



St Helena
Government

ST HELENA GOVERNMENT
PROCEEDINGS OF LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
THURSDAY, 30TH NOVEMBER 2023
FIRST SITTING OF THE FOURTEENTH MEETING

Laid upon the Table 13th February 2025

ST. HELENA
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

THE PRESIDENT

The Honourable Cyril Keith Gunnell

EX-OFFICIO MEMBER

The Honourable Attorney General, Mr David Ballantyne

ELECTED MEMBERS

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

OVERSEAS

The Honourable Christine Lilian Scipio

Acting Clerk of Councils

Miss Anita Legg

PROCEEDINGS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Thursday, 30th November, 2023

The Council met at 10.00 am
in the Council Chamber

(The Honourable President in the Chair)

ORDER OF THE DAY

1. FORMAL ENTRY OF THE PRESIDENT

2. PRAYERS
(The Rt. Rev. Bishop Dale Bowers)

3. ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT

Honourable Members and everyone else present today in the Council Chamber at the Castle, Jamestown, a very good morning to you all. A good morning also to all those listening to this live broadcast of the proceedings of the first sitting of the fourteenth Meeting of Saint Helena Legislative Council to be held since the Council was formed in 2021. Welcome one and all. Not present today is Minister Scipio, who will be absent from Saint Helena until 12th December to enable her to attend the COP 28 being held in Dubai in December. Also absent from the Chamber today is our Deputy Speaker. Her reasons for extending apologies is because she, being disabled, is unable to safely access this Parliament building. Saint Helena currently does not have an independent parliament building, one that is accessible to all persons that are interested in listening to parliamentary business their Elected Members are carrying out on their behalf. Unfortunately, each time there is a Formal Meeting scheduled, the Legislative Council is uncertain what suitable room will be available to them. That is, now that the Court House, which provided safe access for everyone entering, is no longer readily available to the Legislative Council. Our Clerk for this sitting of Formal LegCo is the Acting Clerk of Councils, Miss Anita Legg. The Order Paper for the sitting, which has been published on the SHG website, includes nine sessional papers, 14 questions for oral response, three motions for debate, and the adjournment debate, where each Member is able to speak for up to ten minutes on issues affecting Saint Helena. Honourable Members, Youth Parliament Week was held recently both in UK and Saint Helena. I'll pause to say something about these important programmes, but not too much because I expect some encouraging comments will be coming from the floor of this House today. However, it would be remiss of The President of the Legislative Council not to take opportunity to applaud happenings both in the UK and in Saint Helena. Here on Saint Helena local politicians visited various schools with a planned programme. I understand this was successful. Representing the youth of Saint Helena at the 2023 UK Parliament Youth Parliament, in the House of

Commons, at the UK Overseas Territories Youth Summit, was Miss Kelly Yon. Kelly gave a very good account of herself from the despatch box. I witnessed something like this when I attended The President's Conference in Anguilla this year. In the presence of the Commons Speaker, Sir Lindsay Hoyle and Overseas Territory Speakers, Leader of the Opposition in Anguilla, Governor of Anguilla and community leaders, the Anguilla Youth Parliament Leader delivered a powerful and inspiring speech in the Anguilla House of Assembly and then she presented a communique. My mind at the time was with the youth of Saint Helena, reflecting that in good time, a youth leader in Saint Helena will take opportunity to address the House of this Legislative Council. I extend grateful thanks this morning to Bishop Dale for leading the prayers, to SAMS for broadcasting these proceedings live, and to Mr Patrick Young for once again delivering the Mace, thank you Honourable Members. Clerk, may we have the first item of business, please?

4. PAPERS

SP 25/2023 – The Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development.

The Speaker –
Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –
Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I beg to present Sessional Paper 25 of 2023, entitled Saint Helena Government Currency Fund Annual Financial Statements 2021/2022.

Ordered to lie on the table.

SP 26/2023 - The Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development.

The Speaker –
Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –
Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I beg to present Sessional Paper 26 of 2023, entitled a Bill of Ordinance, Supplementary Appropriation, 2023/24 Bill, 2023.

Ordered to lie on the table.

SP 27/2023 - The Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development.

The Speaker –
Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –
Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I beg to present Sessional Paper 27 of 2023, entitled Saint Helena Government Supplementary Estimates for 2023/24.

Ordered to lie on the table.

SP 28/2023 - The Honourable Chief Minister.

The Speaker –
Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –
Thank you, Mr Speaker. I beg to present Sessional Paper 28 of 2023, entitled Saint Helena Government Proceedings of Ministers Question Time, Tuesday, 25th of April, 2023, Second Sitting.

Ordered to lie on the table.

The Speaker –
Honourable Members in accordance with Standing Order two, rule six, I put the question. That if the Members are satisfied with the verification of the Clerk, that the draft record of the proceedings of Minister's Question Time held on Tuesday, 25th of April, 2023, Second Sitting be confirmed.

Question put and agreed to.

SP 29/2023 - The Honourable Chief Minister.

The Speaker –
Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –
Mr Speaker, I beg to present Sessional Paper 29 of 2023, entitled Saint Helena Government Proceedings of Ministers Question Time, Tuesday, 13th of June, 2023, Third Sitting.

Ordered to lie on the table.

The Speaker –
Honourable Members in accordance with Standing Order two, rule six, I put the question that if the Members are satisfied with the verification of the Clerk, that the draft record of the proceedings of Minister's Question Time held on Tuesday, 13th June 2023, Third Sitting be confirmed.

Question put and agreed to.

SP 30/2023 - The Honourable Chief Minister.

The Speaker –
Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –
Thank you, Mr Speaker. I beg to present Sessional Paper 30 of 2023, entitled Saint Helena Government Proceedings of Ministers Question Time, Tuesday, 18th of July 2023, Fourth Sitting.

Ordered to lie on the table.

The Speaker –

Honourable Members in accordance with Standing Order two, rule six, I put the question that if the Members are satisfied with the verification of the Clerk that the draft record of the proceedings of Minister's Question Time held on Tuesday, 18th of July 2023, Fourth Sitting, be confirmed.

Question put and agreed to.

SP 31/2023 - The Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I beg to present Sessional Paper 31 of 2023, entitled Select Committee One Report to Legislative Council on the First Meeting of Select Committee One published on the 12th of September, 2023. Fisheries, A Cross Functional Review. However, prior to doing so, I wish to make a brief statement, if I may.

The Speaker –

You may do.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, the report that I am about to lay is the first published by Select Committee One following the inquiry made earlier this year, and in particular the live hearing that we held on Wednesday, 9th of August. Mr Speaker, the Select Committee made a total of eight recommendations which have been shared with the two Portfolios affected, responses for which are relayed alongside the Select Committee Report. In closing, Mr Speaker, I would again wish to thank the Minister's Portfolio Directors, other public Officers and members of the community who assisted in this inquiry and to make special mention of UK Parliamentary Clerk, Miss Chloe Freeman, who helped the Select Committee considerably during her recent secondment. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Ordered to lie on the table.

SP 32/2023 - The Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I beg to present Sessional Paper 32 of 2023, entitled Saint Helena Legislative Council Report by the Investigative Commission on the investigation of the appeal made by the Honourable Jeffrey Ellick. However, prior to doing so, I wish to make a brief statement, if I may.

The Speaker –
You may do.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, to put into context the laying of this report of the inquiry by the Investigative Commission convened to investigate an appeal, the Elected Members present and also the listening public, should bear in mind that the complaint was made during the previous Council and that the appeal was also made at the very end of the previous Council. Prior to being dissolved in 2021, as all will be aware, both the Standing Orders and the Code of Conduct for Members of Legislative Council were reviewed and approved at the Formal Meeting of Legislative Council held on the 16th of December, 2022, to ensure that unfinished business from the previous Council was not overlooked. Appropriate amendments were made so that any unfinished business could still be investigated and reported. For example, this particular appeal, which is left over from the previous Council being laid with the Report of the inquiry by the Investigative Commission convened to investigate the appeal, is the report of the Investigative Commission convened to investigate the original complaint. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member.

Ordered to lie on the table.

SP 33/2023 - The Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I beg to present Sessional Paper 33 of 2023 entitled Saint Helena Legislative Council Report by the Investigative Commission, on the investigation of the appeal made by Honourable Christine Scipio. However, prior to doing so, I wish to make a brief statement, if I may.

The Speaker –

You may do.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, without wishing to sound repetitive, I again need to raise the point made previously that in order to put into context, the laying of this report of the inquiry by the Investigative Commission, convened to investigate an appeal, the Elected Members present and also the listening public, should bear in mind that the complaint was made during the previous Council and that the appeal was also made at the very end of the previous Council prior to being dissolved in 2021. As all will be aware, both the Standing Orders and the Code of Conduct for Members of Legislative Council were reviewed and approved at the Formal Meeting of Legislative Council held on 16th December 2022, to ensure that unfinished business from the previous Council was not overlooked. Appropriate amendments were made so that any unfinished business could still be investigated and reported. For example, this particular appeal, which is left over from the previous Council being laid with the report of the inquiry by

the Investigative Commission, convened to investigate the appeal, is the report of the Investigative Commission convened to investigate the original complaint. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member.

Ordered to lie on the table.

The Speaker –

Next item of business, please?

5.

QUESTIONS

Question No. 1 – The Honourable Robert Midwinter to ask the Honourable Minister for Health and Social Care.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. So, Mr Speaker, I'd ask before I start raising questions, is, may Members take jackets off?

The Speaker –

Yes, you may do that. Surprised somebody didn't ask before now.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, will the Honourable Minister for Health and Social Care tell this Council, if there has been or will be a formal inquiry into the matter regarding surgeries conducted by Dr Sergio.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister for Health and Social Care.

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

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I like to thank the Honourable Member for his question. I would just like to add that before I start to answer this question formally, I would like to make all Members and the public aware that this is a highly sensitive and live topic, which makes it difficult for myself to comment outside of my given response in certain areas. I would therefore look to the AG to intervene on any supplementary questions should he deem necessary to do so. The Health and Social Care Portfolio, undertook a full review in 2022 using an independent medical service provider. Remote reviews of patients were conducted with consent given, and provided a clear feedback to the Orthopaedic Surgeon, who was at the time contracted on Island. The joint approach in the review enabled the service to look at treatment plans where required. Much of the surgery review was considered appropriate however, as with any surgery, there is an element of risk that surgical interventions may not reach their desired outcome or results. One of the other outcomes from this internal inquiry, was that it is now considered too high a risk

to conduct large orthopaedic surgeries on Island. As LegCo will now be aware, we have a visiting Orthopaedic Surgeon as part of our new medical services offering, that undertakes clinics on Island and minor surgery. But all major surgery such as joint replacements, is completed in South Africa. This continuity has helped patients to develop an element of trust in the system, and this approach has helped to improve the outcomes. However, one of the negative impacts of this method is that we now have an increasing accumulated list of patients now waiting to be referred, with no financial resource to accommodate this at present. Separate to this medical review, a formal police inquiry was conducted independently and the outcomes from this is now public knowledge. This is a common compensation scheme linked to the separate police inquiry and its outcomes will be developed, is in development creating an opportunity to collect data which can be analysed to inform future provisions of the service and its practice. The scheme is likely to produce a wider data than an inquiry, and for that reason it is in the best interests of the health service provision and patients to allow the scheme to progress without disruption. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, before I ask the next question, if I just say a few words, basically, whilst we're all aware that there was a police investigation into the alleged criminal acts, which clearly cannot be discussed in this House at the moment, what the public actually wish to know is whether or not the internal inquiry is going to, or was going to be undertaken regarding how this occurred in the first place, that continued unchecked, and who is ultimately responsible for implementing procedures to ensure that what happened doesn't happen again. So I'm pleased to hear that there was an internal inquiry. So I just ask, will the results, the recommendations from that particular inquiry be made public along with the conclusions and recommendations?

The Speaker -

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister.

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

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member for his follow up question and no, the results from this inquiry won't be made public. In terms of the medical review, it contains detailed medical documents which myself wouldn't have access to. I just have access through my Portfolio Director to some of the outcomes that we have now put in place, which includes now not doing large orthopaedic surgery on all.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. No further questions. Next question please.

Question No. 2 – The Honourable Rosemary Bargo to ask the Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development.

The Speaker –

Honourable Rosemary Bargo?

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Can the Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development tell this House, when will the preferred bidder for the shipping freight service be approved and what is the expected start date of this service?

The Speaker –

Honourable Martin Henry?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I'd like to thank my Honourable friend for her question. Mr Speaker, following last Friday's announcement in the form of a press release, we did inform the public that we have entered into a late stage negotiations with MACS. So Mac's Shipping Company and earlier this week, SHG signed a letter of intent with the objective of reaching an agreement on a contract with MACS by the end of December or sooner if possible. Mr Speaker, I think members of the public will be pleased to hear that the service, which is likely once again to commence, will connect Saint Helena directly with Cape Town and we anticipate the service commencing in February. However, Mr Speaker, we are not expecting the first voyage of this new service until after the last voyage of the Maria de Paz in March 2024. But as one can imagine, Mr Speaker, it will take a certain amount of mobilisation before the first vessel can set sail. So we're hoping that we will be able to, as I've said before, to the public, come out and give updates as and when we can. And we hope that the next update will be to confirm that there is a signed contract. But until that time, Mr Speaker, that is all I can say in regards to the service going forward. Thank you very much.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Member. Honourable Rosemary Bargo.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you, Mr Speaker and thank you, Minister. Minister, can you state if there is a backup plan in place with regards to a reserve bidder in the likelihood that negotiations does not materialise into a satisfactory outcome?

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for his supplementary question. And yes, in the procurement process, there is a plan B, and that would be to go with the reserve bidder should the negotiations with the preferred bidder not move forward in a preferable way. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you. No further supplementary questions. Next question please.

Question No. 3 – The Honourable Ronald Coleman to ask the Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development.

The Speaker –
Honourable Ronald Coleman?

The Honourable Ronald Coleman –
Thank you, Mr Speaker. Can the Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development, in the light of problems being experienced with the interim shipping arrangements, ensure that the new shipping contract will be fit for purpose fulfilling the needs of Saint Helena.

The Speaker –
Thank you, Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –
Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I would like to thank the Honourable Member for his question. Although, Mr Speaker, I have a little difficulty in answering this question because the “fulfilling the needs of Saint Helena” is very subjective, because what might fill the needs of one person or one business may not necessarily fill the needs of others. And as Ministers, we have to look at the needs of the Island as a whole.

The Speaker –
Okay. Thank you.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –
So in saying that, Mr Speaker, I also would like to just illustrate how sort of operating a shipping service to a tiny, remote Island like Saint Helena has its challenges. And that main challenge, Mr Speaker, is ensuring that the costs for the service is satisfactory and because of the remoteness, but also because of the volumes of cargo that we actually import to the Island. This is challenging. With that, said, Mr Speaker, the tender documents, put together with the involvement of the Chamber of Commerce and direct involvement with some large importers, clearly stipulated that Island's shipping needs and therefore is designed to ensure that the new contract meets these needs. Mr Speaker, I am also aware of the community's frustration with the delays and the inconsistency of the current service. To that end, Mr Speaker, I have made it clear to the negotiation team that future agreements with MACS will have a clear performance metric rated so that timelines and the quality of the service is monitored. Mr Speaker, as I said earlier, we cannot ensure that the service meets the needs of every individual, but our objective is to make sure that this service needs meets the needs of the Island as a whole, now and into the future. Thank you.

The Speaker –
Thank you very much, Honourable Ronald Coleman.

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –
Thank you, Mr Speaker, because of the rise in costs of Shipping, Mr Speaker, has this Government looked at the possibility of subsidising.

The Speaker –
Thank you very much, Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Mr Speaker, I think it has been quite clear for some time now that the British Government would only subsidise one means of access to the Island. They are subsidising the airport. To ask to subsidise the shipping could be something that we might need to move to by default, if we cannot maintain a suitable and costly service to the Island. But at this very time, we do have credible bids, which we are now entering into negotiation with. Until that is concluded, I would not say in this House whether or not this Government will be looking to put a case forward to the FCDO on the subsidy. Like I said, Mr Speaker, because they are creditable services on the table. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Karl Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Would the Honourable Minister be able to say whether, as part of the shipping tender process, we're also looking at the capacity of port control and immigration and customs to also manage the shipping schedule, because obviously, as most listeners will be aware, the Wharf has been closed for most of this week to merchants. So it's not just about getting the ship here. It's also about getting the cargo off the ship and distributed throughout the Island, which is something else we consistently fail at.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for his supplementary question. However, I think his question is a cross-cutting issue, which does involve my Honourable colleague here, Minister Ellick, who port operations comes under the responsibility of. So all I can say is, yes, it is a Government that is our intention to make sure that port operations can handle any shipping service in the future. But I can invite my friend, Honourable Jeffrey Ellick, just to give a little bit more context to how, what operations will be carried out going forward.

The Speaker -

Thank you very much, Minister Ellick. Are you able to help?

The Hon. Jeffrey Ellick (Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Yes. Just to reassure the Member I've already had a chat with my Portfolio director about Cargo Operations this week. So he's working on that and should be having a meeting later today concerning that. But going forward, there needs to be proper planning and we should be ensuring that we can manage our ship and our aircrafts going forward.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. No further supplementary questions. Next question please.

Question No. 4 – The Honourable Gillian Brooks to ask the Honourable Chief Minister.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Gillian Brooks?

The Hon. Gillian Brooks –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Honourable Chief Minister tell this House, what policy and strategy does SHG have in place for addressing the critical decline in population on Saint Helena?

The President –

Thank you very much. Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Gillian Brooks for her question. Saint Helena's Population Projections 2020 to 2051 describes five population scenarios for the Island. One, no migration, that is, no net inward or outward migration. Two, residents leave, but all return. No net inward or outward migration. Three, more residents leave than return. Net outward migration of 20 residents a year, four returning residents, a net inward migration of 20 residents a year, and finally five, returning residents and new residents arrivals. Net inward migration of 40 residents a year. I think it is all obvious to most of us that the statistics will show that we are in scenario three more residents leaving than returning. Historically, this represents a typical pattern on Saint Helena. Residents, mostly those of working age and those with young families, leaves to work abroad in the UK, Ascension or the Falklands and wider afield as we move forward. While some come back to the island when they are older, many do not choosing to live and settle abroad, typically in the UK. The continued outward migration is already posing major issues in all sectors, and as a result, there is an inadequate workforce to meet the needs of the island. Key economic development sectors struggle to recruit. Anecdotal evidence suggests that it is most notable in the hospitality sectors and in traditional sectors such as fishing and agriculture. But I believe, if not addressed as a matter of priority, it would be fair to say that the ability to recruit is becoming a growing issue across all sectors. There is brain drain. We educate and provide training and our workforce become more employable elsewhere. Graduate teachers, qualified nurses attracted to jobs on Ascension and the Falkland Islands. The ageing population means higher dependency on public services like Social Care and Health. There is growing reliance on the Government to provide social benefits. So to address this, we are working to create the right conditions to attract people to live and work on our island. These include a more liberal Immigration Policy which targets working age people. Improved internet connectivity. Obviously, everybody knows now Saint Helena is connected to the subsea cable. Renewable energy to drive down cost of electricity. The renewable energy policy was approved earlier this year in August 2023. Banking reforms, creating a policy environment which attracts foreign direct investment and makes it easier for businesses to become established and developed. We are also looking to improve educational standards by doing an education review in 24/25; improving health care another review being done next year. It is recognised that some of the policies above will take time to bed in and make a positive impact on the working age demographic. However, there are opportunities for some quick wins. For example, it is anticipated that the Immigration Policy will be implemented by the beginning of the 24/25 financial year. Further work will take place during the next 18 months to build on the enhanced internet connectivity, with a view to targeting and encouraging digital nomads to come to the island. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member, Honourable Gillian Brooks.

The Hon. Gillian Brooks –

Just to say thank you, Chief Minister, for that really informative response. I did actually have two questions, but you've answered them, so I'm not going to repeat. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, can the Honourable Chief Minister say whether in order to help address this decline, she has had any discussions with UK counterparts regarding the possibility of hosting migrants or asylum seekers from the UK.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. The short answer is no. We haven't actually spoken to the UK about hosting asylum seekers or migrants. However, as part of the Immigration Policy, we will have to be looking at ways in which makes it easier for people to come to Saint Helena. I think we have to be very careful when we say we are going to open the door to asylum seekers or migrants. We are struggling at the moment to have the infrastructure in place to look after our current population. So I think we have to be real careful when we make statements like that. And then they say, right, here you go, here's 50 people coming and we don't have the infrastructure in place to deal with it. So I'm not suggesting it's not something that we can have a discussion about in the future. But until we have the infrastructure in place to deal with the issues we have right now, I think it would be more of a hindrance to us knowing that we are not in the best place at this present time to open ourselves up to more issues.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Member, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

I just wanted to follow on from that.

The Speaker –

Okay. Thank you, Honourable.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker and thank you my Honourable colleague, for deferring because I just wanted to respond to that. So I thank the Chief Minister for that response and fully acknowledge that clearly, any discussion with the UK Government would need to include discussion around additional facilities, additional infrastructure, which is actually quite doable in this day and age with things like Porta-cabins. And so I just wish to raise the question is, can that be considered in the future?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Response.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I think in my initial response, I didn't say it was off the table. I've just said that at the moment the timing isn't quite right. One of the discussions or a part of the discussions that we had in the UK whilst there on JMC, but also what will be discussed in FAM this week, is about the need to address effective infrastructure for Saint Helena. So it's not that immigration etcetera won't be talked about. It is being talked about, is not opening the door right now to say that we can accept migrants or asylum seekers.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. And if I may, I would like to preface my question with a short explanation to explain where I'm coming from.

The Speaker –

Please do.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

One of the reasons for the decline in population is the excessively low birth rate. One of the reasons for the excessively low birth rate is the cost of child care and associated provision for young children on the island. Has she considered implementing any allowances, mitigations, etc. that would help to ease that burden on young families?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Corinda Essex for the question. I know that there is a Tax working group and in that forum I know there is. They are looking at ways in which we could look at different tax regimes. That is yet to be presented to the Executive Council, as Cabinet we have seen some of the ideas and if my memory serves me right, I believe the Honourable Andrew Turner did talk in Elected Members Meeting about some of the ideas that's been put on the table and that's been thrashed out at that level before we're able to take it forward at this present time. But yes, we are looking at a number of tax regimes, whether it will be specific to the question you've just asked. Dr Essex, I wouldn't wish to confirm that at this stage, but there is some work being done to look at other ways of tax incentives. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Mark Brooks, did you wish to make a comment?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Yes, Mr Speaker, just to confirm what the Chief Minister has said. Obviously, I also am a member of the Tax and Revenue Working Group, and I have said this in public before, although I can't quite recall if it was in the House. But I will make the statement in the House that in the next financial year, the Tax and Revenue Working Group are considering a raft of tax measures and they will include some sort of child

incentive or tax allowance. So that will be considered, although I can't predict the outcome as of now, Mr Speaker, thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much for that comment. Any further supplementary questions? No. Next question please.

Question No. 5 – The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex to ask the Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development tell us House, when it is envisaged that the long awaited policy related to competition between Saint Helena Government and the private sector will be completed?

The Speaker –

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

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I'd like to thank my Honourable friend for her question. Mr Speaker, I'm pleased to say that I am advised by the Economic Development Portfolio that work is progressing on development of a Comprehensive Competition Policy for Saint Helena. Although, Mr Speaker, our progress to date has been limited due to the other pressing priorities within my Portfolio. While the development of the policy is written into the Economic Development's Portfolio Strategy plan, which I have shared with the Elected Members, a lack of resources has meant that development of this relatively, quite complex policy has progressed slower than I wanted it to Mr Speaker. But I will give a little summary of what we intend to put in our policy, and that the policy is being developed will also incorporate to provide for overarching competition rules on Saint Helena. So that's as an umbrella overall throughout Government, and this will include powers to deal with specific sectors that require special rules because of their monopoly. Sorry, this word is a little bit difficult for me to say Mr Speaker, it is their monopoly, monopolistic.

The Speaker –

Monopolistic. Well done.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Yes, in nature. So I think the public is well aware of that, even though I couldn't say, it means that someone offering a service that nobody else on the island is offering, and also it applies to SHG whenever it engaged in activities where there is an actual potential capacity competitor known as, another big word here, Mr Speaker, who wrote these questions? Answer, sorry. Another big word, Mr Speaker, but that is known as the competitive neutrality.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

So the policy work already underway has considered whether the Commonwealth Model Bill on competition provides a suitable base for competition rules on Saint Helena. So, in other words, Mr Speaker, the team is looking to other areas in the Commonwealth to help design this competition policy and seeing and learning from what other areas of the Commonwealth and other jurisdictions is doing to help address this issue. But, Mr Speaker, I think the main point I want to drive home today here to my listening friends and the listening public, is that all Portfolios are encouraged to act within the principles of this Government's vision and strategy. Which includes establishing an enabling environment for the private sector to thrive. To that end, Mr Speaker, if any member of the private sector feels that she is acting in direct competition with them, then please do not hesitate to contact me or contact any of the Councillors through their local reps. And what I'm trying to say here, Mr Speaker, this Government has set its vision now a little over two years ago, or just on two years. And every sector of the public service should be working in principle to that vision. And if they're not working to that vision, then it needs to be brought to the attention of this Government. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Member. Honourable Karl Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Would the Minister be able to say if this policy goes a little bit further and actually encourages divestment of Government properties, not properties? Sorry, Government equities and sectors that compete with the private sector.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Yes. I'd like to assure my Honourable friend that will be included, but also is a separate piece of work. We are, as a Government, looking at areas that can be diverse into the private sector. And we have in the past talked about the tourism function of Saint Helena Government. And I have said or given assurance to this House that eventually we do want to move to having, that function delivered by the private sector. But as I said before, and I've made a case before, right now isn't the best time I feel and we feel to do that. But it is something that we will be working towards within our Tourism Recovery Strategy. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Councillor Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for his very detailed response, but he failed to put any timescale on completion of this exercise. Can you please give us an indicative timeframe?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. And I would like to thank the Honourable Member for her question. However, Mr Speaker, it is hard for me to stand here as a Minister and give specific timeframes when I know those timeframes will all depend on the capacity within the Portfolio, which is not in my control, Mr Speaker. So I will assure the Honourable Member that I will do my best to push this forward, bearing in mind that there's other competing priorities within our Portfolio. But this is very heavily dependent on the resources available. And right now we are struggling with those resources within our Portfolio. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Can the Honourable Minister please indicate whether it's likely to be completed by the end of this financial year?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Mr Speaker, just turning to my Portfolio Director. I don't think we are going to complete this work within the financial year. However, I will take it on myself now to come back to this House before the end of the financial year with an update on how this policy is developing. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Mr Speaker, it seems that we are not getting very far in actually determining an indicative timeframe. I did not ask for a specific timeframe. I asked for an indicative timeframe. I've now been told, not likely before the end of the financial year. How long after the beginning of the next financial year? Is it likely that this work will be concluded if all goes to plan?

The Speaker –

How long after? Thank you very much. Honourable Member, Honourable Minister Brooks. Oh. Sorry I anticipated Minister Brooks. Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Just as the Honourable Minister Brooks is speaking without sounding to make excuses here, I think it really needs to be highlighted how much pressure is on the Public Service at the moment to deliver on a lot of the big projects that we have. I've mentioned quite a few in my response to the Honourable Gillian Brooks just now about immigration, about all the other parts, but access, shipping, all of this comes under Economic Development when we're talking about access tourism, etc. So I think to ask the Portfolio Director in this forum to give that kind of undertaking is something that I would rather the Minister goes away and really have a look at the priorities within their Portfolio before we make an indicative timeline,

then to have to come back in 3 to 6 months' time and we've got a Formal LegCo for us to have to say we've missed that deadline when it's just been given today just to answer a question. So unless Minister Brooks now has got more information, I would be a little bit reluctant to do so.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much for that, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

With the greatest respect to what the Chief Minister has said, which I fully accept, I am not asking for an undertaking. I am not asking for a specific date. All I am asking for is an indicative date, and I would have no problem at all if when that indicative date is reached, it has not been possible to complete that piece of work for a number of justifiable reasons. We all know indicative dates are indicative and are subject to change if circumstances alter and they then become impossible to achieve. So I would like to make it very clear I am not asking for a Formal undertaking. All I am asking for is an indicative date, and I believe this House is entitled to have an indicative date supplied. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you for that point. Honourable Minister Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and just having a quiet word with my Portfolio Director, we can give an indicative date, sorry, of the second quarter of next financial year. However, Mr Speaker, I will emphasise again that it is this Government's Vision and Strategy to support the local private sector and we want to be an enabling Government. So again, until that policy is in place, the principle is that this Government will not be in competition with the private sector. We will try to do the complete opposite, which is support the private sector. So any private sectors out there who feels that we are in direct competition with them, please come and speak to a Member of Legislative Council, including myself, if I do have the time to speak. But there are channels which any member of the public can feed information through to myself. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much for that, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

I thank the Honourable Minister very much for the indicative time frame, and also for his assurance that it is basically not considered a favourable or advisable for SHG to compete with the private sector. I would also like to add that I have brought instances where there has been competition to the attention of SHG on several occasions. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Next question, please.

Question No. 6 – The Honourable Andrew Turner to ask the Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development.

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, on what basis funding for cultural activities through Creative Saint Helena has been cut?

The Speaker –

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

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for his question. Just to give some context to the listening public out there, Mr Speaker, Creative Saint Helena has received and is currently receiving a grant from Saint Helena Government to support their work in the community, providing activities to various ages and groups, including young people. The following numbers Mr Speaker, I shall read out is a summary of the approved grant available to Creative Saint Helena over the last two years, was the 2021/22 budget and 2022/23 budget. The grant approved for 2024 is also included in these numbers. So Mr Speaker, I will read some numbers out so that my Honourable friends could understand the subsidy that has been provided to Creative Saint Helena over the past three years. So 2021/22 we supply 31,500 in the grant subsidy. In 22/23 we cut that to 17,500. And in this budget going forward, we have allocated the same, which is 17,500. Well, Mr Speaker, for the 22/23 Financial Year, Ministers agreed to reduce the grant to 17,500 from 31,500. In making this decision, Ministers took into account the following. The funding constraints and the significant pressures being placed under overall Government budget to finance public services. And that is mainly the pressures that we have experienced on our health team over the last couple of years. We've also taken to consideration the operational cost of Creative Saint Helena for the prior Financial Year, and also the balance in Creative Saint Helena's bank account as their reserves. Furthermore, Mr Speaker, we also take into consideration that the organization has the ability to fundraise and or to charge for their services, which is being done by other non-Government organizations to finance their activities. So as an example, I can talk about New Horizon's, who often does fundraising events and also charge a little fee to help fund their activities. And so I know my Honourable friend here to the right will agree with me when we want to demonstrate that to NGO's, that they should be doing innovative things to try and make their money go further. So things like fundraising events to help fund their activities, charging fees, where and when it is appropriate and when it's affordable. All those sorts of things we want to encourage the NGOs to do going forward, because we all need to make the most of the money that we are allocated, and that goes throughout Government. So, Mr Speaker. I think it's important also to understand the operational costs of this organization as well, because to one person, £17,000 might sound a lot. To another person. It might sound like it's a small amount, but just to give some context. The employee costs for Creative Saint Helena in financial year 21/22 was £16,547. Internet and phone costs was £1,063. Advertising was £243. Vehicle running costs was £205. Materials, etc was £2,353 and other operational costs was £749. Mr Speaker, in this financial year it does not include also the purchasing of a vehicle and also the hire drive. So those costs could also be added to these costs, I just read out as the final operational costs. However, the purchase of a vehicle and hire drive should no longer be needed in future years. So Creative Saint Helena is operational. Costs remain the same as 2021 or even if the costs increase by inflation. The combination of the grant we are giving 17,500 and other income where they should charge for their service or fund raise is would be able to cover the difference of £3,660. So what I'm saying, Mr Speaker, is the amount that we gave give, have gave and will give taken into consideration, the organization's ability to fundraise. The difference that they used in that financial year to their use for

cost of operations is £3,660, and we feel as Ministers that the organization could have a good stab at trying to raise those funds through fundraising and charging fees, which they were successfully doing a few years ago. Also, Mr Speaker, I just want to add that one of capital purchases that could be sort of covered for the entity or for the organization could be from their reserves in their bank balance, and at the time was in excess of £26,000. So that is the last sort of information I have. We haven't had their accounts for this year. Of course, the year hasn't end, but until we do that, Ministers can only base decisions on the numbers we see in front of us. And that is why we've made the decision to cut Creative Saint Helena budget last year and the year going this year, sorry, and the year ahead. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Andrew Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I wonder if I might just add a quick point of information on the front of that, because there was a little bit omitted from there.

The Speaker –

You may.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

That's worth noting, and that the last year's budget was reduced because of special circumstances where Creative Saint Helena had, as the Minister quite rightly pointed out, excess in their bank account. They saved that year to fund an artist residency course, bringing in a young Saint Helenian artist who lives overseas to help try and develop more arts and culture on the Island. According to the organisation, they were told at the time it was purely because of those circumstances. They didn't get the usual 31,500 and this year when they submitted accounts that showed their near zero balance. So I think that quite clearly shows there has been a cut here, hence why we're talking about it now and not in the context of last year's. But what I want to ask now, following on from that is, is tourism still considered to be a major part of developing our economy, and if so, why the cuts funding for the cultural development that goes to entertain those tourists?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

As I said, Mr Speaker, I'm trying to sum up why Ministers make this decision. We have a lot of competing priorities, and there is a lot of strain on our budget overall. We actually will be putting forward a supplementary because we haven't covered the cost that was supplemented for this financial year. So that will give some indication of the strain that is on our budget. And this is not just this year, the last financial year we find ourselves, we were in a similar situation and so all Portfolios had to make cuts. And so I don't see this as doing something that we didn't have to do ourselves. This is just spreading the pain. It's not directing the pain to one entity. It's spreading the pain across Government because we all have to make sacrifices given the limited budget that we got and we have to manage. Thank you.

The Speaker –

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

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Is the Minister not ashamed that it's taken until November for Creative Saint Helena to be given this budget settlement, considering that our main budget was approved in July.

The Speaker –

Is the Minister ashamed? Honourable Minister?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

I think ashamed is the wrong word. I am disappointed and I'm disappointed because there are constraints within the Public Service. But we have highlighted that to our Honourable Members here on a number of occasions. And I personally, myself, I cannot do something about this until we have adequate resources within the Public Service. And I know that the whole of the Public Service is working together to try and address those issues. Which is not an easy task, but it is a task that we are faced with, which is a lot to do with our isolation, Mr Speaker, and also to do with the level of subsidy we get and the level of wages we can afford to pay our staff. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. I'll allow Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, in rising, I just want to pick up on the point made about reserves and say that my understanding is there are no reserves remaining with Creative Saint Helena. But I just want to ask the Honourable Minister, does he acknowledge that the youth of this Island are calling on this Government to provide more, not less, cultural and creative based activities?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Yes, Mr Speaker, I am aware of that. And as I said, well, as this Government has said in the 2024/25, we will be in discussions with New Horizon and Creative Saint Helena about better utilising the resources. Should that take place, then we will see if we can deliver a better service by amalgamating those two services. Now, I'm not saying that it's going to work and it's going to be ideal, but we are going to try to do all we can to make sure that the money that we are given out is going as far as it could possibly go, and is basically covering or capturing all the different activities that Creative Saint Helena and the New Horizons offer to our youth and our elderly community. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Andrew Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Is the Minister aware that because of this Creative Saint Helena is now considering having to wind up the organisation, leading to a loss of all the cultural development activities they do for people young and old across the Island? And let's take note of what some of those are actually. Weekly ukulele group lessons at Saint Paul's Primary, weekly violin lessons, Children's choir at Saint

Paul's and Harford Primary, weekly ballet and tap classes aimed at young people. And of course, the work Creative Saint Helena does with persons at the CCC such as their weekly music and movement sessions.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. And no, I am not aware. And I think one of the biggest reasons why I'm not aware, because no one from Creative Saint Helena has come and spoken to me or the Deputy Financial Secretary who is sitting here.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Yeah, but I need to be aware directly from these entities, Mr Speaker, and that would help tremendously if these entities can be proactive and come forward to Government when there's issues like this, then we can try and address these issues rather than have them, like I said, slung out in this House where really this isn't an appropriate place to deal with issues like this. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, Yes, I would actually like to respond to that. I'm sure my Honourable colleague, Andrew Turner was going to raise the same point because I am a co-signatory in a letter that has gone directly to the Deputy Financial Secretary. I am really disappointed with the outcome of this because and again, I raise the question, does he, when he talks about drain on resources, but does he not recognize the knock on effect that this has, not provided these types of activities have, on our youth and the ongoing resource demand that there is when these types of activities are not provided to our youth?

The Speaker –

Response Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

I think there's a bit of confusion in the House Mr Speaker, at the end of the day, I don't provide these activities. Creative Saint Helena does creative. Creative Saint Helena has been supplied with a grant from this Government. Creative Saint Helena has the ability to fundraise and to charge fees, so if the service is stopped, it is not the Minister's fault that it's down to the entity themselves. If they no longer want to continue the service, however much funding they get, or they no longer want to continue fundraising or charging, then it is down to the entity themselves, not down to the Minister. Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

I take the point. Thank you very much. Any further questions? I think the question has been fully answered. Anyway, just one more Honourable Karl Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

I'd just like to come in. I'll stay away from, but clearly, you know, we're talking about £31,000. Being a member of the PAC, you get to see the wastages to give you an idea because IT ordered the wrong batteries and fitted them wrongly. It cost the Government £100,000. You have to realise that things such as the small amounts of money we give to the Saint Helena National Trust, the small amount of money we give to the Napoleonic Society. I hope I haven't got that name wrong, I think it changed recently. New Horizons that we use New Horizons to prevent bad behaviour in Jamestown and it's worked very well. That was what was reported back to this Council. Look, the simple fact is you're talking about small amounts of money for NGO's that should be fully supported. They are key to the culture of this Island and if the Government would just simply stop wasting money on silly, frivolous expenses, you would have the money for this. You are giving £2 million for energy. It would pay for your health shortages and everything. Can't you just see it?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much for those comments. Honourable Minister, do you have a response? I do, I think maybe Chief Minister's light was on just before you. Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Once again, it would seem that this is becoming a cat fight, if I can put it this way. I think we all recognize that we can run Saint Helena Government more effective and efficiently. But when the budgets are provided to our core services, it's not given with the hope that some order comes incorrectly. So to be here today, having a go at Minister Brooks, because, you know, we couldn't give the amount of money that Creative Saint Helena would like. At the end of the day, when those mistakes happen, we are just as frustrated as you are on that side of the room, if I can put it that way. But we are trying to run a more effective and efficient Government, but we need everybody to work together on this. However, if we start to look at Creative Saint Helena on its own and it only looks like 31,500, I will then turn around and have Minister Henry saying, but I only would like to have 50 grand. 31,500 doesn't even cover the cost of one medical flight. For instance, if we need a flight to come in but we don't have that surplus money to be able to give additional flights in a year. So I think we need to stop just looking at things in in silo and start looking at the issue that Saint Helena has at this present time as a Government. Yes, foreign non-government organizations would love to be able to give more monies. I think we all support that. But I would also say that from listening to the conversation that's had here today, there might be some communication breakdowns here. I'm not suggesting that it is, but until we can look into this, based on what's been brought today from what the Minister saw or have been seeing from this entity we're talking about now, a lot of questions were asked when we took the decision in 22/23 to reduce the amount of grant that was given. Nothing was demonstrated to us to say that in 23/24, they would require additional funding, and what detriment that would have, if I'm quite honest, I'll say it like this. There are some NGOs who do one pages when it has to come in to tell us how it is that they're entity would struggle if we were to reduce their budgets. I think more emphasis needs to be put on how putting together a good business case to put forward to the Government when considering the grants. With that said, that does not result in having a bigger pot of money because there isn't a bigger pot to dive into. So I think the answers to most of the questions today is going to come down to lack of resources, whether that is financial or human, but that is the reality of what Saint Helena is facing at this time. So I would all I'd say is we need to now just look at the letters that you refer to, Honourable Rob Midwinter, but it will not make a difference for what's happened for 23/24 and as Minister Brooks has rightly said, we've got supplementaries here to deal with later simply because we just don't have the funding resource we need to operate our core services. On top

of that, our revenue generation is down and it doesn't help when we can't move with revenue generating ideas. When things like The Honourable Karl Thrower made reference again to renewable energy, I am starting to get quite frustrated. I guess because we all want renewable energy. I think we're all on the same page when it comes to that, but I simply don't have the money in my back pocket to say, and here's the money, and renewable energy will appear next year. It doesn't work like that. So we have to work and make sure we get the groundwork done correctly so we don't go through the project and realize after that this is not the best for Saint Helena. We need to do the groundwork upfront so that we don't go back down the same road that we travelled in 2016 at Saint Helena. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. I'm aware that Honourable Robert Midwinter wants to ask a question, but Honourable Minister Brooks, do you want to make a comment that supports.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Just a comment, and I'll leave it there. Mr Speaker, just to say that the entities that my Honourable friend Mr Karl Thrower set out earlier, Creative Saint Helena, New Horizons, Bicentenary Trust, these are all entities that has the ability to fundraise money to fund their activities. And I will just say, Mr Speaker, some is doing better than others and I'll leave it there.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I'm really glad that the Honourable Minister made that point, because we heard about looking at things in silo and sharing the burden across the board. But I'd just like to ask, has any other NGO or CSO lost funding this financial year?

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister. I think it may just be relevant.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

No, Mr Speaker, they have not lost funding this year.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

May I rise on the point of information please?

The Speaker –

You may.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

I just rise to pay tribute to the organizations on the Island that do not seek funding from SHG, and that provide valuable services to our young, to our old, and to our community as a whole. And I think that their contribution to our community should be fully recognized. Thank you. Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. I think we may have exhausted the question. Thank you for your responses and for the questions put forward. Next question please.

Question No. 7 – The Honourable Robert Midwinter to ask the Honourable Chief Minister.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, will the Honourable Chief Minister tell this Council, what progress has the Education, Skills and Employment Portfolio made thus far in respect of the Primary School Review that she announced earlier this year?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. So further to the response that was given to the Honourable Rosemary Bargo in the June setting of Legislative Council on the Primary School Review, I am able to provide the following update. On 26th of July 2023, a preliminary workshop was held with the Consultant contractor to undertake preparatory work on the Primary School Review. In attendance were Education personnel, representatives from all schools and invited stakeholders, which included the Children's Champion, PTA Parent reps and I. Data collected has been shared with the consultant and we are now awaiting feedback. In the meantime, we are progressing the following work streams. Determining the most cost effective and efficient school bus routes for the different primary school site options. We have initiated work with GIS to undertake this piece of work, assessing school capacity and capability to accommodate potential class sizes. And obviously, we are also looking at this when we talk about the growing concern regarding our special educational needs and also our social, emotional mental health, because as I've mentioned in Minister's Question Time and potentially in this House as well, we are concerned that you've got classes that have a lot of one to ones because of the growing need. So due to the change in circumstances within the Portfolio, however, in respect of challenges around catering for inclusion, works being undertaken to improve progress and attainment, the increasing concern regarding recruitment for key teaching roles and support services, and having to do more with less, and constantly having to review how we can become more efficient and effective to ensure we maintain our educational standards, whilst doing all we can to retain our overstretched staff and working collaboratively with our strategic partners. It has been identified that there is need for a wider review of the Portfolio and Education provision on Saint Helena. We are therefore proposing to undertake an education review project, of which the Primary School Review will be a part, but this review will also include the following services we'll be looking at secondary education, inclusion, teacher training, adult education, training and development. And it is anticipated that this work will progress from January 2024. Elected Members and key stakeholders will be updated as the project develops and progresses. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Member, Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you Mr Speaker, and I'd like to thank the Chief Minister for her comprehensive update. And just the usual questions is, can she say when she anticipates the review will be completed? And also, will she give a commitment to share the results of the review with all Elected Members?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. So our indicative timeline for completing the review is August of 2024. And as we go through this process, as I've just said, we will share the outcomes with the Elected Members. And actually, I would like that to go further because obviously education is everybody's business. So we will be, as we did with the stakeholder working group meeting, we would obviously include PTA and parents through the normal newsletters, etc. To give them updates. But if it's specific then obviously we will then have to get the parents in to have a direct consultation.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker and again, just to thank the Honourable Chief Minister.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Next question, please.

Question No. 8 – The Honourable Ronald Coleman to ask the Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development

The Speaker –

Honourable Ronald Coleman?

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Yes. Thank you, Mr Speaker. Can the Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development state what measures are in place or will be put in place to grow the Island's economy?

The Speaker –

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

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I'd like to thank my Honourable Member for his question. Mr Speaker, as outlined in my budget speech earlier this year, this Government's two priorities are to create a business friendly environment and to ensure we have the infrastructure in place to support economy growth. To that end, Mr Speaker, Government has decided that from September, Economic Development should be its own Portfolio so that it can set out responsibilities and resources are more targeted at achieving these priorities. So, as you know, Mr Speaker, there is a change in structure in September of this year where

Economic Development was sectored out or sectioned out as its own Portfolio so we can prioritise our targeting. The Acting Portfolio Director has been working to write the Portfolio's New Strategy. And the week after next, Mr Speaker, Executive Council will be meeting to hopefully approve the new Sustainable Economic Development Strategy and the delivery of the plan to deliver this. Sorry and the plan to deliver this. Once approved, this will be published so that the plans can be scrutinised by the public and that me and my team can be held accountable against those performance. The strategy will replace the SEDP. So all it becomes instead of the Sustainable Economic Development Plan, its Sustainable Economic Development Strategy. But this change has charted a refresh in the course of Saint Helena Development Journey, has charted a course in Saint Helena's development to focus on the new Ministerial Vision and taking into account the global or the changing global environment since drafting the 2018 SEDP. In the meantime, work has progressed on delivering some key policies and projects, including the Economic Development Investment Programme, which is EDIP, as we all know. Tourism Recovery Strategy, as we all know, is happening now. So these two projects, as well as a modernisation and development of the financial services which all Members are aware of. Part of those financial services, you might remember, Mr Speaker, we had two consultants on the Island a few weeks ago, Nestor and Max, who are from Legal Nodes, and they will be looking at a policy to look at a specific sector in the financial services. But we've also talked about other areas in our financial services that we are trying to develop as well Mr Speaker. But, Mr Speaker, growing the Island's economy, although it is mainly the responsibility of Economic Development, we cannot do this in silos. It needs cross-cutting input from all Portfolios. Hence Immigration Policy, our Labour Strategy and so on and so on. Mr Speaker. So, as I said, I've given an indication of the work that will be done and the work that is currently being done. But like I said, Mr Speaker, it is the work by this entire Government, including Councillors, to try and grow the Island's economy as a whole. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister, Honourable Robert, Ronald Coleman I do beg your pardon.

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Can the Minister say if this new Strategy Plan will be shared with all Elected Members or will they have an input before it goes public?

The Speaker –

I'm quite certain you've already responded to that. But Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Yes, I will share the Final Strategy, although I have already shared the draft Strategy with all Members. Was it a few weeks ago? Maybe a month ago now? But we don't foresee the Final Strategy changing that much. But of course, Mr Speaker, it still needs to be approved by an Executive Council. But at the end of the day, it's looking very much like the same one that I have already shared with Members. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much Honourable Member. Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. If this new Strategy is basically a refresh of the SEDP, why has there not been any public consultation undertaken regarding its formulation? Because the SEDP actually emanated from full and detailed public consultation.

The Speaker –

Point taken. Thank you very much, Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

So, Mr Speaker, we're not writing an entirely new Strategy. This is more of an update to the SEDP. A lot of the things in the SEDP will continue to be in the SEDP. We felt there's no need for a complete consultation process because we're not changing the contents of that strategy. We're more or less updating it and sort of modifying it to meet this Government's Vision. But we have also in that time, in the two years we've been looking at this, we have been taking into consideration what the Private Sector's has been saying, including myself joining the Chamber of Commerce once a month, to also hear feedback on areas which might be relevant to the SEDP. And those events that I attend, I'm always there with an open ear, Mr Speaker, and I feed that back to the Portfolio Director when we have our one to ones. So we and I said we, are trying to ensure that this modernisation of the SEDP is capturing the change in environment, not just here on Saint Helena, but globally. And if we used to stick to a rigid plan that was developed in 2018, it might not meet the needs of today. So we have to be a little bit flexible in how we deliver that Strategy. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. If I may respond, and this is more on the point of information than a specific question. Having seen the new draft Strategy, there are some deviations from the original Sustainable Economic Development Plan. And as such, I believe personally that it should have gone to public consultation, or at least the public should be made aware of the proposed changes before a final decision is taken in the Executive Council. Is there any possibility of getting feedback from the public before the document is actually finalised?

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

As I said, Mr Speaker, we have been taking feedback from the public through various different forums. But if my Honourable friend would like to suggest a way where the public could feed in more directly, I think the Portfolio would be happy to consider this. Bearing in mind, Mr Speaker, this like I said, there might be some changes, but it isn't a complete different approach or a different direction to the original SEDP.

The Speaker –

I am aware that Dr Corinda Essex wants to have a question but Honourable Chief Minister I allow you to comment.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I think this is because it's fresh in my mind. I've just gone over the recent draft SEDS. We call it the Sustainable Economic Development Strategy, and I take on board what Honourable Corinda Essex has said. I think, just to be clear, the main thing that we're doing now is ensuring that what was the Sustainable Economic Development Plan is more fitting towards the Vision and Strategic Objectives put in place by this Government when we came in two years ago. So the changes that Dr Essex refers to is more to do with the change of priority that this Government has set. Also, when I looked at the presentation, if I can say that, of the Sustainable Economic Development Plan, which is now coming towards an end, if I remember, 2027 might be the year that it was due to expire. We are now trying to implement what is really important to us, which is the Brand Saint Helena as well. So it's making sure that all documents look as if they're talking to each other. So that's the main change that is happening with the Sustainable Economic Development Strategy. And although we need to ensure that the wider community has some buy in to that, I think it's also really important that this Government be very clear about the areas of priority to take Saint Helena forward. So we've talked before about the need for affordable and accessible access. We talked about connectivity. We talked about renewable energy. We're talking about building our Economy and the working age population. So really the Strategy now is to complement our ability to achieve what it is we would like to do before our term ends in two years. So taking it out to consultation could, if we're not careful, take it away from what is the priority objectives for this Government. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

I thank the Honourable Chief Minister, but would she not agree that the priorities of Saint Helena are likely to, and should be aligned with the priorities of Ministers and the general trajectory that the Island as a whole wishes to pursue? And if there are any major discrepancies, then it would be a very serious issue.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I fully appreciate what Dr Essex is saying, but we're trying to set the effective infrastructure. That is pretty much all we can do at this stage. If I'm to be quite honest, in the two years that we've got left and without having the effective infrastructure, we can't then build a better economy. We can't attract more working age population back here because we know that we don't have our Saints returning or investors coming because what the clear comments we receive is prior to what we've now got with our connectivity was that the internet charges were so high. Electricity is another one. The effective infrastructure in respect of access, I don't think I can't even switch on the radio without somebody talking about a delay of a Ship or what that does to a business. So it's those type of things. And we come back to what we were talking about previously about an NGO. But if we look at it holistically, that is the issue for Saint Helena. If we're going to address the key ticket priorities, there isn't going to be a lot more left to be able to sprinkle into the smaller areas. And I think that is what the strategy depicts. And I hope, as Minister Brooks has said, that will be shared with the wider Council in its final draft, if I can put it that way. And I would hope that all Council then would see that it hasn't changed a great deal since sharing with you

previously. If I'm honest with you, the only change is that I have contributed is just making sure that it is aligned with the Brand Saint Helena. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Okay. Thank you very much. Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker and if I can frame this question, Mr Speaker. I was just going to wait for the alarm to stop. Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, an important component of Economic Development is, of course, trade and investment. And having just returned from Kenya, where I met several delegates from different African states who had no idea where Saint Helena was and may well be interested in developing trade links with us, can the Honourable Minister say if any consideration has been or will be given to developing further trade links with our African neighbours?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Chief Minister or Honourable Mark Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Yes, I can say that this will be taken forward. We are very keen to develop any trade with any jurisdiction that obviously will be beneficial to the Island. There has been some talks a while ago between Saint Helena Government and I would just say an African nation. However, those talks hasn't so far led to any real tangible sort of discussions or decisions. But this is something that my team is always keen on, sort of trying to develop as we on Saint Helena will find it very difficult to trade commodities with the rest of the world, given our isolation. But whatever we can do to try and build on the sector or build on this opportunity, we will do so. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I'd like to thank the Honourable Minister for that very positive response. Again, more than happy to feed in information that I picked up whilst in Kenya. What was of particular interest because there was a margarine situation when I left and we've had the cooking oil situations as a result of Ukraine, is that actually Kenya produces its own cooking oil and margarine from macadamia nuts, so there are certainly opportunities there. And thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Martin Henry.

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

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Just one further comment. I would just like to make to this conversation. And that is and it's because of previous experience in my previous professional role, is that and I don't mean to say this about the countries in particular we're talking about, but we have to be very careful when we do trade that we ensure that there are certain regulations and standards that are met, especially around food, about around building materials, and they meet certain regulations. We do not have some of those

regulations in place at the moment to protect ourselves as a Government. So we do whilst I would want to trade with quite a few countries around the world. I have discovered through my working through food, that we have to be very careful where the origin of some of our imports. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Mark Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

I think just another note to mention, Mr Speaker, I tried to mention it before when we talked about our shipping service is the small volumes. So regardless of who we trading with, when we're trading with jurisdictions, it's usually in big volumes. We are a very small community, only 4000 people. So I know my Honourable friend mentioned things like cooking oil, but the amount of cooking oil that we import compared to other bigger jurisdictions is very minute. And that is why it's challenging sometimes, Mr Speaker, to strike up trade deals simply because of the small amount of trade we can actually manage or we actually need. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. And I think this question has been thoroughly explored. Next question please.

Question No. 9 – The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex to ask the Honourable Chief Minister.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Honourable Chief Minister tell this House, what active steps are being taken by Saint Helena Government to fill frontline positions in shortage occupation areas?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Hot topic today, I can tell, is the recruitment and the ability to address our working age population, which I hope the listeners will note is a growing concern for all of us in the room. So the public service, like other sectors, is being negatively impacted by the declining working age population. We are currently carrying a 15% vacancy rate overall, and in some areas this percentage is even higher. Areas with the highest vacancy rate include Health and Social Care, Economic Development, the Treasury and the Program Management Office. This means that there are obvious negative impacts on service delivery. This has led to increased reliance on utilising the Technical Cooperation Program, the TC program, to fill the vacancies in areas including Health and Social Care, Education, Finance and Police in order to provide these crucial services. To address this, we are implementing a raft of measures which include delivering a graduate scheme to encourage young graduates to return to the Island, better utilisation of the apprenticeship scheme to target vacancies in key areas in SHG, and that policy has been shared with all Elected Members. A current project examining international recruitment opportunities and how to potentially.....

The Speaker –

It stopped. Okay. Thank you.

The Hon. Julie Thomas –

I did say this was a hot topic. So there we have it. So I'll just start again on the last. Oh, probably not.

The Speaker –

Okay. He's got it, I heard. All right.

The Hon. Julie Thomas –

Yeah. So I'll start that one again. Dr Essex, so that you don't miss it. So a current project examining international recruitment opportunities and how to potentially incentivise younger Saints to return to the Island or SHG using auxiliary workers for some teams. So Sea Rescue, Police, Customs and Immigration, Social Care to provide more flexibility, including cover for leave. Better utilisation of the TC programme, which will include looking at different international recruitment markets and creation of hybrid contracts. Exploring the possibility of using schemes such as VSO, which I know a lot of us have talked about capitalising on Brand Saint Helena to promote Saint Helena as a good place to live and work, improving pay and benefits. We're hoping to implement phase one of pay progression framework, increasing leave entitlement across all roles and pay bands, more targeted training and development opportunities, utilising the improved internet connectivity and reviewing the SHG functions. Looking at core versus non-core and assessing divestment opportunities, so that answers this question should have been asked first, I think, and then it would have given quite a lot of answers. But and also when we talk about core versus non-core, we'd also need to look at some of the core isn't legally things that we need to provide. But it is important for Saint Helena. So I'll use nursery schooling. It's not core. It's not a core service, but it is something that we wouldn't wish to remove in the short term. It is likely that the TC programme will continue to be drawn on to cover staffing gaps in the frontline services, particularly in Health, Education and Policing. This obviously comes at a cost and work has already started on focusing on better utilisation of the TC programme, which will be a key priority to address this issue. And I'd just like to reemphasise what Minister Brooks has been saying today. TC programming is definitely something that we're looking at as a Cabinet across the piece because we need it. It's desperately something that we need to address, noting our current situation with the declining working age population. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. And thank you, Chief Minister. Is the graduate scheme now in operation?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I was just checking, but yes, I had the right answer. So no, it's not in place at the moment. There is some communication going on with current students that are studying in the UK,

because they are aware that that is being put forward as part of the FAM discussions this year, but the hope that it can start to be implemented as of April 2024.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. And I had a similar question to my Honourable colleague, Dr Essex because I wasn't clear when she was referring to incentives for Saints coming back, whether she was talking about the graduate scheme, because I know for a number of years we've talked about diaspora incentives. So are there any sort of tax incentives being considered or financial assistance for relocation being considered in terms of the wider diaspora to ensure that we are able to fill critical posts by Saints?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Mark Brooks. Or is it Honourable Chief Minister? I'm not quite certain. Thank you.

The Hon. Julie Thomas –

This time it is me, so we are looking at how we can incentivise younger Saints to return. Initially, we are looking at whether we can work with the Bank of Saint Helena to see if there is any loans to help us with repatriation, but we are going to be looking at how best we can cater for this. I know, I don't think Dr Essex will mind me saying this, but when we were talking about how do we attract people in Social Care, for instance, and there was concern raised that we could be doing incentivising other nationalities, is the things that we could be doing across the piece to encourage us Saint Helenians back for instance. So I think we need to look holistically and then not just focus on returning Saint Helenians, but ensure that our returning Saint Helenians are indeed in that package so that they aren't, they're not lost. When we are trying to look at how to incentivise people to work and live on Saint Helena.

The Speaker –

Yeah. Sorry. Thank you very much, Honourable Gillian Brooks.

The Hon. Gillian Brooks –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Chief Minister, can I just ask, you spoke about having auxiliaries in the post, so which we know is always invaluable in these posts. So is more work being done to encourage and enable this to be probably put into permanent roles?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas –

So the dear budget, we come back to the wonderful dear budget. So I think what we're looking at is, I'm not suggesting what you're saying is not on the table, but at the moment we're looking at, how can I say, upskilling across the Portfolios, whereby, for instance, you could have somebody who isn't, if you think of the sea rescue, you've got people who are auxiliaries, but they don't work in that particular Portfolio but have the skills to be auxiliary workers. So I know when I look towards my Honourable friend, Minister Ellick, I know there's some initiatives being taken forward within his Portfolio whereby you may not be

an Immigration Officer, but it might be good to allow others within the Portfolio to be upskilled to take on the role, especially now when the Honourable Karl Throter mentioned the closure of the ports at times, if more people can assist, then we wouldn't have to have all these closures. So it's about ensuring that we work more effectively and efficiently, because we can't really take on more people because of our budget constraints. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. The Honourable Chief Minister made reference to plans being put in place to incentivise younger Saints to return. Can she elaborate a little on what these contain, please?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. So this is part of the recruitment review. So I spoke earlier about the Educational Review, the Health Review, Recruitment Review is the next piece because of the declining working age population. And my laptop is decided it's time to shut down. But that Recruitment Review is being undertaken now. And the initial review, we hope, will be completed during the last quarter of this Financial Year, and then we hope to implement during the incoming Financial Year, 24/25. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Next question, please.

Question No. 10 – The Honourable Andrew Turner to ask the Honourable Chief Minister.

The Speaker –

Honourable Andrew Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Honourable Chief Minister tell this Council, what steps she has taken to improve openness and transparency in her Government?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. So I suppose yes, it is my Government. But I would say we like to talk collectively here. So it's all about how we improve openness and transparency. And I hope that some of the steps I have taken will help with that. So the Ministerial Code, which was approved by this Council in December 22, is the framework which guides how this Government operates. The principle of collective responsibility is set out in the Ministerial Code, requires the Minister to act in accordance with decisions taken collectively with the other Ministers, and also requires the Minister to be able to express a view, frankly in a private setting, so as to maintain unity in respect of a decision reached. Pursuant to this

principle, the privacy and confidentiality of the business of the Executive Council and any other Ministerial forum, and any correspondence in relation thereto must be maintained. Whilst the business of Government through Executive Council is conducted in private, my Government takes every opportunity to ensure that policy decisions are communicated to the public as soon as practicable via press releases and by radio. Ministers also give regular updates via their In-scope radio programme that is now been running, believe it or not, nearly 18 months and we give updates on the work which is being done through our respective Portfolios. In addition, Ministers meet weekly with all Elected Members to update them on key policy work streams and Elected Members are able to invite officials to provide technical detail whenever this is required. Other fora used include Legislative Council and Minister's Question Time, both of which provide opportunity for Elected Members to question Ministers on policy in an open setting, and Scrutiny Committees provide a process whereby Elected Members can play an influential role in the shaping of policy and decisions that will have a real benefit on behalf of the community they represent. And I think what I did miss saying there. Now, I know that there is a review of the Government website, and I know that there's a lot going on there whereby we hope to be able to engage with the community via now that we have the better connectivity. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Andrew Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Under the Constitution, it's required that the Members of the Executive Council shall be collectively responsible to the Legislative Council for any advice given to the Governor by or under the general authority of the Executive Council, and for all things done by or under the authority of any Minister in the execution of his or her office. That's the line. So what I'd like to ask is why the need for the expansion of closing Executive Council Meetings to the public? What's the logic?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

I feel as if I've just covered that because of the collective responsibility of the Ministers and dare I say, if we were to demonstrate the conversations that go on in ExCo to try and make a final decision. We are all humans and I think we will understand. We see it within the 12. We don't always have the same opinion, but we must come out to the public with a decision. And if it was seen that Minister Henry is saying one thing and I'm saying something else and somebody else is saying whatever, I don't think it would prove wise for Saint Helena to know that when the decision is taken, we need to stand by that decision and take the Island forward. Because at the end of the day, all decisions taken is for the betterment of Saint Helena. For the community to see those discussions sometimes it is to gather more information. I don't think it would help us. We've got enough. What can I say? Unrest on the Island in certain areas already. And to have that and to be able to have the opportunity then to almost play one Minister against the other, I don't think would be helpful to take this Ministerial Government forward.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Andrew Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Well, firstly, Mr Speaker, I don't accept that open political discourse is going to lead to unrest in any way, shape or form. But can the Minister explain why in the previous system, where ExCo Members were also bound by collective responsibility, ExCo sessions were open to the public?

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

So I think from the questions that's been asked here today, they might need to be another round of talking about. And I know this has been discussed with the Chief Secretary on a number of times, that now that we are two years into the Ministerial form of Government, I think we probably do need to do another communication plan and get some information out in the public domain, because it would seem that Saint Helena, whether the percentage was low or high, it was the percentage voted for a Ministerial Government. And now we are having to operate in a Ministerial Government, but we're still trying to make it work like a committee system. And that's not going to happen because why move to a Ministerial Government?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Andrew Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Does the Honourable Chief Minister remember these words? Open communication is vital and must be applied appropriately and consistently. Government must be more engaging, more transparent, and have the ability to acknowledge the value of its people and encourage input from them at all levels of development. How else is accountability and success achieved? As these words are from the Chief Minister's own manifesto, when does the Chief Minister intend to live up to them and make ExCo open and accountable?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

So I think once again, Honourable Andrew Turner is using my words, which I still stand by, by the way. Hence, I wouldn't be the one wanting to do In Scope. In scope was my idea. So if I didn't want to be open and transparent, I wouldn't do such things. Minister Brooks has mentioned it. We make ourselves available. There's a lot of people who will say, oh, they don't see the Ministers, but when they ask for a Meeting, I have not known of any of the Ministers to decline a Meeting. We cannot. I think we need to also we honour our own Ministerial Code, and that is for us to be able to have those discussions in closed forums. As soon as decisions are taken, we put them out in the public domain. We share what we can with yourselves. So I think when you're using my statements out of context, I don't really appreciate that. But if you're going to just say that the only place you think you're going to see Ministers at work is in ExCo, then I think you're hugely mistaken, because we do go out in the public domain for as much as we possibly can to talk about the work that we do. I mean, we've just come back off from the UK. What have we done? We've put press releases out. We tried to update the public whilst I'm even in the UK for short periods of time, talking about who we are meeting with, the purposes of it tomorrow, I know Minister Henry and I will go out on radio again, talking in detail about things that we tried to do whilst away. So it is a shame

that because ExCo is closed, that is the only thing now that is hung around our necks is we are not open and transparent. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Jeffrey Ellick.

The Hon. Jeffrey Ellick (Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Just point of information. Collective responsibility is within the Constitution. I'd just like to remind everybody that the Constitution is our primary law, and we will follow that primary law in terms of collective responsibility. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Next question please. I do beg your pardon. The Attorney General. Thank you, Attorney General, for intervening.

The Hon. David Ballantyne (Attorney General) –

Just a point of Information, if I may. The Minister is correct. Section 36 of the Constitution prescribes collective responsibility. And secondly, the Ministerial Code of Conduct approved by this House makes the following provision. That collective responsibility is the internal process through which a decision has been made. Decisions reached by the Executive Council or Ministerial fora are binding on all members of these bodies. The individual view of a Minister or advice provided by a public servant as part of that internal process must remain confidential. Secondly, decisions reached by the Cabinet or Ministerial Committees are binding on all Members of the Government. Such decisions are, where appropriate, to be announced and explained as the decision of the Minister concerned. I give this for information.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Attorney General. Next question, please.

Question No. 11 – The Honourable Robert Midwinter to ask the Honourable Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs.

The Speaker –

Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, will the Honourable Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs tell this Council, how many applications for Saint Helena status have been received by his Portfolio in the last two years, and how many of these were successful?

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs.

The Hon. Jeffrey Ellick (Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member for his question. So for 20/22 and 23, there has been a total of 56 applications. 48 were approved and eight were refused. I'd just like to just add 2021, a total of 32 applications were received, 31 approved, and one refused. Within those figures that include

dependents of the primary applicant. I just also like to say that people can't come in and just pick up status at the same time. It takes time, so it takes five years to get Saint Helena status. But in some cases it can be three years if you're married to a Saint Helenian. So it's five years and three years.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. And I'd like to thank the Honourable Minister for his response, recognising that he can't go into any specific detail. Can he give any sort of indication as to, in terms of those that were refused, the sort of basis for the refusal?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister, are you able to do that?

The Hon. Jeffrey Ellick (Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs) –

Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. My Honourable colleague is totally correct, I can't go into that detail, but all I will say is because of the legal requirements. So, as you know, under the legislation, it points out when you can refuse the applications. And that's the reason why under the legislation.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Next question, please.

Question No. 12 – The Honourable Ronald Coleman to ask the Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development.

The Speaker –

Honourable Ronald Coleman.

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Can the Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development inform this House, if the following entities have been wound up: Basil Read, Saint Helena Fisheries Cooperation and Enterprise Saint Helena?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for his question. Mr Speaker, I cannot answer for Basil Read, although it would appear that they are still operating in South Africa. With regards to Saint Helena Fisheries Corporation and Enterprise Saint Helena, these are both in final stages of being wound up. The Saint Helena Fisheries Corporation, the Administrator, has now completed the final account and for ESH, the board has recently approved the final statements that has been sent to Audit Saint Helena. Arrangements are being made for the loan book to be transferred from ESH to the Bank of Saint Helena. It is envisioned that the legislation for both entities will be repealed before the end of this financial year, March 2024. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Ronald Coleman.

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I know he couldn't give an answer on the Basil Read, but is Saint Helena Government finished with Basil Read Contractors?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Yes. So as I have said in one of my earlier questions, I'm not sure if it was in this House, or whether it be in Prime Minister's Question Time. It's all a little bit blurred up there now, Mr Speaker, but yes, there has been the termination of the contract between SHG and Basil Read, and there was some equipment that was left over from that termination. And that equipment is now going through the process of being either transferred to Transport Division, and that is the equipment we feel the project will still require to complete, or equipment and assets that we feel is no longer needed by Saint Helena Government, this will be tendered out to the public Mr Speaker. But at this current time, we are just waiting on approval from FCDO for these for these bits of equipment to either be transferred or disposed of. So that's where it currently stands. It's taken some time, Mr Speaker, but it's to say it's not all in my gift. We do need approval from various different bodies, including, like I said, the main approval from FCDO. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

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

Question No. 13 – The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex to ask the Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development.

The Speaker –

Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development tell this House, what is the projected remaining lifespan of the currently used Bulk Fuel facility in Rupert's Valley, and what progress has been made in determining how and where the Island's fuel supplies will be stored in the longer term?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister of Treasury and the Economy Development.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Now, I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for her question. Mr Speaker, in attempting to answer my Honourable friend's question, I will break it down into three sections. The first section will talk about the current BFI. So the current BFI, the fuel which is being stored and distributed

around the Island, is managed by Solomons' PLC, on behalf of SHG. The infrastructure had a conditional assessment carried out by Triton Engineering Consultants from the UK in the first half of this year, so not too many months ago Mr Speaker. And the resulting report indicated that a life span of approximately 3 to 5 years with the scheduled maintenance and monitoring plan in place is possible. So in other words, Mr Speaker, we had in a company with the relevant expertise to do an inspection of the current BFI. They've said if you have a proper maintenance plan in place, you could possibly get 3 to 5 years out of it. So if I take the latter amount of that, 3 years from now should take us until 2026. Now, Mr Speaker, the current situation also challenges in the short to medium term. So due to the possibility of the fuel delivery options being changed by the fuel supplier, it will be necessary to increase the temporary storage available in the Mid Valley site. So that's a little bit further up than the current BFI. And the team is working to reinstate the former Basil Read diesel storage tanks at that location. This would double the diesel storage, and with some capacity changes to the current BFI, we could increase the petrol storage by 25%. This storage would be temporary and is predicted to be available until the main fuel infrastructure project is complete. So I was saying, Mr Speaker, is that we do have plans right now ongoing to increase the storage capacity on the Island. And that might be necessary because the way we get our fuel delivered might be changing in the medium term. So, Mr Speaker, now moving on to the new BFI. So the new BFI installation project encompasses all fuel systems which are designed and installed under the Airport project, and this includes the ship to shore, the Bayside facility, the pipeline up to the Upper Valley storage place or storage infrastructure, as well as the Airport fuel facility. So encompass all of those different facilities into one bulk fuel installation project. So, as I mentioned earlier, Mr Speaker, the termination of the design, build and operate and hand-back contract with Basil Read allow for a pause in construction works to determine if completing the new fuel infrastructure to its original design is still the best solution for the Island. So a technical independent review was commissioned by the Airport Project Board and was undertaken in 2019 by ARUP, I'm happy to supply the full name of that company to. Yes, sorry, I thought there was abbreviations. Which recommend changes to the method of fuel delivery and subsequent design changes to Saint Helena's Airport Project Board. And this board comprised of SHG Officials as well as UK Government representation. But this was back in 2009, so obviously it wouldn't have been any representation from this Ministerial team when that decision was made, when the recommendations were presented. So, Mr Speaker, in addition to that, a further social, environmental and economic impact assessment was concluded in 2021 by the Economic Consultant and Associates, also with the support of Triton commissioned. And this report was commissioned by the FCDO through the Saint Helena Airport Project Board. This latest assessment focused on how the different methods of fuel delivery could impact the community, including the cost of fuel itself. So the mechanism to take the project forward has now been agreed. But funding for the initial phase confirmed by the FCDO. The first phase is to secure a project management consultant with the right expertise to visit Saint Helena. They will then undertake a feasible study considering economic, technical, logistical, environmental and safety factors. The output of the study will be used to inform the second phase, which is for the production of a design for completion and commissioning of the facility. At this time Mr Speaker, we do not know what the consultant will recommend as the final configuration for the new bulk fuel facility. The procurement process is now complete and the PMO is in the process of finalising the project management consultant to commence the project. Phase one of the contract is expected to be six months from the period of mobilisation, which is subject to finalising the contract between this consultant and SHG. And it's envisioned that this work or the mobilisation would start in quarter one of 2024. Mr Speaker, I am confident to say that I know the Chief Minister, my boss will support me when I say, now that I am a Member of this Project Board, I will not present a proposal to ExCo that I am not 100% sure will meet the needs of the Island today and in the future. The reason. Mr Speaker, I am confident to say this is because as Ministers and after two years, we

can still sit and have a bit of banter. We can argue, we can debate and we can compromise. And all of the above. All of the things I just mentioned is qualities. What makes a good team a team. And I can see from the two years that we've been working together that this team is and can only get stronger. So thank you, Mr Speaker. And the point I was trying to make there is that, with a national infrastructure like this, the whole Ministerial team will support me in trying to deliver the best outcomes for this Island. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you for that, Honourable Minister. Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex -

I thank the Honourable Minister for a very detailed response. Where has the funding for the first phase come from? Is that from EDIP or additional supplementary funding or what source?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

I beg your pardon, Mr Speaker. Thank you, my Honourable friend, for your question. The funding will also come, and, as I said, it has been confirmed by FCDO and the funding will come from FCDO.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Just for a point of clarification, would that be outside of the normal allocation or will it be contained within the next EDIP program?

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I'd like to just confirm that my Honourable colleague, that this funding will come through the Fuel Infrastructure Project, which is a project that will sit outside EDIP. As my Honourable friend will know, we have already presented a pipeline of projects. Fuel infrastructure is not part of that, because that is a separate project which we will be in working in partnership with the FCDO on. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

In terms of the temporary arrangements to increase storage, what are the financial implications relating to those? I don't want specific figures, but in general principles.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Minister Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. And I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for her question. And as I said, we are right at this current time looking at extending the storage. We don't have the full details of what that will cost, but we do have an indicative price, and it's not expected to be a huge amount because most of the infrastructure we will re-utilise the current infrastructure. We just need to do some additional work to make sure that we get a longer life out of that. And the work to extend the fuel storage is utilising tanks that was already used before for fuel storage. So maybe just to illustrate to the public, we are not building any fuel facility from the ground up. This is just using infrastructure that we have around Rupert's to try and make the most use out of that life. Like I said earlier, it is expected by doing this work we will extend the life of the fuel storage by 3 to 5 years. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

I'm sure my Honourable friend won't be able to anticipate what I'm going to ask. But what will be the source for this funding? Because there will be a need for additional funding.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Minister Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I've just been informed by the Financial Secretary that this will become another of the trading fund, the special fund under the BFI. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Next question, please.

Question No. 14 – The Honourable Andrew Turner to ask the Honourable Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Andrew Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. May I just preface this question with a very short statement?

The Speaker –

You may.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Obviously, I submitted this question before the Honourable Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning left to go to COP 28. I understand that the last minute, the Honourable Minister for Health and Social Care has stepped into the firing line to answer the question, but obviously won't have had the

time to engage with all the relevant organisations on this. So I'll ask the question anyway, obviously, as it's on the Order Paper, but I understand that there may be limited answers that he can give today.

The Speaker –

Okay. Thank you very much.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

So following the recent visit of the Energy Observer, will the Honourable Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning state, if SHG have taken any inspiration from this vessel to inform their own renewable energy plans?

The Speaker –

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

The Hon. Martin Henry (Acting on behalf of Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning)

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I'd like to thank my Honourable friend for making that statement before we start. Given the short amount of time that I have been here as well. So the visit of the Energy Observer brought a sense of general sort of inspiration about renewable technologies, I think, to us all. You know, just boarding that vessel and seeing what can be done on such a small piece of machinery in what can be really adverse conditions is quite remarkable. So, you know, in brief, on board, the crew demonstrate that they have designed a proper system and with the commercial mind set behind it so that this technology can be implemented going further. But I think the important point, which my Honourable friend does want to get from this is that the technology, there's room in their technology on that vessel to improve. So for instance, they had older solar panels. They replaced them with new solar panels that simply could just be plugged into the system, their hydrogen system they're making they were making hydrogen on board the boat. They were planning to then use hydrogen that could be bought once hydrogen becomes more available. So their thinking about the future, has been one really well thought through. So the useful takeaway for me, and the most important part is that as we strive to work towards a renewable energy system with a minimum of 80% energy generation from renewables by 27/28, and that we are able to sustain this target beyond this period, such as the use of green hydrogen to replace that 20% diesel generation in the near future, that we consider how the Energy Observer has strategised and how they have used technologies current, but also thought about potential technologies in the future. And we use that same blueprint to move forward with our own energy system. I think Saint Helena has been out far too many times by having a short future projection on what we can do. It's not necessarily the fault of projects, but it's the cost of some of the projects to ensure that we can actually build in towards our future. So I think that's what my Honourable friend is after, given my limited time to prepare for this question.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Martin Henry, Honourable Andrew Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and just to thank the Honourable Minister for that response, and I'm glad to hear he was as inspired by that vessel as I was. And I look forward to seeing hydrogen forming, hopefully part of our plans in the future.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Rosemary Bargo.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Can the Minister say if our current energy provider Connect also had an opportunity to visit the Energy Observer?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Martin Henry.

The Hon. Martin Henry (Acting on behalf of Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning)

The answer that's been shout at me is a definite yes.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Brilliant news. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you, thank you very much, Honourable Karl Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Unfortunately, this might be a question, actually, for my Honourable friend Minister Brooks, rather than my Honourable friend, Minister Henry. So we've just been talking about the bulk fuel farm, obviously. Has any consideration been given, you know, how we're moving forward with these phases, to what would happen if Saint Helena did change the fuel source of its power generation?

The Speaker –

Honourable Mark Brooks, are you able to answer this question? Since it wasn't to you.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development)

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Yes, I will, I will try and answer my Honourable friend's question. So, as I said, the first phase is secure, a project management consultant with the right experience to visit Saint Helena. So important thing is they'll be coming to Saint Helena. Ministers, myself as the project Member will be able to explain to them and we will be able to say to them, what is our Vision going forward will be to demonstrate to them that our policy is to have 80% from renewables, and we will make sure that they take all that into consideration when designing the needs of the Island going forward. So, yes.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. That then concludes this part of the business for today, that's the questions. It has been a long morning and a very busy morning. Next item please.

6.

MOTIONS

Motion No. 1 – The Honourable Mark Brooks, Minister for Treasury and Economic Development

THE SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION (2023/24) BILL, 2023

The Speaker –

The Honourable Minister for Treasury and Economic Development.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I beg to move that the Supplementary Appropriation (2023/24) Bill 2023 should be approved in principle and referred to the Committee of the whole Council.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Is there a seconder? Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I beg to second.

The Speaker –

Thank you Honourable Minister Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I also, under section 73, two of the Constitution, have the authority to proceed by His Excellency the Governor.

The Speaker -

Thank you. Can I see that, please? Thank you very much. Honourable Minister Brooks you may proceed.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I beg to present Supplementary Appropriation (2023/24) Bill 2023. Section 105 of the Constitution provides that if, in the course of any Financial Year, it is found that amount appropriated for any purpose is insufficient, or that a need has arisen, or for expenditure for a purpose which no amount was appropriate, a supplementary estimate showing the sum required shall be laid before the Legislative Council. This Supplementary Appropriation Bill is presented today following the work undertaken by Portfolios in conjunction with Treasury, to estimate the year end outturn from revenue and expenditure for the 2023/24 financial year. Mr Speaker, the Bill today seeks to authorise an additional recurrent expenditure of 1.609 million. This Supplementary Appropriation is planned to be funded through additional revenue generated during the financial year, and a withdrawal from the Consolidated Fund. Mr Speaker, the Supplementary Appropriation Estimates outlined additional expenditure requested. And whilst we go through these details in the Committee stages, I would like to highlight specifically at this stage three key points. Firstly, Mr Speaker, overseas medical treatment budget line within Head 23 of Health and Social Care continues to put pressure on the overall Government budget. There is a higher number of patients being sent to South Africa requiring treatment than the budget provided for. In response, Health has adopted a policy to send only urgent cases for treatment. Examples of these would be cases with high risks of life, limb or sight. Despite this, Mr Speaker this further appropriation is required to ensure that those needing urgent treatment can receive the necessary treatment. A call will be made on a call down funding agreed by FCDO as part of the financial aid package to cover these additional costs. Secondly, Mr Speaker, a further appropriation is needed for the technical cooperation budget or the TC budget, which was over programmed as part of the budget process by 21%, equivalent to 1.6 million to account for vacancy savings that could have been achieved during the year. Much work has been

undertaken by the public service to limit overspending without dramatic impacts on the front line service. However, an additional appropriation of 541,000 is still required. The greatest challenge facing the budget at this time is the declining labour market Mr Speaker. And the reliance on the TC budget to fulfil posts within public service that would otherwise be filled locally. Mr Speaker, this mainly relates to Health and Social Care and the Police, and there are some examples of services that are doing well with local recruitment. If I used to name a few, it would be the Fire Service and the Sea Rescue. But thirdly, Mr Speaker, and finally, I would like to highlight that it is the intention of this Government to provide an additional £50,000 to Saint Helena Hotel Development Limited or in other words, as people know of it, the Mantis, to cover the difference between operational costs and the expected revenues during this year. This will bring the available subsidy to the Mantis Hotel up to 200,000 for this financial year. This additional subsidy does not feature in the Supplementary Appropriation Bill here today because due to underspends in Head 17 Treasury Infrastructure and Sustainable Development, but mainly the Treasury side, the additional subsidy can be covered without a requirement for a further appropriation. Mr Speaker, finally, I can advise that this appropriation is proposed to be funded by one additional financial aid on the Head 17 Treasury of 750,000. Additional revenue from the reserves of the currency fund of 150,000, and a withdrawal from the Consolidated Fund of the General Reserves of 709,000. Mr Speaker, we will go through the detailed provisions of the Bill in the Committee stages. I therefore recommend to this House that this bill is now referred to the Committee stages. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. I put the question that the Supplementary Appropriation (2023/24) Bill 2023 be approved in principle and referred to a Committee of the whole Council. So the question is open for debate. Does anyone wish to speak? Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I rise reluctantly in support of the motion. Mr Speaker, I say reluctantly, as once again I wish to note my concern that we are three quarters into the financial year, a matter only six months since approving the budgets, and we are again having to significantly adjust these approved budgets, either because assumptions made relating to savings anticipated not transpire, or Portfolios were simply underfunded in the first place. Both situations I personally find unacceptable, and I would hope that the Public Accounts Committee will look into why this has transpired when reviewing the accounts for this financial year in due course. Mr Speaker, a further concern that I wish to note formally in this House is that during the Legislative Council meeting held on the 17th of March this year, when we considered the third supplementary estimates, a commitment was given to provide further information in respect of the technical cooperation budget line, namely, the total sum of money against the TC budget that had been incurred through failed recruitment or churn in posts, along with a number of posts where this had been incurred, whereby a replacement officer needed to be sought, leading to increased costs in respect of recruitment, alongside the costs associated with the outgoing officer having to be paid off and repatriated. Mr Speaker, to date, despite regularly chasing this, further information has not been provided, but instead we are again being asked to increase funding support to this particular budget line because anticipated savings have not been realised. Mr Speaker, I have noted on numerous occasions that I am not willing to simply rubber stamp decisions taken by the Public Service, particularly when it would appear that someone has made a poor decision. This is something I stand by today. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Members. Anyone else wishing to speak to the principles? Honourable Karl Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Just to say that I absolutely agree with my Honourable colleague Rob Midwinter, but I'm very disappointed what we just heard about Mantis.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Member, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Whilst I do have sympathy with the sentiments of my colleagues who've already spoken, in fact there are signs of progress because the call for supplementary appropriation has been identified at an early stage, and it has not been left unaddressed until a request for expenditure in excess has to be made at or after the end of the fiscal year. The bulk of the projected increase relates to Health and Social Care, which, as I think we all know are demand led services. Making it extremely difficult to predict what level of funding is required. Furthermore, Mr Speaker, it is arguable that in order to present a balanced budget for 2023/24 items such as overseas medical referrals were under budgeted in a forlorn hope that the forecast figures would not have to be exceeded. And here I agree with what my Honourable friend to my right has said, because ideally that is a situation which we should not be faced with. However, in the current global economic climate in which it is unlikely that much larger age settlements are achievable, the options for being able to introduce more realistic initial budget ceilings are limited. And if, for example, the initial budget ceiling for Health was increased to what we might consider to be a more realistic level, that would have undesirable consequences on budget lines within other directorates, some of which are also fulfilling essential needs within the island. However, Mr Speaker, as I think we are also all fully aware, constituents are constantly complaining that Saint Helena Government is wasting money and it is obvious that there is scope for greater efficiency, effectiveness and productivity. And in this context, I would like to know at some point in time, although obviously not this afternoon, whether the fit for the future program is in fact making ground in these areas. The Chief Secretary has informed us previously that part of the focus of the second phase of this programme would be looking at efficiencies and effectiveness. Furthermore, divestment of services and activities is a key way in which Government spending can be reduced, if government is not going to have to buy these same services back at increased cost. But there still appears to be no movement on this front. The number of staff employed by Saint Helena Government has increased considerably in recent years, but it is questionable whether outputs and outcomes have also done so. Mr Speaker, a key reason why we are being asked to authorise a sizeable withdrawal from the Consolidated Fund is because the indications are that there will be a significant shortfall in revenue. Whilst this is in part attributable to the diminishing tax base, it is also a consequence of the unreliable and expensive interim shipping service that has been in place throughout the current financial year. This has contributed to a serious economic downturn, impacting the majority of the private sector very negatively and further reducing local disposable income. I do support the Supplementary Appropriation Bill, but hope that the actual outturn at the end of this financial year will be better than is currently anticipated. I also trust the Saint Helena Government will make all efforts possible to achieve real efficiency gains and take robust steps to increase productivity and reduce wastage going forward. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Does anyone else wish to speak? Honourable Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. While I do support the principles of this motion, I am rather shocked to hear from the Minister that instead of using the Underspends in the Portfolio to support important areas such as Health, as we are discussing in this motion now, or even as we mentioned earlier today, the cultural development of the Island, they are instead going to use that money to essentially to bring additional support to Mantis and avoid having to bring that to this House. What do you have to fear?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Any other Honourable Ministers to speak. The Honourable Minister. You may respond, of course, as well. No?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Yes. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Mr Speaker I do hear the concerns of Members, and I do agree with some of those concerns of Members. However, in referring to the Mantis, it was brought to Members earlier on this year, a few weeks ago, probably months ago now, Mr Speaker, why the need for additional subsidy to the Mantis. The Mantis Board made a case to all Members here that without this additional subsidy, Mantis could no longer stay insolvent and they would have to close. So the reason we as a Government took the decision to support the Mantis is because the Mantis plays a big part in our Tourism Recovery Strategy. And we did not want to see Mantis closing down before we could appropriate money to support it. So the decision was made to use savings within Treasury to support Mantis in their downtime of operation in the winter months, so that they can be open and ready for the peak season to welcome tourists again to Saint Helena. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Member. May I take that as your reply to the debate? Thank you very much. So I put the question that the Supplementary Appropriation, (2023/24) Bill 2023 be approved in principle and referred to a Committee of the whole Council.

Question put and agreed to.

The Speaker –

Mover.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, may I invite the Deputy Financial Secretary to the table to go through the detailed provisions?

The Speaker –

Absolutely yes.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –
Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –
Do you wish to move that the Council do resolve etc?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –
Yes Mr Speaker, I do beg to move that this Council do resolve itself into a Committee to consider the detailed provisions of the Bill. Thank you.

The Speaker –
Thank you very much. Is there a seconder? Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –
Thank you, Mr Speaker. I beg to second.

The Speaker –
Thank you, I put the question that the Council do resolve itself into a Committee to consider the detailed provisions of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Council in Committee.

The Chairman –
We are in Committee.

Title, Enacting Clause and Clause 1.

Question put and agreed to.

The Chairman –
Sorry. Is there something wrong? Honourable Members in accordance with Standing Order 14, rule six, we now need to work through the schedules first. I put the question that Head 12 Central Support Services standing in the amount of £541,000 do stand part of the Bill. Honourable Chief Minister, would you like to provide an overview or Mr Nicholas Yon?

Mr Nicholas Yon (Deputy Financial Secretary) –
Thank you. I can provide an overview. What Members might find helpful is the Supplementary Estimates that was also laid on the table this morning. And that gives a little bit more information about each of the requests under the Supplementary Appropriation. So under Head 12 the 541,000 is to finance additional spend under the technical cooperation budget. When the budget was put together earlier this year, it was over programmed by 21%, which is equivalent to about £1.6 million. And the anticipation, as has been in previous years, that there will be a number of vacancies that will occur, a number of delays and recruitment

etc. that will take place. So we over programmed in an effort to, as a budget tool in order that by the end of the year, you close enough to the budget that is approved. So when that was done it was anticipated over programmed of 1.6. However, in this case, when the forecast was done in quarter two, it was anticipated that we would overspend this budget by £543,000. That is, on the assumption, some very big assumptions around when we anticipate recruitments to be completed. And so, for example, between November and March this year, it is anticipated that there will be recruitment of approximately 39 posts, new posts under this particular budget line. Now, that all depends on whether we are able to actually get people here, go through all of their clearances or whether sometimes has been mentioned before, people pull out last minute for recruitment. So when the forecast was done, it was based on the information that is available for this particular budget line. But it all is based on a number of key assumptions and whether those assumptions fall through by the end of the financial year.

The Chairman –

Thank you very much. Would any other Honourable Member to speak? Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you. When you say new post, do you mean totally new posts that have just been created now, or ones that have been vacant previously and are now going to be filled?

Mr Nicholas Yon (Deputy Financial Secretary) –

Sorry. Yes. So that is where vacancies exist, replacements then. Sorry. These are replacement parts. Yes.

The Chairman –

Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Chair. Mr Chair, I just wanted to raise that point again that I made earlier that we did ask for information back in March. I again raised it in June when we were doing the budgets. That information hasn't been forthcoming. We did hear from the Chief Minister earlier that a complete review is being undertaken on the whole TC programme, but I am afraid that without that information I am not willing to accept that particular budget. The rest of the appropriation bill I have no problem with. Thank you.

The Chairman -

Thank you very much. Anyone else? Honourable Gillian Brooks.

The Hon. Gillian Brooks –

Inaudible

Mr Nicholas Yon (Deputy Financial Secretary) –

Yes. So the 39, for a number of those positions, not all, but for a number of them they will be, so we went through the recruitment process, and so someone was selected as the preferred candidate. And so sometimes it takes a while to actually bring somebody here; time to go through all that depending on their country of origin etc. So for most of these cases it would be someone is perhaps identified, but just waiting on the clearance. And for example, even in the Treasury, we had someone identified in October and then about two weeks ago they said no, they're no longer interested. So then we had to start the, we go to the second candidate, but again just adds time to the process.

The Chairman –

Thank you. Is there anyone else? No.

Head 12 – Central Support Services - £541,000

Question put and agreed to (by majority) Honourable Robert Midwinter and Honourable Andrew Turner voted ‘No’.

The Chairman –

I put the question that Head 14 Attorney General's Chambers standing in the amount of £29,000 do stand part of the Bill. Mr Yon do you wish to?

Mr Nicholas Yon (Deputy Financial Secretary) –

Yes, So in relation to the 29,000, what has transpired this year, is that part of the team in the Attorney General's Chambers is being funded or was part funded, sorry, by the Blue Belt programme. So that funding has now come to an end or is anticipated to come to an end later this year. And so now what this means is that that same level of technical support is still required in the team at the Attorney General's Chambers. And so what this request is, is to cover that period between when the Blue Belt funding is expected to come to an end and the end of the financial year. We have also part of the budget process for next year, taking this into account, the full amount for next year. Yes. Oh, sorry.

The Chairman –

Thank you very much. Thank you. Would any other Honourable Member like to speak? Honourable Karl Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. The thing that concerns me about the 29,000, I fully understand that this is for that post. So it's not about that. But what I'd like to do is ask, you know, we have constantly heard recently that one of the things that's holding up things like the Legislative Program and things like that, and that there's been a huge amount of extra work for the Attorney General's Chambers due to the, shall we say, the legal issues raised by Health recently. Wouldn't it be a good idea actually to ask them and give them the additional funding they need to get rid of this blockage so that we can actually start? You know, does the AG basically, do the AG's Chambers, could they actually do with more than the 29,000, while we're doing this now?

The Chairman –

Thank you very much.

Mr Nicholas Yon (Deputy Financial Secretary) –

I suppose the answer is I'd imagine that they, any additional resources would be appreciated by the AG's Chambers. I suppose there is two elements to the funding support for the AG Chambers. One is through the recurrent budget, and there's the TC element of that as well. And so one of the things that I know the AG is working with HR is around how to better utilise the funding that's in the TC program so that he can get the resources that he requires. But there's I don't know if the AG wants to add anything in respect.

The Hon. David Ballantyne (Attorney General) –

I can try and throw some light on all of this. There is funding at least from an HR point of view. There are ten posts available within the Chambers. One of those is Crown Council Ascension, so that takes us down to nine. And there are two Legislative Drafting positions. There are several Crown Counsel positions, one Criminal Crown Counsel which is presently filled. There are, I think, three Civil Crown Counsel positions, of which two are presently filled. The immediate vacancies are for a Commercial Lawyer and another Legislative Draftsperson, which would double our capacity. We do still have Catherine working remotely, albeit she's not on Island. The overall position is that in order to try to meet the demand, we have resorted to hiring on a short term basis; Barristers from London Chambers who have come here as locum Crown Counsel. We have one at the moment. We have another one arriving on the 5th of January, and we're going to keep doing that until we compensate for the gaps that exist. But the other, more, long term initiative is the one that we're pursuing with the Government Legal Department in the UK. Just for those who don't know, the Government Legal Department are a body of lawyers who serve Government in the UK. So they know what Government legal work is like and they will cover a whole range. We've managed to get an arrangement, with the assistance of the FCDO Desk Officer, with the Government Legal Department, where I'm able to say today that expressions of interest, as they're called, have gone out and to the Government Legal Department. And just to say what that means. The biggest problem I found coming here, apart from finding out what it was all about, because people do not know what Saint Helena is about, at least as a generality, and I didn't. The biggest problem is continuity. And when you lose people, it's so difficult because of the length of time that it takes to recruit and the fact that people will accept an offer and then fall out of the system. We tried to recruit earlier in the year, a bit of a long story, but I think it's worth telling. We tried to recruit. We had one Crown Counsel who was already here, and we have employed that Crown Counsel on litigation, fortunately. Well, not fortunately. You have litigation, but fortunately that she has those skills. The other person who we recruited and we interviewed twice, managed to get to a point where he was quite keen, but hadn't discussed it with his spouse and was unable to commit, so we wasted about three months on a recruitment exercise which was just unproductive. So I have come to the view, rightly or wrongly, I hope, rightly, that if we go to a body of lawyers who are interested in coming here, who have importantly the right to return to the Government Legal Department, the Government Legal Department have a policy of reinstatement. If you go back within five years and I think that's really important because we struggle for professional people here, you're going to continue to struggle unless they have an option to resume their career, when they've done their time here, as it were. So we are looking right now for a Commercial Lawyer and a Legislative Drafter. And if we get those two positions and we keep recruiting the Locum Crown Counsel, which is the other arm of our effort, we will be pretty much at full complement. Whether that's enough to meet the latent demand, I don't know, because we really need to tackle this Legislative Program with seriousness, because the laws are miserably out of date. If I can put it in that form, and it's a task that is fundamentally important to the development of the Island, so that without overemphasising it, I really would like to get us up from maybe third gear that we're in at the moment into Top Gear. If I can put it like that. And when we're in that position, I think, I hope you will see a difference in terms of the materials that come to Legislative Council. I would say in addition but the backlog and it is a backlog on MCA matters, Marine Coast Guard Agency matters, Merchant Shipping is going to be addressed as well. I've just received the draft of amendments to the Merchant Shipping Ordinance prepared by a consultant funded by MCA, and that will come in due course, which will allow us to fulfil our mission to comply with international obligations regarding shipping and then work its way down into the entire marine sector or maritime area. So that aspect is being catered for. The Blue belt issue has not gone away. We haven't forgotten about it. We're going to deal with that as well. And we have got some kind of understanding that we will make progress in that area. The adjustments are

sometimes slow and sometimes invisible. But I warned when I came here, I can put it this way, that, if you like, destruction is quick. And it has been. Rebuilding is slow and it has been, but it has to be reliable. And I'm hoping that with these initiatives, I can't promise, I think I said that the first time I met Elected Members, I cannot promise and will not what I can't deliver. But with appropriate help from the Government Legal Department and initiatives from the people in my Chambers, they are a good team, they are too small, we need to get from that 60% to 100%. And I'm hoping that these initiatives will achieve that. So this 29,000 that you're looking at is just the tip of the iceberg. The whole structure of Chambers got to be made fit for purpose. And that's the mission.

The Chairman –

Thank you very much. Does anyone else wish to speak? Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Chair. I fully concur with the Attorney General's points made. I do however think that we also need to look at home grown options. This particular post was as a result of local recruitment on a traineeship basis that was supported with an educational programme. And I think, again, for the continuity side of things, we need to be looking to do more of that. And if it means the AG's Chambers having additional funding to do something like that, I think that's something that needs to be considered.

The Hon. David Ballantyne (Attorney General) –

If I could just briefly respond to that, Mr Speaker, I should have said that we also have in mind to engage, if you like younger people who can become paralegals and who can progress within the Chambers and get the benefit of working in what I would describe as a collegiate atmosphere. We do talk a lot to each other, and we work, you know, in relative harmony, and that's extremely important. We did recruit a school leaver, and that's also a facet that should be encouraged. But there are probably young people who could make a career by coming in at the appropriate level and developing their skills. So that's a commitment that I'm quite happy to honour as well. To the extent that we can. And if, frankly, if we need more resources, I won't be slow in coming and asking for them. Thank you.

The Chairman –

Thank you very much. Is there anyone else? No.

Head 14 – Attorney General's Chambers – £29k

Question put and agreed to.

The Chairman –

I put the question that Head 15 Safety, Security and Home Affairs, standing in the amount of £89,000 do stand part of the Bill. Mr Yon do you wish to?

Mr Nicholas Yon (Deputy Financial Secretary) –

Yes thank you. So the £89,000 is for five key areas under Safety, Security and Home Affairs. So the first area is under the Prison budget, as you may be aware, there are capacity constraints in the prison. And so the first two areas that we have on the list is one around the overcapacity in the prison and the need to have additional support come in from overseas. That was entitled Operation Safeguard, and that was £50,000 required in order to build a capacity here to deal with the number of prisoners that we had during

the year. In addition to that, because of the increased number of prisoners, an estimate was made as to the increased operational costs that there was when we put the budget together. However, as it transpires, additional money is required, particularly for food supplies for the prison, and so an additional £6,000 is required by the end of the year. And that's made on assumption of the same level of prisoners as it is now. The other three areas relate to immigration side of things, and the first two are around licences and the OTRCIS licence that Immigration uses. There was an assumption built into the budget earlier this year that some of these costs would be financed through CSSF or FCDO. However, as it transpires, that didn't occur and so they still require those services in order for them to be able to do their job under the Immigration Ordinance. And so that is why these costs now need to be accounted for in the recurrent budget. And then finally, there is an ongoing asylum case and the costs associated with the ongoing asylum cases, £7,000. So overall altogether is £89,000.

The Chairman –

Thank you very much. Any other Honourable Member wish to speak at this point? Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I think that this comment is really directed towards the Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs more than the Deputy Financial Secretary. But I am mindful that obviously the UK Government has been faced with a prison overcrowding situation as well, and they are looking at ways of addressing that in relation to reducing sentences on the low level offenders and also reducing sentences and then deporting international parties that are incarcerated in the United Kingdom. So again, I just wonder what the Portfolio is looking at doing, if they are looking at doing anything to help alleviate the situation at the other end.

The Chairman –

Any response Minister Ellick?

The Hon. Jeffrey Ellick (Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Yes we've had discussions concerning repatriation of offenders, but that has to be an agreement with the opposite country as well. So until you get an agreement with the opposite country, because it has to be a mutual agreement, in any case, we can't do those sorts of things, then we should be doing those sort of things in respect of reducing the sentences. I have raised about reducing the sentences and have been given legal advice. But like it's for the low level offenses and some of the offenses that we currently having at the moment aren't in the low level offenses. So most offenses that you're seeing being convicted for at the moment are high level offenses rather than the low level offenses. And what you find with the low level offenses at the moment, they get a remission of one third in any case. But as you will probably notice, there aren't many people in the prison at the moment with short sentences for low level offenses.

The Chairman –

Thank you very much. Any other Member wish to speak? Honourable Gillian Brooks.

The Hon. Gillian Brooks –

In regards to number five, the 7,000, is that sort of the rep of that number five or is that expected to grow more or, you can't really.

The Hon. Jeffrey Ellick (Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs) –

So thank you to my Honourable friend. Currently, we're doing some work in relation to that so it could increase. It all depends. You know, it's a moving sort of thing. So we have to monitor it as we go. We can't just turn around and say it's going to be this, that or the other. We have to monitor it as we go. As is now for a supplementary appropriation. Thank you.

The Chairman –

Thank you very much. Honourable Members just put your put your light on when you're speaking. You didn't have yours on at the time Honourable Gillian Brooks. Anyone else wish to speak?

Head 15 – Safety, Security and Home Affairs - £89k

Question put and agreed to.

The Chairman –

Thank you very much. I put the question that Head 16 Judicial Services, standing in the amount of £5,000 do stand part of the Bill. Mr Yon do you wish to give an overview?

Mr Nicholas Yon (Deputy Financial Secretary) –

Yes, thank you. So under Judicial Services for the Supreme Court they cover all the additional costs associated with any of the costs, including appeals, and is currently an appeal case that's going through the Courts at the moment. That is causing additional costs for Judicial Services, which they would normally seek to cover within their normal allocation. But they have highlighted that these costs are greater than what they would have anticipated, and so they request an additional £5,000.

The Chairman –

Thank you very much. Councillor Karl Thrower?

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you. Just a point of interest, really. If somebody loses the appeal, do we then get to claim the £5,000 off them or is it just gone?

Mr Nicholas Yon (Deputy Financial Secretary) –

I'm not too sure of the answer to that question.

The Chairman –

Anyone else. No.

Head 16 – Judicial Services - £5k.

Question put and agreed to.

The Chairman -

I put the question that Head 23 Health and Social Care, standing in the amount of £886,000 do stand part of the Bill. Mr Yon do you wish to make an overview or Honourable Minister Henry, do you wish to give an overview? No. You passed it on to Mr Yon. Mr Yon do you wish to make an overview. Yes.

Mr Nicholas Yon (Deputy Financial Secretary) –

Yes. So the 886,000 for recurrent expenditure is for four key reasons: overseas medical treatment, medical supplies, community and carer's allowance and better life allowance. The Minister Brooks alluded to this earlier. Under overseas medical treatment we're seeing continuous upward pressure on that budget and what is required in such a complex budget to be able to predict in terms of the number of cases that require treatment overseas, what type of cases will be referred, when is the best time to refer? In some cases, people are referred for a diagnosis. And so we just don't know what their condition is to even begin to think about treatment. There is very urgent cases. There were a few this year. Very complex cases that costs in one particular case, I think it was upwards of £100,000 for the treatment. And so when we look at that, in addition to the actual treatment costs and being able to get the person there, there's also the accommodation. And particularly in cases where perhaps, for example, chemo, where people stay for a long period of time, then they may be there for several months. And so all of those things we've took into account preparing the budget. In addition to that, this year, in particular, when the budget was put together, it was during a period when there was a transition between the old contract for overseas medical treatment and the new contract, and there was discussions around the greater control of costs, which we are starting to see the benefit of those greater controls and costs. However, I think as Minister Henry mentioned, a number of times over the past few months, is that it's difficult to be able to see that in the numbers simply because the number of the volume of cases continues to increase. So in this number, at the time of putting together this forecast, 62 people had already been sent overseas. And as I mentioned, some very complex cases. And then we also took into account those cases where we knew it had been agreed for them to go on overseas medical treatment, but they were still to travel. And then it was also taken into account that there would be approximately two additional urgent cases each month for the rest of the financial year then we also added in a contingency of 15. Together, by putting all of those numbers together and estimates of what the costs could be, it was determined that the cost could be in the region of £2.1 million by the end of the financial year, and given the budget of 1.5, here is the request for £600,000. But it really depends on the type of cases and as they come up. So we have better controls in this year, the Treasury working with Health team to make sure that we're able to monitor that on a much more regular basis, at least once per month, sometimes more earlier than that, just to make sure that we can understand how finances are going in terms of overseas medical treatment. The next area of pressure on the Health is medical supplies. £103,000. There are a number of reasons here. Some of it is to do with supplies required for the CCC and some of those institutions and the increased costs associated with those, but also under the Pharmacy. I think Dr Essex mentioned earlier around some of the complications presented by the current interim shipping service. And one of the things that they've had to deal with is that the ability to bring refrigerated goods on the current interim service and the reliability of that or the frequency. And so what they've had to resort to ensure that stocks, critical stocks are maintained on island for those refrigerated pharmaceuticals. They've had to bring it in via the weekly Airlink flight, which is more costly than they would have to if it was on the sea freight side. But they've had to do that to kind of mitigate the risk of not having critical medical supplies here on the Island. So there's an increased cost that they've experienced this year as well as just generally global prices in medical supplies are continuing to increase. And in South Africa, they've found that in some cases is quite way, way above inflation. Then under the Social Care side of things, Community Carer's Allowance. When the budget was put together earlier this year, Health and Social Care set out to try and look at how they could minimise the costs or reduce the costs in

the provision of this domiciliary care out to members of the public who are living in their homes and need support to continue to live in their homes. And what they've found is that service has just had to grow, and the demand for that service is ever increasing. In some cases, the care packages require upwards of three people to provide the care for one individual. And because people live at different various parts of the Island, it's difficult to be able to coordinate that. So they've tried to limit the costs as far as they can without kind of compromising people's care packages. And so here is the additional 148,000 that is required. What I will say is that as part of the budget process for the next year, all of these different areas have been considered and taken into account in some way so that we won't be in a similar position next year. Finally, is Better Life Allowance. This policy has been reviewed, some people have come off that allowance, but some have had to had their allowance change at different category. And so this has increased in costs. We anticipated that could come down when we put the budget together. But now it is found that that has to be maintained. So this has gone back up to what the budget was for last year.

The Chairman –

Thank you. Anyone else wish to speak? Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Chair. Again, this is more directed to my Honourable friend, the Minister for Health and Social Care, because when we discussed this several weeks ago, before I went away, the one item within all of this that is more within the control of his Portfolio is the Community Carer's Allowance. And we were advised that they were seeking; SHG HR were seeking, I believe, a total of 15 migrant workers to fulfil roles within the care sector to help alleviate that, and as we've heard earlier in relation to the TC budgets, we have failed recruitment. We sometimes take three months to organise a post and the person pulls out. That is because we are not the only people with labour market shortages. International competition for skills is rife and the longer we delay recruiting posts, the longer it takes, the more we're likely to lose people, people that we're trying to bring in. Since returning, I hear on the grapevine that there are delays in bringing those migrant workers here due to Immigration. I don't know how true that is, but again, I'm just raising that as a concern because I think this is one area of the budget where there is the potential for further control.

The Chairman –

Thank you very much. Any response, Honourable Minister Henry.

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

I just make a quick response. Fast forward to Honourable friends, particular budget line and just probably say something overall about the Health budget in general. So there are a number of constraints at the moment with bringing in some of these community care allowance, they are going, community care workers. They are going through some of the processes and those processes are put in certain areas, other Government Departments. However, the point that Nicholas has made, which we are starting to reach a bit of a snowball effect where the demand is much, much higher. One of the points he pointed out is in some cases we need to put three carers against to 1 person that is around the clock care, 24 hour care. And the underlying reasons behind such care is that we are at absolute capacity with the CCC complex, etc. So these are now mitigating circumstances moving on from being at capacity in other areas, and also indicated around the areas of bed blocking and the hospital as well, because of long term care members situated in the hospital, which isn't ideal for either them or our staff. Just overall just to quickly say, and I know I can bring this up in a different forum, but the Health and Social Care budget is starting to become extremely

frustrating for myself and for members of the public. If I just look at the overseas medical treatment while the Deputy Financial Secretary point to some of the mitigations that we are making this year just to get through this year, there is an accumulated list now of, as I mentioned earlier, of people requiring orthopaedic surgery because of the changes we had to make there and what we really, really need to discuss with FCDO and other colleagues. You know, we can't have Sky's the Limit budget is some of the long term provision that we will have to stop making. Without that long term provision, we have to stop making. We will run into a point of no return with Health and Social Care on us all. And that is my findings here today. We have to start strategising. Thank you Mr Speaker.

The Chairman –

Thank you very much. Any other Members to speak? Councillor Karl Thrower?

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you Mr Speaker. I just ask for some clarity on the 600,000 for overseas medical treatment. So earlier today, we spoke about the fact that we're at the stage where we're only sending off, I forgot the exact term used, basically critical cases of people who need urgent medical attention. Will this 600,000 free up that backlog? Will it allow us to send the people or are we, so my worry is that actually what we're doing is we're getting to a stage where, because we've still got so long to go, what is it, six months in this financial year that by the time we start the next financial year, we're going to have to find so much money that it's almost a false saving because it's probably going to cost you. I know these people are medically stable, if that's the right word, but it does worry me that all we're doing is delaying things to actually hit us next year. Isn't it better actually to increase the amount and just get it done? Because these are people. Why are some of these people and some of them have been speaking, you know, obviously medical things are always something people speak to the Councillors about. There are people who are currently off work, although they're not critical, they're currently not able to work and therefore they're not paying taxes and things like that. Wouldn't it be better to try and keep that back log up to date?

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

So I probably will let Nicholas come in behind this, but we have to look at this from both elements across any service or across any care service, especially from medicine. There will be natural waiting lists and those will depend on, as I said earlier, the causation. So it will depend on whether they need immediate or sometimes elective surgery which can actually wait. But what I do agree with my Honourable friend about is that we need to have a look and as I said earlier about the strategy going forward, because what does tend to happen is that we really stagnate towards the end and stop or bring to almost a halt some of the cases that we send towards the end of the Financial Year, and that then accumulates and starts at the beginning of the next financial year that has happened. So I do agree with my Honourable friend about this, but as I said, we also have to weigh that against the fact that there are natural waiting lists everywhere across most health services, which are state funded. So there is a fine balance. But we also need an end game strategy because at the moment I can't see an end game strategy with some of the current funding around these particular budget lines.

The Chairman –

Thank you. Anyone else?

Head 23 – Health and Social Care - £886,000.

Question put and agreed to.

The Chairman –

I put the question that the total of £1,550,000 to stand part of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

The Chairman –

Now look at schedule two capital expenditure. I put the question that Head 23 Health and Social Care, standing in the amount of £59,000 do stand part of the Bill. Honourable Minister Henry or Deputy Financial Secretary. Do you wish to provide an overview?

Mr Nicholas Yon (Deputy Financial Secretary) –

Yes. So under the capital requirements what Health have done, they've commenced a programme to review their medical record software. And some of you may be aware that at the moment Health is operating two software, one is Patient Source, one is EMIS. And so for example, doctors have to input information into 2 programmes. The two programmes at the moment don't talk to one another. And so what they've done is set about reviewing which system is the best system, how best to bring it in. And they're now moving to one system for medical records. And so what they're requesting is the upfront costs of being able to implement the one system and move fully to one system, and that will obviously bring benefits financially in the future, but also in terms of doctor's time, nurses time, being able to generate reports and information as well into the future. So that is basically the upfront cost of 59,000 required this year. But I don't know if Minister Henry would like to add anything further to that.

The Chairman –

Minister Henry.

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

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Just to add to what Nicholas just said, I don't know if any of you heard my both radio programmes yesterday, along with what we're doing right here with upgrading the system, we're also now starting to put together a disease registry, which will go hand in hand with this upgrade. This is truly a step in the right direction and a step in terms of becoming far more efficient. Being able to predict our diseases on the Island, being able to use modern software to help us to do that, being able to work with our medical referrals team and look at upfront costs for operations, etc. will help us become far become more able to predict budgets going forward. And I think that's the important point about this as well, is clearly reducing the time our doctors spent with trying to navigate the way around both these systems.

The Chairman –

Thank you very much. Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter–

Thank you, Mr Chairman. Mr Chairman, this is one area that I have no hesitation in supporting. I think it's the right direction to go in because it will help to streamline activities in the future, and I actually would like to say that that's the sort of thing that I would like to see in other Portfolios, particularly with the advent of the cable, where we can create efficiency savings through upgrading software and having better control of systems. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Chairman –

Thank you very much. Any other Member wish to speak. Honourable Karl Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you, Mr Chairman. Just to say I fully agree with Councillor Midwinter. We looked at this quite deeply as part of PAC as well. And this is exactly the way we should be going on the Island. These kind of software upgrades will really, we should get a very significant return on the investment that they cost for the 59,000. And we all know that our doctors and medical staff have been struggling with that horrible software, system record keeping method for far too long. So this is the kind of thing I think we should see more of and not, you know, accept it fully.

The Chairman –

Thank you very much. Anyone else? No.

Head 23 – Health and Social Care – £59k

Question put and agreed to.

The Chairman –

Thank you, Honourable Members. We now turn back to the main part of the Bill again, Clause two. Clause two, Consolidated Fund provision for the financial year 2023 to 2024. Does any Honourable Member wish to speak? No one at all.

Clause 2 – Consolidated Fund Provision – Financial Year 2023/2024

Question put and agreed to.

The Chairman –

Thank you, Honourable Members, we will now resume Council.

Council Resumed.

The Speaker –

The Bill is to be reported.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I beg to report that the Supplementary Appropriation, (2023/24) Bill 2024 passed the Committee with zero amendments. And to move that this Council approve the said Bill and recommend to the Governor that it should be enacted.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Is there a seconder? Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I beg to second.

The President –

Mover, you may speak to the motion. No, not at all. Thank you. I put the question that this Council approves the Supplementary Appropriation 2023 2024 Bill 2023 and recommends to the Governor that it should be enacted. Does anyone wish to speak? Honourable Mover do you wish to, no not at all. No.

Question put and agreed to.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Next item of business, please.

Motion No. 2 – The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex

The Speaker –

The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I beg to move that Rule six of Order Nine, of the Standing Orders of the Legislative Council be amended to remove the limitation upon Members in respect of the number of supplementary questions it is permissible to ask during Minister's Question Time.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Is there a seconder?

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Mr Speaker, I beg to second.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much Honourable Member. Honourable Mover. You may speak to the motion.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, it became apparent when Elected Members trialled the procedures for Minister's Question Time that the limitation to only one supplementary question per substantive question, which is currently imposed by Rule six, of Order nine of Standing Orders, impeded achievement of the objectives of holding Minister's Question Time. Minister's Question Time enables other Elected Members to call Ministers to account and probe areas of public interest, to gather more information, explore the reasons for policy decisions and obtain clarity on current issues. Thus, it is a key process that contributes to openness, transparency and good governance, which cannot operate effectively if only one supplementary question is permitted after the relevant Minister has given their response to the initial question. Consequently, at each of the eight Minister's Question Times held to date, it has been necessary to move a motion to suspend the relevant portions of Standing Orders to enable more supplementary questions to be asked. This has become a frustrating, repetitive task that delays commencement of the main business and opens doors to criticism. Therefore, Mr Speaker, I wish to propose that the current wording of Rule six of Order nine of the Standing Orders be deleted and replaced with the following. “Any Elected Member who was not appointed as a Minister may put a question to a Minister and is

permitted to put one question and supplementary questions to a Minister, subject to The President's overall discretion". Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Members. The motion is that Rule six, of Order nine of the Standing Orders of the Legislative Council be amended to remove the limitation upon Members in respect of the number of supplementary questions it is permissible to ask during Minister's Question Time. Does any other Member wish to speak? Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I rise in support of the motion. Mr Speaker, following the adoption by this House of the revised Standing Orders in December last year, we have since held several sessions of Ministerial Question Time, as noted by my Honourable colleague. During these sessions, it has been necessary to suspend Standing Orders in order to permit the asking of multiple supplementary questions as was originally intended when the revision was being drafted, so I fully support the motion presented. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Does any other Honourable Member wish to speak? Honourable Karl Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I also rise in support of this motion. I think my two colleagues have covered the reason why I support it fully.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Any other Honourable Member wish to speak? Honourable Ronald Coleman.

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I rise in support of the motion and the amendments being made.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Anyone else? Hon Attorney General.

The Hon. David Ballantyne (Attorney General) –

Just a clarification, Mr Speaker. I'm looking at the wording. The wording is quite apt. It was suggested by the Legislative Drafter. Apologies to the proposer for the delay in supplying that. However we have got there. Just for clarity. Looking at the wording, I think it needs to be interpreted that the supplementary questions may not just come from the Member who put the original question. I hope that's implicit in the wording. I don't think it's a contentious issue, but just so that we appreciate that any other Member who has a question, a supplementary may put that. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much for that. Thank you, Mover?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

I would like to thank my colleagues who have expressed support for the Bill and the Attorney General for his intervention, because that is indeed the spirit in which this amendment is being made. As I've heard no dissenting voices, I would like to thank all my colleagues for their support and hopefully passing this motion and enabling the proposed amendment to be made. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. And the amendment is, any Elected Member who is not appointed as a Minister may put a question to a Minister and is permitted to put one question and supplementary questions to a Minister, subject to The President's overall discretion. Thank you very much. The motion is that Rule six of Order nine of the Standing Orders of the Legislative Council be amended to remove the limitation upon Members in respect of the number of supplementary questions it is permissible to ask during the Minister's Question Time

Question put and agreed to.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Next item of business, please.

Motion No. 3 – The Honourable Rosemary Bargo.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Rosemary Bargo.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I beg to move that this House resolves that the Code of Conduct for Members of Legislative Council be amended to permit The President to choose a third member from the Panel of Investigators to perform the role of Chairperson.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Is there a seconder? Honourable Gillian Brooks.

The Hon. Gillian Brooks –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I beg to second.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Mover you may speak to the motion.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, the Code of Conduct for Members of Legislative Council has been extensively reviewed and was approved by Honourable Members at the Formal Meeting of Legislative Council held 16th December 2022. Moving on however, there are signs that the Code of Conduct is in need of further amendments and it has been proposed, therefore, that a meeting of the Elected Members is organised to scrutinise further the Code and list any concerns that arise. In the meantime, it has come to light that a problem would exist immediately if The President, when determining an Investigative Commission, is unable to select the Deputy Speaker to Chair the Investigative Commission. If the Deputy Speaker is unable to act, for example, due to a conflict of interest. Honourable Members, as you are aware,

currently, when an Investigative Commission is determined, The President, in compliance with the Code, selects the Deputy Speaker and two members from the Panel of Investigators, with the Deputy Speaker as Chair. If a third Member from the Panel could be chosen to perform the role of Chair, the conflict of interest issue could be overcome. Honourable Members to facilitate the aforementioned, it is proposed that the Code of Conduct for Members of Legislative Council under the heading Enforcement, at paragraph 7.2, Investigative Commission, an insertion be made at the end of sub paragraph a) 2, so that the sub paragraph reads where a complaint is made against a Member who is not The President or the Deputy Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, and two persons from the Panel, and if the Deputy Speaker is unable to act due to a conflict of interest, The President may choose a third person from the Panel in addition to the other two persons already selected to Chair the Investigative Commission. Honourable Members, I trust you'll be able to give your full support. Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Apologies Mr Speaker I beg to move.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Andrew, I do beg your pardon, Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I rise in support of the motion. Mr Speaker, it makes perfect sense to me that on occasions where there may be a conflict arising that relates to The President, the Deputy Speaker, or possibly both, that there should be a mechanism that permits the appointment of another individual from the list of Panel Members to act as the Chair. As such, I fully support the motion presented. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Any other Member wish to speak? Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I didn't speak before, and I think it's only fair to demonstrate unity within the Legislative Council to demonstrate that this is something that we all need. And as we grow as a Ministerial Government, things like this will have to happen as we learn more about the roles and obviously the restriction of it as we do more of this. So it's great that Rule six of Order nine, I think Dr Essex will get a well-earned rest now when it comes to the Standing Orders. And indeed, yes, we'd like to move on with our Code of Conduct, because if we are to be a democratic society, we should be able to carry out our business in an effective and efficient way. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. No. Any further Member wish to speak? No. The motion is that this House resolves that the Code of Conduct for Members of Legislative Council be amended to permit The President to choose a third member from the Panel of Investigators to perform the role of Chairperson. And the amendment is where a complaint is made against a member who is not The President or the Deputy Speaker, The Deputy Speaker and two persons from the Panel. And if the Deputy Speaker is unable to act

due to a conflict of interest, The President may choose a third person from the Panel in addition to the other two persons already selected to Chair the Investigative Commission.

Question put and agreed to.

The Speaker –
Next item please.

7. **ADJOURNMENT DEBATE**

The Speaker –
Adjournment debate. The Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –
Mr Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn sine die.

The Speaker –
Thank you. Is there a seconder to the motion, please?

The Hon. Martin Henry (Minister for Health and Social Care) –
Thank you, Mr Speaker. I'd like to second the motion.

The Speaker –
Thank you very much, Mr Martin Henry. Thank you. The motion is that this House do now adjourn sine die. The motion is now open for debate. The Honourable Ronald Coleman.

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –
Thank you, Mr Speaker. We have covered quite a lot of broad range of issues today, and we are now half way through our term of office as Elected Members, serving the people of Saint Helena and this wonderful Island. But, Mr Speaker the two years haven't been too good as one would have liked. Mr Speaker, we survive on overseas aid, and although we are grateful to His Majesty's Government for this aid, the balance is also made up of taxes mainly squeezed out of our very own people. And maybe enough is enough. My main purpose as an Elected Member is to improve the quality of life for everyone and moving forward, any decisions made would benefit the Island and its people. But we are really struggling to do this because of other pressures. Cost of living, Mr Speaker, is a global problem and our little Island is also feeling the pinch. This is visible from the rising cost of products in the shop brought on by the high cost of shipping, which is an area that needs to be looked at and how we can cut costs or bring down prices. And now that we have entered into negotiation with a new shipping provider, let's hope this new provider will give us a good service to Saint Helena and its people for the next 10 to 15 years. And it will be one fit for purpose and one that is robust as possible, and hope that this Government has learned from the situation with the telecommunications provider, with their negotiations. Mr Speaker, low incomes is a real problem for Saint Helena or no incomes at all. We need to get additional money into people's pockets. Although we found the 4% for people on benefits again, which was welcome. But this also pushed some of the people on benefit systems into the tax bracket, which is something we want to avoid. But we did not or could not afford to help those in other low incomes areas, especially our pensioners. If I keep raising benefits, we

are eroding the value of our pensions. Let's hope that when there is a salary review, pensions will be included. Mr Speaker, I will now turn to Customs, the Airport has been in operation for over seven years and weekly flights has always been on the books. But how can we as a Government close Customs on the Wharf when there is a midweek flight? When during this time of the year, all merchants want to get their goods into the shops for Christmas or any other time as matters. I was pleased to hear today that the Minister is also addressing this. Mr Speaker, land for housebuilding. What is happening to Bunkers Hill Development? What was the outcome of Bottom Woods development? And perhaps we can have an update on the Half Tree Hollow Commercial Development Area. These are all areas that can help the Island's economy, but nothing is happening on the front. I was too, pleased to hear that the Minister this morning, about the long awaited policy related to competition between SHG and the private sector. Mr Speaker, we are still getting calls from the private sector about contractor's still using SHG vehicles and equipment. When the private sector have these available for hire, this is going to be sorted a long time ago, but nothing has happened and the private sector is becoming frustrated. Finally, Mr Speaker, we will welcome FAM this weekend and there are many areas of concern that needs to be discussed. And as Elected Members, we would like to address things like the high cost of living on the Island, a good Health and Education service for Saint Helena, funded that will make a difference. Access, both air and sea access. The Ministerial system, which was going to be cost neutral and trying to get a three year budget with Saint Helena, can really make a difference in moving the Island forward instead of keeping the status quo year after year. In closing, Mr Speaker, I would like to thank everybody for their support and hope the final two years will be one with a difference, with Ministers leading for the greater benefit of Saint Helena and its people. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Member. Any other Honourable Member? The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I wish first to declare my interest as President of the Saint Helena Chamber of Commerce. Mr Speaker, it is very pleasing to be able to acknowledge great improvement and progress in two main areas. These are the delivery of clinical and pastoral care to patients referred to South Africa for treatment and the faster, cheaper internet service utilising the subsea fibre optic cable. All those responsible for bringing about these positive changes are to be congratulated. In particular, the managerial and technical staff of the internet provider deserve praise for the efficient and effective way in which the change to the new system was brought about within a very short timeframe. Another step forward is that negotiations have commenced relating to the longer term sea freight service. This should prove considerably more reliable than the interim arrangement, which, although definitely better than nothing, has had a very negative impact on the local economy, which will take some time to turn around. It is to be hoped that the Island will be able to benefit from a service that meets its needs relatively soon. The reintroduction of the midweek flights for the peak season and of direct Cape Town calls during the same season next year are also encouraging and should help to boost the local economy. However, Mr Speaker, it is very saddening that even with the positive changes that I have mentioned, very many of our local population feel that they have a bleak future if they remain here. This was even expressed by Primary School pupils during the recent Parliament Week activities. As they perceive the situation, their aspirations and views are ignored. What they need is placed beyond their reach frequently due to its price, as in the case of affordable land, and there is a greater focus on encouraging inward migration than on recognising, rewarding and incentivising our own people. Mr Speaker, action needs to be taken now to demonstrate

that these perceptions are not warranted and that the needs of Saints are being given the priority that they certainly deserve. And I would go as far as saying entitled to have. And in this context, I would ask the Honourable Chief Minister if in her response, she might clarify what she said this morning when she stated that we should not focus on Saint Helenians, but treat them as part of the piece. Because that will concerning Elected Members who are frequently told that the reason why so many important, outstanding actions remain undone is because of lack of capacity and capability together with the aging population. This may be true, although I am not convinced that more could not be achieved with better organisation and focus upon improving productivity, which would be likely to bring the added benefits of enhanced motivation and commitment. However, to address the current situation, the only truly sustainable solution is to actively incentivise Saints to remain or to return before they reach retirement age if they are overseas. In 2018 yes, Mr Speaker, five years ago I brought a motion to this Honourable House requesting that consideration be given to developing an appropriate scheme to assist Saints currently living offshore, to return to take up employment. The motion was passed, but no such scheme has been developed. When I requested an explanation, I was told that the new Labour Market Strategy would address the underlying issues. This has not proved to be the case, although that strategy does assist in alleviating some of the problems. When the Falkland Islands and Ascension were not renewing the contracts of Saints having certain chronic medical conditions, I pleaded in this Honourable House that attempt should be made to reach out to the individuals concerned, to make them aware of opportunities here. From feedback that I received, it appears that this never took place or only did so in a very limited manner. We are all painfully aware that money is in short supply, and that a lot of what is desirable is therefore not affordable. However, additional funding frequently ends up being required to solve an issue that will not have escalated if it had been tackled earlier. This is precisely the situation which we will be placed in if we have to bring in migrant workers to sustain required staffing levels in frontline services. As this point is reached, it is of the utmost importance that any assistance with flights, freight of personal effects, etc. associated with the post in question is also made available to the Saint Diaspora, who should receive the same opportunity to apply as other individuals and on the same terms and conditions. If this were not the case, it could be argued that it would be discriminatory and potentially conflict with the provisions of part 2) 21 of our Constitution. It was encouraging to hear the Honourable Chief Minister state this morning that progress is being made with the graduate scheme and other measures that could encourage Saints to return. In 2017, Mr Speaker, Elected Members actively pursued amendment of the 2009 Constitution order to align its relevant provisions for those contained within the Constitution of the Falkland Islands, so that a Saints First policy could be legitimately and legally established and implemented as exists in the Falklands. We were subsequently informed that it was futile to take this matter further, as the Privy Council would be most unlikely to agree to such a change. Mr Speaker, if we cannot have a formal Saints First policy, the very least we can all do is to work together at all levels on Saint Helena and across all sectors, and indeed with our colleagues in His Majesty's Government, to ensure that we do not end up having policies and decisions that have the effect of putting Saints last, even if that is far from their original actual intention. I support the adjournment. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Andrew Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Firstly, I wanted to highlight a fantastic speech by Kelly on the UK Youth Parliament. Now, while I'm envious of the opportunity to represent Saint Helena at the despatch box, I think Kelly did the whole Island proud by giving a powerful and honest view of the situation that young

people face on the Island. I hope the Government will listen and take note of this speech, as they look at how to attract young people back to the Island. Next up, Mr Speaker, I'm appalled by the revelation that Ministers are planning on diverting SHG underspends to prop up Hotel Development Limited. In doing so, they would avoid bringing the issue to a Formal session of LegCo and deny Councillors the opportunity to vote on the issue and represent public views. This clear attempt to avoid scrutiny from the House and the public is unacceptable, especially when, earlier in the day they used lack of funding in an attempt to justify their cuts to arts and cultural activities through Creative Saint Helena. How can the Government justify spending money paying its hotels while ignoring the needs and aspirations of the people of this Island? We deserve better. We deserve transparency and accountability. I urge the Ministers to do the right thing and to bring this matter to the House, so that the public can have their say on the issue. Now as it's the first LegCo since we crossed the halfway mark of this Council term, I thought it was time to reflect on a few of the key issues that we faced in our time so far. There have been a few victories. Opening up from quarantine was a big step forward, and has helped us see family and friends that we severely missed in the years the Island was closed. The Legalisation of the importation of CBD products has meant that people now have the option to use alternative treatments to benefit their wellbeing. And the biggest win is that we've seen the introduction of uncapped internet to the Island. Although every time I hear it referred to as superfast or even fast internet, it becomes something of a cause for concern. It often reminds me of the airport story, when we were promised planes full of hundreds of tourists every week, and then disaster, wind-shear and oh no, we can't land planes. So we were all quite happy when we started getting regular, albeit much smaller, flights. It was a step ahead from where we were and considered good enough. But I want to make a few things clear today. The introduction of uncapped data plans on the Island is a step forward, but we signed up with the EU to provide fibre to home. More importantly, that's what was sold to us as the people of this island. With the fiber network project having all but disappeared, we are left asking, is it still the intention to provide the high speed, reliable internet we were promised? Or are we going to be stuck with good enough? Because in reality, what we get now just isn't. Not if we're going to generate the digital economy that Ministers talk about. Regardless of uncapped data, we still have a monopoly provider who's responsible for all telecoms on our Island and their take it or leave it attitude to service provision means those who are struggling to make the most of their new connectivity are left helpless. Why do we now allow a monopoly provider who refuses to allow businesses to offer normal services, such as WiFi, to its customers? Who refuses to repair phone lines outside working hours, and who leaves people without access to emergency services to operate in an environment where they are beholden to nobody. In recent months, we've witnessed the effectiveness of independent regulation and Connect Saint Helena stands as a prime example. Now, absolutely Connect has its issues, not least of which is the lack of vision necessary to move the Island forward on renewables. But because it is overseen by the Utilities Regulatory Authority, Connect operates within a framework that ensures accountability and gives the consumer protection from the poorest of practices. In our two years in office, one of the only significant new pieces of Legislation that has come to the House has been a Bill to bring our Telecoms Legislation up to date and introduce a style regulator for Telecoms on the Island. Despite this being passed with many statements as to its urgency, this Government refuses to bring it into law. How are we supposed to protect these people from these poor practices? And why do you continue to place the importance of one company over the people you were elected to represent. Moving on, albeit in a similar vein. We're often accused in the street of having done nothing in the last two years. It's difficult to argue with that perception when even Question Time earlier this week highlighted how we are still waiting for vital legislation, such as the new Road Traffic Ordinance and, equally importantly, a new Immigration Policy. It would be great to be able to tell the public what other legislation is being worked on and prioritised, but unfortunately, the Legislative Programme is elusive as ever. Perhaps it's easier to avoid being held to

account for failing to deliver if you never actually say what you intend to deliver on, or when you intend to deliver it. Mr Speaker, perhaps I should end it there, but I want to end on a positive note with a solution. For my question earlier today on transparency, it's become evident that, much like the challenges we faced with quarantine, the solution is to open up. An open and transparent Government holds the key to addressing the challenges faced by the people of Saint Helena, by actively involving us in decision making processes, ensuring access to information and maintaining high standards of public life. We can pave the way for progress. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Does anyone else wish to speak? Honourable Karl? Robert Midwinter, it's getting late in the day.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Yes, Mr Speaker it is late in the day, so I'll try not to be too long. Mr Speaker, I rise in support of the Adjournment. Firstly Mr Speaker, I bring greetings from the Senate and the National Assembly of Kenya, on conclusion of the joint UK / Kenya Commonwealth Parliamentary Association workshop held in Nairobi earlier this month, and in doing so, I wish to place on record my own gratitude for the very warm welcome that I received during my recent visit. In particular, I wish to thank the staff of the Parliament of Kenya, and Kenya Women's Parliamentary Association or KEWOPA, and also the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK, for hosting a very enlightening and rewarding workshop. I am extremely grateful and feel very privileged to have been invited to attend and represent the St Helena Legislative Council at this important Parliamentary gathering, which preceded White Ribbon Day and the subsequent 16 days of activism and awareness raising towards addressing Gender-based Violence, leading up to International Human Rights day on 10th December. Whilst I will not pre-empt my formal report, I would note that the issues of Gender-based Violence, particularly towards women and young girls, and also Modern Day Slavery in Supply Chains are most certainly relevant to our small jurisdiction, and I fully intend on following up on a number of the commitments that I personally made during the workshop. As the Chair of Select Committee 1, I found the interactive session on sensitive scrutiny of particular interest, and would again note the concern that our own Select Committees are insufficiently resourced when compared to other jurisdictions, who were quite shocked to hear that all of the topic research, report writing, and a number of other admin related activities fell onto the Members of the Select Committee itself, as opposed to there being a dedicated Select Committee Clerk, which I personally feel raises questions regarding how committed we are collectively to the role of public scrutiny, and the value that this adds to the Governance of our small island. Mr Speaker, I would also like to make mention, as I referred earlier to the very warm welcome that I received in Kenya, that here in St Helena we really need to up our game from a Public Service perspective, in relation to how we treat our Parliamentarians, our visitors to the island, and even our own people. In truth, we are simply not customer focused, we are not customer friendly, and there is little respect afforded to the Elected Representatives of this island by our own Public Service. Mr Speaker, in this respect, and for the benefit of the listening public, having just approved the Appropriation Bill, all members of the Public Service who were present have now left this Chamber. It was once said to me by a former Chief Secretary when I was in such a senior position "if you want Elected Members to listen to you, make sure that you are in the House to listen to them". This becomes particularly evident when travelling overseas on official business, and then being made to feel especially welcome in other countries from the minute you step off the plane and then depart again, and I again note here my thanks to the Clerks from the National Assembly, who ensured that my visit went beyond any expectation that I had before my arrival. Mr Speaker, I raise this point because we, this

Legislative Council, this Island will in a few short months be hosting various people who would be classed as foreign dignitaries, not least our Parliamentary colleagues from within the British Islands and Mediterranean Region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Mr Speaker, if in six months' time we are unable to provide visiting Parliamentarians with the level of respect and customer service that we receive when visiting other jurisdictions, we will paint a very poor picture of our beautiful island. Mr Speaker, again, I mention resources, as we need to be adequately resourced if we are going to be able to host this workshop effectively, and we also need to ensure that the Public Service is on-board to support us in doing so. Mr Speaker, being away, visiting places that depend heavily on Tourism, and then returning to the island, brings to mind areas where we could be improving both our own efficiency and also the customer experience. As an example of this, we appear to have taken a step backwards for passengers arriving in St Helena, having replaced the small cards previously issued with a double sided A4 sheet of paper, issued to passengers by the cabin crew. Everywhere else you visit these days, you simply hand over your passport upon arrival, it is scanned, and then you answer three simple questions, namely: Where have you come from? How long are you intending to stay? And what is the purpose of your visit? Once completed, you then simply head for either a red or green channel; there is no form, there is no declaration, and it takes very little time for most arrivals. It also reduces the human resources required to process arrivals, so for example, there were only three Border Control Agency staff checking passports at Johannesburg the day that I arrived, and there were literally hundreds of passengers being processed through in a matter of minutes. Mr Speaker, this is something that I intend to raise directly with my Honourable Colleague, the Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs, so I will move on. Mr Speaker, I mentioned earlier White Ribbon Day, and I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate all who were involved in organising and also supporting this year's on-island campaign. I was sorry to miss the actual event last Saturday, however, I hear that it went very well, so well done to all involved. Mr Speaker, I am coming towards the end, however I also wish to recognise the work undertaken by my Honourable Colleague, and Children's Champion, Councillor Rosemary Bargo during UK Parliament Week, along with the support provided by other esteemed colleagues, and of course the staff of the four schools that were visited. Having been in attendance at two of the interactive sessions, I was really pleased to see how engaged the youth of our island was at each of these. That noted Mr Speaker, I was then extremely disappointed to learn that one of the civil society organisations that supports the development of our young people, namely Creative St Helena, has had their budget significantly reduced when compared to previous years, especially as the children we spoke to during our school visits were asking for us to support more activities such as these; again Mr Speaker, we are reducing resources in areas that actually help the future development of this island, and its people, so I am really disappointed to hear this, especially as we are actually talking very low levels of funding support in the first place, and this was the only supported organisation to be cut. Mr Speaker, I for one still believe that there is much more that can be done to reduce our overheads and increase our revenue streams, however, to target the soft underbelly of those bodies that are trying to support the island's development, both socially and creatively, is in my own mind completely unacceptable. What I would say to my Ministerial Colleagues is at what cost? What is the long term impact of such a small, short-term budgetary saving? The need to install video cameras and lighting systems at additional public expense and loss of public privacy, perhaps? Mr Speaker, before closing and noting that we have now been in office for over two years, I am again raising my concern that, despite previous reassurances given in this House, no policy and legislative programme has been shared with Elected Members, in draft or otherwise; Mr Speaker, this is supposed to be a live programme, it is not cast in stone, so where is the problem, and who is ultimately responsible for addressing this? Mr Speaker, I am mindful that I could go on and on about the things that I believe are not going well right now, however, as this is likely to be the last opportunity to do so for this year, I believe that we should recognise

achievements made during 2023, not least the cable connectivity, significantly improved internet packages, significantly improved offshore medical referrals, increased flights during our peak season, increased visitor numbers, refreshing new visuals in the arrivals lounge at St Helena Airport, increased cruise ship arrivals, and the prospect of a new shipping service commencing in the New Year along with the reinstatement of mid-week flights via Cape Town for next year's peak season; so Mr Speaker, it's certainly not all bad news in terms of the direction we are heading in. And finally, Mr Speaker, as this is likely to be the last opportunity that I will have to do so formally in this Honourable House before our Christmas Recess, I would like to wish everyone an enjoyable, and peaceful festive season; my own thoughts and prayers go out to all of those who are suffering right now in conflict areas around the world. Thank you Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Gillian Brooks.

The Hon. Gillian Brooks –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, we have just about reached the end of another year and like the year before, it has not been without its challenges, many of which are difficult to overcome in a quick process, not always through trying. We know we have no deep pockets of money. Resources are limited and the cogs of wheels turn so slowly, more often than not, too slowly. We experienced issues with our shipping that caused frustration, but these were beyond our control at the time when we needed a shipping service. We didn't have a line up banging on our door, but I would hope the issues we have experienced will be useful information in the decision making for the new shipping service. Thank you, Minister Brooks for the information you brought to the House this morning in regards to the preferred bidder for our shipping service. Our winter months tested us with our weekly flights here again, frustrating, but beyond our control. But hats off to Airlink for getting us through this, and we now look forward to the increased flights and the family, friends and visitors we normally have around this time of the year. We started a new overseas medical service provider a few months back. We need to give it a time to bed itself in, but I would expect that in the New Year, we will be looking at how it has established itself and how Saint Helena is benefiting from the new service. October saw the introduction of the new telecom packages, and I hope this has helped in some way to assist people financially. Having access to telephone and internet service in a home is, in my opinion, helpful in enabling educational and social being. This coming week we will have the visit of the FAM team, financial aid mission. It is budget time again. We know it is an uphill financial struggle for so many. We have a dwindling working age group, an aging demographic, and a constant struggle to make what money we have go around. Which is why having enough time to work on and scrutinise the upcoming budget is critical. Today we heard about the considerations going forward on tax. This is also very welcoming. I would like to mention New Horizons here and say thank you for the painting and tidying up that has been done to their venue here in Lower Jamestown and to the Works Division for the maintenance they did on the building. Mr Speaker, I've been overseas for a few weeks, starting with attending the PAC workshop in Zambia with the PAC Chair, Mr Mark Yon and the Clerk, Ms. Anita Legg. We joined our colleagues from the UK and the African regions, and I want to say that not only was the workshop so informative and well presented, but the friendship developed over the three days was quite remarkable. I was a panellist for one of the sessions and used this opportunity to raise awareness of Saint Helena. I would like to thank the Chief Minister for her response to my question today at PAC. Dame Meg Hillier did ask about the concerns that I raised. I then travelled via the UK to Iceland to attend the Reykjavik Global Forum for Women Leaders. I have submitted a report to Elected Members and once discussed, will arrange to speak on radio. So I will not elaborate too much here today, only to

say, Mr Speaker that it was an honour for Saint Helena to have been selected to attend amongst the delegation of 500. Here in Island we do not have an issue of women being accepted into the workplace and in prominent roles, but that is what we have to offer at forums such as these. I felt well received and valued for what I could contribute at group events. Speaking positively for Saint Helena. At the time of this event, Iceland was in a state of emergency due to the earthquakes and imminent volcanic eruption. And this is still ongoing and my thoughts are with the people there. Prior to travelling to Iceland, I spent a day in London at the travel show with Matthew Joshua and Emma Weaver and His Excellency the Governor. I want to say thank you to Matthew and Emma because this was a huge event at London in the Excel building in London, where for some countries, money is not an obstacle to put on a big show. But for Saint Helena they had to work to a small budget but did take advantage of the opportunity and I hope it helps us with increasing our tourism. I would like to conclude, Mr Speaker, by remembering those who at this time of the year are in areas of the world that are affected by war, conflict, unrest and natural disasters. People and children are having their lives destroyed. And when I think about this, I realise that in spite of the problems we have here, we also have a lot to be thankful for. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Member. Honourable Rosemary Bargo.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I rise in support of the adjournment. Mr Speaker, it's been approximately five months since our last sitting of Formal LegCo. Today, I want to highlight the concerns of my constituents, echoing the sentiments of many on Saint Helena. Whilst my colleagues may have already voiced similar concerns, I believe it's crucial to emphasise our shared challenges such as the high cost of living, shipping issues, employment struggles and a declining population. These issues are global, requiring collaborative efforts not only with the UK Government and international organisations, but also amongst ourselves on the Island to address matters that can be resolved locally. We need to, as a Government, Elected Members and you, the public, work together for the common good of the Island and for all of us. Mr Speaker, on a more enlightened reflection that I have had the privilege of participating in the Advanced Parliamentary Development Residency Programme in the historic city of Edinburgh, Scotland. This immersive experience has deepened my understanding of parliamentary procedures, legislative processes and policy development. Additionally, I have gained valuable insights into effective communication, collaboration and leadership within a parliamentary setting. The programme equipped me with practical skills and knowledge to contribute meaningful, fully to the legislative process in addition to my academic pursuits. Mr Speaker, as Children's champion, I aim to dedicate significant time to fostering political awareness among the youth. I, along with my colleagues, recently embarked on a series of visits to schools to inspire the next generation's interest in politics. Uk Parliament Week was an opportunity to do so, which we did through engaging discussions, presentations and interactive sessions. I endeavoured to bridge the gap between the classroom and the real world workings of parliamentary systems. My engagements with schools seek to not limit to theoretical discussions rather, I sought to provide practical insights into the functioning of our democratic institutions by sharing personal experiences and shedding light on the day to day responsibilities of a parliamentarian. I aim to demystify politics and encourage young minds to actively participate in shaping the future of our nations. I look forward to continuing these endeavours and have commenced works on re-establishing a Youth Parliament on Saint Helena, and trust that the seeds sown today will yield a harvest of informed and active citizens tomorrow. I would like to join Ministers and my colleagues to push for the continued financial support for the educational and after school activities for our youth, and to ensure that such organisation

evolves with their youth, are adequately supported to allow for the continuation and growth. An issue that I'm happy to highlight to the FAM seeing this coming Monday. As we adjourn today, I want to thank my colleagues for supporting the school visits, and I would like to invite all colleagues to reflect on the importance of nurturing political literacy among our youth. The success of any democracy relies on an informed and engaged community, and our commitment to education and outreach will undoubtedly contribute to the resilience and vitality of our democratic institutions. Lastly, Mr Speaker, a few thank you's. It's wonderful to see the community engagement and positive initiatives in respect to suggestions from my constituents that have contributed for the use of the £500 community grant. The majority would like to see the clean-up and maintenance of Longwood Green and Children's Play area, which reflects a commitment to enhancing public spaces. So thank you for all for your contributions. Thank you to the White Ribbon Day organizers for organizing a successful march last Saturday that promoted awareness of domestic abuse, with special mention to Mrs Debbie Knipe, the lead organizer of these events and who was instrumental in all aspects of promoting awareness. Domestic abuse happens every day, so I urge those who are experiencing or witnessing such abuse to speak out and change the story. Mr Speaker, as a member of the Women's Corona Society, I declare my interest. But additionally, I must mention a special appreciation for the Women's Corona Society, led by Mrs Patsy Flag for their dedication to fund raising and supporting the elderly and vulnerable community. Efforts like these make a significant impact. However, this special society are looking for more members, so if anyone is interested, please contact Mrs Patsy Flag. In general, a huge thank you to all those organizations out there who continue to raise funds for the betterment of our people. Not forgetting a very special congratulations to the Ministers and their negotiation team for the successful outcomes of our improved Wi-Fi packages. And thank you to Sure and the SHG IT team, for their hard work in implementing the necessary changes. Mr Speaker, as this is possibly our last live broadcast this year, I want to take the opportunity to wish everyone a happy and safe holiday season and a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year to come. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member and Honourable Karl Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Before reading my adjournment debate, what I will do is I will declare an interest on three fronts about and I'm just going to briefly touch on these. So some people will have seen me walking into Mantis with large arms full of flowers. That is because, as we do, supply managers with some flowers on occasion. Obviously everybody already knows of my connections to energy, and the other declaration is that I'm going to very briefly mention the Prison, which I did supply some CCTV equipment for, so they could expand their network into their new extension, shall we call it. So just to be clear, I just wanted to be clear on it. Mr Speaker, I rise before you today with a deep seated concern regarding a matter of utmost importance to the progress of our Island. Moving our Island forward requires not only the formation of sound policies and legislation by Elected Members and a clear vision from our government, but also their effective, efficient implementation by the public service. Regrettably, my time in this House has made me increasingly aware of a concerning lack of cooperation or synergy between the Government and our civil service, and just how mismatched the structure of the civil service is with the needs of the Island. Mr Speaker, I will highlight three very recent examples of what causes me concern. At the wharf last week, I went down to pay for my Asycuda, and the Customs Department has undertaken a commendable initiative by opting to print out duty receipts on A4 paper instead of A5 paper, resulting in an estimated 50% reduction in printing costs. This strategic move translates into a saving of 1 to 2p per sheet, reflecting at least a conscientious effort to reduce costs. During this week in Minister's Question

Time, it was communicated to the House that there is no additional funding earmarked for road safety signs, despite the evident need for them. This serves as a stark reminder of the challenges we face in addressing essential infrastructure and the requirements of the lack of funds. 1 or 2 weeks ago, we had a meeting within the Elected Members and the Ministers in which we touched on problems that the Chief Minister was having with parking. The solution that we all agreed to was that the Chief Minister should be able to park in the back courtyard, if you want, or the yard at the Castle, which seemed a good resolution and wouldn't create any impact on the public parking spaces out front of the Castle. So adding a touch of irony to this, two new parking spaces marked by aesthetically pleasing signage have been introduced in the yard at the rear of the Castle. One space proudly bears the label Chief Minister Reserved, while the other is designated as Minister Reserved. Interestingly, when I spotted the two new additions, the SHG works van was parked in the Chief Minister's space, was this work actually necessary? Could this money have been better spent by putting a road safety sign up at one of the key locations that have already been identified as needing one, but as not having the money for it? These three instances underscore the lack of cohesion, which I find so concerning with our Public Service. The Elected Members opted for a solution. It was a perfect solution. It required no additional expenditure, and I don't believe that anybody asked for additional expenditure because there's always plenty of room to park in the yard. And while I commend the Customs Department for its cost saving measures, we must also grapple with the very clear reality that crucial areas like road safety are currently overlooked due to monies often being spent frivolously. A core function of the Public Service should be prioritising essential needs. Clearly, this area requires significant work. This disharmony significantly obstructs the delivery of critical projects essential for our Islands advancement and the effective provision of public services. Earlier today, in today's meetings, I referred to a £100,000 that had been wasted on batteries. Actually, I misread my own notes and I should have said specifying batteries. So this was in referral to the Public Service and its lack of inability or its inability to execute the 2016 energy policy directly in specifying a storage solution, which had been deemed absolutely necessary and has now been deemed even more necessary, as we have now received Connect's reason for wanting to increase the electricity cost as being due to low load, and they themselves have stated that they need methods which would stabilise the load. So if we'd have specified the right battery solution, then maybe we could have instantly ordered the battery solution and it would be very quick to do it. That is not to criticise the ongoing work that the Ministerial team are doing to move forward with renewable energy. It is simply highlighting the amount of money that we keep spending on works that never get done, and I will highlight a few here. So first of all, one of the oldest ones is obviously the sewerage down the Ladder. At the time when I was on the Planning Board, we were informed that over £80,000 had been spent on all of the referrals, the planning and everything else for it, never to get developed. The cash deal was reported to us at over that at £100,000 of costs, with no project ever being developed. Then we've got the Comprehensive Development Areas in Half Tree Hollow, which wasn't developed because the sewerage was never developed, which once again went off Island for planning by consultants at quite high costs. Then we've got the new Bottom Woods CDA, which simply isn't being utilised. And once again in the Meeting on Tuesday, the Minister's Question Time, Minister Ellick referred to the simple fact that there is no money available for maintenance on tertiary roads. And whereas I fully agree that tertiary roads obviously should become third in line. The simple fact is why do we keep building tertiary roads when we can't afford to maintain them? So now, unfortunately, the roads at the Bottom Woods CDA and the Half Tree Hollow are deteriorating at quite a steady speed as there are no cars working on them, and the weeds are just getting out of control. But then the key problem for me with all of this is that we have now had problems with the fibre to home project, which, let's be clear about it, the fibre to home project was supposed to have been finished by the 1st of January next year. This obviously hasn't happened, but it just seems that we cannot learn from the mistakes of the past when it comes to the

civil service implementing projects and policies of the Government. Mr Speaker, it is not all gloomy news this week during Minister's Question Time, Mr Ellick commended the work of the road section. The road section's ability to achieve so much with such a modest budget is highly commendable. I must also acknowledge the possible developments on the Island, including the blue green environmental projects, improvements in the Health service and the successful expansion of our prison capacity, which is why I mentioned the cameras. These are just a few examples and there are many more examples throughout SHG. So why is it that we can realise the small projects but absolutely fail on the very large projects? There is a very old term in accounting. It is penny wise, pound foolish, and I certainly think that currently we fit that bill. Urgent action is imperative. We must glean lessons from both successes and failures. I implore both the Government and the Civil Service to reassess their working relationship through open and honest discourse. Identify and rectify the root causes of this breakdown. It is crucial for restoring cooperation and ensuring the efficient delivery of public services. The progress of our Island depends on it. Therefore, I implore this esteemed House to embark on a course which will deliver much more religion, sorry vigilant, (thank you Councillor Turner) and intimate security of public services. By doing so, we will not only honour our commitment to the public principles of transparency and openness, but also empower the public to actively participate in the governance of how their monies are utilised. Finally, Mr Speaker, as this is likely to be our last Formal LegCo because let's remember, you can always have another one meet before the holidays, I would like to wish everybody a Happy Christmas and New Year. And as you're aware, I'm planning to spend the holidays with my family in the UK. However, just to let everybody know that I will be contactable throughout. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Member. Any other Members to speak? Honourable Martin Henry.

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

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I rise in support of the adjournment debate. I do have quite a lot to say, but I'll save that for another time. On the back of, believe me, on the back of a unique opportunity to go to Ghana, to go to the CPA and visit Speakers and largely the Backbenchers and largely the members of the other side. Then to go to the JMC and actually see the Premiers and the people running the show, and then to go to the Youth Parliament and hear what they have to say. I think I've had a very unique opportunity to hear all sides to quite a few territories, and all I want to say to that. I won't go into detail. All I want to say to that, I know we have significant issues, but believe me, they do as well. You know, in Turks and Caicos, people are being shot every day. They have a lot of money, but they're being shot every day. In the Caymans, it costs £7 for a box of milk and £6.50 for a pack for some bread. The bottom income for those kids to get on that property scale is £350,000. So I do know we have our problems and I'm not here using that to defend those problems. But I think sometimes when you get a check of reality, as I have by attending all of these events together, it does sum up some of the things. I don't want to go on about that today, but it was a very, very interesting combination of listening to all sides. What I want to say today is something I think which is, we need to self-check for ourselves sometimes, but we definitely need to self-check. But the Public Service as well on a number of fronts. And I want to bear in mind that there are people within the service and there are people who are working really hard. There are people who are not being recognised in some cases, and I don't want these people to be held down by what I'm going to say today. But I just want to reflect on what Minister Brooks talked about in his budget speech on mind-set change. And I want to simply make an observation and a comment on what could be the first step to enable such a mind-set change. To be honest, I am tired of hearing and seeing pages of documents saying why we can't do something, really tired. It is almost seem that the very fast approach for most new ideas, ways

of working, investment and or change in process. There is a large feedback paper or comments detailing why it can't be done. What about how it can? A mind-set change costs no money, but requires people to think outside of their normal ways of work. It will make you uncomfortable and force you to move from the status quo. Which might have worked for ten years when an old, outdated technology, and it is often outside of our full understanding regardless of our expertise and experience. May I ask that this Government and its state owned entities start any new idea by way of working or change in process with 'can we make this work'? What are the areas that could potentially be an issue? Suggest some solutions and most importantly, 'will this serve'? Will this service benefit our community even if it may initially impact ourselves? Thank you, Mr Speaker. I rise in support of the adjournment debate.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Member, any other Honourable Members to speak? Honourable Jeffrey Ellick.

The Hon. Jeffrey Ellick (Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I rise in support of the adjournment. Just to add on to my Honourable friend Minister Henry. I suppose what he's trying to say is change your way of thought and all around you changes. So I'm just going to start off, just earlier this morning points, very well, before points were raised by Councillor Midwinter in respect of my Portfolio. And they were very much welcomed. And I look forward to having a meeting with him because my Minister to the right, he also, to the left, to the right sorry. He also raised the same point that you raise. So I'll have a discussion with yourself and see what we can do in terms of my Portfolio in those areas in respect of Sessional Papers 32 and 33. The public might be wondering why it has taken over two years to lay these papers. Bearing in mind I had submitted my appeal prior to the dissolving of the former Council. I would just like to give my position on the Sessional Papers that was presented by Councillor Midwinter when laying earlier today. No one in the current Speaker's Office knew of the appeal I or my colleague made, or receipt of such appeals. When the original report from the Commission of Investigation was about to be laid, I raised concern about delaying of papers, knowing that I had appealed on this matter. The current Speaker's Office was unaware that I and my colleague had made an appeal. I then had to prove that I had made an appeal, which I easily did. I also raised about my right to natural justice in order for my appeal to be dealt with. The appeal process could only take place if the President's Office had received the appeals. However, the previous Speaker had received the appeal. Why this was not dealt with by the previous Speaker or pass on to the current Speaker, I am unsure, but the mind boggles. Finally, after two years, I and my colleague received the right to natural justice, which is the basic fundamental principles of fair treatment. These principles include the duty to give someone a fair hearing, the duty to ensure that the matter is decided by someone who is impartial, and the duty to allow an appeal against the decision. I would encourage Members and the public to read these papers, as in my view, it reflects what myself and my two colleagues were up against with the previous Government. I also like to touch on a little bit on Immigration. To the various questions today relating to how we build our economy and address the declining population. As I stated, I wish to reassure Members and the public. I have given direction that the policy intention in respect of Immigration is to open the Island up and make it more attractive to come live, work, stay and be productive members of the community to benefit Saint Helena's long term future, thus enabling economic growth and outward migration issues. I'm sorry outward migration issues raised to be addressed. Also, I'd like to touch on the Mantis Hotel because people, I'm not sure if everybody's getting the picture with the Mantis Hotel. If we want to encourage tourism and urban planner, then quite simply, we need a hotel that can cater for high end customers and group bookings. If we choose not to fund the Mantis, there could be a knock on effect.

For example, less seats on flights means less footfall. If we look at this from the private sector and the wider perspective, it will mean persons who provide Island and marine tours, taxi services, souvenirs, etc. The service would be affected. Eateries also see the benefit, as most tourists who go to various countries go to experience the scenery and the local cuisines. No tourist go to a place and stay in one building for their entire stay, they experience the place. Persons supplying local produce and other products produced will also be affected. We need to see the Mantis also as a main piece of infrastructure, which links to our tourism strategy and helps enable economic growth and increase footfall. I would say the plan going forward is for SHG to have an exit strategy in respect of the Mantis. The only reason we own a hotel is because no private sector entity owns a hotel that can provide the service that Mantis currently provides. I would also like to point out that before the Mantis was built, Saint Helena Government spoke publicly and gave the private sector the opportunity to put a high end hotel. No private sector or consortium took the opportunity to build a hotel that could cater for a high end tourist and group bookings. I think more to the point, if you're going to open that, then we need operating infrastructure. Mr Speaker, I come to the end. I would just like to wish you all a merry Christmas, and let's hope the year ahead provides better opportunities and prosperity for all.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Member.

The Hon. Jeffrey Ellick (Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker I beg to move.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Mark Brooks.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury and Economic Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I would just like to say one thing, and that is happy festive season to the listening public. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. You've done enough talking today. Unless it is down to the Chief Minister. Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I hope that the public have timed how long it's taken with the adjournment debate and that they won't expect me to answer every piece of information that has come out this afternoon. First, I'd like to thank all the Members for their participation in the adjournment debate. I think quite a few good information has come out there, and I think there's also demonstration of some collaboration. Obviously there's room for more, and I think I just want to touch on what Councillor Coleman said. I think when we joined this Government, it's fair to say that we all wanted to strive to improve the quality of life for the people living and working on Saint Helena. Yes, cost of living is a global problem and we are not going to be able to fix it from a Government perspective. Only there will need to be collaboration. So I'm going to be constantly talking about teamwork and collaboration here because unfortunately, the Saint Helena Government is not in a position, nor should it be if I'm honest, to be always subsidising the cost of living. It is the fact of life. Shipping. I think I'll just remind people I kept talking about the big five, and then it went to the big four. And I think we're back up to big six now, probably, if I'm honest with you. But we

talked about effective infrastructure. We as a Government wants to ensure that we've got reliable, somewhat affordable in this financial climate, access to the Island by air and sea. I think everybody is somewhat positive at the moment with air because we've got our midweek flights. We are talking about expanding our service provision to Cape Town this time next year. Renewable energy is moving and as the Right Honourable Karl Throver has mentioned and quite a few others have. So I'm not going to quote who said what, because there was some that was mentioned by you all. Renewable energy is the next baby for this this Cabinet here standing today because we see the importance of it in helping us to achieve a better quality of life for all, for Saint Helena. Telecoms is not complete. So I would like to give you that reassurance, it is good to know that our colleagues notice that what we wanted out of telecoms hasn't been achieved in its entirety and we are not stopping there. We do need time, however, to ensure that we get the best for Saint Helena. And yes, I do thank Sure for what they've provided us thus far. The interim measure is a good measure, if I can put it that way. We did signed up to fibre speeds to the households, but we didn't necessarily sign up to fibre cable to all homes. It was always going to be a case that some areas would have microwave technology. So we are still looking at all those options. And I think as we've learned as we go on, technology is always improving. So we need to constantly keep with the times. But for us it's also keeping within budget, which as we saw today, it's not always easy when you've got services that are human led, and we need to be able to look after our people. I would like to reassure and assure, I guess, the listening public and the wider Council that shipping is really important for this Island, and we understand that. Hence, we hope that the long term service will be the answer to what it is that we're looking for. However, I think we also need to be mindful of the global challenges because I know there's so much negativity around the interim service, but if my memory serves me correctly, I'm sure it is Dr Corinda Essex who mentioned the fact that it was better than not having anything at all, because we have to be so mindful of the fact that although Saint Helena is special to us who live here and know so much about Saint Helena, there are so many out there who Saint Helena is not known of at all, or it is seen as a small island. And they just assume then, that the level of service won't be the same as a huge town or city somewhere in the UK. The unfortunate thing is we can't reach out and use the services of our neighbour, so it is extremely expensive to run an Island in the middle of the South Atlantic. Ronald, Councillor Coleman sorry, can I say lessons learned from telecoms is definitely on the agenda for the Executive Council and the Ministers. We want to learn lessons and ensure that we don't go down that road again. But it would be unwise of me to suggest that Governments in the past, or indeed have learnt lessons well, because, as was mentioned, there have been less mistakes made and they keep being made. And I know that my Government is very keen to ensure that that stops. Salary review I spoke a little about it this morning that we're hoping that we can get started on that through if we get a successful FAM. Discussions happening, however, and pensions will be discussed, but I can tell you that we are all concerned about the salary review, and even though we know we have to start somewhere, we are very cognisant of the fact that it can't take forever because our people are leaving us. Trying to retain our staff is becoming extremely difficult. Obviously, as I stand here today, I speak as Chief Minister, so I recognise that across all the Portfolios and the private sector. But I do want to give a quick shout out to Education because I know there has been hit really hard at the moment because key posts that we had hoped would have been filled this month hasn't come to fruition for the same reasons that was mentioned by the Attorney General, etc. The process is long, but we also must ensure that we do reliable due diligence. We cannot lower the expectation of what we wish to have in the fear of obviously attracting the wrong people to Saint Helena as well, if I can put it that way. I think I won't labour the point anymore, because Minister Ellick has talked about the Customs closure and Port Control, etc. And I think you've got the support of your whole House here today, Minister Ellick, that if we are going to try and look at how we attract more people to the Island and grow our revenue streams, we cannot continue with closure times in key areas, especially at this time

of year when everybody is struggling or pushing to try and get services out to the community. Mention was made of Bunkers Hill and the CDA's. I am led to believe from my Honourable Minister on my far right that the Bottom Woods CDA is still out for sale with discount plots for first time home buyers, and they have priced these plots to be cost neutral for the services provided for each plot. So I can't go much further than that, but we can look at and try and understand why we don't have interest in those areas. Bunkers Hill, another one that's come over from the previous Government that we, there's quite a few things that we've actually tried to move forward as the current Government that has obviously come across from the previous Government, and we've made progress with Bunkers Hill. It's now without going into detail, because this is obviously directly affecting a particular business. All I'll say is communication doors are open and I'll leave it there on that one. The private sector competition, I know that was raised today, and I think Minister Brooks has now given some indicative timeline for it. I would, though, do a shout out to the private sector that there are policies and procedures in place to ensure that the government isn't competing with the private sector. And I'm speaking specifically here on transport, because I have looked into this before and told that some of the private sector will not provide a signature to say they couldn't provide that service at any particular time. So when people approach the Transport department, they don't have anything to determine that somebody else could have provided it. They do ask for it. There's forms for it. I've seen them, so I know it's there. So I think private sector just needs to be a little bit more cognizant as well. And to ensure that when they make these comments, which I'm not suggesting, they're not right, that they do support the process so that we can follow through and make sure that we are not competing with the private sector when there is alternative measures in place. Well, then we talk about the arrival of the Financial Aid Mission. I have to say, I'm not one that is afraid of hard work, but this year, as there has been, the two years has been extremely busy and then to go away for one week was very adventurous and I think almost brave of me to think I could do it. It's been done, but it was tiring. It's been good discussions and I do hope that the listening public will listen to our radio programme tomorrow on SAMS at 10:00, when Minister Henry and I will be giving some detail about some of the work we did whilst in the UK. Yes, the Financial Aid Mission is really, really important for Saint Helena, but we now have direct contact. I've just literally sent it to Ministers today. So, as was promised in the JMC in April/May of this year, we now have direct contact with Ministers in all the different UK departments. So it will be Minister to Minister. That is a step in the right direction. The Declaration I have to say, I think lots of the OTs were a little bit deflated when they realised the layout or format of JMC was going to change. But what came out of JMC because of the Declaration, which is the first step towards building and strengthening the relationship between the UK Government and the Overseas Territories. I have to say I think it's a step in the right direction. Loads more work for all of us to do because the Compact will come at some stage and that will be the detail for individual Overseas Territories. So I'm hoping that enough and adequate time is going to be provided to the OTs, so that we can ensure that we get the best deal for our respective OTs. I know there's been some talk about exposure trips and I know there's been some comments about Councillors leaving. You know, now that the flights are back, oh, the Councillors are off and running and Ministers are up and running. I do hope that the listening public has heard from those who've just returned recently how valuable these exposure trips are. There's talk of upskilling, there's talk of networking. And I think we'll touch on that tomorrow. The importance of networking, because even though you're in a particular forum, it's the networking that happens in the margins that sometimes has the greater return for the Island or whatever it is that we're fighting for getting those friendships. I've said this before, Saint Helena is in the minority when it comes to the OTs, when it's because there's only a small amount of us who are financially dependent, which is a great thing, but then how things affect us, not always. We get the support from the wider OT family. So it's really important when I go that I build relationships with all the OTs so that they will support. And I think Minister Henry will confirm that some of the support that

Saint Helena received at JMC wasn't just from those who were financially dependent. Outside of that, we'll be giving some feedback. It was good to see what's happened from the PAC recent trip and all the discussions that happened in the UK last week. Because of that, Saint Helena was mentioned. Key areas in Saint Helena was mentioned, like the BFI. That is something that's been a stumbling block and a grave concern for us because we don't quite know what it is. What's the future for the BFI? So to know that that is now being mentioned to the heads of FCDO by UK PAC is extremely helpful. We also, and when I say we, I'm talking Minister Henry and I had the opportunity to meet with the Public Accounts Advisory Committee when we were there, as well as the Foreign Affairs Committee and we'll be talking more about that tomorrow about areas that they have been asked, because they're talking about setting up a subcommittee. The areas that the OTs would like them to look at. So the relationship is strengthening. But we need to do more as Saint Helena to not just talk about the problems we have. We need to be able to collectively say what solutions are there. So it's not always about finance. I do understand that right now I think financial support is important, but as well as the human resource, because that is hindering our ability to move forward. I like the idea that I think it was sprinkled throughout most of what I heard this afternoon, but I won't try and go through all of them. I think the listening public will hear my colleagues talk about Ministers leading, and believe me, we do want to lead and we do give direction. It is really frustrating for us, though, when we give direction and it's not followed through in the timely manner that we would wish for it. It costs money. It of many a time ends up with, as you rightly said, overspends or, you know, you just question whether it's been spent in the right areas. So I know that all of us are looking to strengthen the relationship with the Public Service. However, I have to say the mind-set changed when it came to Ministerial Government. It does make me wonder if the mind-set change was actually the community, or if it was within the boards of the Castle. So we do need to do more to ensure that that is strengthened, because we will not get to the best outcome for Saint Helena if we are not working together. I am pleased that you all saw some fantastic positive news and pros that we've achieved. It's great to hear that we finally got something working and as somebody said, I think it might have been Councillor Gillian Brooks who talked about time for embedding of the new medical care service that we've got now in South Africa. But I think it's fair to say we can already hear some of the comments that's positive. So that's a good news story because there was some very concerning comments being made prior. We've got the improved telecoms and we hope, I hope that we can soon move to say about the new shipping service. I want to focus on Dr Corinda Essex's point because you asked me specifically to do so. I can't quite remember exactly how I said it this morning, but we talked about our Saint Helenians, retaining our Saints, so that was the basis of it. And I said something to the effect that it would have to be seen in the holistic nature of it, I think, or something. So what I meant to be clear is, I think yes, we can incentivise and try and work towards returning Saints, but we can't because of the state of our working age population. It needs to be addressed. And if we can't get Saint Helenians to return to take up those vacancies, if I can put it that way, we can't continue to wait. We need to have people in positions because it is negatively affecting our ability to provide the best services for Saint Helena. So I would agree that we do need to do everything to look at how we promote and talk about the opportunities here on Saint Helena for everybody. But if we can try and target our returning Saint Helenians, we'll do that. But I would like to see what effort was made in the past, because I am told that it has been made and there was very little return. If that is true, I can't provide the evidence of such. I think with immigration, I won't go on too much longer on that, because Minister Ellick made it very clear that this Government is keen to open the Island and build the working age population and of course, build our economy without growing the number of people living on Saint Helena. It's going to be extremely difficult to grow the working age population or indeed the economy. But we have to be mindful of how the world has changed, that we are not discriminatory against any particular person. I will also emphasise that there is need for good, reliable due diligence because we

need the right people for Saint Helena. So I'll stand by that. And I am really passionate about this because my Ministers will know. There is somewhere, and I have to say it like that because I don't know where it's coming from, and some will know I've asked direct questions of people. Why is it being said that this Government is not keen to open the Island and attract people? Because that's so not true. We just want to make sure that the people we attract are for the benefit of Saint Helena. We cannot be looking at what will benefit individuals. It must benefit Saint Helena. So that's the only caveat that I have when it comes to Immigration. Councillor Tuner spoke about Kelly's speech in the Presidents house. It's wonderful to hear our youth speaking out and having those opportunities and more importantly, taking those opportunities. And I think there is more work we can do to engage with our youth. And for that, I thank our Children's Champion and all the rest of the Councillors who supported you in the UK Parliament week, but also I would speak out to our young people and say that you need to come out of your comfort zone too and join the adults in the community when there's Constituency Meetings, because time is precious for all of us. We are extremely busy and it's good sometimes to get the engagement at all different levels so that you understand the whole picture that we're dealing with. But of course we need to do more engagements within the school, and I thank Education once again for making that possible. I'm not going to go on about Mantis anymore. I think we need to address the concern that was raised specifically about Creative Saint Helena. I will endeavour to get all the information, but I would speak to all of the state owned entities, is one thing, but the NGO's, and say when you have grants, funding from the Saint Helena Government, don't take it for granted and ensure that the business case that is being put forward, are realistic and is being thought through. And I just want to also emphasise the fact that we did not reduce Creative Saint Helena this year. It was the previous year, so obviously we looked on what was given the year before to set what we would do for this year. So again, it's necessary for them to tell us how the circumstances have changed. I have to stand up and say at this present time, so I'll look at it again, that was never brought out to us how the circumstances had changed. But as I said, I'll take that offline and have a look into that. I think we're talking also about respect, if I think that's something that Saint Helena could do a lot more of, just as we talked about the customer experience and the customer service. It's good that we're all getting the opportunity to go further afield and, and see how parliamentarians are treated when we're in their setting. And it is said, I will say it is very sad. I want to be who I am when I'm out socializing, etc. I don't expect to be Chief Minister all of the time. I want to just be myself as well. But the lack of respect for the positions we hold, especially within some of the arenas of the Government or the Public Service, if I'm talking holistically, it is very noticeable. And if we can't get it right within the Government, then how can we expect the wider community to respect us in the way? And that doesn't mean that we've got it right. I'm saying you need to still hold us to account. We need to be responsible, but we also need to be respected for the type of roles that we take on. So I fully support that as well. I think, Minister Ellick, you've got some work to do on the declaration forms as well on arrival. But I would like to say well done to, I think that's also Minister Brook's Portfolio in collaboration with the airport, with the beautiful pictures, etc. that we're doing out there. Because in my In-scope program with Gwyneth, I know she was really keen to get all those different scenery pictures, and getting to sell Saint Helena on arrival is extremely a step in the right direction. So well done to everybody out at the Airport. Mr Speaker, I think without trying to name everybody, I would just say thank you to everybody who works hard for the betterment of Saint Helena. I'm not going to name specifics, because I think then I'll be accused of forgetting someone. So especially this time of year, we've got loads of non-government organisations and all these different organisations, whether it is charitable or not, working hard to make sure that Saint Helena experiences the best festive season ever. Tomorrow is World Aids Day, so we'll be recognising that. But for me, when December hits, it's the Primary Schools nativity plays, etcetera that starts off the festive season. So for those of you who are not in the festive season, I can guarantee you that towards the end of this week, early next week, you

definitely will be there when the Primary School starts. It's also brilliant to see because I'm always talking about the primary, but I'd like to also highlight the fact that the Secondary School is coming on board this year. And if my dates are right on Monday the 11th of December, they're showcasing their event. So it's lovely to see the school being reopened for parents and the public to get involved, to see what our young kids and talents that they have there. So I'm really looking forward to that as we move forward as a Government, but also as we move forward as Saint Helena. The key is to work together. We must work together. We must build the relationships. And you know why wait until we come to these settings? We really just need to work together and put some solutions on the table. Because as I've said before, Ministers are extremely busy and not always we can take the time to send or give the attention to specific areas. We are working on the big policy issues and the effect of infrastructure. I mentioned earlier, but as I said, FAM is coming next week and I really hope that all Council will take the opportunity, but also to the wider Saint Helena to take the opportunity to speak to the team. They are very pro Saint Helena. I just think we need to tell them where are areas of strength because it's not always about the doom and gloom. We do very well. As someone else has mentioned in the blue green agenda, we just need to give, ask them to give us some attention and some upfront funding, as they always talk about, to be able to address the key areas of concern. So it's going to be a busy calendar for all of us, I guess, in December. And I'd just like to finish by wishing everybody a happy, healthy and collective, collaborative festive season and all the best for 2024. But at the same time, we are reminded of those less fortunate than ourselves. So thank you, Mr Speaker, and I'm hoping that that is me out for Formal LegCo for 2023.

The Speaker –

Now, you may think so. No, thank you all very much. And some of you should give yourselves a pat on the back, quite honestly. I mean, some of the things that were said today, you ought to give yourselves a pat on the back. Well, you know, we're supposed to be timekeeping. I'm not certain. I said to Anita about time, but if some of you went over, if some of you did go over time, it doesn't really matter, because I'd like to hear people talk. Oh, AG, do you want to say something? I do beg your pardon.

The Hon. David Ballantyne (Attorney General) –

It's quite all right. I'm a little bit diffident about, you know, a lawyer having the last word. But I did want to share 1 or 2 brief points with Elected Members, if I may. I've been here just over a year, and I wanted to share some perceptions that I've realized in that time, listening to the debate today. In this last year, there have been cliff edge moments. Which have been very difficult for the Government to deal with. But the highlight for me is the foresight that whoever had the notion of acquiring that cable did one of the best things that could have been done for Saint Helena. And although the plan hasn't quite worked out in the way in which it was intended, the benefits have in fact been realized to some degree. There's a platform there which can be built on, and that's all I'm going to say on shipping. You may have noticed that I had a document with me today. This is a first draft of a Shipping contract. And we have an expert shipping law firm in the UK now engaged on our behalf with a view to getting a contract in place at a very early stage. We've had a very productive meeting with MACS at the end of last week, and the atmospherics, although I know you can't, you can't sell that. The atmospherics are good. There's a very positive attitude. I just wanted to share this. I don't really want to overstretch my position or take advantage of it, but in my opinion, this country has got the national assets to, over time become largely self-sufficient if it was developed with due seriousness.

The Speaker –

Absolutely.

The Hon. David Ballantyne (Attorney General) –

That's my fundamental impression. It's probably due to population size, not ability, may not be able to be self-sufficient professionally and therefore it needs to have better arrangements with the UK to ensure the continuity. The last point I want to make is this that I listened carefully to what's being said about making connections. These connections are absolutely vital to ensuring the future and to getting the respect that this country needs. My impression? For what it's worth, I hope it's of value, is that despite Ministerial Government, we're operating under a system that is somewhat outmoded. Yes. That's my perception. I think we should work on that. It's not a personal agenda. It's a systemic problem. I think all I would say is that it's a privilege to work here. I think St Helena needs to find its place in the wider world. And from that perspective, that's all I wanted to say. Mr Speaker, I will be leaving to go to the UK. But as Arnold said, I'll be back. Thank you very much.

The Speaker –

Yes. Do come back Attorney General, your intervention is always appreciated. Thank you very much. But thank you all for your contributions today. And what contributions they were too. And, you know, thank you to the staff in the LegCo office. The importance of that Office can't be underestimated and shouldn't be by anybody at all. Not at all. And especially the Acting Clerk of Councils. And this is not to say that the junior member, you know, doesn't have potential as well. But, getting this particular Formal LegCo Meeting done this time and on time, because Anita is calling me last night and this morning about stuff to happen today. You know, it is always that way to the very last minute. As the AG said earlier on, we got there. And he was speaking to something to do, I think was Councillor Essex. But we did get there but especially difficult we have had over the last three months. We had one third of the complement of staff taken away. One third, if you want to say it is 33 and a third percent. Well, that's what it was. And so 2 staff in the Office, has had to do what three staff normally couldn't do. And I say couldn't do because they are always catching up. And we had one third taken away. So obviously there is work that has not been done. And I do apologise to Members for some of this work that couldn't be done, impacted what you wanted to do. I know it did impact your progress. But let's hope that we're going to be up to strength. But, you know, once we get up to strength in terms of numbers, I think a review should be taken of the Office itself to see if people do know exactly what actually happens in the Office, is meant to happen and isn't happening. You know, it is a very, very important office. And, you know, earlier on someone mentioned respect. I think it was the Chief Minister. Was it disrespectful to take away one third of the complement of staff? In fact, one of the members to my left actually said that to my right. But I think you both said it, but it was disrespectful to take away one third of the staff at a time when the office was only trying to catch up. But anyway. Honourable Members I too would like to wish everyone on the Island a very happy Christmas and Happy New Year and good luck with the FAM! Honourable Chief Minister. There you are Members that then concludes the business for this Formal Meeting of Legislative Council. Thank you all for your contributions. As I said earlier on throughout this Meeting today, and look how long, it's 25 minutes to 5. Now, I've never been here that long before, I don't think so. This possibly is the last Formal Meeting this year. But as you know, if there's something of an urgent nature comes up, then I can call an urgent Formal Meeting. But let's hope that that won't be the case. On that note, I think, thank you all very much. And once again, though, reiterate that I'd like to thank everybody on the Island and Honourable Members and Attorney General. You going away? Are you going to be back before the New Year? No?

The Hon. David Ballantyne (Attorney General) –

It's going to be a busy new year for this Council. Okay, I should have said I'm getting the opportunity to say it now. The Legislative Program. I'm going to make sure that it's shared with all Elected Members so that you can see what's on the agenda. Sharpen your pencils for next year.

The Speaker –

Thank you all. I think we are all looking forward to that anyway, Attorney General, but as you go away, do go safely and we wish you and your family a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. That's all from me. Let's go home and have a cup of tea. So thank you. This Meeting is now adjourned sine die.

Honourable Speaker

Date