



# PARISH OF ST HELIER



## Minutes of the Rates Assembly

Wednesday 2 August 2023 at 7.00 pm

Assembly Room, Town Hall

34/23	<b>Welcome &amp; Apologies</b>
	<p><b>Apologies:</b> The Dean, Deputies Stephen Ahier, Inna Gardiner, Mary Le Hegarat and Catherine Curtis, Stewart Mourant, Jackie Hilton, Sarah Richardson, Alan Oliver and Bernie Manning.</p> <p><b>Deputies in Attendance:</b> Lyndsay Feltham, Sam Mézec, and Rob Ward.</p> <p><b>Procureurs in Attendance:</b> Peter Pearce and John Baker</p>
35/23	<b>Item 1: Presentation of the Accounts (Financial Statements) for the Financial Year 2022/2023</b>
	<p>The Constable opened the Assembly by thanking the municipality and volunteers who contribute their time and skills to Parish life.</p> <p>He advised that Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) have been created and the Parish has secured £1million in urban regeneration funding from the Government, spread over 3 years (2024/25/26), and are expected to receive a further £15million available over 5 years.</p> <p>Andrew Sugden, CEO, gave a presentation, looking back at the accomplishments of the past twelve months, including an update on the Parish's plans to reach net carbon zero by 2030. He then presented to the Assembly a PowerPoint presentation of the Parish's Accounts/(Financial Statements) for 2022/23, explaining that the Parish made a surplus of £282,000 against an estimated deficit of £425,000. When compared to 2021/22, income increased by £842,000, while expenditure increased by £1,291million, due to high inflation. The balance sheet stands at £53.1million, with fixed assets of £48million and current assets of £5.1million. Overall, the Parish remains in a strong financial position.</p> <p>Don Connolly, Auditor, from Alex Picot &amp; Co., explained that the Parish has a new CEO and Finance Director who joined after the financial year ended, this brings increased risk as these individuals are recently appointed to these roles. To reduce the risk, Alex Picot has had more personnel on site, undertaken additional work, and increased sample sizes, which has impacted items such as charitable grants being reversed. Mr Connolly confirmed to the Assembly that based on the additional work undertaken, he could confirm that this was a clean audit and that the figures presented could be relied upon.</p> <p><b>Questions on the Accounts:</b></p> <p>John Shenton stated the Accounts show £126,000 being given to the St Helier Youth and Community Trust. The Trust does not publish their accounts; but holds over £200,000 in reserves. What due diligence does the Parish undertake to ensure the funds are needed and used wisely?</p> <p>Andrew Sugden, advised the Trust gave a full presentation to the Accounts Committee in January 2023, advising of the actions taken and providing a full set of accounts and a financial summary of why such reserves were needed. In that respect, the Trust receives oversight, governance, and scrutiny from the Parish Accounts Committee. It is recognised the Trust requires a similar amount from the Parish this year, but moving forward, will need to generate income itself. In the interest of transparency, the Parish will request the Trust publishes its accounts. The Assembly were reminded that half the grant pays towards the salaries of youth workers who are employed at St Helier youth clubs. A commitment was given to review the Parish's approach to administering charitable donations.</p> <p>In relation to the on-going dispute, Mr Shenton asked if there was any provision in the Accounts that ratepayers may have liability for legal damages? Don Connolly explained that from an accounting perspective, money can only be accrued if there is a likelihood this will happen. Currently, there is no provision, as the details are unknown due to the sensitivity of the legal case.</p> <p>Deputy Ward asked about the proportion of recycling processed through the Ports of Jersey contract and how this affects the recycling income? Bob Kearsey, Municipal Services Director, advised the contract was a trial, delivery of card is irregular, and much of this recycling is taken off Island.</p> <p>Deputy Ward was interested in dog licence money, as he believes there is a lack of bins in the Parish and more could be spent to change the attitude of irresponsible dog owners.</p> <p>The Constable advised that the money goes into the general expenses account and is used to cover the administration, and this year will go towards the cost of a new online computer system for dog</p>

	<p>registration. A poster campaign to discourage dog fouling has been instigated in hotspot areas in St Helier.</p> <p>James Corbett stated the Parish Accounts showed assets of £53million, but £45million related to property, which leaves £8million in current assets against liabilities. Can the Parish give an indication of the cash pressures this year?</p> <p>Andrew Sugden advised that cash is required to bridge the gap between the end of the financial year and the time rates payments are received; it is more critical this year as the Rates Assembly has been delayed by a month. The Parish is currently operating a policy of essential spending only, as the completion of capital projects has reduced cash returns. The Parish is asset-rich and cash-poor; this year there is a planned reduction in capital projects and a long-term cash management forecast is to be produced.</p> <p>Deputy Feltham questioned staff savings and asked if this had reduced the services provided?</p> <p>Andrew Sugden explained the savings were because of long-term sickness, resulting in half or zero pay. Redundancies had not led to a change in service; the team had been under-resourced as recruitment had proved difficult, and the Parish had paid a contractor to provide the service.</p> <p>Mark Le Chevalier asked why the parish paid the Government £250,000 in fines. The Constable explained there was a requirement in law for the Parish to return half the parking fines income to Government. He also asked why the Parish has not produced a balance sheet to show its wealth? The Constable advised that St Helier is the only Parish to use GAAP Lite accounts - this was at the request of a former Procureur, Clive Barton, as it provides a truer picture to parishioners. Don Connolly advised that the Parish publishes its property, cash, assets, debtors, and liabilities, which operate under the Parish's own accounting policy. The questioner was asked what else he expected to see on the balance sheet, but no recommendations were forthcoming.</p> <p>The Constable asked for a proposer and seconder: the accounts were proposed by James Corbett and seconded by Jason Lagadu and were adopted by a large majority of the Assembly.</p>
<b>36/23</b>	<p><b>Item 2: Presentation of the Estimates (Budgets) and approval of the Assembly for the financial year 2023/24.</b></p>
	<p>Andrew Sugden, presented the Estimates (Budgets) for 2023/2024, explaining a key driver being inflation which had reached 12.7%, but this has reduced slightly.</p> <p>Over the next 12 months, it is planned to review the recycling operation. The costs of insurance, electricity, and staff have risen, as has Roads expenditure, due to an increase in building materials. Managers are required to save a percentage of their budget through good management practice, and the Parish will continue to invest in apprentices and management training. The events programme is back to pre-Covid levels, but the Parish will continue to seek sponsorship. St Ewold's is expected to make a small deficit this year or come close to breaking even, with the new 20-bed unit is due to come online this calendar year. Westmount Day Nursery is doing well, which has enabled the Parish to reduce the cost-of-living increase in fees to assist working parents.</p> <p>The Constable explained that the NIAs had been allocated £30,000, and, in addition, he had received an indication from the Government that they may match Parish spending on the Halkett Street scheme.</p> <p>James Corbett asked for details of the £1.3million capital improvement programme. It was explained that the programme covers the Town Hall, the Deanery, Nelson Street, Town Centre, public conveniences, and the next stage of the St Ewold's project.</p> <p>James Sheedy stated he was pleased that the Government were considering investing in the town centre and back streets of St Helier. The Constable explained that previously he had tried to secure funding from Government to assist with the revenue costs of parks and gardens and public conveniences, but it had not been forthcoming, whereas he was more hopeful of a Government contribution towards the capital costs of the regeneration of St Helier.</p> <p>Deputy Feltham asked if money had been allocated to refurbish the children's play areas at Parade Gardens, and if event holders could be fined for leaving a mess on People's Park.</p> <p>The Assembly was advised that the Parish had recently replaced play equipment at First Tower Park, People's Park, and Clos Vaze. The sum of £30,000 is in the Estimates for the playground at Parade, Gardens, and this will be reviewed again later in the year. New developments without play equipment are being asked to contribute money to play facilities in the vicinity. The Constable referred to the large sums spent by Government on Coronation Park in recent years, and said playgrounds are not only used by Parish residents; he requested that Parish Deputies assist him in securing Government funding towards their maintenance.</p> <p>Deputy Mézec asked about the cost of keeping St Helier House empty and expressed his frustration at the estimated length of time before the programme currently on the table can be delivered. He asked</p>

whether the Parish could find an interim arrangement or a temporary use.

Andrew Sugden explained it was costing the Parish little to be kept empty and that a solution for the Parish to develop the building had been explored, but the estimated cost was out of the Parish's reach. It was agreed that further alternatives would be considered, and the matter would be brought back to the Parish Assembly by the end of this financial year.

Mario Pirozzolo questioned whether the Dean needed to live in such an expensive property and asked if the diocese contributed to the Deanery's maintenance. The Constable stated this matter had been discussed at previous Assemblies, and the repurposing of the Deanery and its garden when there was a change of Dean, had been blocked by former Procureurs.

John Baker referred to £52,500 in the Estimates for the Deanery maintenance and asked why the Parish should house the Dean of Jersey without Government contribution. He questioned whether prayers should be said at Parish Assemblies.

John Shenton felt it was wrong that the parishes discriminate against one faith over another. He advised the Assembly that the Deanery is registered with the Charity Commission as having made a profit of £3million last year. Mr Shenton asked what ratepayers can do to rectify the matter?

The Constable said the Assembly could make an amendment tonight, but he would recommend that the Assembly allow him time to consult and discuss the matter with the Dean, the Governor, and the Archbishop of Salisbury. Whereas, other parishes ratepayers contribute to the upkeep of their rectory and the church, in St Helier this is funded by the income received from the Deanery Car Park. The Constable gave a commitment to review the Deanery funding arrangements before the next Rates Assembly.

Mike Graham questioned the cost of Vallee des Vaux traffic road calming measures and the Halkett Street repairs. Andrew Sugden provided clarification that £100,000 was in the Estimates for Vallee des Vaux and a further £350,000 for Halkett Street. Mr Graham felt the measures proposed for Vallee des Vaux were excessive and asked if it could be removed from the Estimates. The Constable confirmed that amendments could be put forward later in the Assembly.

Procureur John Baker spoke in favour and provided an outline of the works to Vallee des Vaux.

Mr Graham had no concerns over the change of name for Halkett Street, but he was concerned at the cost and requested that details of the works be open to public consultation.

The Constable confirmed the change of name for Halkett Street would soon to be tabled at a Parish Assembly. The Parish has budgeted the full cost of the repairs, but it is hopeful the Government may match the Parish contribution. The Constable confirmed there would be a public exhibition of the planned works.

Deputy Ward asked when the new unit at St Ewold's would open, and the purpose of the £750,000 in the Estimates. Andrew Sugden clarified that the sum was to complete connecting the lifts and stretcher lift to make the unit operational.

A gentleman asked if the Government's new rental scheme for landlords would see increased costs. It was confirmed that costs would be minimal, as properties are well maintained, and surveys are undertaken in-house.

Procureur John Baker questioned why the Parish was running a loss-making residential home, while at the same time ratepayers were facing a substantial financial contribution of £8million to improve the building. If this were a commercial enterprise, the Home would pay a notional rent on the building, which would increase the deficit further.

Procureur Peter Pearce stated that the Parish is in the business of providing services to ratepayers, and the Residential Home and Nursery are part of those services. Both the Home and Nursey contribute a rental factor to the Building Reserve Fund.

The Constable confirmed he wouldn't support changing the current arrangement - the Nursery made a surplus last year, and there are other cross-subsidies within the Parish system. The subject had been discussed by previous Assemblies, which were supportive of the service if the deficit was reduced each year. The Accounts show that the deficit halved last year, and it is estimated to reduce further or break even in this financial year. The Parish is proud of the care provided by both St Ewold's and Westmount Day Nursery, and if one speaks with any parishioner who has used the facilities, it's clear how appreciated and respected they are throughout the community. If there was ever a case to support the Parish running a Home, it was during Covid when the Parish was able to look after the most vulnerable in the community.

A parishioner asked whether kerbside recycling is affordable to ratepayers. Andrew Sugden replied that he is midway through a review of gathering data to answer that question.

	<p>The Constable asked if there were any amendments to the Estimates.</p> <p>An amendment to have £100,000 for road works in Vallee des Vaux removed from the Estimates was proposed by Jason Lagadu and seconded by Mike Graham.</p> <p>On debate, Deputy Feltham wanted confirmation of the budget line that would be affected and asked if it would impact other road safety projects?</p> <p>Procureur Peter Pearce said that taking money away from a road safety project was a bad idea.</p> <p>Deputy Ward proposed it would be better for the Roads Committee to review the spending, rather than the Assembly approve its removal.</p> <p>John Shenton asked if the amendment could be altered to remove the planned works for Vallee des Vaux but retain the £100,000 for road safety. The Constable advised the item would need to be removed first and then a separate amendment brought to reinstate the expenditure.</p> <p>Procureur Peter Pearce expressed concerns that if the item were removed, it could be brought back to a future Assembly.</p> <p>James Corbett advised that the figures were only an estimate, which authorises overall expenditure. Expenditure is the responsibility of those elected, and the Assembly should allow those concerned to exercise their responsibilities.</p> <p>Procureur John Baker said the Roads Committee have a key role, which is to look after the public's safety. If the Assembly votes to remove these safety measures and an accident happens, he hopes the Assembly can live with itself.</p> <p>Mario Pirozzolo, Roads Inspector, said he walked the route daily and that the matter needed resolving as it was heavily abused by fast cars.</p> <p>Following a secret ballot, the amendment was defeated 18 votes in favour and 19 votes against.</p> <p>The Estimates were proposed by Deputy Sam Mézec and seconded by Deputy Rob Ward and were unanimously adopted by the Assembly.</p>
<b>37/23</b>	<b>Item 3: Approve the Parish Rate for the Financial Year 2023/24</b>
	<p>The Assembly were advised that after 9 years of the Rate remaining level, the Parish proposed to increase the rate to 1.25p - an increase of 8.7%, which would see the Parish operating at a deficit of £278,000. The Constable asked if there were any amendments. This rate is possible as it reduces the Rate Reserve, while keeping it above the policy limit of £2million. This would provide parishioners with a cushion if the cost of living increase were to continue next year.</p> <p>There being no amendments, the rate of 1.25p was proposed by Mario Pirozzolo and seconded by James Corbett; the rate was then approved by the Assembly, 34 votes in favour and 3 votes against.</p>
<b>38/23</b>	<b>Item 4: Election of the Accounts Committee to examine the Accounts for the Financial Year 2023/2024</b>
	<p>The Constable thanked the Accounts Committee for the hard work undertaken throughout the year, and informed the Assembly that the following members had indicated their willingness to seek re-election: Jackie Hilton, David Croxford, Sarah Richardson, Stewart Mourant, Bernie Manning, Mario Pirozzolo, and Jason Lagadu.</p> <p>The Accounts Committee was proposed on bloc by Procureur John Baker and seconded by Procureur Peter Pearce, the Assembly unanimously approved the appointments.</p> <p>The Constable asked if anyone else wished to join the Committee. Mark Le Chevalier was proposed by Anthony Batho and seconded by Mathew Evans; the Assembly unanimously approved the appointment.</p>
<b>39/23</b>	<b>Item: 5 Approval of the appointment of Parish Auditors for 2023/2024</b>
	<p>On a proposition by David Croxford and seconded by James Corbett, Auditors Alex Picot &amp; Co were re-appointed for 2023/24; approval of the Assembly was unanimous.</p>
	<p>The Constable thanked the ratepayers for their show of confidence in the Parish, and thanked the Auditors, the Procureurs, the Accounts Committee and all Parish employees for all their hard work. The date of the next Parish Assembly was confirmed as <b>Wednesday 30th August 2023 at 7.00 pm.</b></p>