



PARISH OF ST HELIER



Minutes of the Rates Assembly

Wednesday 6 July 2022 at 7.00 pm

Assembly Room, Town Hall

27/22	Welcome & Apologies
	<p>Apologies: The Dean, Deputies Tom Coles and Mary Le Hegarat and Malcolm L'Amy.</p> <p>Deputies in Attendance: Stephen Ahier, Max Andrews, Catherine Curtis, Lyndsay Feltham, Inna Gardiner, Sam Mézec, Beatriz Porée and Rob Ward.</p> <p>Procureurs in Attendance: Peter Pearce and Geraint Jennings</p>
28/22	Item 1: Presentation of the Accounts (Financial Statements) for the Financial Year 2021/2022
	<p>The Constable opened the Assembly by referring to the relationship with the Government, which had improved slightly since the last Assembly, however there is still unequal treatment of St Helier ratepayers who pay the cost of public amenities, which are funded by central government in other Parishes. The Constable spoke of his disappointment that the Government seem focused on prestige projects, such as the South-West Master Plan, Fort Regent, and South Hill, rather than the rejuvenation of the Cinderella areas in St Helier where many parishioners live.</p> <p>The Constable spoke of the challenges the Parish has faced and thanked the workforce for their efforts and incredible flexibility in providing services throughout the Covid pandemic. He expressed his thanks and gratitude to all honorary committees and volunteers who have given of their time during the year.</p> <p>Jason Turner, CEO gave a presentation looking back over the past twelve months and then explained the Parish's aims over the coming year, including moving forward the Climate Change program, setting aside funding to deliver neighbourhood improvement areas, an increased events program and maintaining a strong financial position.</p> <p>Don Connolly, Auditor, from Alex Picot & Co., congratulated Neil Macdonald, Resources Director, and the whole Parish team. He was pleased that his team didn't have to undertake a virtual audit this year. This audit had looked at St Ewolds and a few recommendations were made, but other than that it had been a clean audit. The Assembly were advised that St Helier is still the only Parish to have its assets on the balance sheet and in doing so it is important to keep valuations current, other than that there were no areas of concern.</p> <p>Neil Macdonald, Director of Resources, took the Assembly through a PowerPoint presentation of the Accounts / (Financial Statements) for 2021/22, explaining that non-rates income is now back to pre-pandemic levels. An increase in expenditure has been seen within certain areas, including staff costs, operational costs, and professional fees due to the St Ewolds and Hospital projects.</p> <p>Questions on the Accounts:</p> <p>Deputy Feltham requested an explanation of why legal fees had risen from £133,000 to £387,000. Neil Macdonald advised the hospital project has cost the Parish approx. £20,000 and the remainder has been the St Ewolds project.</p> <p>John Baker and Jackie Hilton-Egre asked for an update on St Ewolds and whether it would ever break even, as it has shown a further loss. Jason Turner explained there is a strategy approved by the Constable and Procureurs to achieve this, but this year there have been several challenges in relation to covid and minimum staffing numbers required to keep residents safe, the care workers market being challenging at present as well as the building project being on hold. On a positive note, the mix of ratios of residents was improving, the home has been rebranded and a new website created. Westmount Day Nursery has shown it can turn around with investment in the premises and facilities and St Ewolds is expected to do the same.</p> <p>John Baker asked for an update on the sale of St Helier House. The Constable stated it was clear from a Parish Assembly that the public wanted the site used for social housing and so the Parish had looked at a scheme in partnership with Andium Homes. Due to rising costs in the building market, Andium are not yet sure the scheme will work and so the Parish will continue to explore other options and will bring them back to a Parish Assembly at a later date.</p>

	<p>John Baker and Sarah Richardson called for more transparency around the Parish's charitable donations and the publication of the details of those who receive them. The Constable spoke of considering delegating the overseeing of this function to the Accounts Committee.</p> <p>Deputy Ward asked why the amount to the Comite of Constables had increased by 30%. Neil Macdonald explained this was a result of Parish IT Systems being moved away from the Government of Jersey, Deputy Ward also asked about the depreciation of assets. It was explained that whilst newer vehicles have their depreciation recorded across their lifetime, the older vehicles have been written off, so this figure will increase as time moves on.</p> <p>Deputy Curtis raised a question about recycling, an explanation was provided that whilst the tonnage had remained the same, the price of recyclable commodities can fluctuate.</p> <p>Deputy Feltham requested that communication be improved, and the public informed of how the money raised from their rates bill is spent. The Constable agreed to take the idea forward in his letter to ratepayers.</p> <p>The Constable thanked the Director for the presentation and asked if there was a proposer and seconder for the Accounts. The Accounts were proposed by Deputy Rob Ward and seconded by Procureur Peter Pearce; the Assembly adopted them unanimously.</p>
<p>28/22(a)</p>	<p>Presentations were received from partners the St Helier Youth and Community Trust and Thrive.</p> <p>The Constable gave a presentation on behalf of the Trust as their representatives were unavailable, He advised that the Trust have bought a piece of land behind the old La Pouquelaye School to be used as a Community Garden.</p> <p>Questions on Partnerships:</p> <p>Sarah Richardson and John Baker expressed disappointment, that years on the Parish were still giving so much money to the Trust. They believed that when it was set up it was promised the grant would only be for 3 years and would reduce over time. Mr Baker suggested that £50,000 shouldn't be used to cover Youth Service staff salaries and that the transfer to the Trust should be cut by a percentage each year, that way they would need to find their own income stream. The Constable explained that a donation to the Youth Service was an historical agreement that all Parishes have signed up to.</p> <p>Barbara Corbett a Trustee explained the Trust has received money from other companies and that both the Jersey Electricity Company and Jersey Water has provided services in kind. Mrs Corbett explained that several organisations, schools, and clubs had benefited from the Trust including Thrive, Rouge Bouillon and Haute Vallee.</p> <p>The Constable suggested that the Trust bring a business plan to the Accounts Committee Meeting.</p> <p>Sheena Brockie spoke on behalf of Thrive explaining the progress the community small holding has made in the field owned by the Parish, the awards it has won and thanked the Parish for their support in making this happen.</p>
<p>29/22</p>	<p>Item 2: Presentation of the Estimates (Budgets) and approval of the Assembly for the financial year 2022/23</p>
	<p>Neil Macdonald, Resources Director, presented the estimates (budgets) for 2022/2023, explaining the anticipated increase in staff costs are due to cost of living rises and replenishing previous staffing levels in Street Cleansing and Parks & Gardens, which includes two apprentices. Road's expenditure has increased this year, as well as £150,000 additional expenditure towards street lighting replacements and £60,000 towards neighbourhood improvement schemes. The Parish is budgeting for a new website, training costs and an increase in events and in charitable donations. Fuel prices have risen, there is also the Parish's commitment to climate change and the costs associated with the replacement of oil boilers at both the Town Hall and St Ewolds and the purchasing of electric vehicles.</p> <p>The Constable enquired as to the payback is on climate change initiatives. Jason Turner explained that electricity is now cheaper than oil or gas, but the main driver is not financial it is a reduction in the Parish's carbon omissions. This figure in the estimates demonstrates the amount of money the Parish is deploying to try and achieve its climate change program.</p> <p>James Corbett asked what the purpose is of the account's summary page, as once you were passed operational expenditure it is impossible to find the page that gives you the same heading or figures. Neil Macdonald explained the Parish adopts gap accounting principles, and these figures are rates cash-based adjustments. Neil Macdonald thanked Mr Corbett for his feedback and advised he would endeavour to break the figures down more clearly next year.</p>

	<p>John Baker stated he was interested in the buying and running costs of electric vehicles. Bob Kearsey, Director of Municipal Services advised that an electric van is approximately the same cost as a diesel or petrol equivalent. However, if the Parish purchased a refuse truck the cost would be double as the battery weighs so much that you wouldn't be able to collect anywhere near as much refuse, so currently the Parish is focusing on using low emission fuels and purchasing smaller electric vehicles and machinery.</p> <p>John Baker called on the Parish to undertake a workplace travel plan, and consider subsidies for staff using buses, electric bikes, etc. The Constable agreed the Parish should set an example to the Government and undertake this work as soon as possible.</p> <p>Deputy Mézec asked in relation to staff costs, is it anticipated to follow the States pay awards and if so, how do you arrive at the figure in the accounts. Neil Macdonald advised that presently the Parish can only guess at it, as we are still seven months away. Deputy Mézec asked if the pay award would maintain, or increase pay and what demands there will be from the workforce in relation to pay.</p> <p>Deputy Feltham enquired if Parish employees were present at the pay negotiations, Jason Turner explained the workforce is largely made up of Unite members who have a regional representative around the negotiating table. Jason and the Parish union representative meet with the regional representative on a quarterly basis. The question was asked if pay is a factor in staff leaving the parish, Jason explained that whilst employees were leaving the Parish a number were leaving to go to other sectors and pay is not always the driver of people leaving. If the Parish were considering moving away from the States pay awards, it would require serious thought and much consultation with staff, there are both pros and cons with such a decision.</p> <p>Mr Corbett said whilst he valued the services supplied by Parish employees, it is not for the Parish to solve the cost-of-living pressures, and careful consideration should be given before the Parish break the current salary structure</p> <p>James Sheedy asked if the estimates were approved this evening, how soon would it be before the neighbourhood improvement plan would be introduced and where would it start. The Constable explained it would begin with community engagement to find out parishioner's views as to what improvements they would like to see.</p> <p>Deputy Feltham stated that although the Assembly had discussed the future of St Helier House, there was no money in the estimates for any work to it. Jason Turner explained that if the Parish entered a partnership with Andium Homes, there wouldn't be a cost to the Parish as the Parish's commitment would be the land.</p> <p>Deputy Ward enquired whether the climate change figures are the entire cost of the work or purchase or were the figures the difference between what a normal replacement would cost and an environmentally friendly alternative. Neil Macdonald confirmed the figure was the whole cost. Deputy Ward felt this to be unacceptable as it gives the impression these costs are because of climate change proposals. The figure for climate change should only record the difference between the two, as presenting it in this manner is misleading and doesn't help the climate change message.</p> <p>The Estimates were proposed by Deputy Inna Gardiner and seconded by Deputy Rob Ward and were unanimously adopted.</p>
30/22	Item 3: Approve the Parish Rate for the Financial Year 2022/23
	<p>The Assembly were advised that the Parish proposed to keep the rate the same, for the ninth year running. The Constable asked if there were any amendments, higher or lower, to the proposed rate of 1.15p, which would result in the Parish operating at a deficit of £799,000. It was explained this is possible as the Parish start the year with a rates reserve of approximately £2.9million, when it has a policy of keeping the rates reserve at £2million. The Constable stated that whilst this year the Parish has managed to retain its rates at the same level, it was unlikely due to cost of living increases to be able to continue this next year.</p> <p>Mike Graham said that it was difficult to tell if the Parish was doing well, or if the Government Policy of building one-bedroom flats and then letting them be sold off Island as buy to let, is the reason for there being no rate increase proposed, In his view this policy leads to an increase in the number of rates quarters, thereby enabling the rate to remain the same.</p> <p>Edward Trevor, Chairperson of the Rates Assessors explained that rates quarters had remained stable for the past couple of years and the Parish had not seen an increase in quarters. Providing an explanation Mr Trevor explained that currently many office blocks are being developed into housing and that housing attracts a lower rate than business, so this results in there being less quarters rather than more.</p>

	There being no further amendments, on a proposition by James Corbett and seconded by Edward Trevor, the rate of 1.15p was unanimously approved by the Assembly.
31/22	Item 4: Election of the Accounts Committee to examine the Accounts for the Financial Year 2022/2023
	<p>The Constable thanked the Accounts Committee for all the hard work conducted throughout the year, and informed the Assembly that the following Committee Members had indicated their willingness to seek re-election:</p> <p>Jackie Hilton, David Croxford, Sarah Richardson, John Baker, Stewart Mourant, Bernie Manning, Mario Pirozzolo, and Jason Lagadu.</p> <p>The Constable gave special thanks to Committee members Bob Le Brocq and Steve Beddoe both who had given many years of service and who had chosen not to re-stand.</p> <p>The Constable asked the Assembly if there was anyone who wished to join the Accounts Committee, with James Corbett showing an interest.</p> <p>The Accounts Committee for 2022/2023 was proposed by Procureur Peter Pearce and seconded by Procureur Geraint Jennings, the Assembly unanimously approved the appointments.</p>
32/22	Item: 5 Approval of the appointment of Parish Auditors for 2022/2023
	On a proposition by Steve Beddoe and seconded by James Corbett, the Auditors Alex Picot & Co were re-appointed for 2022/23; approval of the Assembly was unanimous. On behalf of the Parish, the Constable thanked Don Connolly and his team for all their hard work.
	The Constable thanked the ratepayers for their show of confidence in the Parish; he thanked the Auditors, the Procureurs, the Accounts Committee, all Parish employees for all their hard work. The date of the next Parish Assembly was confirmed as Wednesday 27th July 2022 at 7.00 pm.