



St Helena
Government

ST HELENA GOVERNMENT

GOVERNMENT OF ST HELENA
PROCEEDINGS OF MINISTERS QUESTION TIME
FRIDAY 24TH MARCH 2023 FIRST SITTING

ST. HELENA
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

THE SPEAKER

The Honourable Cyril Keith Gunnell

EX-OFFICIO MEMBER

The Honourable Attorney General, Mr David Ferguson Ballantyne – Apologies

ELECTED MEMBERS

The Honourable Rosemary June Bargo
The Honourable Gillian Ann Brooks
The Honourable Mark Alan Brooks
The Honourable Ronald Arthur Coleman
The Honourable Corinda Sebastiana Stuart Essex
The Honourable Martin Dave Henry
The Honourable Robert Charles Midwinter
The Honourable Christine Lilian Scipio
The Honourable Julie Dorne Thomas
The Honourable Karl Gavin Thrower
The Honourable Andrew James Turner

The Honourable Jeffrey Robert Ellick - Overseas

Clerk of Councils

Mrs Connie Johnson

PROCEEDINGS OF MINISTERS QUESTION TIME

Friday, 24th March, 2023

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 SPEAKER

2. ADDRESS BY THE SPEAKER

Good morning, Honourable Members, all others present, welcome and a very warm welcome to those listening to this live broadcast of this first question time, First Minister's Question Time held in the Council Chamber in the Castle, Jamestown. Thank you Honourable Members for your enthusiasm for this new activity starting and I am aware the public also is looking forward to regular Ministers Question Time. Minister's Question Time is regulated by Standing Orders and a number of rules, perhaps it is fair to say that some teething difficulties can be expected in early Meetings. When a practice Minister's question time was held applying Order 9 in its entirety Elected Members felt that the limitation imposed by rule 6 which only allows one supplementary question for each substantive question prevented thorough exploration of the issue raised and initial response given. I understand that Elected Members intend to propose formal amendments to standing orders with regard to Minister's Question Time, but not before their provisions have been trialled further, as other issues may be identified, that require review and change. What would be appreciated is interaction and therefore Elected Members would welcome feedback from the public however, at the Formal Legislative Council Meeting held 24th March, the resolution determined that rule 5 and rule 6 of Order 9 of Standing Orders be suspended for the duration of the Minister's Question Time scheduled for today. In accordance with Order 9 rule 3 of Standing Orders, the Chief Minister was notified of topic of business to be transacted, that topic is "Progress made in achieving the St Helena Government's vision and strategy dated April 2022 to March 2025". The Chief Minister acknowledged receipt of the topic and Non-Ministers have framed their questions. All of the questions prepared by Non-Ministers for today are addressed to the Chief Minister. However, because the topic chosen is very broad, and because parts of it may be cross cutting will relate directly to activities undertaken within a particular portfolio that other ministers are in charge of another Minister may decide they would like to answer the question and can indicate their intention by switching on their red light. Because rule 5 and rule 6 of Order 9 of Standing Orders have been suspended for this Meeting it is likely that additional supplementary questions will be asked. The duration of Ministers Question Time starting from the first question is one hour, may we have the first question please.

3.

QUESTIONS

Question No. 1 - The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex to ask the Chief Minister.

The Speaker –

What I should have said was sorry you have an Order Paper in front of you and probably would have seen it on there, the questions have been listed in alphabetical order but will be selected randomly for response at the meeting. So I think Dr Essex was pulled.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you Mr Speaker. Will the Honourable Chief Minister tell this Council, what policy changes and/or new policies have been introduced since the last General Election that are aimed at retaining the local workforce and encouraging St Helenians currently working overseas to return?

The Speaker –

Honourable Chief Minister?

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker and good morning everyone, and thank the Honourable Dr Essex for her question. Obviously, there's a lot of work going on and I think it's necessary to also point out here that the minister's vision along with the SHG strategy was our vision for our four years; and as number of people will remember, our priority for year one was to focus a lot of our time and resources on health. But that said, there's lots of other work that has been going on in the different portfolios, and in respect of retaining of the local workforce, we have looked at this to continue the trajectory of trying to improve our minimum wage. We've had tax working groups set up that are looking at the actual tax regime, because I know there's quite a lot of people who are concerned that the 7000, that set isn't adequate and I know the tax working group is working on that. In respect of the biggest one, I think that we're working on that has been out for its first round of consultation, but it's due to go out again soon after consultation with the wider Council and Ministers have had a chance to look at it, is our immigration policy that will hopefully be the catalyst for a lot of the other things that we wish to bring out in respect of making land available, obviously, looking at the disposal assets, etc. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Chief Minister, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Chief Minister for her response. Will the Honourable Chief Minister state whether or not the likely impact upon the issue of retaining saints, or attracting them back to the Island is routinely taken into consideration when making policy decisions.

The Speaker -
Honourable Chief Minister?

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) -

Thank you Mr Speaker, I think it's part of the Vision, our priorities for the four years was always to talk about our people and the importance of our human resource. So yes, every policy decision that's taken does consider retaining the people on Island and indeed trying to attract others back. As much as we'd like to do this, at times, it's very, very difficult when we think about the resources we have. I know that Minister Brooks would also like to make a comment here as well.

The Speaker -
Honourable Minister Brooks?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure & Sustainable Development) -

Thank you Mr Speaker, and like to thank my Honourable friend for the question. And just to follow on from Julie, what we're doing within our portfolio, with developing policies is looking at the stamp duty policy. And that is encourage people, who doesn't own properties to have an extended discount on the current policy. That is all here they're trying to attract returning saints to live on St. Helena, as members know, one of the important things for Saint Helenians is to own your own house. And this policy is trying to make that more achievable for those things Saints living abroad and on Island. We're also developing the land, or the property patches and disposable policy. Again, this will help streamline the process of adequate land on the Island being sort of on the market so that people who are interested in buying land to develop housing, and as well as start a family and stuff like that, would have a better access of doing it in a more clear process of doing. So those are two policies that will help with encouraging things to be better Mr Speaker.

The Speaker -
Honourable Robert Midwinter, sorry before that Honourable Martin Henry?

The Hon. Martin Henry (Minister for Health and Social Care) -

Thank you, Mr Speaker and just to a more sort of holistic comment on the back of Mark's comment. I've spoken about this before, but all policies that we are trying to push through, especially in line with that, it's about creating opportunities. So sometimes we go straight to the source, but to attract people back to St Helena, we need to create an opportunity. One of the best examples of this is when Basil Read was building the airport, we saw increasing capital, we saw increasing wages, and we saw just a general increase in opportunity, which then spilled over to a general increase in disposable income. I use that as a benchmark, in some cases to see what can happen if we do stimulate the economy to something like that. We won't probably won't have a major project of that sort. But we need to stimulate the economy in all different areas. So we lift and create opportunity. I think that's the attraction back to St Helena and so sometimes going straight to source is not always the best aspect. We need to look at all of the policies around that. That creates opportunity. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker -
Thank you Honourable Minister for Health and Social Care, Honourable Robert Midwinter?

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. In terms of encouraging Saint Helenians currently working overseas to return is she able to confirm that her government is intending to extend the first time buyer discounts for Crown land for Saints living and working overseas?

The Speaker –

Thank you Honourable Member, Honourable Brooks?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure & Sustainable Development –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member for his question. As I said before this policy is still in draft form, but I'll be pleased to say that in the draft form, we are looking at extending the first time buyer criteria to those living overseas, not just on Ascension or the Falklands, but also in the UK.

The Speaker –

Thank you Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development. Any further questions on that one? If not can we go to the next question please?

Question No. 2 - The Honourable Gillian Brooks to ask the Chief Minister.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Gillian Brooks?

The Hon. Gillian Brooks –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Honourable Chief Minister tell this Council, what policies have been developed to encourage local food production, in view of sustaining the Island with fresh produce and addressing food security?

The Speaker –

Honourable Chief Minister?

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker and thank the Honourable Gillian Brooks for the question. I will obviously turn to the Minister for ENRP to go into detail here, but obviously food security is key and is one of the priorities in our vision. This is something that we've been working towards over the last year and as many will know, there was some EDIP funding to the tune of £380,000 that was approved to address food security, and how we can make more land available for farming to take place. I will allow the Minister for ENRP to elaborate.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Christine Scipio Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning.

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker and I do you feel like repeating myself Mr Speaker because I only gave an update in Formal LegCo last week about the agriculture sector. So I do apologise to our listeners if they are hearing something that was mentioned last week. So Mr Speaker work is in progress within the agriculture

sector, analysing and trying to inform options for developing a five year agriculture strategy. And as I said in last week's meeting, that a Member of our Council Honourable Robert Midwinter sits on this strategy working group as well as a representation from the Chamber of Commerce so that we are working together for the Island to continue to farm the Islands contribution to St Helena's economy and also food requirements as food security, as mentioned, as the Chief Minister mentioned, yes, that we managed to obtain some funding through the EDIP program in trying to address the government's estate with fencing, land, clearance and of course, we have to recognize it £380,000 does sound like a lot of money but when you try to put it across the sector with various elements of the agriculture, it isn't a lot of you only can do certain parts, I must say they're the targets that was set for this one and we are on target for that and as in our constituency meetings, just recently, I mentioned to the public that for the next round, for the next financial year we'll be looking at the poultry unit. So like I said earlier Mr Speaker, I feel like repeating myself, because I only gave an update last week.

The Speaker –

Not a bad idea to repeat yourself sometimes, any questions from anybody? Honourable Gillian Brooks?

The Hon. Gillian Brooks –

Thank you, Mr Speaker Thank you Minister Scipio. You spoke about the Agriculture Strategy Group. Can you just, I may have missed it but is there a sort of timeframe as to when you're looking to have a sort of strategy in place? A timeframe?

The Speaker –

Honourable Christine Scipio?

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

At the moment Mr Speaker I'm unable to give a timeframe, I'm not sure if the Honourable Rob Midwinter as part of the group will be able to help out our friend here and say what their targets are because I haven't had any update from this working group as yet.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Honourable Chief Minister and I'm addressing the question to her but she is welcome to delegate if she wishes to do so, state what progress has been made regarding review of the labour subsidy policy for farmers.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Chief Minister?

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Obviously, that is quite a detailed policy that hasn't come to us as Cabinet nor Executive Council, because this is something that would be addressed in the Advisory Board of ENRP. So I'll hand it over to Minister Scipio.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Christine Scipio?

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker and just to recollect about in a Formal Legislative Council Meeting a while ago, that question was raised by my Honourable friend, and a draft policy has been drafted and I had had conversations with my Honourable friend about the details of that policy, as well, at the moment, we're looking at, what are the financial implications and because it going to have an impact on our finances, if we're going to go and try to assist individuals in helping when I say assist individuals, I talk about individuals who are unemployed, because in that policy was looking at unemployment. We had discussions with CASH, Careers Access St Helena, because we've looked at what people were on their list being unemployed in the criteria or the calibre of the people. So we looked at that, and we noticed that if we're going to move forward with the labour subsidy policy, it will have financial implications on our budget and because we don't have a budget at the moment, discussions are, we do have a budget, I should say in total, so let's stand to be corrected, but we haven't gone into the detail. The discussions are still to be made known because as Honourable Mark Brooks made the announcement last week that we now have the funding, discussions need to be held as to say how are we going to divide the pie up, and then if this can be accommodated, like I mentioned, there's financial implications, I can't say it going to be implemented because of the financial constraints.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much Honourable Minister. Honourable Robert Midwinter?

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and before I go into my supplementary question, just to confirm that, yes, I am on that particular working group. It's only been established very recently, we've only had two meetings so far. So it's very early days, but I will endeavour to give colleagues regular updates as to how that strategic working group is progressing. Mr Speaker, can the Chief Minister confirm that the existing subsidies and tax reliefs that are currently provided to the farming community, such as water subsidy, and lower rate of import duty animal feed will remain in place for the incoming tax year?

The Speaker –

Honourable Christine Scipio?

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker and sorry Chief Minister, I jumped the gun and put my light on to answer. So at the moment, there is no intention to remove that.

The Speaker –

Honourable Karl Midwinter, I think I may have jumped the gun a bit there and if you don't mind Honourable Coleman I will allow Honourable Karl Thrower to ask his question.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Since we started talking about subsidies, are there any plans, or is it still being looked at too may be look at fuel subsidy for farmers, and better financial offerings for farmers for affordable finance, as previously provided by ESH?

The Speaker –
Honourable Chief Minister?

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Just you're trying to make sure that I'm standing at the right time and not jumping. I think Honourable Karl Thrower. Thanks for the question. I think we're in a bit of a delay at the moment because as Minister Scipio has just said, the budget has been announced but we haven't started negotiations to talk about the allocation of that budget. Depending on how that is divided, then I would want to come and say that that's something that will definitely happen but it is all things that will be considered and when we start weighing up the priorities, we'll need to see how we share the pie.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Ronald Coleman you wish to ask your question?

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I just want to ask is the help that is proposed or being drawn up will help all farmers, as the EDIP Project only help farmers who are farming on Crown land at this moment in time.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Chief Minister first.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Appreciate that the funding helps with crown land, it is very difficult, I have to admit, to be able to support people with the private land, and we can't be putting structures on private land and it's very difficult to be able to manage and control that because in the past, I know especially the Crown land, someone potentially had two acres of land and they're either not using it, or they're just using a small portion of that. So at least if it's Crown land, we can put control measures in place, we can't really see a return on our investment, if we're looking at private land I'm not suggesting it won't be but we will consider the crown lands first because that is the larger parts, a lot of help, as you, as you rightly said, has gone into private lands through Enterprise St Helena but it's also about the responsibility of businesses and farmers as well to constantly invest in their land and the businesses.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Martin Henry do you still wish to speak?

The Hon. Martin Henry (Minister for Health, and Social Care) –

Thank you. I wanted to comment on one of the earlier questions, but it's just an overview and I think there's something for the whole Council that we need to look at. While the question asked is what is addressing food security? I think we need to decide first what food security is, is having potatoes, food security is eating frozen pizza, food security. I think before we can start to just throw a buckle, but what is addressing food security, we may have to decide what food security is, give you an example, there is enough grain grown in the world to feed about 13.1 billion people. Yet, we feed 80% of it to the animals then to feed 15% of the world's population, leaving 1 billion people starving. So food security is just a very big, a very big statement and I think it is as a whole Council we need to decide what is food security before we can continue to go further and address this question. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much for that. Honourable Rosemary Bargo?

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you Mr Speaker, can I just rise on a point of information?

The Speaker –

You may.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Early days of Council when it just started, we had a went out to the EX ADA fields to have a look at the water situation there and it was found to be inadequate, you know to help water all the fields. So my question is, what is the progress on the ability to provide farmers with adequate water supply in the EX ADA fields, and sorry, to add on this point of information, I know ENRD was working with Connect St Helena on this, thanks.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Christine Scipio?

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, my understanding is that my Honourable friend, Rosemary Bargo, has recently been given an update from our offices in respect of this, and from the update that you had just recently, probably in the last 10 days. I don't have anything further to add.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Whilst, can I just say something again? Whilst I know I have the update I believe our listening public would like to know exactly what's being done. Thank you.

The Speaker –

I do take your point. Honourable Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning, please.

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

So it was a statement that my Honourable friend made? Yes. So my understanding is that we did look at the water flow, the pumps, my understanding at that time that Connect St Helena because of other things that were happening in the department that they weren't able to give full attention in providing the expertise in how the water pumps and everything else is, my understanding was that everybody was feeding off the same flow and they were looking at how we could change that, so that they wouldn't be difficulty in the water for that. My Honourable friend is nodding her head here to confirm that what I'm saying is correct. So we are still working on it. It's just that we're not there just yet.

The Speaker –

It's good to see nodding heads thank you very much. Questions from anybody, Honourable Andrew Turner?

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. On this sort of questions, original subject of local produce and food security, would any of the Ministers be able to provide an update on what steps this government is taking to ensure access to local fish products, which are of course another key element of local food production?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Chief Minister?

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Mr Speaker, this is a very difficult question for me because I have to declare an interest first and foremost. And I'm not entirely sure if any other Minister can assist me here. I think all I'd like to say from a Ministerial position is half a million pounds was invested into the fish factory and that was to ensure that we would have fish, fresh fish available to the local market, and that we would see the recommencement of offshore fishery, the exploratory fishing and of course, scientific data that is really, really important. If we are to consider or take into consideration a revisit of the current quota. Beyond that, I can tell you that there's no additional funding that's gone into fishing. With that said, there is still the fuel subsidy that continues for all fishermen who are registered as commercial fishermen and they get that through Solomon and Company. So it's left to the individual fishers to be able to set that up through Solomon and Company. So that's as far as we've gone thus far.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Martin Henry?

The Hon. Martin Henry (Minister for Health, and Social Care) –

Thank you for your question. Thank you, Mr Speaker, just to add to the Chief Minister, the Health Protection Board met as recently as yesterday. Yesterday was Wednesday? No Wednesday, that's how days going at the moment, Speaker sorry. And while on the other end of what the Chief Minister has just said, we have now looked at the Fish Ordinance, and we have decided that because of a number of issues with the Ordinance we will ask, we will come to this Council to ask, could we have a, could we do a full review of the Fish Ordinance? And to ask this Council, what do they want to see in terms of sales of fish to the Island of St Helena, and then we can, we can write an underline Ordinance that governs that and protects our population's health. So a full review, I think is now necessary, but it was only decided on Wednesday, and I have not come to this Council even to put it on the agenda yet.

The Speaker –

Understood thank you very much, Honourable Mark Brooks?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure & Sustainable Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I think I'll just help my Ministers here by just adding in something else that recently has taken place to encourage more sales of fish not just locally, but for export. As my Honourable friend will be aware, recently, a local put together a business proposal for a canary in Rupert's Valley to export into a well-known High Street chain in the UK, as a government, we made that facility available on the rental market so that he could have the opportunity to operate his business from a location that was ideal for that type of business. Also, because fishing is in the SEDP, he would have incentives within the SEDP for different ways in trying to set up his business. One of those would include obviously, import duties on goods that would support the business. And also there is a another method of applying for the

approved investment status, which will allow any individuals who meet the objectives of the SEDP to have a reduced reduction rate on input duties any equipment or materials brought to the Island. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. I think we're still keeping in line with what was asked in the beginning. You want to go and get your papers. Thank you very much. Honourable Martin Henry?

The Hon. Martin Henry (Minister for Health, and Social Care) –

Sorry Mr Speaker, I just I just want to rise on a point of clarification because it's very close Ordinance I was referring to is the Fish and Fish Products Ordinance.

The Speaker –

Thank you for clarifying. Thank you for clarifying that, have we sort of exhausted this question now? Okay I'll allow another question. Or another comment if you like.

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Yes, just for the benefit of our listeners Mr Speaker, if I may, because my Honourable friend Andrew Turner talked about fish products and just to say that earlier this week, I had confirmation that the Registrar of Shipping because we're talking about offshore licensing and exploratory licenses, that the Registrar of Shipping advised me earlier this week that they're still waiting on a registration and application for registration, which is treating vessels and once that registration has gone through that process, then we will consider issuing a commercial license but we can't do that until the processes have been followed.

The Speaker –

Thank you very very much, next question please.

Question No. 3 - The Honourable Rosemary Bargo to ask the Chief Minister.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Rosemary Bargo?

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Honourable Chief Minister tell this Council, what progress has been made with the review of the Education Ordinance?

The Speaker –

Honourable Chief Minister?

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker and thank the Honourable Rosemary Bargo for her question. I think when we look at education, we are one of the only portfolios that probably just has one huge Ordinance. That Ordinance pretty much tells us and guides us on everything that we do within education. So it is something that we're looking at is reviewing the Education Ordinance. It is in its infancy stage so I know that the Portfolio Director is having discussions with her heads if I can put it that way. And then, but all schools have been asked to have a look at the Ordinance and decide areas that they feel needs to change because of their

obviously, they work with the Ordinance on a daily basis. This, I think, to be honest with you, most of our Ordinances needs to be changed to reflect the change in Committee systems to be to be reflective of the Ministerial Government. So that's being done as well. But the biggest thing that we need to do is ensure that our policies that obviously sit with the Ordinance is up to date before we start changing the Ordinances. So it's a huge piece of work.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Rosemary Bargo?

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Thank you, Chief Minister. Can I know, sorry, can you also tell me then, is there any work that's been underway on policies? What has the policies being like works and what extent policies has being implemented to ensure goals are mapped within the priority area “all together better for children and young people” within the vision and strategy?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Chief Minister?

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

So I think, again, this comes back to what I said earlier, a lot of our focus this year has been on the health, education is obviously doing the work that they need to do policies at the moment, I think the key one, which I think everybody will be seeing is antisocial behaviour. We're looking at behavioural issues, how we can best deal with that within schools. That's the whole for schools. Because I know that teachers are quite concerned about their safety as well, because although a minority, there's quite a few incidents, that is quite stressing, I would have to say. So the need for multi-agency working is to key on that as well, not just for antisocial behaviour, but behaviour in general policies, we're looking at is trying to inclusion is another one, when we look at educational needs and disabilities. The sad thing for most, especially the primary schools is the ability to have to accommodate these things. If you all know, the main place that we do, most of this work is kind of spread out. So we have some going on in Carnarvon Court, and Olive College has been used as inclusion and it's not really ideal. Hence, we are looking at the Primary School review, which I mentioned in our constituency meetings. So whilst we have the Primary School review, we'll be looking at how we can best cater for a lot of these issues and that will help to inform policy also.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Rosemary Bargo?

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you and thank you for informing the public on this as well Chief Minister.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Any further questions on that, Honourable Robert Midwinter?

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Mr Speaker. Can I ask the Honourable Chief Minister, in the absence of the maintenance element of student finance, will she give consideration to some element of SHG finance?

The Speaker -

Thank you very much. Honourable Chief Minister?

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker and thank the Honourable Midwinter for your question. Again, I think it would be very foolish of me to give that kind of confirmation. The budget hasn't been allocated at this present time. Maintenance loans there is I can tell you already there is no way that education is going to be able to afford the entire Maintenance Loan. We've made that very clear to the students and their parents that there is no way we will be able to facilitate that. Hopefully we'll have some in the region of six or seven students going this year and when you look at what that will equate to in maintenance loans it is quite significant. We are hoping that we can give something but until the budget is allocated and we want to give that commitment, with that said, I would also like to highlight the offering being put forward by the Bank of St Helena whereby students and parents can access £5,000 per year for the next three years. Thank you very much.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. So just in terms of time, because the public I think probably is, I hope they are listening and interact with us on will provide some feedback. We're halfway through now, since we started at 10 minutes, four minutes past 10. And now we're nearly ready five to 11. So just in case of timing, because we need to make certain everybody tried to get your questions in. We're about halfway through. So thank you very much. Next question, please.

Question No 4 - The Honourable Robert Midwinter to ask the Chief Minister.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Robert Midwinter?

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Honourable Chief Minister tell this Council, what steps have been taken thus far towards achieving the stated aim within the Strategic Vision that the St Helena Government wants a tax reform regime which encourages investment, is progressive, fair and equitable?

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Mark Brooks?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for his question. As the Honourable Member will know there is tax regimes built in the SEDP, which will help businesses that qualify under that scheme. But what we've been doing so far, Mr Speaker, since we came into office is we've developed a beneficial ownership policy, which is an important part of compliance and that is now sitting with the AGs Chambers ready to be drafted into Ordinance. We've also employed a Financial Services Development Manager for the first time ever, in St Helena Government and that is looking at financial tax regimes, which is supporting part of building revenues as part of this Government is one of our higher priorities as well. We're working with the bank to strengthen their tax regime so that they can increase their products and services not just for Saint Helenians, but also for investors. And we are working, the latest thing that we're doing, we're working on a Decentralised Autonomous Organisations (DAO) policy

that will help strengthen or increase the company's register of companies to allow new, unique and businesses to operate here, but not in a general sense as in relocating here, it is just a digital presence on the Island, which is something that we are keen to move towards. Because it doesn't take up any of the resources, the land, and so on the Island, but it does, if it's successful, it does allow new revenue to be collected from companies register. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Robert Midwinter?

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. And I thank the Honourable Minister Brooks for his response, noting that we were told in this House last Friday that no consideration will be given to increasing the basic rate of income tax threshold before 2024/25. Can he say what tax reforms are actually planned for the coming tax year?

The Speaker –

Honourable Mark Brooks?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development) –

So as I said a few weeks ago, we have re-establish the Tax and Revenue Working Group and Mr Speaker, this was re-established after a gap of not having a substantial Chief Economist in post and that Economists or Chief Economist is leading on some work looking at tax reforms and tax regimes. So far, we're just looking at the tax collected through duty but we are, I know, the Tax Revenue Working Group is working on a whole raft of different tax regimes to be put forward to the Minister for recommendations to ExCo and finally on to Legislative Council.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Robert Midwinter?

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Mr Speaker, and I again, thank the Honourable Minister for his response. But can he confirm that those tax reforms, are any of those likely to come into play in the forthcoming tax year?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Mark Brooks?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development) –

I can say a number of them would be considering coming forward in the next financial tax year, but there's a number of them that will need substantial amount of work done and that probably won't be considered until the following financial tax year.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Honourable Minister confirm that the issue of child allowances is one that is being considered by the Tax and Revenue Working Group?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Mark Brooks?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker and I thank the Honourable Member for her question and I am pleased to confirm that the Tax and Revenue Working Group will be considering that as an option in attachment forms as well.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Rosemary Bargo?

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Well, can the Honourable Minister, elaborate on what he meant with working with the bank on strengthening their tax regime.

The Speaker –

Thank you, I can allow that, Honourable Mark Brooks?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development) –

Mr Speaker, I can't get into much detail. I mean, that is why we employed a Financial Services Development Manager. But I think as a government and as a jurisdiction, we need to strengthen our AML or Anti Money Laundering Regulations, and also KYC know your customer. So that is where the beneficial ownership policy plays a big part. In doing that, it is just basically trying to protect our borders from illegal transactions to do with all types of nasty stuff in the world Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Next Question.

Question No. 5 - The Honourable Andrew Turner to ask the Chief Minister.

The Speaker –

Honourable Andrew Turner?

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Honourable Chief Minister tell this Council, in your vision it says “The development of our Renewable Energy and Water Security Plans which ensure that we primarily protect our environment, whilst delivering both resources at affordable prices” can you say what plans have been put in place to achieve this goal?

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Chief Minister?

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) -

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I think it's known to many that renewable energy and water security has been on the agenda not just for this government, but previous governments as well. It is something I know it's not

part of the question but I think what we need to also reflect on here is although we talked about the health being our primary area of focus this year, renewables is one of those as well. It is unfortunate because there's quite a lot of work and reports that needs to be compiled by the current provider who's Connect St Helena, obviously, to enable us to better understand what service delivery is like now. So if you talk about grid stability reports, all of these things are due to come, but from what I gather, and I will wait for Minister Scipio to probably tell you that the date I'm going to give now is not quite correct, but I know they needed some time to do that, and getting access to the consultants with that expertise hasn't been easy because everybody's just recovering since COVID, but I believe that they're hoping that the report on grid stability could be made available to us later in this calendar year and then on top of that, we've been working, on the other big focuses for us is renewables immigration, telecoms and access. So immigration is one that we all know now is coming to the forefront again now. Renewables cloud forests project is one of the biggest things that we are talking about at the moment because the cloud forests project will focus on our water security, because it's the national peaks that has a high percentage of securing our water. So lots of work done in getting those reports done before we can really get down to the nitty gritty stuff to renewable energy. But I'll ask Minister Scipio, if there's anything or indeed with Minister Brooks, if there's anything additional they want to speak about in respect of any of those few topics.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Mark Brooks?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development) –

Yes so I think I'll just elaborate a little bit on a green energy policy, which myself and Minister Scipio, is part of, is working on as part of that green energy policy development group. So we, started this work, because obviously, we know that the energy strategy the current energy strategy can't really meet because the date when that energy strategy was supposed to been implemented was 2022. Obviously now we're in 2023. That was mainly not achieved due to the termination of contract with PASH global. So we have been sort of working with Connect and the British Government. Our support from the British Government is coming mainly through Alfie Alsop who was here recently, and don't ask me the full title, but we call him the infrastructure man because he deals with all the infrastructure stuff on the side, and he has a particular interest in renewable energy. So we have developed some options within this policy, but this is still at very early stage of working progress, and it still hasn't been to Advisory Board to formally endorse the policy. But there's a lot of more consultation that still needs to be to be done with this policy, but we are working towards doing a new policy that will inform a new energy strategy. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Andrew Turner?

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I understand its early days in the formation of this new policy, but is it still the intention of this government, or is it the intention of this government to go for 100% renewable energy on St. Helena?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Mark Brooks?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development) –

In developing the policy, Mr Speaker, it was quite obvious that 100% and full 100% renewable energy strategy was unlikely to be achieved. So we'll set some new targets within that policy. I will probably say and I would, I would just reiterate as the policy hasn't been approved yet. Still in development, but we are looking at gearing towards 80% plus, in the new policy for renewable energies, mainly through solar and wind.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Martin Henry?

The Hon. Martin Henry (Minister for Health, and Social Care) –

Thank you, Speaker and not to contradict Minister Brooks but I think it is for any government to try to work towards 100% renewable energy policy. But however, whether that can be achieved in terms of the term be a debatable question, but working towards 80% policy would be great. But we also must be well aware that green technology is developing all the time. So we must not build a system that then stops there. We need to have a system that allows other technologies when they become available to just slot into that system, and then take the project further. So it's important that we integrate that into that system. Thank you very much.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Minister Mark Brooks?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development) –

Just to also agree with my Honourable Minister Henry, that yes, the policy options, will look at different options. So I just want to correct myself, we looking at 80% plus, I think, sorry, Mr Speaker, I'll just have a sip of water. I think we need to be realistic here. And always talking about 100% gives the perception that we will return a percent. So I think set our goals where we can realistic reach, and then once we reach that target, we strive to improve on that from that point on.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Karl Thrower?

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you, Mr Speaker so if it's 80% What GC is fuel in the other 20%?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister Mark Brooks?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development) –

Policy has identified Mr Speaker that we as an Island will still need a certain amount of diesel generation within our energy strategy.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Karl Thrower?

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, I'd like to just rise on a point of information just very simple. If you burn bio diesel, instead of normal diesel, you reach 100% instantly.

The Speaker –

Thank you for that point of information, any response to that Honourable Mark Brooks?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development) –

I can just confirm that biodiesel has been discussed within the Energy Working Group.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much I think we've exhausted that question. Next question, please. Oh hang on a second didn't see that red light, Minister Scipio.

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker I just want to, we've talked about renewables, but just to address the water side of it because the Honourable Andrew Turner did mention about water, and just to reinforce what the Chief Minister mentioned about the Cloud Forest Project. And yes, part of the one of the pillars of the Forest Project is a water pillars of the peaks implementation plan and trying to build resilience in our water supply. So I've just wanted to confirm that, and also just mention that I mentioned last week in Formal LegCo that there was a draft Water Resources Management Plan that was never adopted by St Helena Government that has been reviewed by FCDO. I'm expecting to get some recommendations and outcome of that review by the end of this month, and once that has been received, I haven't been told if there was any delays, with providing me with the outcome of that review, once that review has been received, then the Working Group will be set up to look at the recommendations from FCDO. So with renewables and water strategy we are getting, we are receiving, some help assistance for my expertise within FCDO, which we are so grateful for.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. I think we now have exhausted that question. Next question, please.

Question No. 6 - The Honourable Ronald Coleman to ask the Chief Minister:

The Speaker –

The Honourable Ronald Coleman?

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Can the Honourable Chief Minister tell this House, what policies or procedures have been put in place since the adoption of the Ministers Vision which is helping to improve the quality of life for people who are struggling with the high cost of living to ensure no one is left behind?

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Chief Minister?

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker and thank the Honourable Ronald Colman for his question. I think we are all concerned about the high impact of cost of living here on St. Helena, or dare I say internationally? It's very difficult for us in St Helena, because hence the reason why things like food security is so important, because we need to be more self-sustaining on St. Helena, because there's so much past that impacts us because of global increases in prices. Our main source of funding, as we all know, is from the UK Government, and you only need to switch on the TV to see how dire it is in the UK as well at this present time. Although with many constraints that we're facing, we obviously put into place the cost of living options last year when the hike in fuel costs were introduced. So we obviously increased the IRB, and we also increased those to IRB and BIP, so those were the two that we looked at there obviously trying to address access and telecoms and trying to make key things like telecoms, and immigration and access to the Island and renewables all key foundation elements that we look to, as businesses and indeed, residents of St Helena, if we can address those, hopefully the cost of living will be reduced. And then we can look at and as Minister Henry said about more opportunities in respect of how we live, work and play, on St Helena.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Ronald Coleman?

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Can I just ask, Mr Speaker, how long is the cost of living options in place for?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Mark Brooks?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development) –

The cost of living policy has been endorsed up until the 31st March 2023. Again, as you as we all know, the budget hasn't been allocated for 2023/24 yet, but that will be consideration taken when we do that work. Mr Speaker, just to elaborate on what the cost of policy options was, was to look at what was implemented. That was to try and reduce the cost of energy. We did something with the shipping or the transport of cargo to reduce the costs on essential goods, and we also looked at the benefits system in trying to give a little bit more to the benefits to offset the cost of living. I think the other thing that we did, which seems like a lifetime ago now, but it was early in last year, was a review of the benefits system as a whole. When we moved the threshold from £3k to £4k and we also looked at reevaluate in the household definition to encourage to take more people to collect more people within that benefit system. Thank you Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Robert Midwinter?

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Can the Chief Minister say how her ministerial team are able to introduce effective workforce related policies which keep pace with inflationary and other cost of living pressures, when it would appear that the Fit for the Future review, for example, nursing is not shared with the relevant Minister?

The Speaker –

Okay, I think I can allow that, Honourable Chief Minister? Honourable Martin Henry?

The Hon. Martin Henry (Minister for Health, and Social Care) –

The Fit for the Future pay policy, which I think what my friend Honourable friend is referring to is an internal policy which reviewed how pays relate to the back spine of our of the HR policy. So that's something which is which is operational at the moment, and that's something that we will have to review holistically, when we look at pay increases, etc. I don't expect for a personal one to one discussion held with HR with regards to my nurses to be presented on my table. Thank you Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, any further questions?

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

I rise on a point of information, Mr Speaker, in that when I asked in this House last Friday, during the adjournment, I was actually told that the review had been done, and that I should ask for a copy of the report, and I have since asked for a copy of that report, and been told exactly what the Minister has responded. So just for that, for the public's information.

The Speaker –

Okay, thank you very much for that. Honourable Ronald Coleman?

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, just to ask that any policies going forward with helping the people to improve their quality of life, if they ensure that no one is left behind within these policies?

The Speaker –

Okay, thank you very much, Honourable Martin Henry?

The Hon. Martin Henry (Minister for Health, and Social Care) –

I just like to rise on a point of information Mr Ronald Coleman, Honourable Councillor Coleman just mentioned, which is the improvement of quality of life. So, as a Government, when we are trying to improve people's quality of life, as we sometimes have to do it ourselves, I distinguish the two different areas, which is needs and wants and not necessarily, it is what our population wants, is what they need. And if you look at yourself, sometimes it's the same thing, I give you an example, what this population, as I see it now, wants from a hospital perspective, is speed dial appointments, that's the want what we need. What we need is to be able to support our current population with some habits etc, are identified in JSNA, to improve the quality of life. So we have to as a as a Council and look at needs and wants because sometimes what is what is wanted on the moment isn't necessarily what we need as an Island going forward in terms of policy.

The Speaker –

Okay, thank you. I am aware that we're sort of running out of time now, but Honourable Chief Minister?

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

So I'll make this one very quick, Mr Speaker, but just to say, all policies are taken with the hope that no one is left behind. But it is individual's responsibility as well, to ensure that they engage and become part of policies at times that is another case whereby the policies are there, but people don't come forward so I'm sure most Ministers can give examples of a policy that's introduced, but the uptake at times isn't great and then it is, this isn't available to me. So it's also about the education process of the policies being introduced.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, and I think that question has been exhausted as well now. The Honourable Karl Thrower is always telling me his turn always comes last, and it's come last again, but anyway, next question.

Question No.7 - The Honourable Karl Thrower to ask the Chief Minister.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Karl Thrower?

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Only 4 minutes left.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

So luckily, it's only one and a half lines. Will the Honourable Chief Minister tell this Council, what SHG are doing to progress the Islands Data Protection legislation in-line with its Vision?

The Speaker –

The Honourable Chief Minister?

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

I feel like I'm running against the clock here now. Okay, so the data protection action project stated key outputs and these include the development of the data protection policy that considers the integration of the General Data Protection Regulation principles, an action plan for the implementation of the policy and legislation to include templates, systems, processes, tools, procedures, to ensure compliance relevant to each stakeholder, and there's loads of presentations at the moment going out in the public and stakeholder consultation. I think, recently we will have all been treated to some input from visiting consultants who's working with our IT Members, and obviously they're now in the midst of doing cyber security policy development, and also doing the engagement and education to build awareness of the cyber security.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Karl Thrower?

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Simple question, do you think we'll be ready for when the cable goes live on the first of January?

The Speaker –

Right, simple question, simple answer.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Well, I think that just comes into what I just said at the end of making sure we get better quality of life or maybe leave no one behind. I'm not suggesting that we will be 100% ready, I think there will be at it, but would be over optimistic to suggest so. But this is why community engagement is so important. I went to some of the workshops that was presented by Gareth Drabble and team and then when you look at the numbers attending, it's not big. But then when you go to constituency meetings, you get asked, are we making us and young people ready? I think, for me, I would actually say the young people will probably be ready before some of us who don't attend those sessions and needed more than young people.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much for that, No further questions. So it seems like we got done on the hour, and I know the public perhaps we're timing us as well. Thank you very much. Well, Honourable Members.

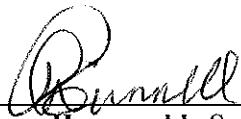
4. CLOSING REMARKS BY THE SPEAKER

The Speaker –

Thank you very much Honourable Members. That concludes the first of the monthly Ministers Question Time. I hope you both Ministers and Non-Ministers, were able to take full advantage of this method of bringing the public up to date, with important issues, and I hope that the public will provide feedback, which is so very important. So a lot of information came out today didn't it and I think the people asked the questions and also the people answering questions to, you know, full advantage of them. So let's hope it continues.

This is the first meeting, of course and who knows as we go on teething problems, maybe one or two teething problems today, but as we go on, we will fix all of that, and we will become professional as we go on not to say it was professional rather well.

I'd like to hear that from the public and they will. So thank you all very much. Thank you.



Honourable Speaker

30/6/23

Date

