

Governor's Welcome Address to the Newly Elected Members of the Legislative Council

Delivered at the First Formal Meeting of the New Council

Honourable Members of the Legislative Council,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you today as you take your seats in this Chamber, having earned the trust of the people of St Helena through democratic election. Whether you are returning to Council or joining it for the first time, your presence here reflects a commitment to public service that deserves recognition and respect.

The work of this Council is central to the life of our democracy. As elected representatives, you are entrusted with three core responsibilities: to make legislation that serves the long-term interests of the island; to scrutinise the work of government with fairness and rigour; and to represent the voices, concerns, and aspirations of your constituents.

These responsibilities are not abstract. They are the daily work of democratic governance. The laws you pass will shape the island's future. The questions you ask will help ensure that decisions are made transparently and with accountability. And the people you represent will look to you not only for leadership, but for listening.

As Winston Churchill once observed, *"No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government—except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."* It is a reminder that democracy is not easy, but it is essential—and it depends on the integrity and diligence of those elected to serve.

One of your first and most important tasks will be to select the next Chief Minister. This is a decision that will shape the direction and tone of government over the coming years. It is a moment that calls for careful thought, and a shared commitment to the good of the whole island. The Chief Minister will carry significant responsibility, but their success will depend on the strength of the team around them—and on the support and scrutiny of this Council.

Equally important is the role of the Speaker, who will guide the proceedings of this Chamber with impartiality and authority. The Speaker ensures that debate is conducted with order and respect, and that all Members—regardless of view or background—have the opportunity to be heard. It is a role that underpins the dignity and effectiveness of Council's work.

This new Council also begins its term at a time of reflection and opportunity. The Governance Review now underway offers a chance to consider how our institutions function, and how they might evolve to better serve the people of St Helena. It is not a review imposed from outside, but one shaped by local voices and experience. I encourage you to engage with its recommendations constructively and with a shared sense of purpose.

This will be the second iteration of the ministerial system of governance. This model brings opportunity for leadership, clear lines of accountability, and a more strategic approach to decision-making. The system is still evolving, with implications for Ministers, for Council, and for the public service. The success of this system will depend on how well we work together to make it real and effective.

I recognise that the months ahead will bring challenges. There will be difficult decisions, competing priorities, and moments of disagreement. But I also know that this Council brings together a wealth of experience, insight, and commitment. If you approach your work with humility, with a willingness to listen, and with a focus on the common good, you will serve this island well.

Let me close by thanking each of you for stepping forward to serve. The people of St Helena have placed their confidence in you. I wish you wisdom, strength, and unity as you begin this important work.

Thank you.

HE Governor Nigel Phillips
10 September 2025