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Employment regulations

In numerous meetings held to date, Social Development Planner, Mrs Anne Muir, met with organisations, employers, and employees, and it became obvious, that, at this point in time, there are not sufficient data available, to reliably identify the shortfalls in local labour relations, which could be addressed by legislation.

In principle, clear regulations in labour relations are necessary, as they provide both employers and employees with clear terms of reference, guiding both parties in cases of conflict.

Strangely, in her research, key elements of modern labour legislation are deliberately omitted, namely all issues relating to medical/health insurance cover for employees as well as anything relating to pension schemes.

Worldwide, labour policies relate to the specific issues of a given economic environment. As a starting point, Anne presented local players with a rather random collection of legal elements of labour legislation, as they are common in the European setting, trying to measure these against St. Helenian conditions.

Reasonably, policy and legislation should not address issues which do not play a role here, but should focus on prevailing problems, with mechanisms to amend legislation as problems arise.

For example, one of Anne's points is the issue of a "minimum wage", which was hotly contended in Europe a few years ago, and European trades unions pride themselves rightly in having achieved legislation in this regard in most European countries. All European countries are plagued by high unemployment rates, which many employers used unfairly to lower wages against the background of millions of available job-seekers. Here, this is not an issue at all, since we have a serious labour shortage on the island, which puts all employees in a quite favourable bargaining position.

What concerns us most here, is the fact that not all employers have



**We have just enough
capital to keep this startup
running until this afternoon.
So, work fast.**

written contracts with their staff – regulating basic terms and conditions of employment. In Europe, no-one can be formally employed without the employer providing a safe-guard against temporary or permanent disablement.

In principle, it is very commendable to regulate labour relations, which will provide a higher degree of transparency and fairness, and prepare the local economy to leave medieval times behind and match up to other economies, which we want to open up to and with which we can interact vibrantly.

RMS schedule concept

The Chamber of Commerce has been concerned for many years about the current pattern of movements of the RMS as contained in the current shipping schedule. We have therefore recently sought the opinion of our membership as well as seeking the views of senior figures and entrepreneurs in the private sector.

The result of this exercise has confirmed that there is overwhelming support within the business community for a change in the schedule to abandon calls to the UK and to make more regular calls to Walvis Bay as well as



continuing with regular calls to Cape Town and Ascension. Walvis Bay is the cheapest and often the fastest destination for international transit into and out of St Helena. Such a change in schedule would significantly increase the number of calls per year to St Helena improving international access opportunities.

Increasing the number of calls to the Island is becoming significantly more important as the ship is now often fully booked many months into the future. Opportunities for Saints, investors, tourists, specialists to enter/exit St Helena are becoming increasingly difficult. There are examples of residents who require, in some cases, life saving treatment and who cannot access this due to the ship being away to/from UK, leaving the Island effectively abandoned for 5 weeks at a time. Patients can wait up to 6+ weeks for attention.

SHG is reluctant to change the schedule from its current pattern, citing the profitable trips south bound from Portland as a reason for no change. In addition, the historical emotional attachment associated with the ship visiting the UK has prevailed.

BUT is this position really best serving the Island?

Most of our members from the Chamber of Commerce and the consulted senior representatives from the SHDA say "NO".

The Island is isolated/ abandoned for 10 weeks every year, leaving many businesses to languish. The shops run short of items, particularly perishable goods, that cannot be stockpiled due to sell by dates running out.

"Improved Access" is SHG's own adopted Number 1 Strategic Objective. The need for more reliable and frequent access has been proven through the economic analysis supporting the air access project. Why then does SHG refuse to move from its current position?

As we move closer (hopefully) to the building of the airport, the need for specialists, investors, contractor representatives, consultants etc to visit the Island will significantly increase. Investors will not be prepared to wait 12 months for an RMS booking. They will go elsewhere!! AND what chance have the rest of us of getting a booking?

We have submitted a report and an extract from a draft schedule to the Governor in Council covering these matters. We will not hold our breath for the anticipated disappointing response. We sincerely hope that we are pleasantly surprised.



Visit by the new Financial Secretary

At our Council meeting in March, several presenters were invited to attend, including our new Financial Secretary, Ms Virginia Grace.

She has previously worked with PriceWaterhouseCooper, and been Finance Director for an organisation related to social housing, and she believes that her experience, spanning public and private sectors, is particularly suited to St. Helena.

In answer to one question, she said that there is no specific plan to modernise SHG accounting practices in terms of automation, efficiency or recharging, but there are plans to move to an accruals basis for accounting (which will take some time) and to review the SHG budgeting procedure.

If you have any concern you wish raised at Chamber Council, please contact one of Council members, or email the Secretary on CofCommerce@cwimail.sh

Tax Consultant

Visiting tax consultant, John Hayes, is here on island and working with the Tax Office and the Financial Secretary over the next 8 months or so. He says that he's not here just to advise, but to have concrete plans developed and implemented.

John will be a guest of the Chamber at the April Council meeting. We are also planning to hold a public meeting, hosted by the Chamber of Commerce, at which any concerns and ideas can be aired and discussed. Chamber members will be receiving an outline of his Terms of Reference before the meeting, which should act as a catalyst for discussion.

Meadow Muffins by Beau Vine

Fortunately, dependable capability implies that traditional realism enriches non-trivial expediency.

Please note: All members are always welcome to sit in on Council meetings. In general, we hold a meeting on the first Tuesday of each month, at 4.30pm in the Jamestown Community Centre. We will also try to announce meetings to members by email.

Next meeting: 1st April 2008