

53rd British Islands and Mediterranean Conference

St Helena

20 - 24 May 2024



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Introduction

The theme of the conference, Challenges to Sustainable Development in Times of Global Uncertainty was selected by the host Branch to inspire discussions, which allowed delegates to better understand some of the challenges faced by parliaments in the British Islands and Mediterranean Region. Topics ranged from depopulation to climate change and from diversifying the economy to social housing.

Despite the range of scale and profile of the jurisdictions in the region, there was plenty of common ground, with parliamentarians sharing case-studies, explaining how they, as parliamentarians, approached similar circumstances and sign-posting colleagues to resources to support future research and evidence-gathering.

The conference also provided delegates with the opportunity to strengthen the regional network, and to identify where continued and future collaboration would be most helpful.

This is the first time for the Saint Helena Branch to host a CPA Conference and the working group had to deal with practical and logistical challenges such as weekly airline schedules, weather reports and limited conference space and accommodation options. The host branch overcame these challenges and exceeded expectations to host a stimulating and engaging conference in unique surroundings, whilst extending the warmest of welcomes.

The Conference took place over five days and included a series of plenary sessions and workshops. Tuesday 21 May was a public holiday to mark St Helena's Day, during which delegates had the opportunity to visit different parts of the island.



Title page and above photo credit: CPA HQ

Background

St Helena, a British Overseas Territory, is one of the remotest islands on Earth, just 47sq. miles, with a small, steadily declining population. Sitting in the South Atlantic Ocean, 1200 miles from Africa and 1800 miles from South America, it is a subtropical retreat where the mountainous terrain and microclimates create an astounding diversity of landscapes all within a few minutes' drive.

CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Region (BIMR)

The branches that make up CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Region (BIMR) are Alderney, Cyprus, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Guernsey, Isle of Man, Jersey, Malta, Northern Ireland, St Helena, Scotland, UK and Wales.

CPA UK serves as its Secretariat. Three Regional Representatives from BIMR sit on the international CPA Executive Committee: Stuart McMillan MSP (Scotland), Chris Elmore MP (UK) and Deputy Mary Le Hegarat (Jersey).

CPA BIMR Strategy

The aims of BIMR are to work together in pursuing the Association's purpose; promote close relations among the Region's branches and members; and to foster close relations with the other Regions of the Association.



Background

BIMR's agreed strategy (2019-2024) sets the following Objectives:

1. To strengthen our own Parliaments and their Members
Improving our performance for those we represent and to whom we are accountable.
2. To play a leading role in a successful future for the international CPA
Ensuring value for subscriptions and a focus on advancing parliamentary democracy.
3. To support non-BIMR Branches, especially where democracy is less established or is under threat
Use the "soft power" of the evolution of our own democratic institutions to support others in their legislatures.

The 2019-2024 strategy has the following prioritised themes:

- » The implications of Brexit: including parliamentary scrutiny of trade arrangements and citizens' rights.
- » Women in Parliament/CWP: gender equality, women's empowerment & ending violence against women.
- » Youth: encouraging greater participation and involvement.

Each AGM agrees a specific theme for the following year's work, drawn from proposals by the branches. The work is led by a Working Group formed at or shortly after the AGM, supported by the Secretariat. The following AGM reviews and evaluates the work on that theme over the preceding year and draws lessons for future work. At the 2023 AGM in the UK, delegates agreed to continue work on **'The Climate Emergency'** as agreed at the previous two AGMs.

Delegates

CPA Cyprus



Christiana Solomonidou – CPA Branch Secretary
Loukia Mouyi – CPA Cyprus Branch Official

CPA Falkland Islands



Hon John Birmingham MLA

CPA Gibraltar



Hon. Leslie Bruzon MP
Hon. Roy Clinton MP
Hon. Giovanni Origo MP

CPA Gurnsey



Deputy Peter Ferbrache
Simon Ross, Delegation Secretary

CPA Isle of Man



Juan Watterson, MHK
Daphne Caine, MHK
John Wannenburgh, MHK
Jonathan King, Delegation Secretary

CPA Jersey



Deputy Mary Le Hegarat
Deputy Samuel Mézec
Yannick Fillieul, Delegation Secretary

CPA Northern Ireland



Steve Aiken, MLA OBE
Phillip Brett, MLA
Paul Frew, MLA
Michelle Mcliveen, MLA
Lesley Hogg, Delegation Secretary

Members of the Mission

CPA St Helena



Hon. Cyril Gunnell MLC, Speaker
Hon. Catherine Harris Cranfield MLC, Deputy Speaker
Hon. Rosemary Bargo MLC
Hon. Gillian Brooks MLC
Hon. Mark Brooks MLC
Hon. Ronald Coleman MLC
Hon. Jeffrey Ellick MLC
Hon. Dr Corinda Essex MLC
Hon. Martin Henry MLC
Hon. Robert Midwinter MLC
Hon. Christine Scipio MLC
Hon. Julie Thomas MLC, Chief Minister
Hon. Karl Thrower MLC
Hon. Andrew Turner MLC
Hon. David Ballantyne (Attorney General)
Anita Legg, CPA Branch Secretary

CPA Scotland



Jeremy Balfour MSP
Sarah Boyack MSP
Stuart McMillan MSP
Charlotta Craig – Delegation Secretary

CPA UK



Dame Meg Hillier, MP
Baroness Gloria Hooper
Lord Robert Lisvane
Damien Moore, MP
Sarah Dickson, BIM Regional Secretary
Helen Haywood, Delegation Secretary

CPA Wales



Natasha Asghar MS
Al Davies, Delegation Secretary

CPA Headquarters Secretariat



Ian Liddell - Grainger, MP (UK) – CPA Executive Committee Chair
Jeffrey Hyland, Communications

Day 1

After the official opening and welcome speeches from the Chief Minister Hon. Julie Thomas MLC and Speaker Hon. Cyril Gunnell MLC, delegates heard from CPA Chair, Ian Liddell-Grainger MP on updates from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Headquarters Secretariat. This included an update on the progress of legislation in the UK Parliament to change the status of CPA from a UK Charity to an international interparliamentary organisation. [1]

At the **BIMR Annual General Meeting** delegates heard from the regional representatives on CPA governance and programme updates. Updates were also given by Regional Secretary Sarah Dickson, the Chair of the BIMR Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Steering Committee, Rt Hon. Dame Maria Miller MP (UK), the BIMR Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities Regional Champion Jeremy Balfour MSP (Scotland) and from the region's representative on the small branches Steering Committee Deputy Adrian Gabriel (Guernsey). The meeting discussed what should be the strategic priority theme for the year ahead. They agreed to defer the decision to later in the week once all Conference sessions had taken place.*The 2024 BIMR Conference delegates later decided the strategic theme 2024/25 should be Digital Transformation*. Full minutes of the meeting are available from the CPA BIMR Secretariat.



[1] The 2024 UK General Election was called before the CPA Private Member's Bill completed the legislative process. In the new Parliament following the Election the new UK Government reinitiated the CPA Status Bill as Government sponsored legislation.

Day 1

1st Plenary: Digital Reforms and Artificial Intelligence

Delegates discussed how using AI can help improve legislatures' efficiency, cybersecurity, and digital transformation in key sectors, such as healthcare and education. The session opened with an acknowledgement of AI's permanent future and its importance going forward.

In his address, Lord Robert Lisvane (UK) advocated a parliamentary perspective. Key considerations raised included who oversees AI (Parliamentarians or technical experts?) and the forums available for such discussions. Legislation was noted as the "elephant in the room", particularly regarding scrutiny and interpretation. Lord Lisvane highlighted the issue of deepfakes, in posing a risk to cybersecurity. Natasha Asghar MS (Wales) later shared her use of identity copyright markers to ensure authentic communication. She advised others to adopt a similar approach to counter this threat.

Discussion progressed to the future and security of AI. Its benefits were noted but the threat it posed to future employment was also considered. Natasha Asghar outlined the Senedd's approach, in considering how the tools of AI can be harnessed to assist parliamentary work.

In the Senedd, meetings had been held with party groups to share this work, alongside the establishment of two working groups. As a bilingual country, generative AI offered opportunities to promote and support the use of the Welsh language. As a result, Natasha Asghar concluded that the development of AI must be business driven.

Gareth Drabble (SHG) highlighted the focus on cybersecurity in St Helena and the need to ensure preparedness to counter cyber threats to the island. He noted that, whilst reception to fast internet access had been overwhelmingly positive, St Helena had now become a target of cyber threats. A level playing field was needed to combat irresponsible users and deter "deepfakes".

Discussion

BIPA (British Irish Parliamentary Assembly) Committee B's recent report on Cybersecurity would be forwarded by the Northern Irish Branch. Delegates agreed it was imperative that legislatures shared best practices and solutions in relation to the use of AI. There was sensitivity around communicating awareness of cyber-threats, but it was questioned why governments seem so reluctant to acknowledge malicious international interventions. A risk-based approach was favoured.

Day 1

2nd Plenary: Decentralised Finance DeFi (International finance and legal framework)

Portfolio Director Damien Burns and Hon Mark Brooks MLC (SHG) set out the case for introducing a DeFi model in St Helena. They outlined a proposal being worked on for consideration by the Government. They were scoping an offshore offering because of St Helena's other limited export options. They did not intend to become a tax haven but aspired to increase revenue, become less aid dependent and to attract more people to work in the sector. They stressed that St Helena was in the early stages and not rushing in, but was talking to experts. The Island would be taking cautious steps in whichever direction it opted for.

The panel discussed beneficial ownership rules and noted there was a quarterly meeting on illicit finance across the Overseas Territories, so the challenges were well known. There was also a dedicated team in the UK Treasury and Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office to help with beneficial ownership rules.

Hon Roy Clinton and Hon Giovanni Origo from Gibraltar cautioned that the offshore finance sector had been 40 years in the building and was a multi-product sector, and that as a start-up St Helena would have no comparative advantage. They suggested focusing on a unique selling point.

St Helena's Attorney General David Ballantyne agreed that caution was needed and was sceptical that a definitive scheme had been formulated. When considering risks versus opportunities no comparative advantage for St Helena had been identified. Without beneficial ownership he was concerned about the legal liability in the case of disputes between buyer and seller. Whilst he applauded innovation, he was in favour of reliable and safe systems for the benefit of St Helena.

Day 2 (St Helena Day)

As it was a public holiday delegates visited different sites around the island including Napoleon's Tomb and House at Longwood, Plantation House – home to the Governor and Jonathan, the world's oldest tortoise - and High Knoll Fort. They also were able to view St Helena's spectacular landscape, coastline, flora and fauna, including St Helena's indigenous wire birds.



All photo credit: CPA HQ

Day 3

The role of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians network

Helen Haywood, Secretary to the BIMR Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Steering Committee opened by explaining the role of the Committee and the activities it organised and participated in. She encouraged all women parliamentarians in the region to get involved, and for the members of the Committee to share the opportunities with their female colleagues. Deputy Mary Le Hegarat (Jersey) reported on her attendance at the Women Political Leaders' Summit in Belgium where she had networked widely and heard from many inspirational women politicians on a variety of topics.

Hon Gillian Brooks MLC (St Helena) spoke about her advocacy on island such as talking to young women in the local High School to get them thinking about whether they could be the parliamentarians of tomorrow. She stressed the importance of promoting gender equality, rather than there being advantages to either men or women.

Natasha Asghar MS (Wales) spoke about the strong tie-ins with CWP from her own parliamentary experiences including through the Senedd Women's Caucus and in Senedd reform where gender quotas were being considered.



Photo credit: CPA HQ

A number of St Helena's former parliamentarians and women from other Island sectors attended the session and pointed to the long and strong tradition of women's political and economic participation in St Helena.

The wider discussion brought in contributions on a range of issues which highlighted the necessity of continued focus on gender equality in politics as championed through the CWP. These contributions included how parliaments needed to introduce more structural provisions to support women parliamentarians, such as maternity leave, working with young women to ensure a pipeline into politics and the role of social media which creates new barriers to participation because of the toxic online culture. Delegates agreed that as the number of women in parliaments increased there was a danger of complacency. Internationally the number of women in parliaments was still on 25%, and women were leaving politics because of entrenched and new deterrents.

Day 3

3rd Plenary: Green Energy Solutions

This plenary considered how parliaments can generate energy with a significantly reduced carbon footprint. All parliaments represented were striving to increase their jurisdiction's supply of renewable energy. Each was at a different stage in this journey.

Renewable technologies for generating electricity were listed and discussed. Demand reduction was one kind of "green energy solution" raised. It could be pursued through efficiency (such as insulation, which needed funding) and through behavioural change, and thus education (such as switching off lights). It was agreed that the technology implemented would depend on the jurisdiction and timeframe.

Storage of energy was identified as a significant challenge. Existing solutions included lithium batteries and hydrogen. These were expected to improve. While efforts had been made in many jurisdictions to encourage the manufacturing and adoption of new electric vehicles, there remained unanswered questions about how to re-use old electric vehicles and their batteries.

The role of government was understood as creating an environment in which green energy solutions could flourish. This included dealing with the national grid, spatial planning (on land and at sea) and provision of financial incentives.

It was noted that these responsibilities extended to energy security, which encompassed not only security of the supply of energy but also security of the supply of the raw materials needed.



Photo credit: CPA HQ

Some jurisdictions might aspire to self-sufficiency, but others would continue to need importation as part of the mix. This brought international relations to the fore.

Parliaments' accountability on behalf of voters and taxpayers was recognised. The need for balance was discussed; members should represent the concerns of their constituents but should also acknowledge the challenges faced and the underlying reasons for unpopular decisions.

Day 3

4th Plenary: Social Housing (Group A)

Discussion centered on the role of parliaments in addressing the challenges to sustainable housing. A holistic approach was put forward, integrating economic, environmental, social and technological considerations, alongside effective policy frameworks and community engagement strategies.

Key themes of this plenary included the shortage of housing across the Commonwealth, rising costs of accommodation, and the impact of new housing on communities. On the issue of housing shortages, it was agreed that problems were exacerbated by long waiting lists for social housing, with many never receiving a home. Planning restrictions added to this delay. The issue of private developers was raised, and their role in (often) unsustainable construction.

It was noted that rising costs are a consequence of domestic and external activity, such as the housing shortage, private interests, and international conflict. These hikes had not equated to quality homes, as many were cramped and subject to poor standards. Delegates discussed the impact on individuals' health and wellbeing, in addition to their lack of security as renters.



Photo credit: CPA HQ

Delegates proposed long-term governmental involvement, particularly in the supply and control of housing, as a solution to the housing problems. The role of local authorities in providing social housing was also considered, linking to the importance of creating communities as well as homes.

The impact of new homes was addressed. New developments put pressure on local infrastructure and facilities, highlighting another area of investment. It was proposed that mixed developments (a blend of private and social housing) could be a solution, alongside developer contributions to social housing. Considerations extended to the type of house being built, including provisions for the elderly and disabled persons.

Delegates concluded that “Home is the foundation for the rest of your life” and its importance could not be understated.

Day 3

Population (Group B)

An ageing population was a complex challenge facing policy makers and legislators in the BIMR. This session explored its implications and the actions being taken to mitigate these.

The significance of this challenge was addressed across legislatures. Delegates agreed that each jurisdiction faces the same common problems – Scotland had published a population strategy to try and address this. The importance of a healthy population and supply of working-age people was emphasised. The issue of outward migration was also discussed; Guernsey had set up meetings with those returning to their island, but this had not solved the issue.

The problem of shortages in care and hospitality was raised, stemming from issues of pay and unsociable hours. Guernsey had gone further afield for workers, improving this situation while also changing the makeup of their society. Others, like St Helena, had struggled sourcing labour as low wages remained a deterrent. Providing accommodation to foreign workers was also recognised as a shared problem.

Another key theme was the housing crisis and struggles with affordability. Home ownership was identified as the most popular encouragement for young people to remain in their home country. In St Helena, many citizens had children living elsewhere and expense prevented them from relocating back. It was agreed that jurisdictions experiencing this issue must consider their unique selling point to increase external interest.



Photo credit: CPA HQ

Day 4

5th Plenary: Climate Emergency

This plenary looked at the actions taken to mitigate the impacts of climate change, and parliaments' role in navigating those challenges.

Hon. Daphne Caine (Isle of Man) shared her declaration of a climate emergency after being elected. She outlined the Isle of Man's UNESCO protected status and the action plan devised, including decarbonisation by 2030. The importance of public engagement and shared learning was also highlighted, as investment in flood defences had proven controversial. Daphne Caine acknowledged that travelling to the conference to discuss climate change may have been difficult to justify.

Damien Moore MP (UK) discussed the need to balance green targets with economic considerations. Climate policies should not burden people further. This could be achieved through gradual transition, tax incentives and promoting local green economies. Collaboration was reiterated but it was acknowledged that not one size fits all. Daphne Caine referred to the green living grant scheme in the Isle of Man, as an example of accessible change. Two thirds of home developers had voluntarily shifted to green initiatives, ratifying this approach to public demand.

Mike Durnford, Environmental Risk Manager for St Helena, spoke of the development of policy and strategy for climate change on the island, introduced in 2019. This helped to raise awareness and initiate projects, such as the Cloud Forest preservation scheme. St Helena had also introduced environmental studies into the school curriculum. Mike Durnford concluded that incorporating climate change mitigation into frontline services was key, alongside an emphasis on education.

Sarah Boyack MSP (Scotland) considered how to encourage the public and accelerate progress. The need for engagement and accountability was discussed, particularly within local communities. The importance of education for both parliamentarians and the public were also noted. Mitigating the fear element was seen as a critical aspect of this strategy. Delegates agreed that officials needed to trust the experts, as well as ensure a collaborative approach with neighbours.

Delegates acknowledged the difficulties that green technologies could bring. These ranged from grid instability to the ability of infrastructure to cope with changes. The current division of funding between research and active implementation of climate policy also presented an issue. The interconnectedness of global systems and the subsequent duty of collaboration were acknowledged throughout the plenary.

Day 4

6th Plenary: Tourism Development

The panel discussion covered sustainable tourism practices and marketing strategies, with consideration of legislatures' position in the post-covid travel industry. There was a focus on St Helena, including its dependency on financial aid, and the restriction this brings. To this end, tourism was concluded as the key to national development.

Matthew Joshua from Tourism (SHG), detailed previous restrictions to St Helena's accessibility. Flights were introduced in 2017 but Covid meant that 2023 was only the third year of tourism. The absence of other significant industries presented another challenge. Although benefits included its diverse tourist product and cross-sectional appeal, it was acknowledged that mass tourism would not be welcome, due to the delicate ecosystem.

Hon. Gillian Brooks (St Helena) raised the importance of provider growth, including infrastructure. In St Helena, island-wide training had been implemented, focusing on hospitality services. Accommodation was another consideration, exacerbated by the rise of Airbnb and similar companies. Cruise ships and infrastructure investment were put forward as potential solutions. Increasing destination awareness was at the forefront of this discussion, particularly regarding US engagement.

The impact of post-Covid tourism on UK legislatures was discussed. Steve Aiken MLA reported a positive story of economic development in Northern Ireland, although challenges of staff retention and connectivity remained. In Scotland, economic growth coincided with issues of inflation and service supply.

Damien Moore MP (UK) highlighted the need for sustainable tourism, brought to the fore by the pandemic. This involved an emphasis on local products, as well as improvements to accessibility and infrastructure in these areas. Hon. Giovanni Origo referred to Gibraltar in this instance, as mass tourism is tackled through tourism taxes that fund environmental protections. He pointed to the flourishing marine ecosystem, demonstrating preservation through regulation.

Hon Andrew Turner (St Helena) discussed what role the state should have in the development of tourism strategy. Minimal intervention was recommended as the state is not the expert. Discussion turned to the spending of tourism income, local versus regional strategies, and the importance of the private sector in tourism development. The ongoing challenge of a universal approach was highlighted, particularly considering the need for post-Covid revival. Delegates concluded that politicians need to be more aware of issues on the ground, reiterating the value of community engagement.

Day 4

7th Plenary: Marine Environment Workshop

This plenary considered the severe impacts of biodiversity loss on marine ecosystems and the activities carried out by BIMR legislatures to ensure the sustainable future of the marine environment.

Kirsty Jones, Marine & Fisheries Conservation Officer in St Helena, introduced the new Marine Management Plan for the island. Staff from the St Helena National Trust detailed the Trust's background and the recent inclusion of marine matters, such as the implementation of the Marine Plastic project. Despite it being a "marine hotspot", several issues were highlighted including the decline of the whale shark population.

Discussion

Delegates discussed environmental initiatives, including pollution monitoring and plastic issues. Neil Thop (St Helena National Trust) detailed the objective of working with colleagues on Ascension Island to further plastic analysis in marine life. A Marine Debris Tracker was already in place, to manage the boat pollution and fast currents. The issue of sand dredging was raised, although Kirsty Jones (SHG) explained that sustainable use of resources minimised its impact.

Sewage disposal in St Helena was addressed, as an absence of sewage treatment plants had meant that raw sewage was discharged into the ocean – representing a big issue for the island's government. However, water quality assessments had concluded that there was no health or environmental concern, with regular monitoring carried out by Environmental Health officials. One delegate from the Isle of Man pointed out that most homes in the Isle of Man have septic tanks.

Action taken for inshore pollution was discussed, focusing on brine disposal and the option of desalination. While nothing was in place thus far, delegates from St Helena acknowledged that care was needed. Work on early warning systems was in motion. The issue of research versus action was recognised, as was the issue of limited funding. Hon Karl Thrower (St Helena) reasoned that funding for research was vital to identify the most urgent needs.

Darren Duncan, SHG Portfolio Director of Environment, Natural Resources & Planning, depicted a fragmented approach by the government. SHG had a series of policies and legislation, as well as a Maritime Advisory Board, but more needed to be done to ensure a united effort. Blue Belt Funding had enabled offshore monitoring of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), while use of thermal imaging detection was identified as a cost-effective approach. Engagement between St Helena and other agencies, including the UK government, was raised by Attorney General David Ballantyne, to better understand the varying requirements and economic needs.

Day 4

Discussion turned to the ongoing monitoring of climate and sea temperatures, and data analysis taking place across the island. Marine data collection was noted as relatively new. Baroness Hooper (UK) spoke of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Ocean in the UK and suggested that a presentation on St Helena would be of great interest. Kirsty Jones detailed the partnership with the University of Plymouth.

7th Plenary: Workshop B Scrutiny Committees

Delegates discussed the importance of scrutiny of government and the subsequent challenges involved.

Lord Lisvane (UK) recognised scrutiny committees' constitutional importance but also noted their inconvenience. For bodies being scrutinised, it can be time consuming, expensive, and reputationally exposing, with defensiveness making scrutiny harder. Evidence-based conclusions can help combat this, as they aid consensus and encourage objectivity. Lord Lisvane advised a minimalist approach toward subject selection, as well as questioning. He recommended that committee members stick to the brief to ensure the correct information is obtained and relevant preparation has been done.

Dame Meg Hillier MP (UK) explained how committees can improve behaviour in the system, using the UK as an example. The expectation of a committee report was key, as was follow up. Teamwork, transparency, and inclusion were emphasised, to create an environment where good scrutiny is rewarded. Dame Meg also addressed correct procedure, including management of members' time. She gave the example of Committee buddying in Westminster. Reports must incorporate discussion beforehand, involving revisions by clerks and the Committee. Her conclusion reiterated the importance of trust well-handled, in its promotion of transparency and accountability.

The PAC Chair (St Helena), Mark Yon, spoke of the challenge of limited resources. Scrutiny was crucial for authorities' accountability, but restrictions impede good oversight. Staff shortages were identified, as some committees relied only on secretarial support. Delegates concluded that more staff and support was needed, alongside a sound framework of procedures. Education for new members was also suggested. Mark Yon recommended a good relationship between the Public Accounts Committee Chair and the Chief Auditor, as their expertise can aid meaningful discussions with the government, as well as networking opportunities. Good collaboration with other jurisdictions was discussed and recommended and the support given to St Helena by CPA UK's UK Overseas Territories Project was recognised.

Delegates spoke of their legislatures' approach to committees. Deputy Mary Le Hagarat drew on her committee experience as Chair of Health and Social Care Committee in Jersey.

Day 4

She reiterated the value of evidence-based information and the wider opportunities for learning available. Jeremy Balfour MSP detailed the Scottish Parliament's journey, with the politicisation of committees creating divided reports. He questioned how to return, looking at the training of new members without political baggage. Hon. Roy Clinton relayed a similar problem in Gibraltar, as his urgent recommendation for a Public Accounts Committee was conceived as a weapon of the opposition. He advocated for constitutional reform to address this issue.

The importance of committee resources was raised. Tynwald Clerk Jonathan King outlined the benefits of Hansard, providing ease for reading and cross-referencing. Public scrutiny meetings were increasing in the Isle of Man, but the Hansard team had been reduced, thus requiring better use of technology. Hon. Karl Thrower highlighted the lack of independent expertise in small legislatures, as accessing advice when formulating recommendations was trickier. St Helena Clerk Anita Legg recommended setting up a Parliamentary Services Commission to become more independent from government.

Day 5

8th Plenary: Improving Agriculture Productivity

Discussion centered on how legislatures can promote mechanisms that increase agricultural productivity through sustainable practices, thereby providing education and support to farmers.

Beginning with St Helena, mechanisms explored included support schemes and land letting. Regarding improving livestock, artificial insemination and importation were potential solutions, as well as funding the clearance of invasive plant species. Support schemes were suggested for the improvement of productivity in the arable sector, alongside further agronomic services.

Across the British Islands and Mediterranean Region, ministers had prioritised agriculture, but it was recognised that self-sustainability may never be fully achieved. Efforts included pesticide services, where training ensures strict guidelines are followed. Hydroponics had also been trialled in St Helena, with the result of increased production. The challenges of a changing climate were highlighted, such as the decline of snow in the Falklands. In Guernsey, where dairy farming was prevalent, state-owned farms had been proposed as the key to agricultural survival. The need for change within the farming community was reiterated, involving new methods. Issues of cost were raised, particularly in the continuation of hydroponics.

Youth engagement in farming was noted as a challenge throughout the plenary. In the Falklands, the introduction of an apprentice scheme had interest from far afield and cooperation had been pursued through the renamed Rural Business Association. The National Farmers Union in Wales was also given as an example as demonstrating good practice to engage more young people in farming.

Delegates concluded that there were no quick fixes to improving agriculture productivity but a gradual change to public mindset was needed. Support to farmers and funding was a continued necessity.

Day 5

Final Plenary: Benefits of a Youth Parliament

Hon. Rosemary Bargo MLC (St Helena) outlined the plenary's focus, which looked to examine the benefits of Youth Parliaments. Parliaments' roles in fostering youth empowerment and civic engagement were also considered.

Delegates compared their jurisdictions' approach to youth engagement. Clerk Lesley Hogg spoke of the Youth Assembly in Northern Ireland, which mirrored the legislative programme in the Assembly. Formed of 90 members, this was a unique model that has faced challenges of time and expense. She stressed the breadth of its involvement, alongside its focus on inclusive representation.

As a young parliamentarian and Chair of the youth wing of his party, Hon. Giovanni Origo spoke of the importance of youth participation, whether representative or electoral. Gibraltar's size meant that youth engagement had been often restricted to local politics, although young people remained the most disengaged demographic. Hon Giovanni Origo questioned how youth engagement could be furthered.

Delegates with Youth Parliamentarian experience advocated the model and recounted the skills they had gained. Deputy Samuel Mezec shared Jersey's approach, involving the Jersey Youth Parliament and the annual Jersey Youth Assembly. Selene Gough and Shanice Phillips advocated for this model in St Helena. They hoped to create structured opportunities for young people to engage with local parliamentarians and express their views. Young people were often disengaged and continued to leave the island. These challenges were echoed by Hon. Karl Thrower, who, alongside Deputy Samuel Mezec, endorsed youth participation as a means of empowerment.

Two main areas of concern for young people in St Helena were highlighted: educational uncertainty and employment difficulties, as extensive work experience was not possible. Year 10 students from Prince Andrew School in St Helena agreed that a Youth Parliament would give young people a voice. It would give them the skills they needed to interact in the world and the workplace – problems that were often overlooked by politicians. A vision for the St Helena Youth Parliament would focus on empowerment, professional development opportunities, and fair representation. The target audience for participation in the Youth Parliament would be 11–25-year-olds. It was agreed that social media could be used to share the outcomes.

Delegates concluded that engagement with young people is key for all parliamentarians, extending to opportunities for exchange across the Region. The importance of reaching marginalised groups was highlighted, with female delegates from St Helena drawing on their personal experiences of inclusion. Delegates noted the sense of community present in St Helena, and the value of this in encouraging engagement and cooperation.

Day 5

Closing Ceremony and Presentation of Gifts

The Conference formally closed with closing remarks from Chief Minister Hon. Julie Thomas and Deputy Speaker of the St Helena Legislative Council, Hon. Catherine Harris Cranfield.

Delegates were unanimous in their praise for the hosts in having organised and facilitated a thought-provoking, informative and varied set of discussions, with visible collaboration and allyship.

Delegates are encouraged to share with the CPA BIMR Secretariat (cpauk@parliament.uk) instances of continuing collaboration because of the Conference.



Photo credit: CPA HQ

Acknowledgements

With thanks to the CPA St Helena Branch for all their hard work in hosting their first CPA Conference, and for their warm welcome and unwavering hospitality. With special thanks to the Working Group tasked with organising the Conference including Deputy Speaker Hon. Cathy Harris Cranfield, Hon. Ronald Coleman, Hon. Dr Corinda Essex, Hon. Christine Scipio and also Clerk Anita Legg whose hard work was in evidence throughout the Conference.

Thank you to the Governor Nigel Phillips CBE and Mrs Phillips for hosting a reception at Plantation House, and the many local people and businesses who provided contributions to discussions, goods and services and went out of their way to respond to many varied questions and requests.

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