



St Helena
Government

ST HELENA GOVERNMENT
PROCEEDINGS OF MINISTERS QUESTION TIME
FRIDAY, 18 AUGUST 2023
FIFTH SITTING

Laid on the Table 25th March 2024

ST. HELENA
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

THE SPEAKER

The Honourable Cyril Keith Gunnell

EX-OFFICIO MEMBER

The Honourable Attorney General, Mr David Ferguson Ballantyne

ELECTED MEMBERS

The Honourable Rosemary June Bargo
The Honourable Gillian Ann Brooks
The Honourable Mark Alan Brooks
The Honourable Ronald Arthur Coleman
The Honourable Jeffrey Robert Ellick
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

Legislative Council Office Assistant

Miss Shanice Phillips

PROCEEDINGS OF MINISTERS QUESTION TIME

Friday, 18th August, 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

Honourable Members, good morning to you, to everyone else present in the Council Chamber and, to all those listening to these proceedings broadcast live from our Parliament building nestled among the many offices at the Castle, Jamestown via SAMS Radio 1. I am pleased to say the listenership today includes Chloe Freeman, a Senior Clerk from the House of Commons in Westminster. She arrived last Saturday, seconded to St Helena, to the Legislative Council, as a Clerk Attachment. A special welcome to you Chloe; I trust you have settled in well, familiarising yourself with the way we do things. The end result of your visit we hope will be some recommendations as to how and where necessary improvements can be made. Your visit among us is all part of a Memorandum of Understanding. Apologies have been received from Councillor Bargo. It is possible her question however will be asked for a fellow Councillor. We focus today on the fifth meeting of Minister's Question Time (MQT). The topic for this meeting is 'Telecommunications'. A copy of the Order Paper was this morning published on the SHG Website. For the public, in accordance with Standing Orders, the Chief Minister was made aware beforehand of the topic chosen by Councillors. But the questions submitted by Councillors are made known an hour before the start of MQT. There are five questions for oral answers. They have been listed in alphabetical order but will be selected randomly for response. Up to an hour has been allocated for this. Hon Members, the duration of MQT, starting from the first question is one hour. The Clerk and time keeper for this meeting is Miss Shanice Phillips. Needless for me to say I know the rules of debate will be respected, but just a gentle reminder perhaps about the red lights. Don't draw my attention to any lights that unintentionally may be left switched on when someone is speaking, because that could mean someone else being interrupted, and an infringement of Order 15 of the Standing Orders. Miss Phillips, may we have the first question please?

The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex –
Mr Speaker, may I rise on a point of order?

The Speaker –

You may Honourable Member.

The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you. This pertains to suspension of Standing Orders in accordance with Order 19 and Order 21 of the Standing Orders of the Legislative Council.

The Speaker –

Is there a seconder? Councillor Midwinter.

The Honourable Robert Midwinter –

Mr Speaker, I'd like to second.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex you may proceed with your motion.

The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you Mr Speaker. I beg to move that Rule 5 and Rule 6 of Order 9 of Standing Orders be suspended for the duration of Minister's Question Time to be held today. This motion seeks to suspend Rule 6 of Order 9 of Standing Orders, so that the restriction to only one supplementary question per each substantive question will not apply. This should help to satisfy the public that Minister's Question Time plays an important part in increasing openness, transparency and accountability, which are all central principles of good governance. In order for the parameters for questions in the House, as set out in Order 8 to be applicable following suspension of Rule 6 of Order 9 it is necessary to suspend Rule 5 also. Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

The Speaker –

Thank you Honourable Member. Does anyone else wish to speak? No one. So I put the question that Rule 5 and Rule 6 of Standing Order 9 is suspended for the duration of this Minister's Question Time.

Question put and agreed to.

The Speaker –

So just for the listening public because Rule 5 and Rule 6 of Order 9 of Standing Orders have been suspended, it is possible for additional supplementary questions to be asked, unlike if the Order were not suspended. A Member putting a question will be limited to asking only one supplementary question, Clerk, the first question please.

3.

QUESTIONS

Question No. 1 - The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex to ask the Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development.

The Speaker –

Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development state what policy and strategy framework St Helena Government has in place pertaining to Telecommunications.

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development?

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

Thank you, Mr Speaker. And sorry, Mr Speaker, just had an issue with my mic here. But my Honourable friend lend me his so it should be okay now, Mr Speaker. So I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for her question. And the policy that is in place for Telecommunications is the Communications Policy, which informed the Ordinance that was passed through this House last year. The Strategy is the current Digital Strategy, which is up online on the Government website, it is the Digital Strategy 2018, or was 2018 when the strategy was passed by Executive Council, under the last Government. So those are the two policies. Sorry, those are the policy and the strategy that currently is pertaining to Telecommunications Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Honourable Minister say whether the Digital Strategy is still fit for purpose?

The Speaker -

Honourable Minister?

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

In all honesty, Mr Speaker, I think some elements of the digital strategy has been outdated. I think some elements is still fit for purpose. But I do think that we need to have a review or an updated Digital Strategy, especially given now that some of the achievements in that strategy has been met, one of them will, one big one would have been the landing of the Cable. And there's other areas in the strategy, which might have taken a slightly different direction in relation to the latest developments with the cable and infrastructure. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you Mr Speaker, will the Honourable Minister state when he hopes that this review will be able to be undertaken?

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Minister?

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

Thank you, Mr Speaker, it would be hard for me to just talk about this without speaking to my Portfolio Director and given the resources or the lack of resources that we have within the Portfolio, at this given time, it will be hard to say. There are a number of priorities my Portfolio is focused in on obviously, this is quite a big priority for us, as well, the Digital Strategy and seeing the benefits of the Digital Strategy. So I think we will start to look at this, but I can't give a confident date in when this review will actually take place. But we have started looking at it already. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Turning now to the Communication Policy, Can the Honourable Minister state whether this is now in full implementation?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister?

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

I would say no, it is not in full implementation as yet, the policy talks about regulatory framework with a regulator and those things hasn't come into force yet. The Ordinance, the Telecommunications Ordinance have been approved by this House. But the Ordinance has also not been enacted. And one of the reasons of that is that the regulations still need to be developed that sits with that Ordinance. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you Honourable Andrew Turner?

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Could the Honourable Minister state whether both of these documents are in the public domain?

The Speaker –

Thank you.

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

Mr Speaker, as I said, my answer to Dr Essex question, both of these documents are on the Government website. Well, I was told by the Chief Secretary only about 20 minutes ago that these were on the Government website, I haven't checked them myself, I have the digital strategy here, which the Chief Secretary printed off the Government website, so I'm not too sure. And I know the Government website is a bit laborious to navigate. But I can't say for confident, all I know is that I was told earlier that it is on the Government website, both those documents.

The Speaker –

Thanks very much, any further questions? No? Honourable Karl Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Honourable Minister please say whether he agrees with this statement out of the digital strategy, around 60% of households on the Island have access to internet and the intention of this strategy is to provide unlimited broadband at an affordable price for the whole community?

The Speaker –

Are you able to answer Honourable Member, Minister?

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

I think providing broadband speed to the whole community, unlimited broadband to the whole community, I think that could be challenged by the ISP, because obviously the ISP needs to set tariffs to meet different, how can I say, different households expenditure. And I think some of those tariffs will be the differentials will be in relation to capacity. So maybe it won't be unlimited. But the idea is to have fast speeds and much larger packages to all of the community under that Digital Strategy. But I think we as a government want to exceed that and provide speeds to the higher brackets to be unlimited, and then work its way down. But I can't say for sure how that actually is going to pan out yet. Because that we'll come in with lot three, that hasn't actually taken place yet. But our, I should say our initial sort of, what we want to achieve is unlimited broadband for the majority of the island. But we do understand that the ones who are at the very bottom, the ones who cannot afford, let's say a package, about 50 quid or more might be limited to not having unlimited, if that makes sense.

The Speaker –

Does make sense, Honourable Member. Thank you very much. Honourable Karl Thrower?

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you. Can I ask if the Minister agrees with this statement out of the digital strategy? Whereas SHG are exploring all options in terms of improved connectivity, at this stage the focus is on securing the marine cable, while not discounting low orbiting satellite solutions.

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister?

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

Yes.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Chief Minister did you want to speak?

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker sorry yes, I just wanted to say that although what Minister Brooks has said is correct regarding the unlimited, but it is because obviously as we progress through this, but it is the intention in the longer term to certainly move towards the direction of unlimited for all because that's what we were hoping to achieve. But it is something that will be done in a phased approach. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Karl Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Then I would like to in response that I would like to read a part of the release that was issued during the press conference that was recently held.

The Speaker –

This is a point of information now is it?

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

It can be yes.

The Speaker –

No, is it or not?

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Yes let me talk about as a point of information.

The Speaker –

Okay.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

It is about maximizing the investment. That's the important thing. We need to exploit that investment in a way which takes into account the public interest. So that whatever there is, is able to benefit the whole of the community of St Helena, it's about better internet, it's not about who's providing it. We made it clear as part of the Digital Strategy and in the earlier discussions, that St Helena wants a better internet. And in the longer term, it doesn't matter who's providing it, provided what we are getting as a service is better than what we currently have. And it's about making sure that everybody is able to benefit from the new technology and not just some, the cable is able to do that. It will offer everybody that advantage, if you like that more enhanced experience. On the other hand, Starlink is only available to those who can afford it. And I think that we need to ensure that what we have is a solution that will fit the whole of St Helena, and not just a few. So I would say that that is not being met, because currently not everybody can afford a gold package. And in the future, not everybody will be able to afford to pay for database tariffs.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Are you wanting to respond? Honourable Minister?

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

I want to. I just want to make it clear here that the Digital Strategy was talking about what our aspirations is, once the cable arrives on St Helena, I think what my Honourable friend has just alluded to, is what the current state of play is. So we, as a Government, and I have said this a number of times in public forums is that we are inspiring to build our own network, a public owned network, so that the potential from that network or the benefits from that network can be passed on to the community, and we as a Government or public body will be in control of that network. That is the overall intentions. What my Honourable friend just read out is what we have currently and currently we don't have as a Government, we don't have control over the network.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Next question, please.

Question No. 2 - The Honourable Andrew Turner to ask the Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Andrew Turner?

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you Mr Speaker. Can the Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development explain to this Council why the new Ordinance titled, The Communications Ordinance 2022, that was approved in this House on the 15th of June 2022 has not been enacted as of yet.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development?

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

Thank you, Mr Speaker. The new Ordinance that was approved in 2022, was anticipated to come into effect when as I just said, SHG takes ownership of the network. Currently SHG does not have a network. And so therefore, I don't feel we can actually bring this Ordinance in because we will be bringing it in under a current license with a service provider. And this Ordinance obviously allows for a different setup of a license. And for us to bring this in. I think it has to be a point with that the current license comes to an end. And then a new license is then designed under the new Ordinance. So that was the reason why we haven't brought it in yet. Because we're not at that place where the current license has come to an end.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Andrew Turner?

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you Mr Speaker, representing this Ordinance back at that meeting. Your words were that it was intended that the regulations will be completed prior to the islands switch to high speed fibre optic internet and ideally prior to 31st December 2022. Now in the terms of being completed prior to the switch to high speed fibre on the 27th of July, Government issued a press release, stating the Government is committed to providing the wider public with access to the cable by January 24. And with a view to providing immediate benefits whilst work on the new network continues SHG has entered into negotiations with Sure South Atlantic limited. This will seek to deliver the much faster speeds and expanded data allowances to consumers at reduced cost by connecting to the now live Equiano cable as soon as possible. So what's changed?

The Speaker –

Thank you so what's changed? So there is a question. Thank you very much, Honourable Minister.

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

Nothing has changed. When I initially made that statement after we enacted or sorry not enacted, we approved the ordinance. That statement was made on the intention that we will be building our own

network and then that ordinance will actually see, will come into force and see the benefits of that network. We, because everybody knows that the network will not be built by the end of this year, so 31st December. We have now, well we will be now negotiating and are negotiating with Sure to use the current networks that are copper network. So I can't say that those two, those two relates to one another because we have taken a different approach in relation to the network that I was actually talking about at that time. Not what I was talking about at a time would have been a full fibre network around the island, the network, what we are going to be plugging into the cable is a copper network. So you're not going to see the full benefits of that. And plus that network that we're plugging into the cable does not belong to SHG it belongs to Sure, and it's under a license with Sure. And that is the reason. So there's a different, there's a difference in approach from when I made that statement back in 2022, to we are currently is now. At that time, we didn't had the direction wasn't to make use of the copper network, the direction at that time was to build a complete new network.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Andrew Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, could the Honourable Minister state why then it's considered no longer necessary to have all the regulatory performances such as the independent telecommunications regulator as established under that new ordinance if we're continuing on with the current provider who, frankly, has been exploiting the people of this Island for far too long.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Minister.

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

As I said, Sorry can my honourable friend, repeat that question?

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

I can come in for you.

The Speaker –

Honourable Chief Minister?

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I think we need to be careful how we are making statements here that are very blunt. So I'd be very careful with that because we are in a negotiations process with the current utility provider, as in telecoms. But we haven't said that we're not moving along with the regulator, the regulator that is still part of the Telecoms Policy. So we haven't said that we're not going to continue to work with putting in place a regulator. So that's, that's not the case at all.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Andrew Turner?

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you. Perhaps the Honourable Minister could then explain how they intend to enforce regulations without the law to back it up.

The Speaker –

Okay, it is relevant, thank you very much. Honourable Attorney General wants to have a say, or I see a couple of lights going on. I think I saw yours first Attorney General.

The Hon. David Ballantyne (Attorney General) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Really a point of information.

The Speaker –

Okay.

The Hon. David Ballantyne (Attorney General) –

Members will be aware that relatively recently, we engaged ISP consultants, those ISP consultants are reviewing the forward direction for telecoms and providing a lead for us on the technical and policy aspects, which have a bearing on the suitability or otherwise, of the legislation that was passed. There are questions about that legislation, because it can only be fully implemented, if appropriate regulations are made and brought forward. And I think as part of the exercise that they're engaged in, will be whether in current circumstances, and going forward with the realization of the cable, and its utility, whether that ordinance is still seen as appropriate. However, my understanding and I lead the negotiations on behalf of the Government, which are currently ongoing, and therefore I don't wish to elaborate for obvious reasons, we are approaching these in an atmosphere of mutual respect. And it's important that that atmosphere be maintained, in my opinion, to facilitate outcomes that are satisfactory, not just for the Government, but for St Helena as a whole. And in that regard, we're dealing with perhaps a situation that wasn't envisaged because the realisation of the Island network has somewhere to go and therefore, in order to take advantage immediately of the cable benefits, the strategy has been to endeavour to benefit the Island by engaging with the existing provider. Under existing arrangements, I should say just for point of information as well, that the new ordinance contains a transitional provision at the back end of it, which preserves any existing license. And in order to ensure continuity of service for the Island, the priority must be to do exactly that, given the circumstances relating to the new network, so that it's hoped that an arrangement may be reached, which will bring some certainty to this equation for the provision of future services. And also the benefits or at least some of them. Albeit, there are limitations because of the nature of the existing network, which would be overcome with new technology, namely fibre. So that this is a work in progress, if I may put it like that, in which we are heavily involved acting on expert advice that we now benefit from no disrespect to whatever may or may not have occurred in the past. That advice is calculated to be for the benefit of the Island and future telecoms policies. I don't really wish to enlarge on that. But I thank you for the opportunity to share that perspective.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Attorney General, Honourable Karl Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you very much. So may I ask the Honourable Minister, who is the, let me just get this right, an unofficial Member of Executive Council appointed by the Governor to be on the Wireless Telegraphy Advisory Committee?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development) –
Thank you, sorry, in relation to?

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

In relation to, Section 6 (1) sets up a Wireless Telegraphy Advisory Committee, of which the membership consists of a manager, the manager of the St Helena branch of Cable and Wireless PLC, a duly licensed radio operator appointed by the Governor, and an official member of the Executive Council appointed by the Governor. And the reason for asking is very simple in exercising his or her powers under these regulations, the Attorney General must consult with the Wireless Telegraphy Advisory Committee, but is not bound to act in accordance with the advice of the Committee.

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

So thank you, Honourable friend and I think what I was getting to was what you was reading out and you're reading from the Telecommunications 1989. Is that correct? Yes, so in that Telecommunications 1989, you're asking me why that Committee wasn't set up. Is that your question?

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

No, I'm asking it must be set up because you

The Speaker –

Let's have a little bit of proper stuff going on here.

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

I was struggling to follow what question came out of that.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you very much simply this.

The Speaker –

Yeah.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Which members?

The Speaker –

Hold on Honourable Karl Thrower, please be seated Honourable Minister. Honourable Karl Thrower you now have the floor.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Which Member of Executive Council was appointed by the Governor on to the Wireless Telegraphy Advisory Committee?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development) –
Under this Ministerial Government I'm not aware that any Minister was appointed by the Governor.

The Speaker –
Thank you very much. Honourable Karl Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –
So do we have a Wireless Telegraphy Advisory Committee?

The Speaker –
Thank you very much, Honourable Minister? Or anyone? Are we still talking about why was the Ordinance of 2022 not approved well not enacted? Are we still?

The Hon. Karl Thrower –
The next question will definitely still.

The Speaker –
I hope so because we don't want to be going off on tangents and so on. Does anyone have a question for an answer for the last question? Honourable Chief Minister?

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –
I don't have an answer to be quite honest with you. But we are talking about 1989. And we've not made any changes at this particular time. We have a new form of Government. And I think we've recognized very early on that there's a lot of changes that need to be made to reflect the new form of Government and we are working our way through this. I think the Attorney General has been very open with all of the Elected Members but also to the wider public with regard to the capacity at the Chambers, but also we are trying to put forward what is the priorities, obviously this will be in its essence, the whole project is a priority. But we have, we are experiencing delays. So the wireless, what you're talking about now that actual part of that Ordinance in 1989, will be superseded by the 2022. That is always the intention. However, we can't do it whilst we're running under an exclusive license with the current provider.

The Speaker –
Thank you very much, for that clarification. Honourable Andrew Turner?

The Hon. Andrew Turner –
Thank you, Mr Speaker. My question is quite simple. If the public is being expected to follow this Ordinance, why isn't the Government?

The Speaker –
Thank you very much. An answer? Honourable Chief Minister?

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –
So we I think, I will ask the Attorney General to assist me with this at this particular time, but the public are being asked, we're not breaking anything. We haven't changed anything.

The Speaker –

Please, Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Can you please tell me which part we are not implementing the Ordinance but what changes are being made under this that makes you believe we are not implementing the Ordinance?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Andrew Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I refer to Section 6, there is to be a Wireless Telegraphy Advisory Committee, whose members are the manager of the St Helena branch of Cable and Wireless PLC, a duly licensed radio operator appointed by the Governor, and an official member of the Executive Council appointed by the Governor. You are expecting members of the public to follow the technical provisions of this Ordinance. Why isn't the Government?

The Speaker –

Why isn't the government? That's the question.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

So I'm asking again, what has changed to want this? There's such a Committee to meet? Because that hasn't been made clear to me. What is it that you see is being done that requires this type of this group to meet?

The Speaker –

I see the question seem to be reversed where the Ministers are asking the Councillors questions. But I do see where you are coming from. I think we need to move on. Wrap it up. We are moving into dangerous areas here. Put out your light Councillor Turner I hope you have an explanation or whatever it is you want to tell us. Please? Honourable Karl Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. My question is relatively simple, without the Wireless Telegraphy Advisory Committee, and since we're not going to have a communications regular, whose job is it to protect the customers, the people of this Island and the businesses?

The Speaker –

Okay, thank you very much. I don't see any red lights. Honourable Minister Brooks?

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

I don't know. So I haven't read that ordinance in the 1989 Ordinance in that section to find out exactly what was the intentions of that ordinance, you asking who would be in place to protect the public and the businesses. I guess that would be Council their selves to look out for the welfare of our community. So without actually reading the ordinance and seeing what the intention was or actually talking to whoever drafted that ordinance back in 1989, I can't give you a confident answer. But I would say there is might be a role for all of Elected Members to play going forward. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Karl Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you. What I find confusing, Honourable Minister is this. This Ordinance was passed with a certificate of urgency from the Governor. At the time of presenting that this Ordinance to this House, you saw it as such a priority to establish a Regulations Communications Regulator sorry, that the Chief Minister even stated in support of the bill, I see this bill as being crucial in assisting us to get to the most out of St Helena's digital transformation, particularly as we move forward with the next stage of implementing our Digital Strategy. We have a press release saying you are moving forward with implementing the next stage of our digital strategy. When did the customer become less important than the ISP?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Yeah.

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

Well in my opinion, the customer is not more important than ISP. They both is important to deliver this energy strategy as each other. It's important that our people see the benefits of it. And it's important that we have an ISP in place that is able to offer a fair and reputable, reliable service. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Okay. Thank you very much. Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. This is a fairly simple question. And coming back to the Telecommunications Ordinance 2022. That was passed unanimously by the House last year, as all I've heard here is failings and delays, including the Attorney General made reference to the fact that there may need to be further work to that particular ordinance. I just wish to ask who is responsible for these failings?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, who is responsible for failings? Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. So I would say that we've taken a decision, we all wanted to own our own network here on St Helena, and that is still the direction of travel. Obviously, delays happen, we have all frustrated with it, I'd say and when I say all, I mean St Helena Government in a collective sense, that is the Public Service and Ministers. And I'd like to think the entire public are frustrated, it was not something that we had hoped would have happened. Based on the information placed in front of us, we wanted to own our own network, it would give St Helena Government best control over a service that is so vital in taking St Helena forward in respect of cheaper, faster connectivity to the rest of the world. And that is what we feel is important for St Helena. As is the case, we have now taken that policy decision. And it's now left to the Public Service, if I can put it like that to take this forward along with the contractor that we have chosen that as we've put out in the public domain has not worked as we would have hoped, there is still contractual discussions going on with the successful contractor. And hence, we are now having to do a contingency plan if I can put it that way in negotiating with our currency provider, which is Sure South Atlantic, which

we've already put out into the public domain in which the Attorney General has made reference to at this present time. And that is because to echo what Minister Brooks has said, we still want the best for St Helena in its entirety. So we can't, we know now that our own network isn't going to be ready by the 1st of January 2024. So we're trying to put in place a solution that allows our people of St Helena to connect to the cable via copper, before so we don't lose the deadline of the 1st of January 2024. So we're doing everything within our power to make sure that we have an enhanced system in place before the end of this year. So it's about now that we are implementing, it's at the implementation stage that the delays are happening. Not at the policy stage.

The Speaker –

Okay, thank you very much. Okay, I'm gonna try to keep some order here because there's lights all around the table. Attorney General, I'll allow you to follow up on that.

The Hon. David Ballantyne (Attorney General) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I realise in my time here that everything doesn't always go to plan. And because of that, the strategic advantage that St Helena has with telecoms is undoubtedly the branch cable to the Equiano Cable. It's an extremely important national asset and should be exploited, if that's the right word. For the benefit of the public, the aim that we are pursuing is an alternative one because of circumstances out with the Government's control. Although the Government, in my opinion, if I may offer one acted in good faith on behalf of the public interest in heading in that direction because of the difficulties that have been encountered, it is taking longer. But respectfully that's an issue which I don't wish to develop because, as the Chief Minister has said, discussions are taking place with the contractual partner. And we shouldn't prejudice that. On the other hand, there is an imperative to realise the benefit of, of the cable as early as possible, so that the public benefit, it won't be the full benefit when an on Island fibre network is present. But there are other aspects of the utilisation of the cable that I really not at liberty to go into, that may also prove to be of benefit to the Island over and above connecting to the on Island network. I won't elaborate on that. But the clear intention, from both of the legal and policy point of view that I am pursuing on behalf of Government's request, is to realise the maximum benefit that we can, from what was an extremely important and strategic move to get funding for that cable. And it means that the Government's in a position to grant access to the cable, the cable is live, the Government is officially in a position to license use of that cable on commercial terms. And the Government can choose with whom to partner in future. What we are engaging in at the minute is an arrangement to ensure continuity. But there'll be a further phase beyond that. And I would just finish on this note Mr Speaker in the interest of time, that it's perhaps because of the inadequate regulatory framework in the 89 ordinance that the new law was passed. It's problematic, bringing that in now without having the detail and the circumstances to get the benefit of it. So that the law is one thing, but if the networks not available, and the regulatory system that the country needs is not there either the law on its own will not achieve the objective. So that I think if I may say so, I appreciate the frustration. I would feel similarly, if I were in your position. If I may say so. However, the effort is going into achieving the best outcome that we can from that key asset and utilising the Government's leverage that that gives in relation to service providers. That's really all I wanted to say, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much for that Attorney General. Have we about finish with this question now? Because probably there's about 20 minutes left to carry it, No Minister Brook's light has been on for a while now. Are you? Are you wishing to ask us a question? Because your light has been on for a while?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development) –
No. So I'm not wishing to ask a question. I'm wishing to rise in the point of information, if you will.

The Speaker –
Okay, you can do that.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development) –
Thank you, Mr Speaker. So Mr Speaker, this information has already been put in the public domain. But I realised that it in the formal press release, but I realized that public don't always read press releases. So I will repeat it here in this Honourable House and for the public to listen, we know how important this cable is to the future of the Island, led by the Chief Secretary. Various program groups are working to deliver the remaining streams under this high priority project. Myself and my fellow Ministers have provided very clear directions to the community. Now, the Chief Minister alluded to that before about building our own network and that is still our intentions. And we have communicated that to the community and the reasons why. SHG Officials as to what needs to be the result of this work, needs to sorry, I was just distracted that time. Mr Speaker, sorry, significant resources have been committed by Ministers. That's what we have done under this project, including specialists support from industry experts. So we are getting in and I think as the Attorney General alluded to, we do have experts inside FCDO, and also consultants that actually is expertise within telecommunications. So what I'm trying to get here is that our intention hasn't changed. We still want to see the benefits of this cable through building our own network. But we're at the stage at the moment where that network is not built. And what we're trying to do is fill that gap in between by making by having benefits passed on to the public. And that is the negotiations that is currently happening with Sure. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –
Thank you very much. This question has been exhausted. I think we want to move on. We've got about 20 minutes left for the rest of the questions. Next question, please.

Question No. 3 - The Honourable Ronald Coleman to ask the Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development.

The Speaker –
The Honourable Ronald Coleman?

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –
Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development tell this Council, what were the benefits to St Helena and its people from the EU funding for the contract between SHG and Google for the delivery of the submarine cable, and what benefits are still to be delivered?

The Speaker –
Thank you very much Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development.

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

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Obviously, I think we've been open to the community and talked a number of times about the benefits in detail. But I think under the agreement of the EU funding, the minimum benefits that the Island needed to seek was 10 megabytes per second download and two megabytes per second upload and having everybody who wants access to the cable being able to get access to the cable, we as a Government has or will exceed that minimum requirement. We are not looking to get 10 megabytes per second to a household, we are looking to get in a region of 100 megabytes to the household under the new network, which is a full fibre network. So those are the minimum requirements. And yes, they are still to be delivered. But I think what we will deliver eventually, under the new network will far exceed what we had as a minimum requirement. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Next question, please.

Question No 4 - The Honourable Robert Midwinter to ask the Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Robert Midwinter?

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you Mr Speaker Mr Speaker, following the press release issued on the 27th of July 2023 regarding use of unlicensed telecommunications equipment, can the Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development, say whether or not the St Helena Government will be banning the use of all devices that breach current telecommunications licensing arrangements, and if a full assessment of the impact of such action has been made?

The Speaker –

Okay, thank you very much, Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development.

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

So, yes, I think what we initiate is going to happen very soon, is regulations will be developed. And that should exclude devices, that doesn't sort of transmit to the internet, or in other words, doesn't impede on the exclusive Sure license. So anything else that transmit that doesn't impede on the license should be exempt. So I know that there has been a lot of talk in the public, and there's been talks about baby monitors, and so on but that should be all exempt, because the idea of this was not to interfere with the exclusive license of Sure. I think the AG, if at all, he might be able to shed a bit more light as this is very much in his realms with the regulations. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Questions? Anybody? Honourable Attorney General.

The Hon. David Ballantyne (Attorney General) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Taking up more time than I would prefer and perhaps everyone would, but for information, I'm instructed to bring forward regulations to specifically deal with the issue of the use of Starlink and therefore, it will have to distinguish between that type of use and any other appropriate uses.

As the Minister has said, the prime issue as the press release indicated, is the exclusivity of the current license and I'm well aware that there are different views about this, it wouldn't be appropriate, in my opinion at this stage in the light of potential challenges, to enter into a discussion about the nature of the advice that's been tendered to the Government, that advice in Executive Council is confidential. It's legally privileged. And if it were to be inappropriately disclosed, may render disadvantage. The intention of the regulations would not to be heavy handed about it. There is as Members will know, a criminal offense in the existing regulations. The alternative of a civil process is considered, as I understand it by the Government to be preferable, rather than engage in confrontational challenges. The precise content of the regulations has yet to be developed and the instructing officer has been identified within the Minister's Portfolio. And we will proceed to act in our role in drafting the regulations that were instructed. I would say that there is a grace period which the Government have indicated and therefore, this should be done in a sensitive and sensible way. So as to try to mitigate any adverse effects and that grace period is one example. Thank you Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, just to draw attention to what I was trying to get from this question. The press release actually states such as Starlink, and clearly, constituents are concerned that the wording “such as” means there could be other equipment. So for example, TV, satellite TV receivers, Skype, and other items of telecommunications that do effectively compete with Sure. So can I get some sort of clarity? When SHG is saying “such as”, do they also mean these other forms of telecommunications equipment?

The Speaker –

Thanks very much. Honourable Minister Brooks can you answer that for us?

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

I think it's slightly too early to give that confirmation to my Honourable friend at this time, as I said, this is all happening very fast. The regulations like Attorney General said is still being developed and we still need to talk through them. And what that actually means. Our intention is to obviously not disclude anything that doesn't need to be excluded under the exclusive license. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Okay, thank you very much. Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, noting that the police service is already overstretched, as is evidenced by them having to contract out patrol services, can the Minister say how these arrangements are going to be policed?

The Speaker –

Okay, thank you very much. Honourable Minister.

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

Again, just as I alluded to the question previously, no, I cannot tell that. And this is a cross cutting sort of portfolio. So I would have to have the Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs also involved when it comes to the police and emergency services. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Understood. Thank you very much. Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, can the Honourable Minister say whether or not the press release took account of the provisions contained within the legal notice issued by the St Helena Government on the 23rd of January 2012, namely the Exemption Notice pertaining to the Wireless Telegraphy Regulations number 7, and number 54.

The Speaker –

Okay, thank you. Honourable Minister.

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

Sorry, can I ask my Honourable friend to repeat the question, please? I didn't get the first part of it.

The Speaker –

Just the right yeah. Well, it is the question that you're having to have the first part of it, is some kind of a clarification I think. The question please.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Mr Speaker, I'm more than happy to clarify the question because what Wireless Telegraphy Regulation?

The Speaker –

Excuse me for just a moment, could you just please be seated Honourable Minister. Go ahead.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

So those Wireless Telegraphy Regulations that were brought into force on the 23rd of January 2012, make provisions for exemptions of certain types of radio and telecommunications terminal equipment. So I'm asking if this legal notice was taken into account of when that press release was issued.

The Speaker –

Okay, thank you very much, is that helpful?

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

Thank you, yes.

The Speaker –

I have to go by what light comes up rather than pointing to people, Honourable Minister.

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

Yes, that was taken into account. But I'm sure the Attorney General could also help with giving assurance to my Honourable friend.

The Speaker –

All right, thank you very much. I'm looking for lights if they are any, Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. That being the case, is the Honourable Minister aware that Starlink equipment is compliant with the EC directive quoted in the legal notice?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister, or was there some point where it's on clarification is once again needed? Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) -

I'm just getting concerned here right now that we are being asked to give legal opinions on things. And I don't think it is fair on any Minister to have to do that. We've taken legally privileged advice, and we're sticking to that. I think now to be asking us for legal opinions as Ministers, it's just not very fair at all. To be quite honest with you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Well we shouldn't be asking for opinions at all that is against the regulations. Honourable Karl Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you Mr Speaker. So can I just summarise this?

The Speaker –

Well, tell me do you?

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Can I ask if the Honourable Ministers would agree with this summary, the fibre optic cable failed to deliver on time due to failures of the Government and the civil service. We then sold out the rights of the people by not establishing a communications regulator, we are now changing regulations to punish anybody who spent significant amounts of money to basically fill in the gap that they've got because of the failures of this Government. And we're even going to change regulations to ensure that they do that just to support an ISP that it currently doesn't even have a contract with after the 1st of January 24, March, is that correct? Would you agree with the summary?

The Speaker –

Okay, so I think I may have to ask the Attorney General, for some advice here. We seem to be going way past the question that was asked. I don't like to hear words like punishing people come in. I don't know where that's listed anywhere. But be very careful what is being said, don't forget the Code of Conduct, as I reminded people of last week. But Attorney General, is there some advice you can give at this stage to this and then we will have to maybe call it a day? Sorry Councillor Brooks, you may not get your question asked. But that's the way it has gone today. But what about, what we're up to see how much time is left. Honourable Attorney General.

The Hon. David Ballantyne (Attorney General) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I'm not willing to offer any legal opinion in this forum. My task as Attorney General is twofold to be responsible for prosecutions, criminal prosecutions. So the earlier comment about policing is really a civil matter, not a criminal matter. I think that was the question, its intention. However, the proposition that has just been put forward is really, in my view, an argument and that the Government is being asked to agree to rather than a particular question. It though it is contingent on legal advice and legal opinion. And as I indicated earlier, it would be inappropriate in this forum, given the strength of feeling here and elsewhere, about the utilisation of certain equipment. So from that point of view, I think it's perhaps we are at a delicate point for the future provision of services here. And I think, if I may be so bold, it would be to say, can we just hold our hand for the moment, until we see whether we can realise the objectives that we're pursuing? They're more important than any legal issues, in my opinion, for the benefit of the country. And that of course, is my opinion, and therefore, I should probably desist. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Attorney General. I think your light has been on for a while, isn't it? Minister Brooks?

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

The Speaker –
Please.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development) –
No, I'm still waiting.

The Speaker –
So you shouldn't put your light on waiting until somebody else finishes because that is against the rules. But are you now wanting to please look at Rules 15 and you'll see where I'm coming from. Are you wanting to ask a question, Minister Brooks?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development) –
I don't want to ask a question sir, I was just going to respond to my Honourable friend's question.

The Speaker –
All right. Please respond.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development) –
The answer is no, I don't agree with that statement.

The Speaker –
All right. Thank you very much. Honourable Andrew Turner. Same question?

The Hon. Andrew Turner –
Yes. Just quite simple point, it's now been revealed that there's going to be new regulations to cover this area. So can the Minister say when it's expected that these regulations will be brought forward?

The Speaker –

Okay. Thank you very much Honourable Minister Brooks.

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

I would like them as soon as possible, Mr Speaker, but that all depends on the resources available to us. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Ronald Coleman.

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the new regulations remove or cease monopolies on telecommunications and give the St Helena people the rights and freedom to choose their telecommunications?

The Speaker –

I'm not certain whether you're asking for an opinion, but I'll allow the Chief Minister to answer.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I think all will go back to there is the Ordinance that we approved in 2020 remove that the need for monopolies anyhow.

The Speaker –

Okay, thank you very much. Do we have chance to get to your last question in how many? Four minutes left? Next question, then please.

Question No. 5 - The Honourable Gillian Brooks to ask the Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development.

The Speaker –

Honourable Gillian Brooks?

The Hon. Gillian Brooks –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development tell this Council what has been the cause of delays to the fibre to home project?

The Speaker –

Okay, thank you very much. Honourable Minister. The question is to the Minister, so the question is to...

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) -

Yes, it is to the Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development. But as was pointed out in the press briefing by the Chief Secretary, there are four groups that's working with it and I am one on one of those groups. So I'd like to be able to provide a comment, a response sorry. So work to deliver the Island network began the moment the contracts were signed last year. The last few months have been spent developing Maestro's proposals, logistics and work plans. Finalising the detailed design of the network has taken longer than expected, meaning there's been a delay in physical construction work

starting against the initial forecast. It's been important that we get this correct though as this is going to be the Island's network that's come through the whole session today. And by SHG for generations to come. We want to build in as much coverage as possible, including wireless coverage and make it future proofed against potential demand. The detailed design has been quality assured by experts. This has been done by both SHGs external telecoms advisors, and an extra step by staff in the UK Government's DCMS, which again Minister Brooks mentioned earlier about the support we're getting through FCDO. This extra assurance has led to it taking longer than expected. In the meantime, the Government has committed to providing the wider public with access to the cable by January 24. This was anticipated to be the point at which the new publicly owned Island wide network would be completed and would be the beginning of a new operator license term. Due to delays in finalising designs for the new network, it is now accepted that it will not be completed by January 24. With a view to providing immediate benefits to the community while to work on the new network continues, Government has entered into negotiations with Sure South Atlantic, which has been made public. These will seek to deliver much faster speeds and expanded data allowances to consumers at a reduced cost by connecting to the now live Equiano cable as soon as possible. As Sure's current operator license period expires in December 23, an extension of this is being discussed. Discussions have already begun and all parties hope to be able to share news on the outcome of these in the coming weeks. And as I alluded to earlier, from the current discussions that we're having, we remain confident that an enhanced experience will be in place before year end. Thank you Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much Honourable Chief Minister, Honourable Gillian Brooks.

The Hon. Gillian Brooks –

Thank you Mr Speaker. Can I just ask the Minister, Mr Speaker, are there any further delays anticipated? And also what is the new timeline for delivery?

The Speaker –

Okay, Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

I think it's again, like we've been saying throughout we are in negotiations with Sure and so that those are complete, I think it would be very difficult for me to give timelines here. But the fact that we are saying there's an update coming, and we are hoping that there will be enhanced access to the cable using our current provider by the end of the year, I would say that we should have another update coming to you soon. Unfortunately, Honourable Brooks, I wouldn't be able to give you a date at this time because the negotiations are live.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you Mr Speaker, Mr Speaker can the Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development, say if his Portfolio has undertaken an assessment of the financial impact that these delays are having on this Island? In particular SHG's budgets? And can he say how much that delay is costing the public purse each year?

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development.

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

Thank you, Mr Speaker and I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for his question. Yes, because these delays are ongoing, we can't quantify it yet. But we are making note of how much this is sort of adding to the overall budget, when I say that there is different streams of funding for this project and one of them is from EDIP. All I'd like to say is that we have allocated a certain amount, and we are yet to get an update on whether that amount will be exceeded or not. But as far as I am aware, or has been updated, this will still fall in the original budget that was allocated for this project in the beginning. And I just like to if I don't mind, go back to my Honourable Gilly's question, which I think was in relation to the new network and not the current network, when you ask about timeframes. And if there's going to be any more delays, I can't tell you that if there's going to be any more delays, obviously, I cannot see into the future. And again, we know that the timeframe that was initially given will be exceeded, because the network hasn't even been started to be built yet. So it's no way it's going to be finished by the end of the year. But we are looking to finalise that project or the delivery of that project with timeframes and come back to the public as soon as we can possibly do so. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much for that. Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I fully appreciate that the Honourable Minister can't give a direct indication of how much because it's a rolling figure at the moment. But these delays are clearly costing the public purse. Can he say? Are we talking 10s of 1000s, hundreds of 1000s or millions now?

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister Brooks?

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

Well, I can actually, for confidence, say that yes a delay like this would cost some, I can't put a quantity to it. At the moment, we are not spending any money. We have allocated some money for materials but we're not spending it on labour actually building a network because no network is being built. So the bills are not racking up as fast as my one might think. But there is going to be a knock on effect from the delays of this project so far. But as I said, I don't foresee it being a huge amount. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. We're out of time but I will allow this question to be finished. Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I'm not talking about the cost of the project itself. I'm talking about the loss of savings to SHG's budgets. So for example, the education budget, and how much that is costing in opportunity lost.

The Speaker –

You're just making it a point of information there. Are you wanting to respond to that?

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

Yes, I can. Because currently, we're not costing anything. This was never initiated to come in until, if you're thinking about the benefits that we will say, until the actual cable goes live. So we weren't initiated, we weren't anticipated to make any savings in this financial year, our savings will come next financial year, when so called the network would have been live. And we would have been able to reap the benefits of that with the rest of the community. But we can't do that at this point. There's no benefits to reap until we have that cable that network built. On the other hand, as I go about and I don't want to harp on about this, Mr Speaker, but on the other hand, we're looking to see some benefits by negotiating with Sure to be able to use the cable to the advantage of Government and the community. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much.

4. CLOSING REMARKS BY THE SPEAKER

The Speaker –

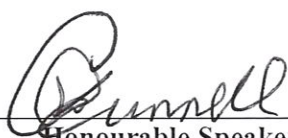
Okay so Honourable Members that then concludes the Minister's Question Time for August. I note, it was necessary to once again suspend Standing Orders. At some point Honourable Members you will need to decide how they want to amend the Standing Orders. I propose that we can't go on every time we have Minister's Question Time to ask us to suspend Standing Orders, there needs to be amendments made for all things to be able to. So I have proposed that I assume that you will be working on this soon. And from my own observation, and from what I hear Members talking about, it does appear to me that there needs to be considerable amendments to the Standing Orders. My Clerk of Council is making notes of what she hears and so at that time, there will be a list of things already that is probably wanting to be amended. But, you know, we need to get these things sorted out. As far as the meeting today, though, while a lot of information went out to the public, it seemed to have been some frustrations around the House. But I guess this is what people are asking for when we were looking for Minister's Question Time. I do think that a lot of you did very well. Honourable Chief Minister, you want to say something?

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

I didn't want to disrupt the light on Speaker. But I do think as part of the format for this, I think we need to add also declarations of interest. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Of course, the Code of Conduct normally takes care of all of that. All of you, as far as I know, have already declared your interest. But if there are any new interest, those should be registered with the Clerk of Council, so that everybody knows what every interests have been declared. But I do know where you're coming from Chief Minister, thank you for that. So thank you listening public, we hope you found the debate on telecommunications both interesting and informative, certainly informative. And we look forward to your feedback. I think we can look forward to quite a lot of feedback from this Meeting today. And it will be all very useful. Of course, thank you very much and thanks to SAMS for broadcasting these proceedings. I wish you all a pleasant day, Thank you.


Honourable Speaker

25/3/24
Date