

Report, Westminster Seminar & CPA BIMR Regional Conference on IOM

Cllr Andrew Turner & Cllr Gillian Brooks

Note from Cllr Turner,

When discussing the Westminster Seminar and also the CPA BIMR conference on the Isle Of Man I believe its important to cover not just the professional development but also how the trip has helped me grow personally and given me a greater understanding of the world.

This was my first time going to the UK since my family packed up and left for St Helena in 2005 when I was just seven years old. To visit the wider world now, aged 24, was an overload of new experiences. This ranged from everything from how to use train lines to how a real debit card works.

This has given me a much deeper understanding of different ways of doing things and how, particularly in the technological side of things, St Helena really is being left behind.

A simple example of this was communications. On arriving in the UK I had no SIM card but needed to get in touch with the people I was staying with. On St Helena having no SIM card would mean arriving on Saturday afternoon and waiting for Sure to open again on Monday so that I can pay £50 for just over 1 gigabyte of data. However, this was not an issue as I had free Wi-Fi from the hotel, free Wi-Fi on the train and was able to purchase a SIM card for £15 that gave me 25 gigabytes of data. This is a level of convenience that people have come to expect as they travel and is essential as almost all resources from banking to ordering food are done online.

Although there are many aspects of the wider world I think should stay there, I have also discovered some things that we as an island should be looking to make work locally such as better banking, efficient public transport and a more openness and acceptance of different cultures and ideas.

Note from Cllr Brooks

Having the opportunity to attend the Seminar and Conference at such an early stage of been elected into council, will without a doubt prove invaluable to me throughout the term ahead. The informative discussions, personal briefings and interaction made the entire visit an enjoyable and rewarding experience. I can only again express my thanks to the CPA and St Helena Government for making this possible for me.

Report of the 70th Westminster Seminar

The first day began with the Commonwealth Flag ceremony in Parliament Square. It was an honour to be a part of representing St Helena at this event.

The day moved on to a tour of the Parliament Buildings including Westminster hall, the house of lords, house of commons and finally a lunch in the Churchill Suite hosted by the Lord Speaker.

In the afternoon, Councillor Gillian Brooks and Clerk Shanice Phillips, joined with members of the delegation for the Seminar and attended the Commonwealth Day Service at Westminster Abbey. In attendance at the service were members of the Royal Family, the Prime Minister, MPs and invited guests from the Commonwealth. The service was delivered by clergy, speakers and musicians from different domains of the Commonwealth.

On the Second day work began in earnest covering several key topics including the Role of the Speaker and comparing different parliamentary systems from across the commonwealth.

Of particular importance was the discussions on Parliamentary Scrutiny Tools which looked at how different systems scrutinise government decisions. This was followed by sessions on the PAC and it was interesting to compare how PACs tended to focus on financial scrutiny and scrutiny of officials whereas other scrutiny committees focused on government Policy and decisions and were more focused on scrutinising ministers.

In the afternoon, Councillor Gillian Brooks joined two other speakers and gave a speech on “Effective Parliaments and the responsibilities of members” (speech attached).

Day three began with a session on “Hybrid Parliaments: How Covid-19 changes Process and Procedure”

This presented an interesting opportunity for me to ask questions about how St Helena could prepare for a potential Covid 19 outbreak and what measures we may have to implement.

The following session spoke about different methods of holding the Executive to account.

This included sessions on Prime Ministers question time and included a live viewing of that week’s session featuring Angela Rayner and Dominic Raab.

Another important session was on Navigating the Digital space and spoke about how parliamentarians can make more use of social media.

It was interesting to see there were two trains of thought on Social Media. While all recognised it as an important tool, some were very keen to engage with comments whereas others took the view that it was simply a way of getting messages out and not a way of directly communicating with people.

The Wednesday concluded with Cllr Turner speaking on the subject of Engaging with the Public and focusing on how St Helena’s small community creates a unique relationship where it is almost impossible to be entirely objective in decision making, but how that can be used as a strength.

Attached is a copy of that speech.

The following day the most useful session came in the form of a mock evidence session where members were able to question expert witnesses in the style of a scrutiny committee hearing.

The session used a “freeze frame” approach where the session was paused to analyse particular aspects. It was very useful to get advice on questioning styles and understanding how to find gaps in the information given.

Finally, on Friday we were split into groups to shadow MPs in their constituencies.

Cllr Turner joined the MP for Enfield Southgate Bambos Charalambous. Cllr Turner was present for meetings with constituents. It was interesting to see how MPs balance the need to be accessible with their need for security which is something that Cllr Turner hoped we never have to do here.

Following that Cllr Turner also met with the leader of the local government and learned more about how local governments work with Westminster. It was interesting to see that it was very much like how we as a council interact with the UK Government. There were many parallels in the nature of the relationship including how they are funded and what powers are devolved to the local government and which are reserved by the National government.

Councillor Brooks went with the group to meet the MP for Streatham, Bellavia Janet Ribeiro-Addy (Bel), a British Labour Party politician who has served as the Member of Parliament for Streatham since 2019. The meeting started in Hon Ribeiro-Addy's office and the group then walked to Brixton Town Hall to meet Politician's there before doing a walk-around Brixton Market. The session ended with a visit to view the Black Cultural Archives in Brixton.

Report from the CPA BIMR Regional Conference IOM

We flew from Gatwick Airport to the Isle of Man on Wednesday, 22 March to attend the 51st Commonwealth Parliamentary Association British Islands and Mediterranean Regional Conference. The two-day programme, which accommodated over forty parliamentarians and officials, focused on the theme "Impactful Scrutiny", with the emphasis on the importance of the role of Parliamentarians in protecting legislative democracy.

On Wednesday evening there was a formal Welcome Reception at the Sefton Hotel, which provided the opportunity to meet and mingle with fellow delegates prior to the start of the Conference the following day.

Day One of the Conference started with the Welcome Address by The Hon Juan Watterson, Speaker of the House of Keys, Joint President of the CPA IOM Branch and Small-Branches Vice-Chair, who said how pleasing it was to be in the position to host the conference to the delegation in person, after the necessary changes made to virtual meetings held during the pandemic. Hon Watterson said the purpose of the conference was to enable jurisdictions to share ideas and practices, noting the difference in the sizes of councils and their access to finances and facilities.

The first session was Scrutiny Systems (SWOT), opened by the Hon Juan Watterson who spoke on the systems used on the Isle of Man for scrutiny purposes and that of the Tynwald Public Accounts Committee, of which he is the Chairperson.

Each delegation was given a five-minute allocation to speak on the SWOT of their scrutiny system. Councillor Turner spoke about the PAC but also explained that on St Helena we have yet to finalise and implement our scrutiny committees and that as a 75% new council with a new system of government, we are still working through the processes to achieve this.

Delegates gave an overview of their respective councils and the processes followed, what works well for them and areas in which they would appreciate suggestions/ideas.

Next up was a session done in what was termed "speed dating" style, whereby each delegate was given a number and when directed, moved around the tables to form small groups for twenty minute discussions on the following topics:

- Effective preparation for new scrutiny members
- Preparing for enquiry and evidence sessions
- Effective media engagement
- How to turn recommendations into results

This was an effective way of ensuring delegates mingled and conversed in a relaxed setting, pooled ideas and were later able to share to a wider audience.

Lunch was held at the Manx Museum; the Isle of Man's national museum which was originally opened in 1922. Following an extension to include an art gallery and lecture and film theatre, the museum was reopened in 1989 by HM The Queen.

Delegates were given a tour of the museum before returning to the Legislative Building for the afternoon session of the conference, which started with the BIMR Annual General Meeting, opened with an address from the Acting Chair for the International CPA Executive Committee, the Hon Ian Liddell-Grainger.

Hon Liddell-Grainger thanked those who work tirelessly to support the BIMR and spoke of the work being done for the Gender Sensitive Audit. One of the main topics on the Agenda was the election of the Representative for the British Islands and Mediterranean Region (BIMR) on the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Steering Committee and also Chair of the Regional Steering Committee. Of the three nominations put forward, the Hon Maria Miller MP was the successful candidate; she succeeded the Hon Samantha Sacramento MP, who had serviced as Chair for the past two years.

An official photograph was taken of the delegation party in the Tynwald Chamber and there was the opportunity for a tour of the Chambers.

That evening there was an official Dinner at Woodbourne House, hosted by the Joint Presidents of the Isle of Man Branch.

Day Two started with a Breakfast Meeting for members of the BIMR CWP Steering Committee to which Councillor Brooks attended in her role as one of St Helena's members on the Steering Committee. The newly elected Chair, Hon Maria Miller opened the meeting with appreciation of being elected and paid tribute to the two candidates who had put themselves forward; Rhiannon Passmore AM and Natasha Asghar AM. She said the main focus of the coming twelve months will be to launch the Report on Gender Sensitive Parliaments, to continue supporting those jurisdictions who chose to undertake Gender Sensitive Parliament Audits and to hold an in-person Conference where the focus will be on the retention of women in parliament.

All delegates met for the session "Which work has the highest impact and why", where case studies were presented on "Committee Effectiveness" by Ms Julie Elliott MP (UK) and "Delegated Powers during Covid" by Hon Stuart McMillian MSP.

Breakout sessions followed where groups discussed "Effective Scrutiny on finance matters", "Climate Change" and "Diversity in Legislatures". The afternoon session continued with breakout sessions on "Population and Demographics", "Legislation" and "Engagement and Outreach".

The closing of the conference allowed each delegation the opportunity to speak briefly on how the conference had impacted them. For St Helena, Councillor Turner said both he and Councillor Brooks immensely appreciated the opportunity to gain invaluable insight at such an early stage in their political careers. Starting on a “blank sheet of paper”, so to speak, processes that are tried and tested in other territories that may be of benefit to St Helena, would prove invaluable in moving forward. All delegates acknowledged that scrutiny is a core function in their role as Parliamentarians and valued the experiences of what had been shared over the two days and extended thanks to the CPA and the host.

The conference was closed with addresses from the Hon Juan Watterson, Chair of the CPA IOM Branch Executive and the Hon Laurence Skelly MLC, President of Tynwald, who both reiterated the success of the conference and their hopes that delegates would draw down on what had been presented.

That evening there was an official Drinks Reception at Government House hosted by the Acting Lieutenant Governor, His Honour Deemster Andrew Corlett and Lady Lorimer before delegates dispersed into small groups for dinners hosted by members of Tynwald. We were both invited to dinner with Mr Rob Callister MHK and Mrs Callister and spent an enjoyable evening at the Forge Restaurant.