwinter, Public Accounts Committee Chair Mark Yon Clerk of Council Connie Johnson, Chief Auditor Brendan Hunt and Senior Internal Auditor Blessing Gurure.

In all, a total of nine Overseas Territories were represented at the forum, including; Anguilla; Bermuda; British Virgin Islands; Cayman Islands; Falkland Islands; Gibraltar; Montserrat; St Helena; and Turks and Caicos Islands.

Logistics and Travel Arrangements

Overall the arrangements made and the various facilities provided were of a good standard, in particular the Wellington Hotel and Portcullis House in London.

Delays were experienced with both the outbound and return British Airways flights between Johannesburg (OR Tambo) and London Heathrow Airport, however this did not adversely affect ongoing or connecting arrangements, as overnight stays had been built into the schedule.

The only negative feedback was the need to collect receipts for expenses that were provided with a fixed stipend rate, namely breakfast, lunch and dinner, as it is no longer customary for establishment to provide receipts in the UK and SA, and in some cases I was unable to get a receipt for meals taken.

I understand that SHG staff are not subjected to the same requirement, and that the stipend is at a fixed daily rate. I feel that consideration should be given to equalising such arrangements for Elected Members.

Programme of Activities / Sessions

Generally speaking all of the sessions were of direct relevance to St Helena, and there was a good range of experienced speakers which kept the forum interesting.

It was [particularly interesting to see how the different Overseas Territories operate in relation to the scrutiny of public finance and policy, and how this varies widely even between jurisdictions that have embraced a Ministerial form of Government. Much interest was expressed during the forum regarding how Saint Helena is progressing with the changeover to a Ministerial form of Government, and our own plans for the effective scrutiny of the SHG Portfolios.

In particular the sessions relating to the effective questioning of officials, and undertaking effective scrutiny of the legislative process, including public engagement and collaborative working were of interest in my own role as the Chair of Select Committee 1.

The Reception held in Westminster on the first evening was a good opportunity to meet with parties who have a relevant interest in St Helena, such as Adam Pile from the FCDO, and Amanda Milling MP, Chair of the St Helena All Party Parliamentary Group.

Day 1 of the forum focused on Partnerships for Good Governance, and the forum was opened by Jon Davies, CPA UK's Chief Executive, Paul Chandler, Director, Overseas Territories Directorate, FCDO, and the Rt. Hon. Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP. This was followed by a keynote address from Hon. Gordon Burton MHA, Speaker of the House of Assembly, Turks and Caicos Islands, entitled "Managing Public Finances and Climate Change in the Turks and Caicos Islands".

Other sessions attended by myself during Day 1 were as follows: The Power of Networking and Collaboration; Managing Public Finances in the Current Global Economic Context; Good Governance for Climate and Energy Security; Comparing Parliamentary Systems; and Collaborating Effectively and Building Consensus.

Day 2 was opened by Paul Wright-Anderson, of the National Audit Office, with a keynote address entitled "The Role of Scrutiny". This was followed by the following sessions that were attended by myself: Using Accounts for Scrutiny; The Role of Effective Risk Management in Oversight; Innovations in Scrutiny Practices; The Committee System; Standing Orders and Scrutiny in the Chamber; and Best Practice for Legislative Scrutiny.

Day 3 was opened by Elizabeth Honer, Chief Executive Officer of the Government Internal Audit Agency, who gave a keynote address entitled "Enhancing Public Trust in Our Governments". After this address, I participated in the following sessions: Standards in Public Life; Effective Reporting and Public Engagement; Improving Performance within a Small Organisation; Parliamentarians' Public Engagement Workshop; Discussion of UKOTP Opportunities for Parliamentarians 2023-24; Feedback and Closing Remarks.

It should be noted that some of the sessions were directed to particular audiences of attendees, with breakaway sessions for some subjects, such as for Clerks or Auditors, that were bespoke to their own work streams.

The overall experience gained from meeting peers from the other Overseas Territories and sharing experiences in a face-2-face forum such as this was invaluable, and I would therefore highly recommend attendance at future forums by other members of Legislative Council, the Public Accounts Committee, Internal and External Audit, and the associated Clerks.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those involved in the organisation and facilitation of this forum, in particular the CPA UK, NAO, and GIAA. At a local level, I would like to thank Connie Johnson and Mark Yon for their assistance in organising travel and other associated arrangements.

Hon. Robert Midwinter MLC

Chair of Select Committee 1

St Helena Legislative Council

25th January 2023