



St Helena  
Government

ST HELENA GOVERNMENT  
PROCEEDINGS OF MINISTERS QUESTION TIME  
TUESDAY, 30 JANUARY 2024  
NINTH SITTING

*Laid upon the Table 13th February 2025*



**ST. HELENA**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

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**THE SPEAKER**

The Honourable Cyril Keith Gunnell

**ELECTED MEMBERS**

The Honourable Rosemary 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

**ABSENT**

**EX-OFFICIO MEMBER**

The Honourable Attorney General, Mr David Ferguson Ballantyne

Legislative Council Office Assistant

Miss Shanice Philips

## **PROCEEDINGS OF MINISTERS QUESTION TIME**

Tuesday, 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2024

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**

The Speaker –

Honourable members, good morning. Good morning to you all, to all attending this Minister's Question Time. I was going to say good morning to those in the gallery, but no one is here this morning. Good morning also to all those listening to these proceedings, or who will be listening to these proceedings when they are broadcast by SAMS Radio One. Due to a technical fault this morning, we're not able to broadcast live, but we have sent out a message to say what is happening. So this is the First Minister's Question Time for 2024, the focus today is 'Creating an Enabling Environment for Economic Development'. This is chosen by Councillors for this, the ninth Ministers Question Time in accordance with Standing Orders, the Chief Minister was made aware of the topic ahead of this meeting, and an hour before Ministers Question Time commencing, the questions was submitted by Councillors or two Councillors, or forwarded to Ministers. Got that a little bit wrong, but you know what I mean. According to established practice, the Order Paper will be published on the SHG website this morning. Also, there are several questions on the Order Paper and they have been listed in alphabetical order, but to be selected randomly for response. Up to one hour has been allocated for questions to be answered. All of the questions are directed to Minister Brooks for the Treasury and Economic Development portfolio. Our members and also listeners to the formal meeting of Legislative Council held 30th, November 2023 will recall that an amendment to the Standing Orders was approved by resolution that rule six of order nine of the Standing Orders of the Legislative Council be amended to remove the limitation of our members in respect of the number of supplementary questions it is permissible to ask. This means it is possible for additional supplementary

questions to be asked, and possibly also for other Ministers to give support answering questions. Before starting Ministers Question Time, procedures, may I touch briefly on the recent visit of His Royal Highness, Prince Edward the Duke of Edinburgh, his visit to us was successful, and many will hold pleasant memories of the Prince on this historic visit to the island. To ensure that we had ran smoothly, I believe a huge thanks should be given to all those who made it possible, including those who contributed behind the scenes. On a more sombre note, we have heard of the recent passing of Mr. John Cranfield and of arrangements being made for the funeral to take place this Thursday. John was a former politician, former parliamentarian. He joined Council during the 2009 General Election under the committee system, and served as Chairman of the Access and Transport Committee for a whole term. On 19<sup>th</sup> September, 2016 he was elected Deputy Speaker, and this continued after the 2017 elections. On the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2019, John was successful for the role of Speaker and continued until the end of that term. We extend condolences to John's family. Turning back to Minister's Question Time procedures. Miss Shanice Phillips is our clerk and timekeeper, and so therefore Miss Phillips, can we have the first question please?

The Clerk –

Questions. Honourable Ronald Coleman.

The Speaker –

Honourable Ronald Coleman.

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker can the Minister for Treasury and Economic Development tell this Council what progress is being made with regard to growing the island's working population and when it is likely that we should see some benefits?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for his question. I would also say hello to the public, but yes, there's no one listening. I'm just saying hello to everyone in this room today. Mr. Speaker, thank you. Mr. Speaker, we do know that the island's population is in decline. There's no secret. We've all seen the stats. We can all feel it in our everyday lives, when we go out in the public and sort of see people that used to be here and no longer here living on the island. A lot of these people, I know this is the working age population, they are leaving and this government recognise that the most critical issue facing the economy at the moment is such that the working age population is in decline. So the new development strategy is focused on solving this issue. As you know, Mr. Speaker, as anyone would know, it's not going to be sort of a one stop shop to solve this issue. This is a cross portfolio sort of problem. It's an entire island problem, decline in population. But we have sort of recognised this, and we have sort of targeted markets, in marketing, in sectors to help this to try and improve production on the island, to grow the working age population. Ministers, they're looking at various means and ways that we can increase wages on the island to make it a more attractive place to work, and also retain our working age population. But however, Mr. Speaker, the scale of the challenge is this will not happen overnight. The last population boom occurred sort of around the time of a large construction sort of on the island, and without sort of capital, projects such as this, it is going to be a slow sort of increase to increase the population. But obviously I'm not going to talk about immigration reforms, because we all know that plays

a part in this. So I would leave it there, Mr. Speaker, and to say that just to finish by, the two main objectives under the economic sustainable sort of strategy, is grow to work in population and grow the proportion of government revenues collected through increased activity in the economy. Sir, thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Minister. Honourable Member Coleman.

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is wages the issue for decline in the working population?

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Mr. Speaker, I would say no, wages is not just the only issue. I would say opportunities to do different forms of sort of work and follow different career paths is also lacking on island, but obviously with the introduction of faster telecommunications, that does reduce those barriers, because now if you own an internet business, you can basically target a global audience. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you. The Honourable Ronald Coleman.

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, at this moment in time, do we have the working population to provide for essential services?

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

As the Minister for Economic Development, it would be hard for me to say whether all posts across all portfolios are being filled with the critical roles to help address this. I know Health is suffering big time with retention of staff with the CCC and other care centres. I also know that Education, at the moment, is suffering with lack of professional staff or various key posts within the portfolio. So yes, and I also know that Christine's portfolio is also suffering from some sort of professional or expertise, or in some important work streams that her portfolio is trying to deliver under the Government's Vision.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Thank you very much. Honourable Minister Henry. Do you wish to comment?

The Hon. Martin Henry –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I just want to reinforce Mark's comment around the Health and Social Care issues. My answer to that is a definite no. There will be a debate around how we go about moving this forward. But I think we also need to recognise that the population decline started over 20 years ago now, and it pretty much started around when we had passed British citizenship back, we also need to recognise that the airport was an artificial boom, because it created that type of opportunity. So looking at statistics, there's many ways we can look at and recognise those statistics, but it was an artificial boom. And I think if we didn't get the airport construction, but that artificial boom, the decline would have been much worse now. So this is not a problem that started yesterday, during our term or two years ago. This is something

that started ages ago. I think it's something that we will now need to totally recognise and totally recognise that some of the solutions to this problem may have to vary across the board and not just a one targeted avenue. Thank you Mr. Speaker,

The Speaker –

Thank you Minister. Ronald Coleman.

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank the Minister for that insight. But can they tell us if we are doing any upskilling to our own people to make sure that they can provide some of these essential services?

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think this is already going cross cutting now, because obviously upskilling comes under Education Skills and Employment. I know that Career Access is available, and since they have restructured and Social Security is doing more of looking at the unemployed as to signing off, so that you can get your benefits, etc. The restructure of how Career Access works is to a point now whereby they've seen the decline and the people that utilise the services being provided. And I know from the staff there, that they've seen a decline, a huge decline, in people willing or wishing to utilise the services to upskill or train or undertake qualifications. Some of that is because, and I'm not suggesting it's just within the private sector, but due to the decline in the working age population, businesses are at a point, at the moment, to include government, no doubt, whereby they can't afford to have so many out during training at this present time, because they need boots on the ground, if they can be so frank and put it that way. Thank you Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Councillor Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister mentioned the intent of the Economic Development Strategy. However, as the original question relates to the working age population, can you say what progress has actually been made in respect of implementing the government's Labour Market Strategy, and in this respect, of course, the Chief Ministers have mentioned CASH. So is CASH actually delivering the results that were intended?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Minister for Treasury and Economic Development.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Again, Mr. Speaker, I think the Chief Minister has put a light on, and I do feel that this is more in her realm of responsibility.

The Hon. Chief Minister –

Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I would say that Career Access is set up to do what needs to be done, but the throughput has definitely seen a decline. So I know that staff are working hard now to be able to restructure and then to be able to promote the services that they can see is required. As everybody will know, we were without a Career Access manager for a long period of time, this deal has now been an appointment, so no doubt now we'll obviously see Career Access get motivated and start moving in the right way again. But this, again, goes back down to what this topic is all about, or discussion is it about? And that's about the decline in the working age population. Staff within Education is multitasking constantly at the moment because of numbers not being there in key positions, as Minister Henry also alluded to. So for instance, I know with Career Access, for a long period of time, the Manager of the College and Career Access, etc., was actually sitting in the office itself, just because we didn't have staff there to be able to man the station at that level. So it's been difficult within that sector, and obviously we're trying to ensure that we have as much support to keep the Primary and Secondary schools standards up. We should be and as again has been mentioned, we still have major gaps within that core educational environment. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, can the Honourable Minister please clarify when the new development strategy to achieve a .... (*Inaudible*) is available to the public?

The Speaker –

Minister?

The Hon. Chief Minister –

The new Development Strategy, which is now the Sustainable Economic Development Strategy? Well, sorry, but replaces Sustainable Economic Development Strategy, has been presented to Advisory Board last year. It also has been to Cabinet and it has been to the Attorney General, so it's done its rounds. There is some feedback from the Attorney General, which my team is now working through. It is due to come out for public engagement, but taking into account the other priorities in the policies that will also be soon coming out for public engagement, and also the current round of constituency meetings. So it is very much in its final progress. The feedback from the AGs chambers, for me, was nothing too concerning. I think we can work through those issues. And I do believe that my portfolio director has sent a request to the Council's office for this to go on agenda so that we can bring you all up to speed on the latest strategy. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Yes, Minister Ellick.

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you. Mr. Speaker, just on the other question. Mr. Speaker, really here to, it seems to me in terms of the immigration Mr. Speaker, and as everyone as well we are around this table, on the Immigration Policy. We only met with the government members last week, we're pretty much on track for delivering an Immigration Policy by April 24 so within the air, and we'll have various things that hopefully will be palatable and be able to attract people in terms of the working age population in St Helena. But I can't go

into all the detail at this time because we haven't finished it, but just to say, you know, the question is more or less targeted towards myself rather than my colleague.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Minister. Next question, please.

The Clerk –

The Honourable Rosemary Bargo.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Rosemary Bargo.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, will the Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development tell this Council when will the long awaited review of the Land and Building Disposal Policy be completed, and what concessions will this contain, to allow and assist economic growth?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank my honourable colleague for her question so the review of the Land and Building Disposal Policy has been in development for some time now. It's a piece of work that the Head of Property started, John Holman, when he first came into post. John Holman's contract is finished, but he did left behind quite a bit of documentation research and that, into how this policy can be improved. So the policy has already been to my Advisory Board, and it did so sometime last year. So I can't think of the dates at the top of my head now, but I think it would have been around middle of last year, has also been to Cabinet and if I remember that sometime around November, I'm looking at my colleagues to help with my memory. But yes, and then it does its round, just like every policy it gets sent to the Senior Leadership team, all portfolio directors have an input in it. But with regard to this policy, obviously the Attorney General would be a key stakeholder in advice. So again, with in contact with Attorney General's Chamber, there is progress. They are looking at the policy, they are asking questions, and the team is in communication with the AG team now on this policy. Again, is unfortunate that we have a few policies in our portfolio and to different portfolios that is due to come out for public engagement. This is also one of them that is due to come out, but the timing of that obviously has to be so that we don't have, you know, consultation meetings or constituent meetings all in one sort of go, because we won't get the attendance from the community as we would like. So yes, the expectation is that it will be ready in March, but we'll have to look at the calendar to see when it's the best time for this to go out to public consultation. As opposed to the second part of your question, how would this help with the economic growth? So yes, assist with economic growth, but also assist with better access to land, because that's what that policy is designed to do. It's designed to clarify and streamline disposal process, including introducing a disposable register and disposable plan, which I can't remember which one now, but one of them you've all seen, it has come to Elected Members. I think that was the register. So you will know that of all the properties that Crown Estates would class as surplus, so not in use; that will go into the register, and then from that register a plan will be developed for the sale or the leasing of land available under the Crown's property, also buildings as well, unused buildings. And allow us to do that because there's an

element in the current policy that talks about disposable plan, although there hasn't been such a plan that's been designed. So I'm kind of trying to kill two birds with one stone here. I'm developing the plan so that we can continue to sell and dispose of land in a very sort of way that meets the objectives of this government, but also develop policy so that the whole process gets more streamlined and be more sort of easier to navigate. That was the idea. But in terms of concessions, yeah, the policy changes. SHGs definition of a first time buyer making more affordable access to land for more people, basically, that was designed to do. We also will be continuing to look at subsidised rents and charges that is available for businesses that meets the objective of the Economic Development plan or development strategy, if it is approved going forward. So basically, yes, coming out soon. And I know, like I said earlier, has been in development for some time now, which is sort of stretching my patience, but again, you know, I need legal advice and sort of proper professional advice on this before I can move it through the process. Those processes obviously need to finish before we can get to the next one. So yeah, unfortunately, it's taking a bit longer than I would like this Bible, but definitely should be with you all quite soon.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you Minister. And can you just elaborate on “quite soon” please, like any idea what time period of the year?

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Sorry, my Honourable friend I did sum it up in my answer to say that March is when we expect it will be ready for public consultation, but we'll have to look at the calendar to see what else is happening before we actually lay some dates down to take it out. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Okay. Thank you very much. Next question, please.

The Clerk?

The Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, again, I'm subject to having put a question forward, which, as my Honourable colleague, the Minister for Safety, Security and Affairs, has mentioned we discussed only last week, but the question went in far before that. Mr. Speaker, in her Christmas message, the Chief Minister stated that immigration reforms was one of her ministerial priorities for the coming year. As previous commitments made to achieve this within a specific time frame have not materialised, can the Minister for Treasury and Economic Development say how he is going to ensure that the new Immigration Policy will be implemented by his colleagues by April 2024 and what impact this will have on creating an enabling environment if this is not achieved?

The Speaker –

The Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And the question was to me, Mr. Speaker, because it precisely say. Well, I'm going to do, be able to pass on to the Chief Minister, if you wish. Yes. I will do in one second. Well, just briefly, to say that I am part of the ministerial team. This is not led by my portfolio, of course, but I will do all I can by attending meetings and responding to, giving my feedback as soon as possible. But yes, it's not something I have control of alone, and it's something we share as ministers, and it's something that we're working together as ministers. And I think the Chief Minister would like to comment on this question.

The Speaker –  
Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I think that Minister Brooks has pretty much said what I wanted to say. I think last it is definitely a priority for this ministerial team. But to ask Minister Brooks as to whether we're going to stick to our timelines. He's very much outside of his roommate, because it is actually Minister Ellick who is working with his team to obviously continue working towards the timelines. So I think more than ever it should be Minister Ellick that probably talks a little bit about the progress being made, of which I'm pleased to report is quite a bit. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Minister Ellick, do you have a comment to this question?

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, like I said, before progress is being made, the document was shared with all the Elected Members last week. They also gave some feedback last week, and I also opened it up for my colleagues to be able to give written feedback that has been done by one of my colleagues. So progress is going quite well at the moment, and like I said before, we're pretty much on track for delivery by April 2024, in respect of the policy, in respect of ensuring that it gets done. I am accountable for that, and I will be trying my best to ensure that we have policy delivered by April 24. Outside of that, Mr. Speaker, based on actual details, I don't think it's appropriate for me to go into it at this moment in time, but once we finished firmly agreeing on options with regard to the public with a draft policy for their comment, as well as the colleagues as well. So from my perspective, Mr. Speaker, we're pretty much on track with the policy at the moment.

The Speaker –

Thank you Minister Ellick, Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, just to make the point that I'm not just looking at a timeline here, I'm also looking at the impact that this is actually having on creating an enabling environment. Earlier, we were talking about the Labour Market Strategy. And clearly the Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs actually said the Labour Market Strategy, although it sits with Economic Development, really comes under him talking in terms of purpose, because immigration will drive that. So the point is, Mr. Speaker, are they looking at these things collectively, is Economic Development looking at the Labour Market Strategy alongside the Immigration Policy?

The Speaker –

Okay, so you brought that into a question at the end, Minister Ellick.

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you Mr Speaker. As my colleagues will know, Mr. Speaker, if you look at the document that I circulated to them, everything needs to work together. The Immigration Policy will not be a magic bullet, as it stays within their policy, it will need all areas, all components, and all policies, and to work together to ensure that we have success. Immigration Policy is just an enabler that will meet all other policies to adapt to suit the Immigration Policy. Thank you very much.

The Speaker –

Minister Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to add on, and I'm not going to get into the immigration side. But also in the last part of my Hon friend's question, it says, what impacts will this have if it's not achieved by April, on creating enabling environment? If it's not achieved by April, as you said, it will be business as usual. It doesn't stop all forms of Economic Development. We can still continue to look at long term shipping contracts, which we have that put in place. We will continue to work with Airlink for air access so that will build on tourism. That's all part of Economic Development. We have signed an agreement with one rep that will bring in additional revenue. That's all part of Economic Development. We have flights going to Cape Town to try and increase the visitor numbers coming in. So that will continue, I know, sort of guaranteed an open market strategy within this question. But Economic Development runs so widely across the board that you know, just because we are we don't have the immigration reforms in place, doesn't stop Economic Development from continue the enabling environment to help grow their economy as a whole.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Next question, please.

The Clerk –

The Honourable Gillian Brooks.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Gillian Brooks.

The Hon. Gillian Brooks –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, will the Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development on following the closure of Enterprise St Helena, say what support mechanisms have been put in place by the St Helena Government that enable private sector development?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you. Mr. Speaker, thank you. Mr. Speaker, and I like to thank the Honourable member for her question. Mr. Speaker, I think this house is well aware that Enterprise St Helena, the project was funded by both SHG Recurrent budget and the UKG funding. That was also a contribution to the running of that enterprise. I do believe that over the lifetime of the enterprise, I think, was between 2013 and 2021 I remember, if that was correct, that would probably come within his head, he was a director at Enterprise St Helena. But they, I think they had a total subsidy of around 17 million, which works at about 2.2 million a year, if you work it out generally over the lifetime of the enterprise. So ESH closed, Mr. Speaker, as we know, in 2021 and SHG put in place a full time Trade and Investor post, which then formed a team, because we have Investor Manager and Investor Coordinator. So a very small team, but however, a team that was established to be the island's single point of contact for all businesses and investors who want to do business on or with St Helena. So while this government has taken sort of steps to sort of deliberately target grants. Sorry, the team led by Mike Ormrod, this is his correct name, and I will mention his name because he is a single point of contact for this team. So anyone out there listening will know who to contact if they're interested in doing business or even getting business advice from St Helena Government. He's also supported by Mr. Kyle Snow, and I will mention his name again, because he's the best investment coordinator. So people really need to know who these people are, so they can easily get in contact with him and to know they are available to assist and advise businesses, big, small, or anyone looking to grow their sales, or even new businesses start-up. So basically, they will give all our advice wherever and whenever they can. The team also, so including my Portfolio Director Damien, also is the administrators of the approved investment scheme, which allows customs to these exemption on certain businesses to, obviously, minister Objectives of the CDP. And also, I would just like to say now, Mr. Speaker, when this does go out to the public, that this team is available for anyone who is looking to get in contact with them, and don't hesitate to contact any member of the team. Primarily, Mr. Omri, if they need any business support or business that they spend for them. Thank you. Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much Member.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Mr. Speaker, now I rise on the point of information, and first of all, I need to declare an interest, obviously, as I was one of the executive directors of Enterprise St Helena.

The Speaker –

Please do. Thank you very much.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, just so to make it very clear, for the benefit of the listening public, the subsidy for Enterprise St Helena was approximately 890,000 a year. The reference made to the UK Government contribution was actually project program funding that should never be called a subsidy. It was funding for specific projects that were operated by Enterprise St Helena on behalf of the island and cannot be considered subsidy. And that was in the order of 1.1 to 1.3 million a year, that element was lost as a result of closing Enterprise St Helena.

The Speaker –

Okay. Thank you very much, Honourable Gillian Brooks.

The Hon. Gillian Brooks –

I just want to thank the Minister, Mr. Speaker, he actually sort of answered what I was going to say about business support being offered and where to go for it, for purpose of the public. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again, looking at it in a more holistic fashion, if you can put it that way, if we look at what we're trying to do since the closure of Enterprise St Helena, noting the financial strain that is on our precious resource, which is the financial side, as well as human resource. If I'm honest, there is a lot more that this government is doing, from Minister Scipio's portfolio, we've got the agricultural program that's operating to try and kick start and extend for the agricultural businesses. We are improving our relationship with the Bank of St Helena to be able to demonstrate what it is that we can do to better to cater for the business community. Obviously, Minister Brooks has the tourism development fund that is looking at ways and means of trying to improve our offering here on St Helena, all of which is part of creating the enabling environment. And if we talk about, if you report back to my Christmas message, as Councillor Honourable Robert Midwinter mentioned, I talked there about the priorities this year, which included the big ticket items, if I can call it that, which was access, both air and shipping. And then if we also look at renewable energy, is something we're still working towards. And then I know Minister Henry is doing all he can in the circumstances that he operates to kick-start preventative care, because as far as we see it, that's the only way we can change the trajectory that we're on. Very difficult to do when we are working within an aging population. However, the primary school review, or the Education Review, because it's wider than just the primary school review, is something that we'd like to also tackle in this coming year, which was obviously talked about. But again, not having resources readily available is making it difficult when we're trying to project as well, because we don't have the human resource to be able to get it done in a timely manner, in how we would wish for it to be done. But those are just other ideas of how it is trying to operate. So that we can make the cost of living on St Helena as affordable as possible. We can't say it's going to be cheaper, because the whole world is under strain at the moment with everything that's going on around it. But we're trying to move connectivity, was one of those. It's not where we wish it to be completely but we've moved in the right direction. So I think it is the whole element of holistic that we're trying to move St Helena forward, so that it becomes more attractive for people to live, work, invest, etc. Thank you. Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much Chief Minister. Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you. Mr. Speaker, what forms of financial assistance and all concessions are available from the government, particularly ready for start-up businesses?

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

So thinking on the top of my head, there's the AIC, which is to improve investor status. Sorry, AIS, approved investor status is the AIC who monitors that incentive, that obviously gives current businesses and new businesses want them to go into expansion or to do a new start-up, reduce custom duty either to the tune of 0% 5% or 10% depending on the score of your business, which is done through a score and sort of mechanism in the AIC Terms of Reference and AIC ordinance, there is also obviously a reduction in corporation tax. So obviously, if a business is successful and it's making good money in this first years, when it's sort of getting its sort of feet on the table or actually building up its business, there's a reduction of 10% from 25% corporation tax down to 15% corporation tax. And obviously through the land disposal policy, there is concessions for reduced rents and charges for businesses that meets the objectives of the CDP. And then obviously, there's also support, obviously from our team. I know that's not financial support, exactly, but you know, it's all helping to reduce the cost of setting up the business. Even if you look in today's world, getting professional business advice could cost quite a bit of money. We offer that service, obviously, for free. So yes, or we will guide you to businesses or an island that is established that can help you to put together business cases to go for an application for funding through the bank and so on. So, yeah, that's government. But obviously, as the Chief Minister said before, there's other initiatives through different portfolios and different NGOs that also would support, say, private sector development through various loans and stuff, through the Bank of St Helena, etc. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Honourable Minister. Can consideration be given to more widely publicising the services that you do provide to private businesses along the lines of exactly what you've told us here in the House today, because I am aware that a lot of businesses are not fully aware of what we've been told here, is in fact, available.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you. I will undertake to do this. However, I'll just mention that I've tried to promote it in the past. We've been on the radio and the scope program talking about the Economic Development sort of plan and work streams and all the support that we offer under that. We've also been to the Chamber of Commerce, and we've also, I think sometime last year, put a news article in the paper, just given the public a little sort of overview of the setup under Sustainable Development, or now, which is called Economic Development, of the various services and support that we offer. But I take on board what my Hon friend has said, and I will ask the team to do another round of public awareness of the various support and sort of concessions available on the SHG, thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, there's been changes with structures in September as well. So obviously the communications help now falls under Central Support. So I will also support Minister

Brooks in ensuring that the Communications team gets this message. I think it highlights once again, why this ministerial team is so keen to get the branding piece of work out into the public domain. Because they think when we are able to share with the community of St Helena what it is that our branding and our messaging and our marketing, they will understand the areas of priority and then that can then support in trying to promote what assistance is available. So I'm happy to speak to the Communications team to see if we can compile a communications plan for that initiative.

The Speaker –

Thank you Chief Minister. Thank you very much. Last question, please.

The Clerk –

The Honourable Andrew Turner.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Andrew Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, will the Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development tell this Council what steps is the government taking to complete the St Helena's Fibre Optic Network and allow the private sector to develop into the digital economy?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the Hon Member for his question, just to remind the public, Mr. Speaker and also ourselves, that back in, just before October. So I will go back further now, back in May. So when the cable was successfully landed and commissioned on the island, we were sort of left with an option of how do we, or a question of, how do we make the most of that cable. So members of the public will be well aware, as well as really lucky members that around sort of October last year, we decided to partner with the current ISP provider, which is Sure, to look at the benefits of enhancing the experience through the internet using the benefits of the cable. Like I said, that was successfully landed here in May, I must say, everyone worked very hard, including SHG and Sure, representative for Sure's expertise in making the use of the cable a reality within a very short time frame. I think it was from the day when we said, okay, let's do it, to the point where this roll out was sort of less than a month, or around a month's time. So hats off to everyone that was involved with that. That enhancement tick all three boxes. The main three boxes was cheaper, faster and unlimited, and the pairs got cheaper. The pairs got faster, and there was two unlimited packages available for the public. Now, what I'm talking about is not just business packages, but also residential packages because a lot of businesses only take up the residential package, because they only need, probably the speeds of a residential package, and they need no more. So they're quite happy in there, however, there is business packages, which is bespoke to each business and in that sort of agreement, but Sure undertake to provide an enhanced package. So about the residential package of 20 megabytes per second, up to 100 megabytes per second, for businesses that wanted this bespoke package, currently, all the businesses that was connected to the telecommunications network that was in the business package is continuing to see improvements to their to their package By having up to 50 megabytes per second to some businesses, and also some businesses requiring more, which Sure has

undertaken to work on and sort of have start putting in place very soon, so by April this year, so that may allow businesses to reach up to 100 megabytes per second beyond that, Mr. Speaker. I mean, it's too early to talk about as you know, with the Telecoms project hasn't gone exactly to plan, but we did deliver on what we said to the public we would do, and that would have enhanced internet connectivity to all residents or anyone who sort of wanted in place as soon as possible. We did give an undertaking, I believe, back last year, to have to stand on the 31st of January this year, or 31st of December last year. It was done in October. So we did, sort of improve on that commitment. But obviously we still have to improve and in the short time working with Sure to enhance the experience for businesses that require a much higher speed than the residential packages.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Andrew Turner, thank you.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Honourable Minister for his response and the rather interesting interpretation done. Can you explain what the current status is of the island wide project of bringing fibre across the island to obviously, to residences and businesses, no matter where they're located?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister Books,

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

I think from strategic and sort of high level, I thought I just did that. We are in the process, well, Sure is in the process of working with businesses, so bespoke packages to businesses to enhance their experience with the Internet. So that would be some businesses talking directly with Sure, the internet service provider, and discussing with them what are their needs and ensure sort of tailoring their connectivity to those business to help address or solve those needs.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Andrew Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

So do I understand from that, that Sure is now responsible for bringing fibre optic, Island wide?

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

No, I think you just misunderstood that. I said under agreement that SHG made with Sure back in October, we said that we will see some benefits of a cable. It's not the end sort of goal, and that will be an enhancement on all packages, including the packages for businesses. So businesses was connected to the internet before, some of them are still going through, probably a copper cable, and some of them will be upgraded. But that will be a charge on that business, and there will be a bespoke sort of package for that business. So yes, that is what I was trying to say. It's not that Sure is rolling out fibre optic all around the island. They are taking care of their current customer's needs. Thank you very much.

The Speaker –

Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister

Thank you, Mr. Speaker I think I can kind of get what Honourable Andrew Turner is trying to ask. And I think without going into too much detail, we're not in a position to be able to talk about the long term provision for the Equiano Cable if we look at it at this present time. Sure has an 18 months, because of the notice period to operate and develop, as Minister Brooks said, the offering that we currently have beyond that at this time, we can't talk any further about it, because we could implicate ourselves legally. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, just to again, because this is something that is obviously sort of quite of interest to the public, and I recognise that she can't go into details, but can she confirm that it is still the intent of this government to have Island wide network.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister –

I think what we have to look at now is our current position and what the current offerings are, and whether technology has moved along since we took that decision. So when we know what's on the table based on the situation we're currently in, I would, I guess we'd like to be able to have the full advantage of the Equiano cable. Exactly how that's going to be delivered is something that, as he said, I can't go into any further detail at this present time due to the sensitivity around it from a legal perspective, but it is definitely that we would wish that the fibre optic cable is more accessible as we had envisaged it would be from the onset.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Thank you very much. Next question, please. Oh, I'm sorry I missed Minister Henry. Did you want to comment?

The Hon. Martin Henry –

Just a quick comment, and that's just to go on the back of what the Chief Minister has said, I think we have to be really open to what is the future of telecommunications. Just because we have a cable, we can utilise their cable, as we are doing with one win. But technology has moved well beyond that 10 year plan. For instance, now we could have 5G network in the sky. We can have telecommunications in the sky. There may not be any need to run a four block to cable around the entire world, because technology has moved beyond that point. So we have to consider every option as we move forward, and not because we signed the paper in 2010 to say that's what we got to do, then that's what we do. We have to move with the times. So I think it's really important that the next decisions, moving forward, incorporates everything that's available in terms of communication, not just now, but the way that communications move. In about a year's time, there'll be something different. Again, the disruption of the likes of starting etc., has caused

huge movement and shifts in telecommunications. And I think it's just really important that we consider everything. I still do think that we'll be able to use our cable and be able to utilise it, but for probably a different source and a different technology.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Thank you very much for that comment. Honourable Minister Henry. Next question, please.

The Clerk –

The Honourable Karl Thrower.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Karl Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, will the Honourable Minister for a Treasury and Economic Development tell this Council, considering that affordable housing is a key requirement when creating an enabling environment for Economic Development, how can the Government justify imposing fees for approximately 105,000 pound per acre for qualifying local residents, and over 175,000 pounds an acre for others interested in the housing plots at the Bottom Woods CDA?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to thank the Honourable Member for his question. However, could he just clarify on what figures is he, what type of land service or unservice is he basing his approximate costing, sort of per acre?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Karl Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government recently, Minister, I'll just go up to it, and it's entitled, Comprehensive Development Area, Phase One, Bottom Woods. 11 properties available for residential development. They are serviced plots, the true cost works out when you simply divide one by the size of the plot and then times it by the value of the plot that's being asked. The figures work out at plot one being 180,000, plot two being 181,000, plot three being 176,000, plot four being 175,000, plot five being 204,000 pounds, plot six being 195,000 pounds, plot seven being 181,000 pounds, plot eight being 181,000 pounds, plot nine being 161,000 pounds and plot 10 being 139,000 pounds. So there are eight above 175,000, 2 below 175,000 so that's the total amount of all the plots. And like I say, they are serviced.

The Speaker –

Yes. Thank you very much for that. Minister Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

So I think how many members working these figures out by times soon, what the size of the plot is. To work it out, what it would be over an acre, but the size of the plot include services. So if you go to times there, you're going to have to time services. So if you can get eight of these plots in one acre, you also have to put in eight times the services if you want the true costs, because they are sold as a service plot just to give members a few figures here. Mr. Speaker, so we'll try and sort of clear the clarity. So clarify the misunderstanding, or maybe it isn't a misunderstanding, just be just the way that the figures are calculated, each plot. So the land, just the land itself, costs 3325 pounds, around about that, because each one have slightly different size. So obviously we work it out slightly different, with the most expensive being around 4300 when we were that size. Now that is the size that is the cost of the land. Then you put on the services, which is telecommunications, water, electricity and road. The cost for those services per plot is 18,000 pounds, and then you put on the professional fees, because government took on a project team to run this CDA, and that team was relied on from the government's own works team, but obviously, nevertheless, we still pay them a fee for doing the service for us, for property. And that fee works out at around 2100 pounds per plot. So in total, each plot is covered, is custom, government, around 23,000 pounds when you take in the services, if you're purely basing it on the cost of the land that is 3000 pounds. And what you need to do is times 3000 pounds by how many plots you get into one acre, given the relevant size, and that will work out to something around between 25 and 28,000 pounds per plot. And just to put in some perspective here of what land is actually selling for in the private sector, I'll read out some figures for you, Mr. Speaker, and for the listening public. Okay, now I have to make this clear all of these parts I'm going to go, I'm going to read out these unserviced plots. So it's just a piece of land. Now, a piece of land sold in 2022 on parcel number, and I will read out the first letters, obviously won't give away the whole parcel number, NGO, for 20,000 pounds, and that was a more point two of an acre. 2021 plot sold in the private sector again, in parcel member NGO, for 26,000 pounds. That was slightly bigger. It was more point three of an acre. Another plot sold in 2021 and this is only the private sector, now this is just asking our market research in parcel number SCOT of 1.9 of an acre, and that sold for 25,000 pounds. Another plot sold in July 2022 for 45,000 pounds, and that was more point six of an acre. And now the plot sold in 2022 for 15,000 pounds in SHG, so a different area of the island, and that was more point two of an acre. I could go on Mr. Speaker, but it shows a picture that when you look at what plots was being sold in the private sector for unserviced land, it would seem that the prices that we are selling for is sort of market value. And it would also point out that the one plot that was sold for around 14 grand, which is the first time buyer plot, actually cost us more to develop, than what we're selling it for, and what we've done to try and recover that cost, or subsidise that cost, we have put extra money onto the investor plans to try and recover the cost that we have subsidised for our own first time buyers. Mr. Speaker, this site was developed, and there was a lot of investments. As I said, if I just read I put into it by SHG, and the idea of that is to sell the plots, recover your investment and reinvest. That's how we get more government, landlord houses built. That's how we have more plots available, service parts available to sell on abroad market or for first time buyers. Mr. Speaker, I'm aware also that these plots are very slow in in being sold. And I have spoken to my team about this, and we will let, and my team has informed me that there has been an increase in interest over the Christmas period, when more Saints and retirement relatives were home. So I have instructed my team to let this play out for a few more months, and then we'll re-evaluate the situation at that time, which might result in some sort of different costing to these plans. But as I said, the only objective is to invest, get back your investment, and then reinvest. If you don't get back your investment, we have nothing to reinvest. Thank you. Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much Honourable Member. Honourable Karl Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you very much Mr. Speaker, tonight with what the Minister has just stated, I'm very confused, because in the House, not so long ago, he said, the government have no business in business, which I completely agree with. So the question is, are we a business trying to recover what we spent, or are we trying to enable the environment for Economic Development. How many St Helenians living on this island can afford 24,000 or 28,000 just for the land? We know that the average wage is just under 9000 pounds a year. We know that people who go to the Bank can only get a mortgage for over loan 50,000 pounds. You're selling plots of land for ... Do you want people from overseas, whether they're centrally new or not, living abroad and coming up for Christmas? Are we trying to develop empty houses for our future, or are we trying to find housing for the workforce that we've just been saying we desperately need? It's completely confusing that the message is from this government on housing. Do we really need to recover the 262,000 pounds, which is what it adds up to if you add all the plots, or could we sell them to people on island who will actually occupy them contribute to the economy, to develop the on island economy? It's just such a mixed message about it.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks

I don't think it's a mixed message. The message is, you get back your investment you reinvest that's where you create the overall environment. If we was to sell those plots and not make any money back, what happens after those nine plots or so? What happened when those people in there, where will the investment come for further developments? There's other areas earmarked for CDA. It's out now to the private sector. No private sector developments are coming forward and taking on these big projects. So it is the government who find themselves, almost by default, trying to enable Economic Development through the sale of housing, but we need to do it sustainably. We don't have an endless pot of money if we don't make that investment, we don't have no more money to invest. It's simple as that. So that is always the first approach. However, if it doesn't work, if I said before myself, I've already given instructions to my team. We will re-evaluate the situation at that time. We will take feedback from what members have already said, and maybe we will subsidise, but we have to pay a price for that subsidy. That money needs to come from some ways, or it won't be replaced by reinvesting it. So where does it come from? And what do we not invest in going forward? Do we not invest in any more houses? Because we've just spent all our money on one part of the land that we had to sell for way under their own rate because nobody was borrowing it. That's the decision we need to make, and that's decision I would like to think we make together as a Council, not just a Minister, because at the end of the day, I want the same thing that you want. I don't want nothing different here. I want Economic Development. I want to see returning Saints. I want to see the economy grow. I want to see more investors come to the island, start up more businesses, give more options for our local labour to work in more professional services on the island and the export of professional services. So yes, we're all welcome to the same goals. We might have a different approach of how we get there, but at the end of the day, I feel the first approach is always to make that the investment so that you can reinvest that is sustainability.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. I like to inform you that we have reached the hour now there's still another question to be asked. However, I will allow Honourable Karl Thrower to comment if you wish, and then the Minister to respond if you so wish.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

I think the problem there was, there was too many government investments. Government don't invest. They invest in people, things like, how come we're willing to lose 200,000 pounds a year on a hotel, but we're not allowed to lose any money when we're talking about providing housing for local people? Governments don't invest. I'm sorry they don't, that's a business, and we do have, and I will challenge you on this, we have a local business who has been trying to build housing plots for how long, and he's not getting anywhere. But we do have local businesses moving forward with these kind of projects.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much.

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

I cannot comment on individual businesses and what they're doing. Thank you. That's not my job to do that. It's entirely up to the business. Yes, we are looking. I mean, the whole point of sustainability is trying to invest continue. If you said government shouldn't be investment, you should be investing in people. That's why we got a policy, the land disposable policy, the land is there. It's available for someone to come forward and put a proposal to government to say, I'm going to do this. But it needs to be a balanced approach. It can't be all in the favour of the development. They need to be in favour of this community and this island and our environment. So we have to balance all those things. So yes, there's people out there that might be right now trying to get a development or working on development, but if that development does not suit this community or this island or this government's mission going forward, then there is going to be problems. There is going to be discussions around that. There is private sector developments that has already happened in the past. So some people have done this. Some people has invested in government land. They've built property and they'll sell it. It's called Real Estate. It's a good business. Any reason why, that you know, as far as I know, but it's a good business on the island. I think the issue is that generally, if you want to talk very high level, I don't think that we are an island that is very, that invests. We are an island. We're not an island that risks. We're not an island that leaps out and sort out our community. Now, when you say an island and take a chance. We seem to be very conservative in what we invest in, and that's just the general consensus I get, personally from living here on this island and obviously understanding the business environment to which I'm also a member of.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. We will have to leave it there. I have to defend the Standing Orders. And the Standing Orders say that we can only operate for an hour. We have gone just by the hour with one question that has to go. But how very interesting Honourable members. Yes, you may do that (*raise a point of information*) Honourable Dr Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Mr Speaker, I would like to inform my constituents in the listening public that I did have a question tabled for today, and the reason why I'm not being able to move it is because we have run out of time. I would not like to think that I didn't bother to submit a question for debate today. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Member. And I'll remember saying that does conclude Minister's Question Time for January 2024. It is unfortunate that we couldn't do a broadcast live today, but due to a technical fault that was impossible. However, I'm not quite certain that it is that SAMs will be broadcast live, hopefully it won't be too very long, and obviously we will depend on the public to provide feedback. Anyway, they will be better informed. They are very certain once the broadcast has been done and the problems, the public have been made aware of why we couldn't be broadcast live today, hopefully they will understand, but I'm hope they will be listening when the broadcast is actually made. So that is it, members. Thank you very much. A very, very interesting day today. Unfortunately, we couldn't get to the last question. I think I've seen this thing forward. It's always Councillor Essex and Councillor Thrower who seem to be the last two, too happy to ask questions. And if there's any that can't be missed, it seems like one of them always misses. Anyway. I wish you all a very pleasant day ahead. Thank you. Bye.



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Chairperson

13/2/25

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Date

