



St Helena
Government

ST HELENA GOVERNMENT
PROCEEDINGS OF MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME
TUESDAY, 30 APRIL 2024
ELEVENTH SITTING

ST. HELENA
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

THE SPEAKER

The Honourable Cyril Keith Gunnell

EX-OFFICIO MEMBER

The Honourable Attorney General, Mr David Ferguson Ballantyne

ELECTED MEMBERS

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

Legislative Council Office Assistant

Miss Shanice Phillips

PROCEEDINGS OF MINISTERS QUESTION TIME

Tuesday, 30th April, 2024

The Council met at 10.00 am
in the Council Chamber, Jamestown

(The Honourable Speaker in the Chair)

ORDER OF THE DAY

1. FORMAL ENTRY OF THE SPEAKER

2. ADDRESS BY THE SPEAKER

Honourable Members a very good morning to you on this the last day of April 2024, on the occasion of Ministers Question Time for this month. A very good morning also to those that have availed themselves to listen to your debates in both this the Council Chamber (I see a couple, few here) and the public via the radio, live broadcast by SAMs Radio One. This is the 11th meeting of Ministers Question Time, the topic chosen by Councillors for this setting is the Draft Immigration Policy. In accordance with our Standing Orders, the Chief Minister was made aware of the topic ahead of this meeting, and an hour before Ministers Question Time commencing, the questions submitted by Councillors was forwarded to Ministers. According to established practice, the Order Paper would be published on the SHG website this morning. There are seven questions on the Order Paper. They have been listed in alphabetical order, but to be selected randomly for response. All questions are directed to the Honourable Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs. Honourable Members are, of course, aware, and Members of the public likely will also be aware that Standing Orders have been amended to remove the limitation on Councillors in respect of the number of supplementary questions they may ask. This also means it is possible for another Minister to give support, once the Minister whom the question has been directed to has answered the original question. For those not familiar with the method, for Members wanting to catch the Speaker's eye, we operate a system whereby a red light is switched on to indicate that a Member wishes to speak. If I sound funny, I got the flu sorry about that. Unless you are rising on a point of order or information, please don't draw my attention when someone else is speaking. That could interrupt someone, which is an infringement of Rule 15. Honourable Members occasionally, I will remind you of selected rules in the Standing Orders. Today, I will draw attention to Rule 3 (c), it states a question may not be asked for the purpose of obtaining a legal opinion, an expression of opinion, the solution of an abstract legal case or the answer to a hypothetical proposition. This is important so I'll read it out again. A question may not be asked for the purpose of obtaining a legal opinion, an expression of opinion, the solution of an abstract legal case or the answer to a hypothetical proposition. This has been the case for many years now, and it is something that

we will be enforcing today. If necessary, up to one hour has been allocated for questions and answers. Miss Shanice Phillips is our Clerk for this Minister's Question Time. Miss Phillips, may we have the first question please? Thank you.

3. QUESTIONS

Question No. 1 - The Honourable Rosemary Bargo to ask the Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs

The Speaker –

The Honourable Rosemary Bargo.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

I do beg your pardon, it seems as though Minister Ellick wants to catch my eye. What is it Minister Ellick?

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you Mr. Speaker, is it possible we can remove our jackets Mr. Speaker?

The speaker –

You know, I wish I could do the same thing, but I agree that you can do so.

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Rosemary Bargo.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Honourable Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs provide an indicative timeline for the implementation of the new Immigration Policy and confirm whether or not it is his intentions to implement all aspects of this new policy at the same time?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Member. Honourable Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs.

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank my Honourable Friend for the question. In respect of the question, it is intended that the policy be endorsed on the seventh of May. It is my intention for some of the aspects to be implemented once legislation has been approved, which at this time I'm going around at September. However, this is very much dependent on approval from ExCo, then capacity within the AG Chambers, if approved, I would expect other portfolios be working towards implementing their policy around this time or near about this time, if practicable, to do so.

The Speaker –

Thank you Minister, Rosemary Bargo.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you, Minister. But can you see if there is adequate financial and human resources to support the effectiveness of this policy for this particular financial year, when implemented?

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I thank my Honourable Friend for a supplementary question. So far, in terms of finances, we seem to be okay in terms of finances. I think in other questions, certain things come up, which I'd probably be able to come up those questions to be able to see what we're actually doing.

The Speaker –

Thank you.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you. Sorry. I thank the Minister for his answer.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Anyone else with a question? Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, can I just ask the Honourable Minister if there are aspects of this new policy that can actually be implemented prior to the approval of the legislation?

The Speaker –

Okay. Thank you very much. Minister.

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank my Honourable friend for the question, yes, there are aspects that can be implemented beforehand. One of them is about the security. So hopefully the increase of security will be implemented way before the policy or the legislation is introduced, because we can do all that now. Already some of the other policies that we are asking to align, some of the portfolios will probably be finished those policies before immigration legislation comes into place. So it's nothing stopping them from coming into place, and we encourage it to happen before time.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Rosemary Bargo.

The Hon Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and sorry, Minister. I meant to ask also, we talking about the policy, it talks about the automatic online portal. So I know this is, it captures, like all the relevant information of those

who are applying for visas as a holiday or to work or stay on the island, will this part be available right away? Or do you envision that to be coming on later on, within months after implementation?

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you for the question Council Bargo, yes, in respect of the portal, we are currently waiting to try and see if we can source a portal. We are also, I've also instructed my Portfolio Director to put in for a business case under essential equipment, so if we can get up before time, so that when it comes into play, we have to portal, if not, it might be a little bit later, but we're hoping that we can sort all these things out quickly.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Councillor Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister for his response to my previous question, which is much in line with my Honourable colleague, because he referred to the security side of things, and in particular, I'd be interested to hear how things are being progressed in relation to reconnecting to the international system for protection.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

I thank my Honourable Friend for the question. There's been extremely good progress in relation to connecting with the UK. I had a meeting last week, I think it was last week, with the Minister for the Home Office, and they have agreed to do work around, in terms of the watch list. So we should have access to the watch list via the Home Office, and this should happen shortly. We've already had an MOU sent to us. My portfolio is just directly, just looking over that MOU, and hopefully next week or so, very shortly, we will be able to sign the MOU and everything will be in place and which is quite effective based on a time frame that we were expecting. So it's all good news for us all round. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Next question please.

Question No. 2 - The Honourable Andrew Turner to ask the Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs

The Speaker –

The Honourable Andrew Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, will the Honourable Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs, tell this Council what training and up-skilling will be given to the Immigration team in line with their increased responsibilities?

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs.

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, thank you for your question. We have a TC officer, Head of Immigration and Customs, who has a wealth of experience and will be arriving in July, who will be tasked with creating standard operating procedures that are in line with the policy and legislation, as well as training officers to implement the policy and legislation. Also the Home Office has agreed to provide training to officers on immigration, and this was done the same time I spoke to the Minister in respect of the watch list. So they are very helpful to accept this moment in time.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Councillor Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you Mr. Speaker just one quick follow up. Will that training therefore include both training in our own new revised Immigration Policy and also how aspects of that interrelate to the UK nationalities policies that we have a certain degree of influence?

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you Mr. Speaker, I thank my Honourable Friend for the question. Yes, the Home Office has agreed to give some training. Will be online at this moment in time, but some aspects from their side, but also to help us with watch lists. So the fact that we will have to go to the Home Office, they will give us some training how to do what was there. And likewise, we will be drawing on the TC Officer for their voice experience as well. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Next question please.

Question No. 3 - The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex to ask the Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs

The Speaker –

The Honourable Dr. Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr. Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Honourable Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs tell this Council whether any annual or cumulative ceiling will be imposed on the number of immigrants granted permits to work and stay?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs.

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank my Honourable Friend, for the question. So just to say, in respect of that at this time, no we do not believe that we will reach the numbers start enough and will take time. Therefore, we need to monitor this aspect. It is not necessary that we have a population of 8000 by 2050 it's more about achieving economic growth that helps to sustain St Helena and address the labour shortage. The figure was only the one available to us at the time, but we will monitor this situation, and probably have to go up and down. We can't say now what sort of figure we're going to put on to it. As you know, if you divide this all out, and as well as the outward migration, you probably come up with a figure for 180 per year. But at this moment, I guess, not realistic, that we don't believe that we will get 180 people per year starting off.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Councillor Essex.

The Hon. Dr. Corinda Essex –

I thank the Honourable Minister for his question, but will he explain why it's expected that the number of applications to work and stay will be low, particularly given the increasingly unstable political climate throughout most of Africa?

The Speaker –

Minister.

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Sorry, Mr. Speaker, I didn't quite get there. Can you repeat the evidence necessary?

The Hon. Dr. Corinda Essex –

I'll repeat it with pleasure Minister. Will the Honourable Minister explain why it is expected that the number of applications to work and stay will be low, particularly given the increasingly unstable political climate throughout most of Africa?

The Speaker –

Thank you.

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you. Thank you for clarifying, it was looking at the trends at the moment so we can see what the trends is, but we also know that we need to do a lot of work in respect of making this Immigration Policy work. So it's going to be, like we said, the dynamic marketing, and we need to get all our policies in line so that St Helena is a more attractive place to come live and work. So when it becomes attractive and viable for people to come here, the chances to stay up, we'll put up, but we suspect that's going to take a bit of time. So people need to know all these things first, and it takes time for people to be able to see these things.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Councillor Essex.

The Hon. Dr. Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'm going to start with an explanatory sentence before asking the question, but I am not making a statement, Mr. Speaker, as it is proposed that work permits will be granted on a family basis, the number of persons eligible to work and stay, following issuance of a single permit could increase substantially. Will the Honourable Minister state what work has been undertaken to establish the carrying capacity of our schools, medical facilities, etc., if uptake is higher than is anticipated?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

I thank my Honourable Friend for the question. In terms of the carrying capacity, I think if you look in the policy, we need to monitor the carrying capacity so we don't expect a whole load of people to come now. But as we do know, in terms of schools and so forth, we have very little amount of people in the schools. And I think as we explained the, some of the facts that we had is like, we will have only have, like, 18 children in one year group, probably in Prince Andrew School at some stage. So that's quite low. So we can manage all that at the moment, but as time goes by and things change, then we have to change local terms. And you know, with more people coming in and increasing our economic growth, this will then help us to develop in these areas.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I'll just support my Minister on this, especially from the educational background. Actually today on our In Scope program, we are talking about the concerns actually being raised by teachers and the PTA alike, with regards to the low numbers within schools. The stretch of resources because of teachers leaving, is one of those, but it's about the resources and being able to cater for our students. Minister Ellick just mentioned about small classroom numbers. We talked yesterday about the intakes being 40 over recent years, but looking at what's going to happen in September for our early years, it's down now to 20 so I think it's going to have, we can take quite a significant growth with regards to children within our schools. Hence, the need for the education reform right now, because we are struggling to provide the level of service we need with the dropping numbers, for an example, there is a class that just has two children in it, so there's room for expansion. And hence the reason Immigration policy was going to be the catalyst of many other policies to follow. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Chief Minister. Councillor Essex.

The Hon. Dr. Corinda Essex

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the Chief Minister for her very detailed response. However, I was not suggesting that we do not have the carrying capacity, I was asking what work has been undertaken to establish it, and it is clear from her response that Education has established its figures going forward.

But will the Honourable Minister state at what intervals the total number of immigrants will be monitored and at what point measures will be taken to place limitations, if indeed that becomes necessary in order to reduce the risk of the local labour market being flooded by immigrants.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs.

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I thank my Honourable Friend for supplementary. The thing is we have, the Immigration officers will have to look at what's coming in. We have to keep an eye on it all the time. If it goes up drastically, then we have to put in interventions. But we don't foresee that at this very moment in time. So we have to monitor it going forward, I can't say two years' time, because it might increase before then. Likewise, it might not increase at all. So then we have to relook at the policy. So the policy will be a live document if it's not going in the way we expect to grow, then we have to put interventions in place. So I can't stand here and say that every two years or every three years, it all depends on the numbers that comes in.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Next question, please.

Question No. 4 - The Honourable Robert Midwinter to ask the 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 what consideration has been given to reduce in the qualifying period for Grant of Status by spouses of St Helenians, and why it has been decided that this is to remain at three years residence?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs.

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank my Honourable Friend for the question. What I'll say is, and you probably knows this as well, because we've already discussed this, consideration was given. However, I've chosen not to take the approach, as the current law is in line with the Nationality Act, and I didn't want to move away from the national health care. And what we are proposing, I believe, will achieve the intention of the policy, which is to grow the economy and working age population, therefore addressing the labour shortage. But also, there is no change to the policy exception with that.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Next question, please.

Question No. 5 - The Honourable Gillian Brooks to ask the Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs

The Speaker –

The Honourable Gillian Brooks, thank you.

The Hon. Gillian Brooks –

Mr. Speaker, can I just make a point of information first, just that the final part of the question here, I think the Minister may have answered, but I'll just include it okay. Will the Honourable Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs tell this Council within the draft policy where it makes reference to other policies that are to be aligned, can you advise which policies are these and the timeframes for these to be finalised?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs.

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I turn my Honourable Friend for the question in terms of the policies we're looking at, Sustainable Economic Development Strategy, Health fees and charges, Minimum Wage, Renewable Energy, Public Transport, Immigration Land Holding, Property Disposal and Purchase policy, Stamp Duty policy, Labour Market Strategy. There's probably others that we need to look at as well, and we've agreed part of our implementation plan is to sit down with the Senior Leadership Team of the Public Service to probably look at other issues as well, and how best we can move forward with these but like I said earlier on, it all depends on the capacity around the Attorney General's Chambers, but also within the Public Service. The aim is to try and get some of this done soon as possible. And I know that some of my friends will probably be able to come in after and be able to see how they're progressing with the policies, but I know has been done on the other policies.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Councillor Brooks.

The Hon. Gillian Brooks –

No thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister.

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister Brooks, did you want to give some support?

The Hon. Mark Brooks –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Minister Jeff, sort of asked for my support. I will give you my support. And I can confirm that a press conference was held yesterday on the launch of the SEDS. So it will start now, it's consultation period, or go out for engagement. And also we are at the very final stages of finalising their Property Disposal and Purchase Policy, and that will go out for consultation after the SEDS has been round for engagement. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Does that create any further supplementary questions? Councillor Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to ask the Honourable Minister, if there are, we've heard a lot about policy areas that are sort of complimentary to the Immigration Policy and will help that work effectively, but are there any that would need to be changed before the Immigration Policy could come into force? Are there any that would be dependent upon?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, yes, I thank Honourable Member for his question. Yes, there might be one or two that needs changing, especially the Labour Market Strategy. As you probably are aware, it mentions permanent residence within there, so that will be taken out, as we know, that's not ethical. So that's one of them, there probably are others and as you know yourself is also working on one of the policies which I want to add in here, which is the Elections Ordinance and that. But I'll be discussing that probably with my Ministers as well as the Senior Leadership Team.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Councillor Essex, your light has been on. Did you want to ask a question?

The Hon. Dr. Corinda Essex –

I do, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

Please do so.

The Hon. Dr. Corinda Essex –

Thank you. Can the Honourable Minister clarify whether there are any other policies or new policies that are going to be developed and aligned with Immigration policy to ensure that the rights, privileges and requirements of our own people do not become eroded?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister.

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank my Honourable Member for her supplementary question for as you are aware, we have a constitution that we follow, Mr. Speaker, and all policies will be in line with the Constitution. So that's our people's basic and fundamental human rights. And I'll make sure that all policies, and I would imagine the Attorney General's Office will ensure that all policies are in line with the fundamental rights set out in our Constitution.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Chief Minister, your light was on. I'm not certain whether you want to give support. I may have missed you.

The Hon. Chief Minister –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to talk to the Labour Market Strategy, because that board with Education, Skills and Employment, we would have liked to be further along with the Labour Market Strategy, but I think I've just mentioned before about the shortages that we've had. We've now got a Head Teacher within our Secondary School, and we're hoping that an interim Director will follow very shortly, and then we can now focus back on the Labour Market Strategy because of other competing priorities to ensure that the schools were sustained and somewhat retained. That became our priority, but definitely now we'll be starting to look at the Labour Market Strategy as a policy that will follow, now that the Immigration Policy has been out for information.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Councillor.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, would the Honourable Minister please say whether one of the policies they're going to prioritise is the one which sets out about how there's a disparity between the 30 day access to health care and the six month access to health care for returning St Helenians?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs.

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank my Honourable Friend, for your question. In terms of policies for insurance and so forth, I think we are in this position because of Solomons, they only do a 30 day insurance. There are other providers that do insurance, but obviously it is not viable for the people that we trying to attract to be able to get those insurance, because it will cost too much money if they're working on local salaries. So I think I've got some answers to your question that you're going to ask probably later on. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Is that okay? Would you, Councillor Thrower, you want to speak?

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, yes, please. That doesn't really answer the question. How quickly are we going to reduce the six month time for St Helenians to get medical entitlement down to 30 days, so it is in line with people who gain work permits in that?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister Ellick, but Minister Ellick first, the question is being asked of you.

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For us, I'm over here, the Health Service is also working on a policy at the moment, but with the Health Service, we're currently meeting, and we only had a meeting yesterday, and we're trying to work something out so that something can come in place as soon as, so we're voting on a policy that needs to come to ExCo in any case.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Minister, Henry, did you wish to give support?

The Hon. Martin Henry –

Thank you Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Councillor, for your question. Just to add to the Minister's answer, the element of insurance being taken out just recently is something totally different to the Immigration Policy. This is an element we are discussing as an element we have to respond to. However, I appreciate that there is a disparity now because of that insurance being taken out. So like the Honourable Minister just said, we are in discussions with TRUP with looking at how we were around that particular element now, but it shouldn't have a bearing on the Immigration Policy, if it's something that has recently just been removed from what was the current practice. So we are trying to address, that is one of the issues but obviously there are other issues, but that being removed.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Councillor Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you, would the Honourable Ministers be able to say whether legal advice has been sought on this? Because obviously, I think you're creating something where you're treating one group of people different to another group of people, and that concerns me greatly, whether it comes under equal rights law, and how you can give somebody access to medical health care and on a different premise to other people?

The Speaker –

Could you repeat your question please?

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Yes have they sought legal advice on whether you can give two groups of people different access to the Public Health Service?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister Henry that you want to, or okay, Minister Ellick?

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I come around with him for the question. But in replying in line with what we are proposing, that we're coming up with, this will come to our Executive Council. We will have the legal advice on whether we can do that or not. So we will wait till whatever our recommendations is that goes to ExCo, and whether the Attorney General tells us what we should be doing, whether we should be doing something different, we'll take his advice and then we'll carry on.

The Speaker –

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

Question No. 6 - The Honourable Karl Thrower to ask the Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs

The Speaker –

The Honourable Karl Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, will the Honourable Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs tell this Council what calculations and evidence were considered to assess the costs of providing access to medical services at local fees and charges starting 30 days after registration?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs.

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank my Honourable Friend for the question. Health and Immigration have been tasked with looking at viable insurance for workers. However, there is none that we have come across. I believe Health has done some calculations, and will be working on their fees and charges policy to align with this policy. The draft policy is seeking to attract people to work on a local salary who will be paying the same taxes in linear and medical insurance for them would be a deterrent to working for a local salary. Like I said before, combined with the fact that Solomon's have discounted long term insurance, it was considered fair to level the playing field, but health care at local rates will be linked to an immigrants economic contribution to the island that they are employed in business or as an investor.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Councillor Thrower do you wish to speak?

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Yes, please, Mr. Speaker. Can the Honourable Minister, say whether they looked at any other options for this, such as immigration health surcharges, which are charged in many countries where potential immigrants for work permits are actually charged a fixed amount per year. For example, in the UK, it's probably 1035 pounds per year for the work permit.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs,

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think Health is probably in a better place to answer the question, but I'll give you some answers in respect of the idea, because we did carry out some research in that as well, and some members also assisted me with research. Is actually, what if you look at the surcharge, and you go to the UK and look at the surcharge that they're imposing on people coming in, it's actually deterring people from going in the UK and causing them to leave the UK. So the intention of this policy is to attract people back into St Helena and make it more viable for people to come to St Helena. By increasing a surcharge, we could have the opposite effect. Thank you Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Minister Henry, do you wish to give support?

The Hon. Martin Henry –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member for his question. I want to give an answer, but I don't want to want it to look like I'm choosing one group over the other. But if I just carry out it this way, if there's 20 vacancies on St Helena, and we get 20 returning Saints, which would be my number one first priority, what is the difference between 20 returning Saints following that pose stress on the health service, and 20 immigrants following those poses stress on the health service? There are 20 extra people, which we must absorb into the community, which we need to, especially in Health, needs right now to have. So there isn't a difference or an imbalance from a person to person, because we will still have to cater for the same 20 people to fulfil those roles. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much for that. Councillor Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That begs one very simple follow up question, if we've got 20 more people, regardless of where they come from, considering the constant Supplementary Appropriations that seem to be required for Health in terms of particularly the aero medical evacuation costs, can we afford any more influx?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister Henry.

The Hon. Martin Henry –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member for his question. I would like to just answer that question by looking at the bigger picture. Can we afford any more influx, but can we actually afford any more people leaving? We need these numbers to be brought up. There is stress always on the health service. There's stress on every single health service that I have placed my hands on, our last is a private service. And we also find issues with getting appointments with private service. So just to answer the question, it is the bigger second item that we have to look at, which is the fact that this population is now unstable. I think we also, I know loads of people draw reference to the 8000 by 2050 for me, which I just laughed and said, what? It's a red herring to focus on. Let's take a look at the previous figure I saw a few years ago in the Chamber of Commerce by the Economist, at that time was by 2050 if trends continue, we would have 1000 people. We are on that trajectory. So we need to start focusing on increase in the population. I do appreciate that it will be stresses on the Health service, potentially, but as I said earlier, regardless of whether it is a retirement Saint or a returning immigrant, we have roles to fill. Those roles will then trigger our economy and help from that end, to support the Government in terms of taxation, etc. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I would like to support what Minister Henry has just said. I think St Helena, I mean, it's an argument that's going on in the community. I know that these people who believe we are putting more strain on the Health budget that is assuming that the people we attract are going to need health services. That's the first thing we have to be careful with, discriminatory practices here as well, but we are very much in need of the working age population, because that is where we are suffering, whether

it's in the public or private sector. But I just want to reassure the listening public, but also my fellow colleagues that medical insurance came into place as an issue, as of the 31st of March. This is early or late April, early May, coming very soon, we are looking at options and how we can address this. So it is very likely that we'll come up with some mitigation that will help to address the issue prior to the actual legislation being put in place. So it's not something we're just accepting, but we do need some time to be able to fully explore this, and obviously with some legal advice backing it, so that we know what the longer term goal is, but I want to support what Minister Henry said, we cannot continue to lose our population because it's becoming extremely expensive to run an island with a population number that we have, because it simply isn't growing our economy and it is becoming difficult to provide the services at that level. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

Okay, thank you very much. Councillor Essex.

The Hon. Dr. Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, can the Honourable Minister for Health in this instance, because I'm responding to what he responded on, state whether there is going to be action taken about relooking at the current practice of making St Helenians, who've been abroad for a number of years, pay for medical care for the first six months after their return.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Minister Henry.

The Hon. Martin Henry –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think Minister Ellick, just want to have something to say in front of what my proper response.

The Speaker –

You can pass over now if you wish. Minister Ellick?

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, before we hand over to my Honourable Friend, Minister for Health, I have made recommendations within certain policies for the Health, and that is Saints who have place of belonging in St Helena, for them to actually have the same rights as to people on St Helena, so people in MPA and Falkland Island. But I understand already Ascension Island is the same as some things here because they don't have it belonging on Ascension, but we also try to extend, therefore MPA on Falklands Island.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much for that, next question please.

Question No. 7 - The Honourable Ronald Coleman to ask the Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs

The Speaker –

The Honourable Ronald Coleman.

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Honourable Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs tell this Council what disparities now exist between SHG and the private sector employers when employing immigrant workers, and how will the proposed immigration policy address this going forward?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs.

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank my Honourable Friend for his question so persons ... in the service of the Crown, which is the Public Service, are exempt from immigration control, however, due diligence is done by the Human Resources in representing the government. However, going forward, there will be a level playing field, so everybody will be treated the same, only different amounts will be exempt from immigration control under new policy, because that's, you know, international conventions also. Exemption will also be considered in emergency circumstances, for example, doctor for the hospital. If you need a doctor immediately to deal with somebody's safe life, then there will be an exemption for something like that.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. No, further. Yes, there is, Councillor Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very encouraging to hear that. But just one question, by any chance, would it be possible to introduce in the Immigration policy the requirement for employees who are bringing out people on work permits to have them do a medical exam before they come to the island, like which is what happens in a lot of countries.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister for Safety, Security and Home Affairs.

The Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, to my Honourable Friend for this question. I think in terms of the Public Service, they normally do something like that, but we had a meeting yesterday with my Honourable Friend, the Minister of Health, and one of the suggestions that we're making for Executive Council is pretty much when people come here to work, or they come in on permits that we have another medical check here. So some people who put in the private sector might not be a medical check, but when it comes to Saint Helena, here's a recommendation that they have a medical check once they arrive in Saint Helena.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Minister Henry.

The Hon. Martin Henry –

I just want to add to that, just to caveat for the public that that is just a discussion held at that at our level yesterday, we have not approached HR or approached Attorney General's Chambers, but we're taking that forward. However from my perspective, it seems like a reasonable way forward to, again in terms of protecting the health system and ensuring that those examinations done abroad are, first of all genuine,

because there are issues with that and then the weekend, uphold that in terms of employing the person after probation. So we are looking at elements we could use to do a double check to secure that.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Chief Minister –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I just wanted to try and, how can I say, do an overview of what has been discussed here today. It is a draft Immigration policy as it stands at the moment. As Minister Ellick has said, because it hasn't been to Executive Council, I hope this will give some assurance to the community as well that there is a lot more work going on behind the scenes now that the Immigration policy has been out for consultation last year and information recently, and obviously we are listening to what the public has said, and if there is any other tweaks and changes that needs to be made before it comes to Executive Council. But I do hope it gives the assurance that, as Minister Henry has alluded to now, discussions are ongoing as to how we need to strengthen the policies that will sit and support immigration, so that we can grow our population with the desire of growing our economy, which is what we all want for St Helena so that we can have a better quality of life for all. So I'm hoping now that when there were loads of questions being put in to the constituency meetings or the information sessions, that we were really focusing on immigration, because if not, we would have been talking about three or four different policies that will be coming out for information consultation, depending on which ones we're talking about, and that will then demonstrate the support or the catalyst that we needed. As Minister Ellick had said, Immigration policy on its own is not the magic bullet. I don't know what other colours or any other description, principles will use. But it is very, very true, we are now working hard to be able to look at other policies that will complement and obviously make St Helena more attractive for people to come and spend time with us here, living or working or indeed visiting us. So I just hope that gives some sort of positive I suppose, aspiration now, as to what we're going to be doing, and I just hope that the community will come on board and play their part and participate in all the other policies that go out. I just would also like to mention on Minister Brooks' intervention earlier, he talked about the SEDS, if people didn't hear the conference yesterday, and that is the Sustainable Economic Development Strategy. Just for clarity, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. I think that just about, does it, any further fingers? No, I don't see any at all. Yes, Councillor Bargo.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to seek clarity on the medical question. It is like ideal for people to have medicals before they come into the island, but sometimes that might not happen, and you're looking to do a medical upon arrival. Is that my understanding, and if that is the understanding, how if someone does not have a medical and comes into the island, but find that they do have serious medical problems once they get the medical here, how do we propose to go about this?

The Speaker –

Minister Henry.

The Hon. Martin Henry –

I'd like to thank the Honourable Member for her question. Those are still in discussion. However, at that particular point, people here, you know, we will, we have to preserve life, but at that particular point, they are not citizens of this current country. And they will, there is ongoing discussions about, how do we deal with that? But, I make the point that they are not citizens of this country, and they are not entitled to the services of the country. How we deal with it, maybe different. But in in black and white, they are not entitled to our services. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Okay. Thank you very much.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you Minister. I think that helps to clarify things.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Thank you very much. One more finger I see. Councillor Thrower.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just as a follow on to my Honourable Friend's question, really about medical. Okay, is it possible that the Ministers will assure this House that they will have adequate checks and balances in place to carry on assessing whether we become a place for health tourism, or, in this case, health immigration. So for example, would they check if we start getting a lot of people who come for, say, six months, but while they're here they get significant medical operations, and that done because of a pre-existing medical condition, for example, a knee replacement or something like that, so that we can then alter the living document in a line with the problems as they may arise?

The Speaker –

A lot of questions, but who wants to take it? Minister Henry.

The Hon. Martin Henry –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you the Honourable Member for his question. It is hoped that pre-existing medical conditions are prop up in the chat. Stand on both sides which one of them is a requirement, and we are hoping to put the second one in as a requirement that should prop up most of those medical concerns. I have to say here, because this is something I had a discussion about with someone. Let's not forget that we are taking a risk. But we take a risk with whatever we do. We risk losing and having 1000 people here by 2050 or having a vibrant population that that can move our economy forward and move this all in forward. So whatever we do, we will take, there is always an element of risk. There will be people who potentially will slip through immigration. There will be people who potentially will slip through both the schemes that we are planning to put in place, but that is the risk you have to associate with moving the island forward. So I understand that there is risk, and people feel that that those risks could come ahead. But I think as the other thing I want to mention is immigration on St Louis, for in a global standing is absolutely in terms of being able to control, it probably one of the easiest to control in the world. You have one entry point, but a large number of people come in once a week, and we have an entry point with yachts which aren't of numbers you know, that are crossing other borders all over the world. So we do have those elements on our side, and we can use our isolation to help mitigate the risks, but we won't say here today that we're going to stop all of those things from happening, that's because, dare I say, Mr. Speaker, such is life, these things do occur.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much Member, Minister. Honourable Chief Minister? I think he wanted to give support.

The Hon. Chief Minister –

I think he probably jumping in before Minister Ellick is probably going to say exactly the same thing, or wanted to say the same thing. I think the only assurance we can give to the public and to yourselves is that whatever we do, we will try our best to mitigate the risk, and that it will be a calculated risk, so that we understand the monies that go behind it. I don't think at this time we can take risk. There can't be some financial figure placed upon it, knowing the status of our consolidated fund, but also our recurrent budget, and also policy is just that it is there. It is a live document it can be changed if we feel that there is a necessity to do so. So Immigration policy is a larger one, but obviously all of policies can be changed, hence, the legislation is informed by the policy, so that it doesn't set it in stone, if I can put it that way, and then we can make the changes, depending on our circumstances, as we develop. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Minister Ellick, did you still want to say anything?

Hon. Jeffery Ellick –

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the Chief Minister covered it, and it's mainly about their Immigration policy. It's a live policy, and if things go seriously in one direction, if you don't want it to go, that's where we can change these things. Likewise, the other policies, as my Honourable Chief Minister said before. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. And that seems to have been brought things to a close for today. But earlier on, small classrooms was mentioned, small classroom numbers. And just recently, of course, I came back from UK and visited a village in Chichester, and they had a classroom of nine. Just nine. It was in the village, but the number was just nine. So I guess you find the sort of things going on wherever you want to find them going on, I guess. Thank you very much for that. That then concludes the Minister's Question Time meeting for April. Thank you very much for your very valuable contributions. Thank you those who took the opportunity to listen to the live proceedings in the Council Chamber and also among the listening public, we hope that you found the questions by Councillors and answers provided by Ministers relating to the draft Immigration policy both interesting and informative. I admit to being aware that there are people concerned with best outcome for the Immigration policy, hopefully some of the questions you wanted answers were among those asked and responded today, and you are now better informed. As usual, we look forward to your feedback. In closing, I would like to thank SAMS for broadcasting the proceedings live. All being well, they will be rebroadcast. I wish you all a very pleasant day ahead. Thank you very much.



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Honourable Deputy Speaker

