



GOVERNMENT OF ST HELENA

BUDGET SPEECH

**HON MINISTER FOR TREASURY,
INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT**

2023/2024

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INTRODUCTION

Mr Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to be able to present the Appropriation Bill 2023, the second budget delivered by this Ministerial team. This budget continues to support our Vision, published in March last year, but also takes into account the realities of the changing economic and operational environment resulting from yet another year of continuing recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and ongoing global inflationary pressures.

Mr Speaker as I said last year, at the heart of our Vision is our environment, our economy, and our social obligations. I said that to enable us to achieve our Vision, our priority policies will align with our priority areas. This message remains, and today, I will outline what these priorities are in the short to medium term, and how we intend to deliver on them with the limited capacity and resources available.

Mr Speaker, while this Government, I feel, is clear on its priorities, in tandem it is important that I highlight the need for a genuine mind-set change. A mind-set change by SHG, its leaders, the Public Service, and indeed the general population.

We strongly believe that without a change in mind-set, St Helena will struggle to achieve sustainable economic and social progress. We need to modify the way in which we spend our money, deliver our services, make decisions, and run our businesses.

So what do I mean by a change in mind-set?

Firstly, this Government wants to be focused on outcomes. We understand the challenges people can face in getting things done on St Helena, be it through “red tape”, slow processes, or ineffective decision making. We want to change that culture in the Government.

Too often, we have seen Government resources and actions focused on delivering specific tasks, business functions, or ad hoc priorities based on the wants and needs of a minority. We need to make sure we are working smarter, better deploying the limited resources we have at our disposal, delivering services in a way that is effective to our customers, and grasping opportunities when they present themselves.

This approach requires teamwork, and SHG is prepared to lead the way in championing this shift, something which I will expand upon during this address. We need the people to get behind initiatives that are being implemented for the greater good, rather than position themselves against things or stand in the way of progress before it begins. We all need to work together to achieve our shared goals, whilst recognising that the Government is responsible for creating the enabling environment.

In creating the enabling environment, we are dedicated to designing policies that will establish a platform and create opportunities for businesses to grasp – we will not be in the business of providing Government handouts. Previously, direct financial support to certain industries or sectors has been seen to be the way to foster growth and development. Whilst there is a place and time for this, the aim of this Government is to create opportunity for all. This budget begins to set in place the pillars on which a variety of industries and businesses can succeed. There will come a time Mr Speaker, where the Government has no business in business.

In addition, we believe we need to focus on what makes St Helena attractive, what truly makes us great and unique, and use these characteristics to grow and develop. Mr Speaker our small, remote community has so much to be grateful for in this ever-changing world. We have a level of safety that is hard to find elsewhere on Earth; we are free from war, from high rates of violent crime and from severe weather, elements I believe we at times take for granted.

We protect an amazing natural environment, one which is of global significance, and our focus on small- to medium-scale developments helps to protect our pristine and tranquil landscape. We have a deep connection to our ocean and place high value upon sustainable initiatives.

We believe we should all focus on these qualities, on the very best and dearest things about our unique Island, in order to preserve and enhance them now and into the future.

As always Mr Speaker we are grateful to His Majesty's Government for its contribution of Financial Aid. This year, we are especially pleased to announce a 4% increase to last year's settlement, which is equivalent to an additional £1.27 million. This includes an increase in core financial aid of £1.071 million, £114,000 for airport operations and £500,000 to further develop the tourism industry.

The UK Government continues to provide contingency funding on a call down basis, albeit at a lower level of £1.7 million. This means total available funding from HMG of £33.06 million.

Local revenues are projected to be £15.1 million and with a withdrawal from the General Reserve of the Consolidated Fund of a further £627,000 to fund projects carried over from last financial year, this means total spending for 2023/24 is expected to be £47.1 million.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE LAST BUDGET PERIOD

Mr Speaker last year I outlined this Government's first tangible set of objectives for the year and beyond.

I am pleased to report that progress has been made across a number of last year's commitments:

Health

Last year, I announced £0.5 million earmarked for essential improvements to areas within and around the hospital. I am pleased to say that these improvements are currently underway.

Cost of living

Since the opening of the Island following COVID-19, the increasing cost of living has been the main pressure on households and families, and therefore the Island more generally.

The introduction of a Cost of Living package, costing approximately £1.4 million by this Government in August 2022 helped reduced the stress on family budgets. In view of the continued pressures being experienced by us all due to the wider global economic situation, in March of this year we further extended this package until 31st March 2024, in an effort to provide additional assistance and relief to individuals and families.

In a few days' time, on 1 July 2023 we will implement the increase to our Minimum Wage. This will offer much needed assistance to our lowest-paid workers across the Island, and will enable an uplift on all non-executive SHG pay grades to ensure differentiation continues between the different levels of responsibilities, which is also important. Increasing the Minimum Wage holistically will go some way to improving people's purchasing power and raising the standards of living.

COVID 19/Tourism.

In June 2022, this Government took the brave and daunting decision to reopen our borders to enable free passage to and from the Island after over two years of quarantine restrictions and limited air access, beginning last August. This, combined with the reinstatement of weekly Airlink flights, the re-opening of the hotel on Main Street, successful marketing campaigns, and strong relationships maintained with key customers, have increased visitor arrivals across all categories, exceeding the expectations projected for the year.

Mr Speaker we also now have in place a Tourism Recovery Strategy as well as a dedicated pot of funding, with actions to continue the recovery of this vital sector for

the Island's economy. I want to make it clear though Mr Speaker that this strategy is in place to bring the customers to the businesses, who will need to seize the opportunity to showcase what we have to offer. Nobody is better placed to sell our Island than our Saints and – we will give *everybody* the opportunity to do so in the next few months by bringing key customers here to meet you directly. This will include a St Helena “showcase” event, where the tourism industry can put itself on display, and the return of twice weekly flights during the peak demand season 2023/24. We remain in discussion with Airlink to secure a longer term agreement on air access to the Island, and have already announced that we may be able to welcome flights from Cape Town during the peak demand 24/25 season, subject to regulatory approval.

Last year also saw a return in cruise ships. While arranging and coordinating these visits are not without its challenges, a cross-sector cruise ship working group is now in place, bringing together the key stakeholders involved in cruise ship visits, from both Government and the private sector. This should see better planning and coordination ahead of visits, and in turn create a better base for allowing businesses and individuals to grasp the opportunities provided by their arrival.

Connectivity and accessibility

Mr Speaker we are all aware of the challenges faced in the last year with our attempts to move the fibre optic cable project forward. Our aim is to ensure that residents and businesses are able to benefit from the now active cable as soon as possible, and work is in progress to build a local fibre-optic network to make sure that we do this in the most beneficial way for all in the long-term. Nonetheless, a number of key milestones have also been delivered in the last 12 months.

The cable was landed in August 2021, and was fully commissioned in May this year, one month ahead of schedule, meaning it is now ready to be used.

But the cable won't just be revolutionary for the local population.

I am pleased to announce that just yesterday an agreement was signed between SHG and OneWeb for the locating of a ground station at Horse Point. SHG expect to receive revenues from the sale of cable capacity to OneWeb, which will help to offset the operational cost of maintaining the Cable and the Cable Landing Station. In doing so, this will help to keep the cost charged to local consumers for their own services as low as possible. As we build this market we will generate additional revenues each year, money that can be used for improving and delivering public services. This is the first realisation of SHG's Satellite Ground Station Policy, published back in 2020, and is the first of what we hope will be many such firms that choose to come to St Helena to do business. This shows that taking a strategic approach to issues and making sure that appropriate structures are in place for the private sector to build on, our “enabling

environment” Mr Speaker, does deliver results in the long run. OneWeb will now be working with their local agent to complete the build of the station and begin operations.

Population

In last year’s speech, I identified the serious issue the Island is facing with regards to our shrinking and aging population. A smaller population, and a smaller tax base, places great pressure on public finances as well as overall productivity and demand in the economy.

In the view of the Cabinet Mr Speaker, immigration reform is vital to reversing these worrying trends. To that end, we held extensive public consultation last year on the proposed immigration policy. We received a wide range of comments on all aspects of the proposal which we are now incorporating into a revised policy, which will once again go out for public information. We are proud of our unique Island and close-knit community and this pride in St Helena is an important cultural aspect that we will gladly maintain. But simultaneously, as a nation, we will need to be realistic about the situation we are in and the path that our shrinking population is leading us down.

It is not a path to prosperity, and not a path that will offer the opportunities our young people deserve. Whilst we have already implemented, and are designing and implementing, a raft of other policies to keep Saints here and bring people home, we also need to begin embracing others – people from other nationalities and cultures; people who understand and embrace St Helena’s values and goals as a community; people who want and choose to come here, to work hard, and to contribute; and people who are, ultimately, excited to be given that genuine ‘St Helenian welcome’ into being part of our unique culture.

Look at the Airport project. We saw a large number of people arrive here from all over the world. It was daunting at first, and there were some fears about what impact this might have on the community. A number of those workers ended up staying here, met people and fell in love, built new lives for themselves and their families, and continue to contribute to our community and economy to this day. St Helena is richer for that experience, and we need to embrace this approach in the future.

Mr Speaker whilst work is still ongoing to implement a fair and attractive pay policy and graduate scheme for the Public Service, we have also begun to earmark opportunities for further development of the labour market for the private sector to engage in. I am pleased that the strategic case for the Pipe Ridge Special Economic Zone, announced last year, is being taken forward for further consideration through the Economic Development Investment Programme. This project will establish a physical home for new professional services as well as free up space in Jamestown currently occupied by warehouses. This could be another enabler for new, tech-driven start up industries on St Helena.

Environment

Mr Speaker, working closely with Connect Saint Helena Ltd, we are making strides towards improving economic resilience through the adoption of more renewable energy generation sources. We not only want to be greener, in line with our community values, but we also want to see more affordable and more reliable energy for the Island in the long run. Given the Island's characteristics, we are well placed to do this.

A renewable energy working group has evaluated options for a new renewable energy policy, and interested parties, both Connect Saint Helena Ltd and others, are starting to bring tangible solutions to the table that we expect to start taking forward.

Year 2 of the Cloud Forest project to improve water security on St Helena has unfortunately met with considerable challenge, due to the impact of plant pathogens on our endemic tree species. Mr Speaker despite these setbacks some good progress has been made during the year to better understand the water resources on St Helena, and invasive management and habitat creation has taken place across 1.5 hectares of cloud forest. These efforts should enable better management of our water resources.

Environmental research also continues in other areas so that we can better understand our precious natural environment and how we can protect it. Through the St Helena Research Institute, we approved 11 research licenses in 2022 so that researchers and experts from across the globe could come to study in St Helena. These covered areas as broad as Natural Sciences, Agricultural Sciences, Engineering, Technology, and Humanities. Research, and researchers, are significant contributors to the domestic economy.

We recognise issues faced by our people when it comes to accessing nutritious, healthy food. With an aim to improve food security, a working group is currently developing options for a new agriculture policy for St Helena to inform and support sustainability of local agricultural production.

Modernisation

Mr Speaker it is our aim to make the Island an attractive place for both traditional, new and niche businesses.

To modernise the business environment, we have been progressing several important reforms.

Changes are in motion that will require all companies on the Island to register their beneficial—not just legal—owners. The effect of this will be to bring our company laws in line with best practice internationally and, provide another indicator of the stability of St Helena as a place to do business.

We continue to explore the development of a legal framework that recognises Decentralised Autonomous Organisations (DAOs) on our company registry. The objectives of this exciting project are to generate economic benefit for the Island, through the collection of registration fees, and for the development of a physical hub for ancillary service providers supporting the ongoing development and operation of DAOs. The project could also serve as a “proof of concept” that SHG can successfully and quickly implement and launch a niche offering in the blockchain sector, providing potential benefits from being an early adopter of an emerging technology. It could be yet another important way to showcase St Helena as a modern, progressive, technological and business friendly jurisdiction.

Mr Speaker, this year has seen the emergence of several new electronic payment options for the Island. The Bank of St Helena’s virtual Tourist Card was launched in March this year, and has proven popular with visitors. In addition, and with facilitation from the Government, several merchants and other businesses have begun to acquire electronic payment terminals that will finally allow on-Island access to the major international credit card systems: Visa and MasterCard. Both of these developments will make it easier for visitors to spend and for businesses to sell, driving economic growth and addressing a longstanding issue for the Island.

Taxation

The changes to taxation embedded in this budget are modest, and reflect the Government’s previous approach of indexing duty on alcohol by inflation, and indexing duty on tobacco by inflation plus 1 per cent.

This year’s duty changes, however, were difficult decisions, as inflation has been unusually high. On balance, and because of the anticipated health benefits that discouraging the consumption of both alcohol and tobacco through taxation is likely to deliver, the Government has continued its long-term approach in this area.

The Government did establish a new category of duty for beers and ciders with an alcohol content by volume of between 4.5 per cent and 6 per cent. This will enable importers and hospitality businesses to expand their offering of beers and ciders to include a larger range of well-known products, thus improving the Island’s offering.

The Government will also review both alcohol and tobacco taxation arrangements over the course of this budget. This will ensure that policy setting around alcohol and tobacco taxation balance the needs of the economy with the pressures faced by the health service.

Projects and Programmes

Mr Speaker we have made progress with our Economic Development Investment Programme, where the Rupert’s Cargo Handling Facility project continues to progress,

with steel frame buildings being erected and the main container yard also under construction.

Alongside this, Side Path Road re-opened in December 2022, and we now have a road base that will last up to 40 years.

Mr Speaker the Government is progressing the work to deliver Field Road to the same standard over the remainder of this financial year. Once complete, we will have a road connection between Rupert's and Jamestown that is not only fit for purpose for those that live and work across the two, but also ready for the transition of cargo operations from Jamestown to Rupert's; quite literally laying the foundations for future growth.

Through the Increased Agriculture Production project we have invested in our agricultural infrastructure. This will enable the agricultural estate to further contribute to increasing local production, in turn reducing the need to import, giving people fresher produce whilst ensuring more money is retained in the Island economy.

Progressing a sewerage system for Half Tree Hollow and Jamestown is also high on our agenda, along with the New Prison which will also continue to be progressed and developed. We know these have long been promised by previous governments, and we commit to making headway with these important infrastructure works.

Further as a Government we are currently finalising our next pipeline of projects, in anticipation of another round of funding. These projects not only provide long term economic benefits, but also a much needed short term injection of cash into the local economy.

Whilst we have a number of *significant* projects underway, we also recognize the importance of acting nimbly to deliver change in areas that people have raised concerns to us about. The Government has utilized EDIP micro-project funding to make a number of smaller but highly beneficial improvements across the Island. This includes multiple improvements to the Jamestown wharf, carrying out infrastructure improvements to some of the Island's Post Box walks, construction of bus shelters around the Island, repairs to Bishop's Bridge, and the installation of a public warning information system.

We've also grabbed other opportunities when they have presented themselves. Earlier in the year we secured £1.8m in additional funding from the UK Government through the Essential Equipment Programme. This allowed us to purchase a raft of essential equipment for our hospital, airport, roads and cargo operations. This will improve both the short and long-term delivery of these functions, and will do so without having to draw down funds from our own budget, which may have then impacted our ability to deliver elsewhere.

We also rapidly mobilised funding for new toilets on the wharf, delivered in time to enable a successful yachting season, from the locally funded special fund.

PRIORITIES FOR THE YEAR AND BEYOND

Mr Speaker, the Cabinet have considered at length how this budget should be prioritised. We have worked with the FCDO and listened to other Elected Members, and consulted with constituents during its development. As I have mentioned multiple times throughout this speech today, this Government will do all it can to ensure the opportunities are there for those who want to take them.

Therefore, our first priority is to continue establishing a business friendly enabling environment. By “enabling”, Mr Speaker, we mean frameworks and structures that allow for businesses to thrive, and new businesses to set up, in St Helena.

We will do this through prioritizing the following deliverables:

- a. Immigration reforms, to ensure that our immigration system works with the aim of growing the working age population, thereby lowering the dependency ratio, increasing economic productivity, and, increasing the market size on St Helena.
- b. Reforms in the Education sector, including undertaking a Primary School Review, and an overhaul of all policies and procedures that will inform a revised Education Ordinance, aimed at creating a more effective and efficient education system. A highly trained and skilled workforce will increase productivity. Better schooling makes St Helena a more attractive place to live for young families.
- c. Stable air and sea access, to ensure that individuals and businesses have confidence in the cost and schedule of getting goods and people on and off the Island – including having schedules that meet the Island’s needs.
- d. Moving to a health system that focusses on preventative care, to ensure a better quality of life and, to reduce the pressure on other parts of SHG’s budget in the longer term. We want to be the Government that encourages our residents to adopt those lifestyle changes that not only benefit the individual, but also the rest of society.

Our second priority is establishing effective infrastructure that provides economic resilience, certainty for consumers and, increases disposable incomes. We will prioritise, through our capital programme allocations or otherwise:

- a. Telecommunications, to ensure everyone benefits from the Fibre Optic Cable and achieve cheaper, faster and more reliable internet.
- b. Wharf infrastructure, to ensure the programme of work to complete the Rupert’s wharf facility benefits the Island through better services for merchants and importers, and releasing Jamestown wharf as a new leisure area to be enjoyed by all.

- c. Renewable Energy, to ensure we continue on the path towards cleaner, affordable and more stable energy.

It is hoped that through delivering these priorities, St Helenian residents and St Helenian businesses are able to do more and make more money. This will not only increase their prosperity, but will also increase revenues for the St Helena Government in the medium and long term as our economy develops. This can then be reinvested in public services.

In order to drive our agenda in the most effective way possible, SHG is also now adopting a programme approach to delivering SHG's Strategy.

To do this, we've established a central Programme Management Office. This "PMO" will coordinate planning, management, and execution of projects, making sure that where we have multiple related projects on the go at once, these are directed toward the same strategic, organisational, and portfolio objectives. The aim is to ensure that portfolios and project teams are focused on both the detail and the bigger picture, are collaborating across departments, and are working together to achieve SHG's shared strategic Vision.

Just as I said at the beginning of this speech, we need to position ourselves to focus on the outcomes we want to deliver, and we hope that with this change in approach SHG can start to deliver more effectively in this regard.

THE BUDGET PROCESS, AND WHAT HAS BEEN ENABLED BY THE 4% INCREASE

Mr Speaker, it was evident right at the start of the budget process that the coming year will present significant budgetary challenges for this Government, creating upward pressure on expenditure.

These challenges include factors outside of our control, such as global inflation rates, but also local cost pressures: the increasing cost of pensions and benefits; the national minimum wage changes; the commissioning of the subsea cable; prison capacity; expected legal and settlement costs for civil cases against SHG; and some very complex criminal cases where legal and professional costs are expected to be high, are but a few. The ever increasing cost of Health and Social care provision in meeting the needs of the community is also a well-known financial challenge.

These budgetary pressures, coupled with expectations of limited growth in local revenues, meant that even with an equivalent level of financial aid to the previous financial year, there would be a significant budget deficit of £2.6 million if public services were to be maintained at the same level. To ensure we were fully prepared for whatever came out of the financial aid settlement, ministers therefore considered the impacts of a 7.2% budget reduction across the Government over the previous year's budget allocations to account for these potential cost impacts.

This would have meant reducing many public services and reductions in Government support to families and community based organisations, some of which would have included:

- Discontinued allowances for 6th Form students (the apprenticeship scheme)
- Reduction in broadband provision within schools and the St Helena Community College
- Cessation of the disabled facilities grant scheme
- Removal of Home Care Support and Community Carers scheme
- Reduction in the Better Life Allowance (BLA) budget
- Reduced Overseas Medical Referrals budget
- Reduce budget for emergency services
- Reduced funding for Economic Development and Innovation
- Delayed Tax Reform and Pension Reform Programmes
- Reduced financial management support
- Reduction in the SHG Central training budget for maintaining professional competence and skills in key sectors
- Significantly reduced agricultural support and terrestrial conservation work

During the financial aid discussions with the UK Government in December and January, Ministers articulated the devastating impacts these would have had on the community and our social and economic development intended under the Ministers' Vision.

As I have announced already in this Honourable House Mr Speaker, the UK Government did in fact agree a 4% increase in Financial Aid over the previous year and though this increase was most welcomed, Mr Speaker, it did not alleviate all the budget pressures facing this Government. Therefore Ministers, with the support of Directors and Officials undertook a process of reprioritisation in line with our Vision and Strategic Priorities and obligations. This has allowed us to present a 'balanced' budget to this House today.

Tough decisions had to be made Mr Speaker, balancing the immediate needs of the community against the investment needed to deliver our longer term goals and aspirations. Trade-offs were made between a number of competing priorities in order to settle on allocations that seek to achieve the most benefit for the people of St Helena, both in the short and long term from the limited resources at our disposal.

THE ALLOCATIONS FOR 2023

The approach undertaken by Ministers in terms of agreeing allocations have largely been to ensure that public services are maintained, and work continues to build the platforms for economic growth. The budget ensures that key risks faced by the Government are mitigated as far as it is possible to do so.

Despite the 4% uplift in Financial Aid, portfolios have still had budget reductions in some areas in order to balance the budget although not on the scale that would have been required had the Financial Aid remained the same as last year.

These allocations for both recurrent and capital expenditure as outlined in the Appropriation Bill 2023 and the Budget Book are as follows:

- Pensions and Benefits - £5.7 million
- Health and Social Care - £9.1 million
- Education, Skills and Employment - £3.6 million
- Environment, Natural Resources and Planning - £1.7 million
- Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development, which includes grants and subsidies, centrally managed contracts like the swimming pool and public transport system etc. - £14.1 million
- Central Support Service which includes support to Council and the Technical Cooperation Budget - £10.0 million
- Safety, Security and Home Affairs - £2.6 million
- Attorney General's Chambers - £105,000, and
- Judicial Services - £147,000

Included within these budget allocations is funding for an uplift in the Basic Island Pension and Income Related Benefits of 4% which if the budget is passed, will be effective from October this year.

As mentioned earlier Mr Speaker, I am also pleased to announce that the initiatives agreed under the Cost of Living policy last financial year to mitigate the impacts of increased cost of living have been agreed, in the main, to continue in this financial year. Most notable is the subsidy to Connect Saint Helena Ltd for the cost of diesel for electricity generation, in place to protect what would otherwise have been unsustainable rises to electricity bills. However, unlike last financial year this subsidy will now be capped at £1.7 million. The changes to the customs tariff to zero-rate a number of essential goods will also be maintained.

I can also advise Mr Speaker, that an additional amount of £460,000 has been allocated to the core Health and Social Care budget in order to support increased needs within the community of our aging population with demanding healthcare needs. This means that in comparison to last year, taking into account the Technical

Cooperation budget allocated to Health, its total allocation is £13.6 million, or 29% of the total budget. We anticipate a new overseas medical service provider, which will offer better care, and better value for the taxpayer.

This funding will bolster services that include chemotherapy, diabetes and hypertension management. Not only are the number of patients being treated increasing but also the cost of the medical supplies needed to treat them over the last year, has seen significant increases in purchasing costs. This further highlights the need to move to preventative healthcare in the long run. Further details, Mr Speaker, will be provided during the detailed discussions to be undertaken during the Committee stage on Friday.

WORKING WITH OUR DONORS

Mr Speaker, the increase to this year's settlement, which followed a number of years with a flat-line budget, displays how far we have come in developing the relationship with our main funders, the UK Government, via the FCDO.

Our approach from day 1 was to ensure that SHG and FCDO work together as "Team St Helena", and this approach has, so far, been successful as proven by the award of a 4% uplift and the agreement to ring fence the Tourism Development Fund from the contingency budget. I have seen first-hand how increased dialogue and a stronger understanding of shared goals has led to huge challenges being overcome in the last year. We hope to continue this long into the future not just with the HMG but also other Overseas Territories.

I would further like to thank those donors who fall outside of this budget but whose funds no less support some incredibly important activities across the Island. These partners include the RSPB, Darwin Plus, the Blue Belt, and the Napoleonic Bicentenary Trust Fund to name a few.

KEY RISKS FOR THE YEARS AHEAD

Mr Speaker I have already spoken about many of the key risks to this budget in terms of, mainly, inflationary cost pressures.

The Government will continue to monitor the risk posed by unfunded pension liabilities, overseas medical referrals and statutory service provision, likely to be compounded if the current trajectory of an aging and declining population continues. Put simply, the risk is that we have too few working people on Island to pay for the services and support that the Island's aging residents need, expect, and are entitled to.

CLOSING STATEMENT

I strongly believe Mr Speaker that SHG can sometimes be its own worst enemy. Our systems and processes can at times be laborious, and I hear this frustration coming from within my own portfolio. If we have barriers in place which inhibit our success in getting our own work done, what chance is there for the business community who rely on us to deliver?

Mr Speaker, I have spoken a lot today, and we speak a lot as an Island, about creating an enabling environment on St Helena. In reality there is still much we need to do across SHG to perform better - be it our procurement systems, HR processes, or customer services. We are also well aware of the need to update some of our outdated procedures, policies, and legislation across the board.

But as I have said throughout Mr Speaker, this budget, our path forward, and the change in mind-set does not just involve this Government.

Mr Speaker, we are at a pivotal moment in the Island's history, where the challenges we face demand a united front and a shared commitment to progress. By embracing the strength of collaboration, we can combine our diverse talents, ideas, and perspectives to achieve outcomes that surpass our individual capabilities.

Each and every one of us must take ownership of our own futures, recognising that our choices, actions and contributions, play a crucial role in shaping the destiny of our Island. It is not enough to simply rely on external forces or wait for others to chart our path.

We have lots to be proud of in St Helena: this Government but importantly our entire community should celebrate these qualities and keep them front-of-mind – because Mr Speaker, if we as a community don't actively demonstrate value for what we love, it is difficult to preserve and protect our best qualities.

Mr Speaker I would like to end with a quote from a young Primary student in a recently submitted essay to the Queen's Commonwealth Competition, "team work makes the dream work".

Mr Speaker, I beg to move.