



St Helena  
Government

ST HELENA LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

SELECT COMMITTEE 2

REPORT TO LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ON THE  
SECOND MEETING OF SELECT COMMITTEE 2,  
PUBLISHED ON 14 NOVEMBER 2024  
SOCIAL HOUSING

Laid upon the Table 13th February 2025



# **Legislative Council of St Helena**

## **Select Committee 2 “SOCIAL HOUSING”.**

# **Second Report of Select Committee 2, together with the formal Minutes relating to the Report**

**Published 14<sup>th</sup> November  
2024**

## Select Committee 2

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### **Select Committee 2**

As per the Select Committees (Establishment) Order 2022, Select Committee 2 is appointed by the Governor to scrutinise sectors of Government activity. Select Committee 2 is responsible for after-the-event review and scrutiny of (i) Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development (now Treasury and Economic Development) and (ii) Safety, Security and Home Affairs.

### **Current membership**

Councillor Dr Corinda Essex (Chair)

Councillor Karl Thrower

Councillor Andrew Turner

### **Powers**

The Committee is one of two Select Committees established under Section 69 A of the St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha Constitution Order 2009 which is available to view on the [sainthelena.gov.sh](http://sainthelena.gov.sh) website.

### **Staff**

The current Clerk of the Committee is Morgan Thomas-Henry.

### **Contact Information**

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of Select Committee 2 at [morgan.thenry@sainthelena.gov.sh](mailto:morgan.thenry@sainthelena.gov.sh) or she can be contacted on 22590/ 22470.

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# INTRODUCTION

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The sector of activity being scrutinised was “Social Housing”.

The themes explored were as follows:-

- Provision of Social Housing and its Effective and Efficient Use
- Housing Strategy
- Repair and Maintenance
- Minimum Standards
- Customer Relations

In preparation for the gathering of evidence, Select Committee 2 familiarised themselves with the 2014 Housing Strategy and associated documentation, along with relevant data requested from the Housing Section.

Prior to the hearing, Members of Select Committee 2 visited both radio stations and asked the public to provide evidence for the forthcoming inquiry if they wished to do so. Oral evidence received by the Members related to lack of timely availability of social housing units; lack of requirements such as running hot water and electrical safety checks; perceived unhelpfulness and lack of empathy of some staff members and poor communication. Constituents raising these issues did not wish to submit written evidence and wanted to remain anonymous.

In addition, Select Committee 2 received written evidence from Mr Basil George, O.B.E. and the Equality and Human Rights Commission. The Public Solicitor’s Office also flagged issues relating to provision of minimum standards.

The evidence received in advance of the formal hearing was extremely valuable as it assisted identification of key areas which could be explored further with the witnesses who are to be commended for their openness and co-operation.

On Wednesday, 10<sup>th</sup> July, 2024, a live hearing took place at which oral evidence was taken from the following key witnesses: - Portfolio Director – Economic Development, Deputy Financial Secretary, Acting Head of Property, Chief Housing Officer, Roads and Maintenance Manager and Maintenance Manager. The Minister for Treasury and Economic Development was invited to participate but chose to only observe the proceedings.

The Committee is extremely grateful to all those who contributed to this inquiry.

# REPORT

## **Theme 1: Provision of Social Housing and its efficient and effective use.**

This theme focused on the provision and management of social housing stock, including: purpose, eligibility criteria, identification of housing needs, and forecasting future demands.

The Acting Head of Property explained the purpose of social housing, which is to provide a safety net for people with St Helenian status, who are not able to afford to build a house or rent within the private sector. She then outlined the criteria for eligibility. She stated that there had been a decrease in demand for social housing since 2013, with current trends showing a need for smaller units going forward. She also provided information relating to the application and assessment processes. The Housing Strategy Manual of 2015 provides guidance as to what type of accommodation is appropriate to meet the differing needs of applicants.

While the total number of social housing units is known to be 196, the exact number of occupants they house is not readily available. 31 applicants are recorded on the housing register as awaiting accommodation. No evidence of future demand projections was presented.

No construction of new housing units has taken place for over three years, although 19 existing homes have been refurbished to the standard of new lettings and a business case developed for major renovation of eight properties for which £83k had been spent to date. Plans were approved for new build flats at the Bottom Woods Comprehensive Development Area, but the original design was altered from single-bedroom to two-bedroom flats to accommodate future needs, such as aging populations and families with children. SC 2 was informed by the Portfolio Director that, "As I recall, that (the decision) was taken at advisory board level on the basis of advice from the then Head of Property, who delivered professional advice that the design [...], the one beds wasn't suitable to that individual's assessment of what the project should look like. So while it might not have been based on any up to date strategy, it was sort of the professional opinion of an officer" The Minister for Treasury and Economic Development approved the changes, and funding was allocated accordingly. However, the project is yet to commence, although funding is available.

Officials providing evidence accepted that further discussions and planning are needed to address evolving housing needs and ensure alignment with strategic goals, but indicated that an estate strategy should be finalised within the next 12 months which will assist in this regard. They also emphasised the importance of multi-agency collaboration and strategic planning to manage changing needs effectively and ensure efficient use of resources.

Select Committee 2 sought information regarding the purpose, use and current balance within the Housing Service Trading Account and the Government Landlord Housing Capital Fund. It was informed that the Housing Service Trading Account is used to manage and



maintain social housing stock, with income from rentals contributing to maintenance and repairs. As of March 2023, it had a balance of £316,000, which increased to £427,000 by March 2024. The Government Landlord Housing Capital Fund, established in 2012, finances the construction, purchase, or major renovations of social housing. It receives proceeds from the sale of Government Landlord Houses, with a balance of £498,000 in March 2023, rising to £568,000 by March 2024. However, a moratorium on the sale of social housing units is currently in place.

Both funds are part of general public funds and do not accrue interest directly. As these Special Funds are held as part of the Consolidated Fund, any interest or returns from these investments go into the general revenue for the St Helena Government (SHG), rather than being assigned for specific purposes.

## **Theme 2: Housing Strategy**

This theme focused on the 2014 Housing Strategy and its implementation.

The Portfolio Director informed SC2 that SHG is implementing the Housing Strategy to the best of its ability, but there are areas where targets are not being met primarily due to resource constraints. Annual Reports and customer satisfaction surveys have not been conducted consistently. The officers providing evidence acknowledged that the current Housing Strategy Manual, implemented in 2015, is outdated and inconsistently applied. There is confusion about whether it serves as a guidance document or a national strategy. A review of the Strategy was commenced but then put on pause. It is now expected that this work stream will be completed within the next 12 months to ensure that it is fit for purpose and can be fully implemented. The Equality and Human Rights Commission housing report will form part of the evidence for the review.

Annual Inspections and tenancy audits are carried out, but not on a regular basis. These audits focus on various aspects such as subletting, criminal activity, property damage, and safety issues. However, there are gaps in estate management and health and safety monitoring.

Social Housing does not provide appliances, except in shared accommodation for homeless individuals. Maintenance of these appliances is managed by the housing service.

Properties are valued every five years, with the last valuation done in 2019/20. Depreciation is considered in the valuation process, but there are discrepancies in the documentation regarding the number of properties deemed uneconomical to repair.

Rent is means-tested and varies based on the named tenant's income and property size. The variance in rent charged is relatively small, ranging from £19 to £25 per week for those on lower income tiers, and from £35 to £45 per week for those on higher income tiers. The difference between the lowest and highest rents applicable within each income tier is also not large. Therefore, despite the means-tested approach which adjusts rent based on income, the overall variation in the amount tenants pay remains minimal. Rent reviews are carried out on an annual basis, subject to Ministerial approval. However, there is a discrepancy

between the financial circumstances taken into account when looking at eligibility for social housing and those considered when rents are reviewed. When applying for social housing, the application is based on household income, but when rents are reviewed only the named tenant's income is taken into account. A proposal to assess household income at all stages faced adverse representation from the public and did not gain political support.

Total rent arrears currently amount to £218,000. Written evidence supplied by the Chief Housing Officer indicates that the majority of these relate to tenants in the low income tier. SHG has processes in place to recover arrears, including working with tenants and taking legal action as a last resort. There are challenges in recovering arrears from former tenants.

The central premise of the "Home for Life" policy is to offer a secure and permanent housing solution for tenants. It was designed to address the concerns of vulnerable persons, including the elderly, disabled, and low-income families. The idea was simple: once a tenant secured social housing, they would have a home for life, regardless of changing circumstances. However, this concept has been a topic of intense debate as its implementation and impact have raised critical questions. The threshold for triggering the policy's provisions is set at an annual income of less than £25,000. Tenants earning above this amount should technically be served a notice to vacate. However, the practical enforceability of this provision remains questionable as, while the policy mandates serving notice to tenants surpassing the income threshold, there is no corresponding clause in the tenancy agreements to facilitate enforcement. The mechanism that should ensure compliance is absent. This disconnect renders the policy "entirely baseless" in practice. The Acting Head of Property informed SC 2 that "...to date, there's been no instruction to amend the tenancy agreements or whether that could be implanted into the tenancy agreement."

### **Theme 3: Repairs and Maintenance Strategy**

This theme focused on the Repairs and Maintenance Strategy and how this is being implemented.

SC2 was informed that the 2014 Repairs and Maintenance Strategy has not met its objectives, although its aims are still appropriate. The primary reason why the Strategy has not been able to be fully implemented is lack of resources, particularly adequate funding.

The annual maintenance and repair budget for social housing stock is primarily based on the income generated from rent collected from lettings. This budget is then allocated after deducting operational and management costs, with a portion set aside for reactive maintenance. The budget does not meet the actual maintenance needs, as it is constrained by the income generated.

The last comprehensive condition assessment of the social housing stock, conducted in 2011, estimated the maintenance costs at around £15 million over 30 years. Since then, there has been no substantial reassessment, although there are plans to use tenancy audits and technical expertise to re-evaluate these figures in light of the current economic climate and rising costs.



Currently, there is no planned maintenance program for GLH properties, with almost all repairs being reactive. This lack of a proactive maintenance strategy is due to limited capacity and resources. The maintenance team is not directly under the housing section, which complicates the prioritisation of maintenance tasks as they operate under a broader directive, requiring them to balance the needs of all government buildings, including schools and the hospital, with those relating to social housing. The maintenance team prioritises work based on the urgency of reported issues, but there is a significant backlog of maintenance work that still needs to be addressed.

The respective maintenance responsibilities of the landlord and tenant are defined in the tenancy agreement, although there are some inconsistencies between this document and the Housing Strategy. Some inspections and audits are conducted to monitor compliance and identify maintenance issues, but the housing team lacks the technical expertise to fully assess the severity of these issues. There are no current plans for periodic inspections by maintenance professionals.

A business case has been developed to use funds from the Housing Standards Trading Account to repair/upgrade some properties, but others are deemed to have deteriorated beyond the point of economic repair. No attempts to dispose of three derelict units declared uninhabitable have been made to date as feedback is awaited from the maintenance team regarding the best way forward.

#### **Theme 4: Minimum Standards**

This theme focused on the minimum standards that social housing must meet and the extent to which these are currently achieved.

Guidance on minimum standards is set out in the 2015 Housing Strategy Manual, but the requirements were (and continue to be) under-funded and cannot be fully implemented on current budgets. The standards set include ensuring properties are safe, secure, and clean before being let. Specific requirements include key elements such as functional doors and windows, adequate lighting, ventilation, and proper waste disposal systems. Additionally, properties must have valid Electrical Safety Certificates and be free from hazards like asbestos and dampness. However, SC 2 was informed that these standards are not met in full. For example, only a few social housing units have valid Electrical Safety Certificates. The Acting Head of Property stated, "I'm not really sure if that plan has been properly implemented or followed for that matter."

Maintenance and inspection procedures are crucial for ensuring properties meet the required standards. The Chief Housing Officer stated that properties are routinely inspected when tenants vacate, and with new tenants before they move in. The live evidence hearing outlined the roles of various teams, such as housing management officers; technical teams; and maintenance teams in conducting inspections and addressing issues, including that of the use of commercial properties as temporary accommodation for homeless individuals. Select Committee 2 was told of the challenges of managing these properties and the need to devise

a dedicated homelessness plan and budget. Ongoing efforts, including development of options to be discussed with other portfolios such as Health and Social Care, to identify and implement long-term solutions for homelessness were highlighted.

Safety and health concerns are addressed through various measures, but these are not applied to all housing units. For example, newly renovated properties are fitted with fire safety equipment like fire blankets and smoke detectors, but this is not standard across all social housing stock. Similarly, hot running water is surprisingly not a requirement under the current minimum standards. However, some properties have had this feature fitted. Furthermore, a number of housing units lack basic features that are mandatory to meet essential safety and habitability standards, such as ensuring electrical safety and addressing dampness. It was stated that checks do not normally include input from relevant professionals. The Chief Housing Officer explained that, in relation to mould, "We work with tenants to try to ensure that they do as much as possible as well to ventilate their property [...], I can't say that there is been a full assessment completed in conjunction with Health, but again, it's something the tenancy audit chap has, you know, listed as concerns regarding increased mould in different locations."

It was also stated that the requirements contained within current tenancy agreements are not fully aligned with those of the Housing Strategy Manual. There are also other inconsistencies in the allocation of resources for social housing and the stated minimum standards required, such as those pertaining to the handling of hazardous materials, including lithium batteries and gas appliances/storage.

## **Theme 5: Customer Relations**

This theme focused on customer relations practices and how effective these are at fostering positive interactions with tenants to maintain satisfaction and clear communication.

The Acting Head of Property acknowledged shortcomings in customer relations due to resourcing issues but highlighted current efforts to improve these, including work that has started on compiling a handbook for tenants.

The Chief Housing Officer stated that the housing section is meeting general SHG response standards, and plans to enhance tenant engagement further through newsletters and handbooks. The housing section conducts property visits and assists tenants with completing application forms, especially those with difficulties such as poor eyesight or literacy issues. They collaborate with various agencies, such as mental health and social care, to ensure comprehensive support for tenants. There are ongoing efforts to review and simplify application forms with the assistance of feedback from relevant agencies.

SC2 was informed that a complaints procedure is in place that enables tenants to complain to the Portfolio Director, but this is seldom used.

The housing section is transitioning from paper-based records to a secure digital database, ensuring that all customer data is stored confidentially and accessed only by authorized



personnel. Data sharing with other government departments is minimal and only done with tenant consent. Select Committee 2 was assured that data protection practices are in place despite the absence of substantive data protection legislation.

Tenancy agreements are currently generic and need regular reviews to ensure compliance with changing laws and best practices. The Acting Head of Property stated that tenancy agreements require “definitely a more regular review.” Officials conceded that they are not fully sighted on all the gaps between social housing provision and the requirements of associated legislation, regulations and policies. However, there are plans to update these agreements to reflect new requirements and improve their relevance.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Theme 1 – Provision of Social Housing and its Efficient and Effective Use

Select Committee 2 (SC2) concluded that the stated purpose of social housing is appropriate. It was, however, extremely concerned that although there is a waiting list of 31 applicants, there has been no construction of new build units or conversion of existing properties for more than three years, despite funding being available. This time lapse will make the provision of additional housing units more expensive, thereby reducing the scope of works significantly which seriously undermines achievement of value for money because, as the Deputy Financial Secretary stated, “...as time moves on, [...], the value of that fund is potentially less.” From the evidence presented, SC2 was not convinced that the delay is fully justifiable and concluded that urgent action is essential to rectify the current unacceptable situation.

The absence of future demand projections is also disturbing, as is the lack of clarity regarding the level of priority given by SHG to the efficient and effective provision of social housing to meet current and changing needs. There also appeared to be some confusion relating to where responsibility lies regarding final decisions on housing construction and design, which has resulted in wastage of limited resources and lengthened processes.

It was obvious that there are gaps in the availability of readily accessible, reliable data to inform decision making. Such data are essential for effective planning and resource allocation and should include that pertaining to household circumstances and associated changes.

It was, however, reassuring that the relevant officials are clearly aware of these shortcomings and some action is being taken to address them. Clear, consistent and precise guidance from senior management and the Portfolio Director, as well as strong strategic oversight at a Ministerial level, is essential to ensure that the purpose and objectives of social housing provision are met.



## Theme 2 – Housing Strategy

Considerable evidence suggests that failure to keep the Housing Strategy up to date and to implement annual reporting requirements has undermined the effectiveness, efficiency and delivery of social housing provision, with issues having gone un-addressed for many years. The Portfolio Director acknowledged that, “Using what I know about implementing controls, such as annual reviews, the failure to do regular reviews does usually lead to things slipping through the net.” This reveals a pressing need for development, approval and implementation of an up to date Housing Strategy, and of an Estate Management Strategy which would help to clarify the level of priority afforded to social housing in comparison to other parts of SHG’s estate.

The current discrepancy between how eligibility for social housing and rental bracket are determined is anomalous and potentially unfair. SC 2 recognises that social housing providers must navigate the delicate balance between adhering to policy guidelines and maintaining positive relationships with tenants, but all criteria should be mutually consistent and aligned with the overall intent and purpose underpinning provision of social housing.

The extent of rent arrears is a matter of concern. Although SC 2 was told of the attempts being made to recover arrears, there was no evidence that rent payments are being monitored regularly and efficiently, nor of an established formal process and action plan that kicks in when a tenant defaults. Furthermore, no standard procedures to attempt to reduce the accumulation of rent arrears were identified, such as issuance of warning letters, etc.

The “Home for Life” policy faces significant challenges due to the lack of enforceable clauses in tenancy agreements. SC2 is fully aware that balancing stability for existing tenants with financial sustainability for housing providers and meeting the needs of new applicants remains a delicate task—one that requires thoughtful consideration and timely action. Evicting long-standing residents based solely on income thresholds can strain community bonds and create resentment. However, the circumstances of individuals and families change over time and it is hard to justify social housing units being inhabited by persons who no longer meet the eligibility criteria, particularly when less fortunate members of the community are in great need of such accommodation.

## Theme 3 – Repairs and Maintenance Strategy

The current true cost of ownership of the social housing stock is not known and condition surveys with associated cost estimates for repair and maintenance works are extremely outdated. This situation is serious as it impedes providing justification to obtain the necessary additional resources to enable social housing to be up kept to an acceptable, safe standard and also undermines the efficient and effective use of the very limited funding available. The Repairs and Maintenance Strategy itself is ten years old and no longer wholly fit for purpose.

SC 2 is deeply concerned that there is no recurrent budget for repairs and planned maintenance of social housing. Although such costs are charged to the Housing Service Trading Account, this relies on rental income which cannot realistically be expected to

increase much in the present economic climate without defeating the purpose of providing social housing, and is insufficient to address current demands. Evidence presented indicates that a vicious circle already exists as preventative measures are not affordable, resulting in greater end costs and causing some housing units to have deteriorated to the point of being uneconomical to repair. The Acting Head of Property stated, "I think what we have assessed is that, currently, rents don't allow us to adequately maintain property or adequately deliver services to our properties. So we are still looking at how we can charge appropriate rents, but also looking at that must be balanced with affordability. There is work that's going on."

The funding available for maintenance is also negatively impacted by the extent of the debt on the trading account resulting from arrears in rental payments.

It is also apparent that inconsistencies exist between various relevant documents and that prioritisation and programming of works is largely undertaken on an 'ad hoc' basis, rather than in compliance with clearly defined parameters understood by all stakeholders. SC2 was informed that most repair and maintenance is carried out when properties are void which is understandable, but raises questions about whether those housing units occupied for long periods are neglected in comparison with those having greater turn-over of tenants.

#### Theme 4 – Minimum Standards

SC 2 was disturbed by the nature and extent of discrepancies that exist between what is provided in different housing units, with some lacking essentials while others are fitted with less cost effective items. This inconsistency in upgrades and maintenance efforts indicates a need for a more strategic and equitable approach to resource allocation to ensure all properties meet the minimum required standards before additional enhancements are considered. Furthermore, it raises concerns about the prioritisation of the very limited amount of funding available, as essential safety and habitability standards, such as addressing dampness and ensuring electrical safety, are not being uniformly met.

The lack of consistency in applying minimum standards for social housing properties has the potential to create significant liability issues for SHG. When standards are not uniformly enforced, this creates a risk of claims of unfair treatment or discrimination, and if essential health and safety requirements are not met tenants may face unsafe or unhealthy living conditions which could lead to legal challenges and subsequent litigation.

Additionally, failure to maintain properties to a consistent standard is likely to result in increased maintenance costs over time, as reactive repairs are often more expensive than planned maintenance.

SC 2 considers that the current inconsistent application of minimum standards is a serious issue which is likely to undermine tenant trust and exposes St Helena Government to substantial legal and financial risks.



SC2 was also concerned that there is no dedicated homelessness plan and budget, nor does there appear to be a generic definition across SHG of what is homelessness that can be applied consistently when assessing applications for social housing.

#### Theme 5 – Customer Relations

SC 2 concluded that there is a pressing need to revise tenancy agreements to ensure that they align with social housing policy intent and also reflect the practical realities of managing tenancies. It is also imperative that the agreements are supported by a robust legal framework to facilitate their enforcement.

Furthermore, there is no comprehensive customer relations strategy in place to guide structured interaction between SHG and social housing tenants and establish a consistent approach that is understood by both parties.

Evidence presented indicated that policymakers and social housing providers need to collaborate to find practical solutions, in consultation with tenants. Clear communication with tenants about the implications of the key strategies and associated legal documents is crucial to avoid surprises and foster transparency.

Although SC2 does not dispute that few formal complaints are lodged, its Members do receive quite a large number of expressions of dissatisfaction from tenants of social housing. Some reflect unrealistic expectations and the majority stem from breakdowns in communication which are relatively easy to resolve. However, some are more serious as they relate to issues such as staff conduct and health and safety.

There was considerable evidence that action has started to be taken to improve customer relations which is commendable.

Theme:	Recommendation:	Timeframe:
Provision of Social Housing and its Efficient and Effective Use	1.1 The provision of additional housing units must be aligned consistently with the yet to be developed, updated Housing Strategy, with clearly defined roles and processes within the workflow.	See Recommendation 2.1
	1.2 Immediate action is taken to fast-track construction of additional social housing units at Bottom Woods and Half Tree Hollow Comprehensive Development Areas.	Immediate
	1.3 The efficiencies and cost effectiveness of conversions as opposed to new builds must always be considered when making decisions regarding provision of additional units to meet housing needs.	On going
	1.4 Urgent action should be taken to assess the reliability and accuracy of current housing data, and to identify gaps that require addressing. This work must be used to inform the development of the new Housing Strategy.	By 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2025
	1.5 It is imperative that housing data is regularly updated.	On going
	1.6 SHG should reassess and define the level of priority that is given to the provision of social housing, in relation to the other services it provides, as it plays a key role in achievement of the Ministerial Vision and Strategic Plan, including the aspiration that nobody is left behind.	By end of January 2025
	1.7 The moratorium on sale of housing units should not apply to those assessed to be beyond economical repair, which must be disposed of promptly to avoid further deterioration.	By July 2025
	1.8 Consideration should be given to ring fencing interest or returns gained by the Housing Service Trading Account so that it accrues to that account only.	By 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2025
Housing Strategy	2.1 Priority must be given to the urgent development, approval and implementation of an up to date Housing Strategy and of an Estate Management Strategy.	By July 2025
	2.2 An "Accommodation for Life" policy should be introduced that reflects the intention of the current "Home for Life" policy, but provides greater flexibility to enable changes to be made that reflect alterations in the circumstances of tenants.	By July 2025
	2.3.1 Annual Reports must be compiled and issued relating to both the Housing Strategy and the Estate Management Strategy, and their implementation. These Strategies should be reviewed and revised in line with the findings of the Annual Reports.	July – Annually
	2.3.2 Eligibility criteria and rental brackets should be examined and amended where necessary to ensure these are consistent and aligned with the overall intent and purpose underpinning provision of social housing.	By 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2025
	2.3.3 St Helena Government should establish and implement a clear, proactive and structured approach to the monitoring of rental payments and recovery of rent arrears.	By 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2025

	<p>2.4 Rents, should more closely reflect affordability, and consideration should be given to introduction of a sliding scale instead of two tiers. Those tenants whose financial situation places them at the highest end should pay rents more closely aligned with those charged by the private sector.</p> <p>2.5 Consideration should be given to establishing a trading account in respect of the provision of social housing in order to manage all related income and expenditure more efficiently and effectively.</p>	<p>By 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025</p> <p>By 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025</p>
Repairs and Maintenance Strategy	<p>3.1 A revised and updated Repairs and Maintenance strategy should be drawn up and implemented as a priority.</p> <p>3.2 All social housing units should be inspected regularly by a team of maintenance professionals.</p> <p>3.3 Urgent work must be undertaken to establish the true cost of ownership of each housing unit.</p> <p>3.4 A cross-cutting task force should be established to take a holistic view of how best to break the current vicious circle relating to maintenance, and formulate associated recommendations.</p> <p>3.5 An annual works programme should be developed in collaboration with all key stakeholders that clearly prioritises repair and maintenance needs of social housing units.</p>	<p>By July 2025</p> <p>On going</p> <p>By 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025</p> <p>By August 2025</p> <p>By December 2025</p>
Minimum Standards	<p>4.1.1 There should be a clear consensus achieved across SHG, in collaboration with other relevant agencies, regarding what are the minimum standards for social housing units and how best to provide these in the most cost effective manner. When determining these standards, priority should be given primarily to safety, then cost effectiveness to occupants, then cost of ownership to SHG.</p> <p>4.1.2 Minimum standards must be strictly adhered to and all properties must meet these standards. Priority for upgrading should be given to occupied units which do not meet the minimum safety standards.</p> <p>4.2.1 An agreed definition of homelessness should be established across SHG.</p> <p>4.2.2 A dedicated homelessness plan should be finalised and implemented. An associated budget should also be prepared.</p>	<p>By May 2025</p> <p>By December 2025</p> <p>By end January 2025</p> <p>By 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021</p>
Customer Relations	<p>5.1 New tenancy agreements must be drawn up as a matter of urgency. These must reflect the social housing policy intent and may require specific provisions for differing types of units.</p> <p>5.2 All tenancy agreements must be regularly reviewed in order to meet modern best practice and changes in law, regulation and policy.</p> <p>5.3 A proactive and comprehensive Customer Relations Strategy must be developed and implemented.</p> <p>5.4.1 A method of capturing useful social housing and tenant data should be included within the tenancy agreement and the Customer Relations Strategy.</p> <p>5.4.2 Data collected from these sources must be regularly collated and updated.</p>	<p>By March 2025</p> <p>Annually</p> <p>By July 2025</p> <p>By July 2025</p> <p>On going</p>



# Formal Minutes

Social Housing

Minutes of the Meeting of Select Committee 2, held on the Monday, 4<sup>th</sup> November 2024 at the Council Chamber, the Castle, Jamestown.

Members present:

Councillor Dr Corinda Essex (Chair)

Councillor Karl Thrower

Councillor Andrew Turner

Introduction read and agreed to.

Report and Conclusions read and agreed to.

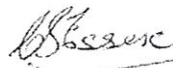
Recommendations read and agreed to.

Annex 1 agreed to.

Resolved that the Report be the Second Report of Select Committee 2 to the Legislative Council.

Ordered, that the Chair make the Report to the Council.

Adjourned to a day and time to be fixed by the Chair.

  
6/11/2024.

# Witnesses

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The following witnesses were called to the table. The transcript can be viewed on the [sainthelena.gov.sh](https://sainthelena.gov.sh) website.

## **Wednesday, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2024**

Mr Damien Burns, Portfolio Director - Economic Development, St Helena Government

Miss Nikita Crowie, Acting Head of Property, St Helena Government

Mr Nicholas Yon, Deputy Financial Secretary, St Helena Government

Miss Melissa Fowler, Chief Housing Officer, St Helena Government

Mr Deon Robbertse, Roads and Maintenance Manager, St Helena Government

Mr Theron Henry, Maintenance Manager, St Helena Government

Honourable Mark Brooks, Minister for Treasury and Economic Development, St Helena Government

# Annex 1: Published written evidence

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## Written evidence from Mr Basil George O.B.E:

The following documents were provided to SC2 by Mr Basil George O.B.E:

- Cottages, Cultures and Community; and
- Sentinel Article – Culture & Capital

“Creative St Helena

### **Cottages, Culture and Community**

Creativity can express itself in many forms: in painting, writing, music, sculpture to name some. On St Helena one of the main expressions of creativity is in its buildings, in forts, public buildings, fine houses and especially in the houses built over the centuries for family homes.

The painter has the materials of a blank canvas, brushes and paints to create a picture, the writer’s materials a blank sheet of paper and a pen, the composer a sheet of paper to write music. On St Helena a family has a plot of land on which to build a house using whatever materials are at hand, their own skills and the skills of the community. As an island, in its isolation, creativity means maximizing the use of local materials and skills that were learnt, developed and got passed on from generation to generation.

It is a collective, resourceful creativity, evolving over the centuries since the time of settlement in the 1600’s. It involves individuals, families and members of the community, becoming the key component of island culture, of people who “think with their hands”. It is not only in family homes that the creative skills of Islanders can be seen. Islanders were also involved in building fortifications and public buildings. This creative energy can be seen in the Jamestown Community Centre completed in 1825, one of the finest buildings on the island exhibiting the highest level of stone masonry and carpentry. Records show that it was built “by free men of colour”.

Sandy Bay is a district that gives good examples of different types of domestic houses. Until recently with the introduction of cement blocks, the walls of all houses were made of local materials: mud and stone. The houses also give a perspective of social history, the type of house reflecting the status of the person in the community. They match the topography of the land, from the more fertile higher reaches to the less fertile lower lands. The creative energy directed to building family homes is embedded in Island folklore: the story of a father who trimmed and carried home a single piece of stone each day after work and another family that carried stone a long distance, naming their house “Carry Stone Cottage”

Creativity is not only limited to Islanders building family homes. It can be seen in more recent times for example in the use of empty metal drums in which fuel was imported before we had the fuel farm at Ruperts. Some examples are - cutting and pressing into sheets for building sheds, different sizes of plant pots, car silencers, barbeque stands. The St Helena Government also used the covers for official traffic signs, reinforcing the island culture of resourcefulness and creating the environment for the expression of creativity to continue and thrive.

The potter needs clay to create and transform it into various objects, often domestic like cups, plates, jars. If the cost of the clay is too expensive the potter will not be able to create his own wares. He will have to import or rely on a hand-out, will become dependent. Are we, inadvertently?  
Creating an environment for dependence?

The culture of building family homes also has a social dimension in strengthening family and community cohesion. In the various changes and reforms currently taking place are we still providing the environment to allow this energy to creatively express itself or will the systems being introduced for the island to be part of the global village trap that creative energy? How will it then express itself: escape or destruct internally and externally?”

Basil George

St Helena Island

November 2015



## NOTICE BOARD



*Saints continue even today to build and restore old cottages.*

Basil George

Visitors to the island by the cruise ship (MV Costa neoRomantica) last month said that the lasting memories they would take with them would be the spectacular scenery and the friendliness of the people. These are the main assets the island has to offer: the place and the culture of the people. We should not underestimate the true value of these assets that make St Helena a unique tourist destination.

What is central to Island culture is Islanders building family homes by people who "think with their hands". This goes back to when the Island was first settled in the 1600's. Settlers had to build homes for themselves and their families from the materials that were on hand which for ordinary people were mud and stone walls and thatched roofs. Slave quarters in certain parts of the country were also made of this sort of material. As more wealth was generated with the English East Company (who ran the Island) trading with the Far East, descendants of the

settlers built larger houses with some imported material, like slate for roofing.

Islanders building these types of family homes lasted for about 300 years and was still continuing into the mid-1900's. Though there are other examples, one example is the house built by the late Cecil Tunn. The plot of land had a lot of stone on it. He cleared the land of the stone, breaking up large boulders and using the stone to build his house. He planted fruit

four decades since the end of the Falklands War, about £5m a year is being returned to the Island by offshore workers. This income has been one of the mainstays of the economy during this period especially in the building sector.

We all want to ensure that there is a successful outcome to the considerable capital put up by the British government for an airport and that safeguards are in place to minimise risk. In order to minimise that risk, we also need to minimise the risk to the culture of the people as a key asset in both social and economic development.

The risk is not only to the social capital, but also to the financial capital that Island people have invested in their homes. With about 80% of Islanders being home owners (on Tristan it is 100%) we also do not want to put Islanders' collective capital investment in housing, estimated at £100m (one hundred million pounds sterling) at today's prices, at risk, the Island biggest private capital investment.



*Writing Stones, Sandy Bay. Typical early island house. Pic Robin Cartel*

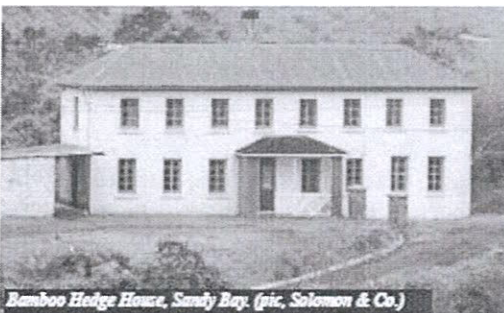
trees and grew vegetables in the remainder of the land he cleared.

Though cement blocks have replaced stone walls and roofing material is now iron sheeting. Islanders are still building family homes. To do this with increases in materials, land and labour costs, many Islanders work offshore. Something like half the working population were, and many Islanders still are, involved in this way. It is estimated that during the last

St Helena culture is centred on family and family stories. There is the story of a family who had to carry stone to build a home in a valley. They brought most in by donkey. The house was made of mud and stone and had a thatched roof. It is a story within living memory. It is said the family wanted to call the cottage "Carry Stone Cottage". It is a personal story that shows the resourcefulness of people, of their culture. There are no banners or monuments to show what Island culture stands for. It is carried in the homes Islanders build.

*Great names and great events are etched in stones of history, the stones of Carry Stone Cottage are etched in hearts of Island lives.*

*(From Carry Stone Cottage, Basil George)*



*Bamboo Hedge House, Sandy Bay. (pic, Solomon & Co.)*

Written evidence from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC):

The following was provided to SC2 by the Equality and Human Rights Commission:

- A Commentary on Housing and Human Rights on St Helena, December 2021

<https://sthelenaehrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/housing-report-final.pdf>

Written evidence from the Portfolio Director for Economic Development:

The following documents were provided to SC2 by the Portfolio Director for Economic Development:

- Housing Strategy Manual , 13 January 2015
- St Helena Housing Procedure, January 2015
- Tenancy Audit Checklist
- Tenancy Agreement, August 2016
- Example of tenant's letter, December 2022
- Government Landlord Housing Repairs Responsibilities

Written evidence from the Acting Head of Property:

SC2 requested further information and received "Business Case: Trading Account Reserves" and "Tenancy Audit Report"

Written evidence from the Senior Policy Planner:

SC2 requested further information and received:

- Minimum Income Standards Report, 06 December 2023
- Minimum Income Standards Update, 2023
- IRB and the Minimum Wage: Work Scenarios, 27 July 2023







