



PARISH OF ST HELIER



Minutes of the Rates Assembly

Wednesday 10 July 2024 at 7.00 pm

Assembly Room, Town Hall

31/24	Welcome & Apologies
	<p>Apologies: Deputy Mary Le Hegarat, Jackie Hilton, Stewart Mourant, Barbara Corbett, Alan Oliver, and Malcolm L’Amy.</p> <p>Deputies in Attendance: Stephen Ahier, Inna Gardiner, David Warr, Lyndsay Feltham, Max Andrews, Sam Mézec, Rob Ward, Beatriz Poree and Catherine Curtis.</p> <p>Procureurs in Attendance: Peter Pearce and John Baker</p>
32/24	Item 1: Presentation of the Accounts (Financial Statements) for the Financial Year 2023/2024
	<p>The Constable opened the Assembly by explaining, new partnerships between the Parish and the Government of Jersey, including joint funding for Halkett Street and investment in redevelopment and rejuvenation of the Town Centre. Looking forward to 2024/25 it is hoped the Parish will invest in new play areas in Parade Gardens and in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIA’s). The Constable thanked the municipality and volunteers for the time they devote to Parish life, and made special mention of the late Don Perrier, a regular attendee of the Parish Assembly, who upon his death bequeathed his estate to be used for the long-term benefit of St Ewold’s residents.</p> <p>Andrew Sugden, CEO, provided an overview of 2023/2024, thanking those who had assisted with the clear up following Storm Ciaran. He referred to Town Centre events, various road improvements, the progress of St Ewold’s, Westmount Nursery and St Helier House and explained the Parish’s progress with its environmental strategy and modernisation.</p> <p>James Donald, Finance Director took the Assembly through a PowerPoint presentation of the Parish’s Accounts/ (Financial Statements) for 2023/24, explaining that the Parish made a surplus of £531,000 against an estimated deficit of £64,000. The surplus was based on an increase in non-rates income, whilst expenditure was in line with the estimates, staff costs which were £170,000 below budget. The difference has been reinvested into the roads program, and overall, the Parish remains in a strong financial position.</p> <p>Don Connolly, Auditor, from Alex Picot & Co., explained that the difference with this year’s audit is the arrival of a new Finance Director. A change in personnel, creates unfamiliarity with the Parish system and a risk of errors. The new postholder is settling into the role, and the additional disclosures demonstrate the work going on behind the scenes. This has been a clean audit and the figures presented show the Parish accounts are in good health.</p> <p>Questions on the Accounts:</p> <p>Deputy Warr referred to parents facing high nursery fees, he asked the viability of the Parish freezing nursery fees. The Assembly were advised that the Parish had suppressed last year’s nursery fees; if this were to occur the Assembly would need to accept the nursery running at a loss. Westmount is one of the cheapest, most flexible nurseries. The Constable suggested the setting of the Parish rate would have more impact on St Helier families.</p> <p>Louise Ferns asked how charity grants are decided. Alison Roberts, Parish Secretary explained that previously, the Youth and Community Trust has received a large grant, incorporating an amount allocated to the Youth Service. Last year, charities were invited to apply to the parish for assistance and the Constable and Procureurs made the decision as to those who were successful. Based on the success, a charities policy and procedures are being devised to ensure a transparent and fair application and selection process.</p> <p>Deputy Mezec questioned how much the other eleven Parishes contribute to the Rectorat, as the Dean is the Dean for the whole Island. Andrew Sugden responded, work has taken place this year to bring you the account disclosures and it is an ongoing matter. It is unlikely the other 11 Parishes will contribute, but the Dean has a broader role. It was explained the Rectorat is a body in law, and the Parish is required to provide a church and rectory. An independent review has been undertaken to establish the true costs to the Parish, which will aid future discussions. Income to cover these costs is derived from Byron Road Car Park, located in the former Rectory Garden, therefore it is self-funding and does not affect the Parish rate. It is important the Parish maintain these properties as they are Parish assets, which increase in value.</p>

	<p>Alison Brown asked if the Parish administers St Helier parks, and if all Parishes pay for maintaining their parks and toilets. The Constable advised that he had been seeking equality from the Government for the past twenty years and there had been little movement in that time. The current Treasury Minister has stated that the Government should not contribute, as the land belongs to the Parish. Government funding is under pressure and there has been a recent suggestion, that other Parishes may be asked to pay for the parks and toilets in their Parish.</p> <p>Alison Brown asked the Constable to elaborate on a statement he made, that discussions with Government are beginning to provide fruit. The Constable said he was delighted to have received £300K for half of the Halkett Street project, although he acknowledged it is not the £70 million or £15 million previously promised. The Constable will continue to lobby the Government on behalf of the Parish, they are presently investing a million pounds in Havre des Pas, and undertaking work in Broad Street, New Street, Minden Place and La Motte Street. The Government's view is that the Parish and Government should spend money on their own assets and that is why Halkett Street, a Parish road, is a major step forward.</p> <p>Daren O'Toole said he didn't understand why rate payers were paying for cleaning the Deanery windows. Andrew Sugden confirmed these discussions are to take place.</p> <p>Deputy Gardiner congratulated the Parish on a good set of accounts and asked the reason for a sharp increase in postage costs. James Donald explained that previously costs were allocated to several places in the Parish accounts. The postage figure has increased by 10%, however Jersey Post has increased costs by 9% 2024 and 8% in 2023. Postage is unavoidable, as it is a requirement of the Rates and Electoral law.</p> <p>The Assembly asked if the Parish undertook cash reforecasting, rather than ending the year with a surplus. James Donald said that a reforecasting exercise had taken place at the end of the second quarter, savings identified were allocated to the roads program. Moving forward this will be done on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>Deputy Ward questioned £19,000 dog licence income; he asked the Parish to explore providing facilities for dog poo bags and bins.</p> <p>The Constable asked for a proposer and seconder: the accounts were proposed by Daren O'Toole and seconded by Deputy Ahier. The accounts were adopted unanimously.</p>
33/24	<p>Item 2: Presentation of the Estimates of the Parish of St Helier for the Financial Year 2024/25, and the approval of the creation of a Neighbourhood Improvement Area reserve.</p>
	<p>Andrew Sugden presented details of Parish core and non-core services. This year the Parish would like to focus on two major projects, replacement of play facilities in Parade Gardens and a (NIA) for Poonah and Pomona Road. Focus will also be on finding a solution to the last 10% of carbon emissions to achieve carbon neutrality, as well as efficiencies following an admin review.</p> <p>James Donald presented the Estimates (Budgets) for 2024/2025, explaining he wished to build on last year's results, which are assisted by £300K from the Government for Halkett Street and a full year's rental from St Ewold's. Bank interest is likely to return to normal levels. Staff costs are to rise by £600K due to a cost-of-living increase, but a reduction in headcount means the figure proposed is below RPI. There has been a 15% increase in insurance premiums and the Parish will incur a full year of costs for the transition to biodiesel. St Ewold's is estimated to make a surplus, even though it will not run at full occupancy due to the planned refurbishment program and Westmount nursery is set to break even.</p> <p>Andrew Sugden explained the Parish plans to create two play areas in Parade Gardens, the first for ages 0-6 years and the other for children 7 years and over. It is proposed the funding for these areas will come from the Halkett Steet contribution and last year's surplus.</p> <p>The Constable provided the Assembly with details relating to a Neighbourhood Improvement Area and the proposed reason for an (NIA) reserve. The Constable explained he proposed to kick start regeneration in the back streets of St Helier. A resident's working group has formed in Poonah and Pomona Road, plans have been drawn up and they have been out to public consultation. Due to the cost of the (NIA) it is proposed to spread the cost over a two-year period, and that is the reason for proposing an (NIA) reserve; the result being that money allocated for this year can be ring fenced and added to next year. It is hoped that this project will be a blueprint for improvements in other St Helier streets.</p> <p>Questions on the Estimates and Neighbourhood Improvement Area reserve:</p> <p>Daren O'Toole said the Assembly had heard numerous Governments agree to provide millions to rejuvenate St Helier, but the money is never forthcoming. The projects being put forward amount to 1.6 million; Government should fund Neighbourhood Improvement Areas. Ratepayers are struggling to feed and clothe their children and if the (NIA) were not approved, the Parish Rate could remain the same as the previous year.</p>

The Constable confirmed the improvements to the play areas in Parade Gardens, could still proceed, as they were being funded from the previous year's surplus and the Halkett Street funding. It was confirmed that if the (NIA) was not approved, the rate could remain the same.

Bernie Manning asked if the playground would incorporate a swing for disabled children. The playground designer confirmed there was not a swing in the design, but there was other equipment, which can be used by those with a disability. A swing has not been incorporated in the Parade Gardens scheme due to lack of space and parking facilities. Sarah Richardson stated that disabled children can get themselves to and from the park, without requiring the use of transport.

Mike Graham requested confirmation that the playground would not impact the Parish rate and enquired why the plans do not incorporate increased toilet facilities.

Deputy Ahier asked how many Parish bank accounts receive a fixed rate of income. James Donald explained the Parish receive good interest rates for instant access accounts. At this time of year, until the rate is decided, and the money comes in, the money in the bank is required to keep the Parish operating. This year, once the rate is received, he will explore the concept on a six- or nine-months basis.

Alison Brown asked why Halkett Street money being earmarked for play areas and not road works. The (NIA) is the difference in the proposed rate increase, what would happen if ratepayers didn't contribute? The Constable confirmed that if the proposed cost of living increase were not approved, the project could not go ahead. If the Assembly approve the money, the Constable agreed to continue to fight for Government funding.

Daren O'Toole felt the Parish should benefit from the Jersey Development Company's £8 million profit, as it was obtained by building in St Helier.

Bernie Manning asked if money for (NIA's) included maintaining the planters and hanging baskets in Poonah Road. The Constable confirmed that an integrated watering system is to be installed as part of the plans.

Mark Le Chevalier stated that based on the cost of the playground, it should include facilities for people with disabilities. The playground designer said wheelchair users can use the trampoline, climbing frame and there are several sensory experiences to be enjoyed.

Deputy Gardiner encouraged the Parish to invest in St Helier and not just in the centre, as other roads like La Pouquelaye are often forgotten. She asked if St Andrews play equipment would be updated. Andrew Sugden replied that Deputy Feltham had raised Parade Gardens a year ago, and it is being proposed this evening.

Philip Johnson asked why charitable donations had reduced to £30,000 and the St Helier Youth and Community Trust donation, also reduced. The Constable advised the Assembly, that the Accounts Committee has been calling for the Parish donation to the Trust to be reduced year on year, as they are expected to begin to secure their own funding.

James Sheedy asked why a reserve was being created for the (NIA's), The Constable explained it would allow money to be ring fenced and not used for any other purpose.

Procureur Baker asked the Constable why he was not seeking private money. The Constable confirmed that a four-figure cheque had been received from a St Helier resident, the money could be used to start the reserve fund. Sarah Richardson asked for clarification as to why a reserve was needed, when it wasn't required for the late Don Perrier donation. James Donald explained Mr Perrier's donation was in Trust.

Philipa Le Maistre questioned if the Parish created a reserve, will it be more or less likely to receive government funding. Deputy Ward asked the Assembly not to pin their vote on funding being received, but to think carefully as to whether Neighbourhood Improvement Areas would improve the lives of St Helier Parishioners.

The Constable asked for a proposer and seconder to set up a Neighbourhood Improvement Area reserve. Daren O'Toole was willing to propose the reserve, to enable Government money to be ringfenced, Philip Johnson seconded this. The Assembly voted 36 votes in favour with 2 abstentions.

Daren O'Toole put forward a proposition to remove funding for the NIA from the estimates. The proposition was proposed by Daren O'Toole and seconded by Philip Johnson

A secret ballot was taken, with the Assembly voting 24 votes against the proposition, 12 votes in favour and 4 abstentions.

34/24	Item 3: Approve the Estimates of the Parish of St Helier for the Financial Year 2024/25
	The Constable asked for a proposer and seconder: the estimates were proposed by Heather-Anne Hubbell and seconded by Deputy Ahier. The estimates were adopted unanimously.
35/24	Item 4: Approve the Parish Rate for the Financial Year 2024/25
	The Assembly were advised that the Parish is recommending a Rate of 1.32, which is a cost-of-living rise, in line with RPI - an increase of 5.6%. The Constable asked if there were any amendments. There being no amendments, the rate of 1.32 was proposed by Procureur Peter Peace and seconded by James Corbett. A secret ballot was taken, and the rate was approved by the Assembly, with 40 votes in favour, 1 abstention and no votes against.
36/24	Item 5: Election of the Accounts Committee to examine the Accounts for the Financial Year 2024/2025
	The Constable thanked the Accounts Committee for the 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, Bernie Manning, James Corbett, Mario Pirozzolo, Jason Lagadu and Mark Le Chevalier. The Accounts Committee was proposed on bloc by Heather-Anne Hubbell and seconded by Arthur Manning, the Assembly unanimously approved the appointments. The Constable asked if anyone else wished to join the Committee. Shirley Madden was proposed by Paul Davies and seconded by Cindy Skinner and Danny Scaife was proposed by Cindy Skinner and seconded by Paul Davies; the Assembly unanimously approved the two appointments. The Constable thanked Stewart Mourant for his support of the Parish, spanning a total of 40 years, in which time he had fulfilled a number of roles, including Procureur and a member of the Accounts Committee for the past 12 years.
37/24	Item: 6 Approval of the appointment of Parish Auditors for 2024/2025
	On a proposition by Sarah Richardson and seconded by James Corbett, Auditors Alex Picot & Co were re-appointed for 2024/25; approval of the Assembly was unanimous.
	The Constable thanked the ratepayers for their show of confidence in the Parish. The date of the next Parish Assembly was confirmed as Wednesday 31st July 2024 at 7.00 pm.