

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Future of the UK Overseas Territories, HC 1464](#)

Wednesday 5 December 2018

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Members present: Tom Tugendhat (Chair); Ian Austin; Mike Gapes; Ian Murray; Priti Patel; Andrew Rosindell; Royston Smith.

Questions 162-220

Witnesses

I: Hon. Victor F. Banks, Chief Minister of Anguilla, Hon. Donaldson Romeo, Premier of Montserrat, Hon. Sharlene Cartwright Robinson, Premier of the Turks and Caicos Islands, and Hon. Ms. Teslyn Barkman, Member of the Falkland Islands Legislative Assembly.

II: Councillor Leslie Jaques OBE, Government of Pitcairn Islands, Councillor Derek Thomas, Member of the St Helena Legislative Assembly, Mr Ian Lavarello, Chief Islander of Tristan da Cunha, and Councillor Keturah George, Ascension Island Council.

Written evidence from witnesses:

[The West India Committee](#)

[Donaldson Romeo](#)

[Falkland Islands Government](#)

[Elected Members of the St Helena Legislative Council](#)

[Chief Islander of Tristan da Cunha](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Hon. Victor F. Banks, Hon. Donaldson Romeo, Hon. Sharlene Cartwright Robinson and Hon. Ms. Teslyn Barkman.

Q162 **Chair:** Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for coming to this afternoon's session of the Foreign Affairs Committee. It is very good to see you here, and extremely good of you to give up so much of your time to help our inquiry. As you know, we are going to ask for two-minute statements from each of you to set out your position. Of course there is a lot to cover, but I would be very grateful if you stuck to time. We will then get on to questions, so a lot of things may come out in questioning afterwards. Perhaps I could ask you to start, Chief Minister, given that you are on the left.

Victor F. Banks: Thank you for giving me this opportunity. We did not co-ordinate, so I am not sure what my colleagues are going to say. I thought I would be rather general with my comments and speak to the issue of the relationship—what it means to be British as an Overseas Territory.

In Anguilla, we have been in a relationship with the United Kingdom since 1650, and we need to know where we go from here. We are not foreign; neither are we members of the Commonwealth, so we should have a different interface with the UK that is based on mutual respect. That would have the advantage of addressing in a practical way the anomalies with citizenship, the issues of student opportunities, and trade with and in the UK. It would also lead to better perception across the UK Government and the UK public and, of course, within the territories themselves, so as to avoid any kind of disaffection.

I want to make a couple of proposals, because I think it is important when we make a criticism always to make some suggestions about how best to advance our concerns. I would like us to consider a more appropriate department to interface with Anguilla, such as the Cabinet Office, as we are neither a foreign state nor a member of the Commonwealth. I would like a Minister to be appointed with the British Overseas Territories as their sole brief. This should increase the accountability of HMG and safeguard the Overseas Territories' democratic processes and protect against undue influence from elsewhere. This should be built into the system to ensure that there is a progression of democracy.

Reclassify the Overseas Territories, separating them and introducing a new rank of countries of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for the more viable and advanced British Overseas Territories, in support of a global Britain. In doing so, protect the autonomy of the democratically elected Governments of the territories.

Introduce a citizens' charter between HMG and the citizens of the British Overseas Territories to enhance transparency and introduce accountability for the execution of the duty of care they are owed by Her Majesty's Government, whose actions affect their lives and livelihoods. Revise the role of Governor and nominate candidates from a wider base of skills and

experience, beyond that of the UK civil service, thereby reducing exposure to potential conflicts of interest and increasing the value of the roles of the UK and the territory alike.

Q163 **Chair:** Chief Minister, forgive me. I know that you have submitted all this in written evidence, for which we are hugely grateful. We are trying to get through this as quickly as possible. Is that all right?

Victor F. Banks: There are two more.

Chair: Go for it—very quickly.

Victor F. Banks: Ensure that there is improved institutional memory and training about the Overseas Territories within HMG and Parliament, and increase awareness among the UK public as a whole, possibly through education. Finally, bindingly commit to the development of the British Overseas Territories to ensure equal life chances and standards of living for every British citizen residing in any British nation in accordance with global Britain.

Q164 **Chair:** Thank you. We are very grateful, Chief Minister. Member of the Legislative Assembly, would you like to go next?

Ms Barkman: Thank you. I represent the Falkland Islands and our Government. It is important that the constitutional relationship between the UK Government and its Overseas Territories is routinely reviewed. It is vital that the relationship reflects the present realities in both the UK and its Overseas Territories. In the light of that, and in the light of Brexit in particular and other recent events, we welcome this inquiry. Thank you for your time today.

As the Falkland Islands have developed to become internally self-governing and economically self-sufficient, our relationship with the UK has transformed from one of dependence to one that supports mutual benefit and low contingent liability risk to the UK taxpayer. Whether it is providing a base for UK armed forces in the south Atlantic, providing opportunities for UK companies to participate in major capital projects, or being home to a significant proportion of the UK's biodiversity, the Falkland Islands increasingly see our relationship with the UK as a partnership, and one that the UK can have increasing confidence in.

FIG has a track record of fiscal responsibility and transparency. The Falkland Islands are proven stewards of our environment. FIG are responsible and proactive in respect to resource management, human rights and good governance. At times, however, they have not felt that this is reflected. Rather than being seen as partners, proactively a part or engaged—possibly because of our population, which is slightly smaller than that of some of the other Overseas Territories—we are in some ways more managed by officials in the FCO.

Over recent years, the Falkland Islands have repeatedly demonstrated that we are a reliable, responsible and valued member of the UK family.

As such, we believe that our relationship with the UK should reflect that maturing governance and increasing institutional and fiscal capacity.

Our constitution should not be set in stone—it is a living document. Over time, we will be engaging, through the usual process, to review this document to ensure it is fit for purpose. This is a natural progression that we would like to see reflect how the UK Government interact with the devolved Administrations of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and, increasingly, larger regions and cities in England.

It is important to highlight that, in March 2013, 99.8% of Falkland islanders, on a turnout of 92%—I am reiterating the point, but I am sure you know it—voted to remain a self-governing Overseas Territory of the United Kingdom. That remains the settled and very powerful voice of Falkland Islanders.

On engagement, we are looking to develop the way in which the Falkland Islands Government engage with the UK Government in particular. An example of where this has been particularly useful has been a positive effect of the current situation that Brexit has brought for the Falkland Islands. Obviously, we have a powerful potential area of risk with regard to trade, but we have seen that engagement from UK Ministers and senior officials, with officials and regional and local politicians abroad, has been very strong—engaging on a first-person basis. We would like to see that kind of closer direct contact encouraged and reiterated.

I am conscious of time, so I may just finish my slightly long-winded statement there.

Q165 Chair: You are very kind. Thank you very much. Premier, would you like to speak?

Sharlene Cartwright Robinson: Thank you very much. I appreciate the platform. Today, I am appearing on behalf of the Turks and Caicos Islands. With me is the Deputy Premier of the Turks and Caicos Islands.

We have had a rather tumultuous relationship in the last decade or so with the United Kingdom Government. Not too long ago, we had the unfortunate experience of having our country's constitution suspended and replaced by a regressive constitution so, near our 40-year anniversary of ministerial government, our concern over that time has always been that there is no genuineness on the part of HMG for progression, for a progressive constitution or for allowing elected Governments to do more.

Recently, we submitted some constitutional proposals. We expect to engage with the UK on that. While we appreciate the challenges that gave rise in the UK's mind to the suspension of our constitution, the constitution always allowed for built-in oversight by the Governor who, equally, must be held accountable for any blame or breaches. We share responsibility, but we also believe that the rising cost of the SIPT trial is difficult for us to bear—we are approaching \$100 million, which is for the SIPT trial alone, not the civil recovery programme. Following the storm, we still put in

almost \$10 million towards the operational expenses of the trial, which was difficult for us.

We would like to see the involvement of UK Overseas Territories in the selection of Governors, in particular looking at their backgrounds. Some of the backgrounds have literally been at odds with the diplomatic rule of government, of Governors towards local governments. We would also like to see on the review a Governor who is always in-territory during his term, while he is performing his remit under the constitution. That is important, because we do not have responsibility for external and internal security, so the police operate pretty much in silos. As elected members of Government, people look to us, but we have no recourse as such in the strategic direction—not necessarily the operational direction—of the police force.

We are concerned about the constitutional over-reach that transpired in the House not long ago—the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Bill. We are a democratically elected Parliament and we expect to be treated with much more respect in terms of looking at things that can impact negatively on our economy and way of life.

Finally, we are of course concerned, as are all other Overseas Territories, with the post-Brexit loss of funding that we will experience following removal or withdrawal from the EU. We currently benefit from the EDF 11, and we had benefit from 9 and 10 towards our business transformation and infrastructure projects. We now have support for our education sector. Of course, as small islands, we are also prone to the worst impact of climate change, so we would expect as well that there will be some level of funding for us in the Caribbean—Overseas Territories in particular, which have just recently suffered in the storm—to rebuild, and to rebuild resiliently, looking at climate change action throughout all the Overseas Territories and at disaster risk reduction. Thank you.

Q166 Chair: Thank you. Premier.

Donaldson Romeo: Thank you, Chair and Committee, for this opportunity. We share similar concerns to those that the other territories mentioned, but our main concern is with the way in which aid has been delivered to Montserrat over the past 23 years.

The UK Government have said that, acting in accordance with article 73 of the UN charter, the UK has an international and legally binding responsibility to meet the urgent basic and development needs of the British Overseas Territories. To meet those legal responsibilities, the British Government's own policies state that Montserrat is eligible for overseas development aid and, as a British Overseas Territory, has first call on Her Majesty's \$12 billion aid budget. I have therefore been puzzled by the dealings of the British Government with Montserratians throughout this volcanic crisis and beyond. Why, at the beginning of the crisis, did the British Government consistently withhold from Montserratians critical scientific information on volcanic activity and adequate aid for basic necessities such as food and decent shelter? Some 20 years ago Her



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Majesty's coroner, in his comments on the deaths of 18 persons caused by the volcano, described Her Majesty's Government's delivery of aid to Montserrat as "unimaginative, grudging and tardy".

Why is that still painfully relevant? Why have the British Government, by their inadequate and often untimely delivery of aid, exposed themselves to accusations of having caused or forced Montserratians to leave the island, and thus, sadly, to accusations of committing a crime against humanity? Why have Her Majesty's Government, intentionally or not, consistently delayed providing for both basic and development needs, stunting our economy, compelling our youth to leave and exiles to stay away, including thousands in involuntary exile in Britain? Why is it still said that there are insufficient funds for key infrastructure when, as I have said before, Montserrat has first call on that \$12 billion budget? It would help to free Montserrat from a 23-year dependency on the British taxpayer for 60% of its recurrent budget. Why is our hospital, two decades on, still housed in an ageing school building? Why has there not been a housing programme funded by DFID in the last 16 years, when after 20-plus years, there are still hundreds on the island waiting for hurricane-resistant housing?

Might the answer lie in DFID'S declaration that it focuses on ending extreme poverty? Could it be that Montserratians are not poor enough to touch the heart of the piper who has called the tune for over two decades? Are we still seen as demanding golden elephants, when we are simply asking for long-overdue basics that any British person would consider normal? Have the Montserratians not "hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions...? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh?" And if you finally accept to invest in us rather than penny-pinching us into everlasting dependency, shall we not rise to the challenge? Thanks to Lord Ahmad and Lord Bates, we are presently discussing a five-year capital programme. It is time that we agreed on a real programme of action to create a civilised home for the British people of Montserrat. We stood on our own two feet before the crisis, and after 23 years of resilience training we are eager and able to do it again, with your help.

Chair: Thank you, premier. I will go straight into questions, if I may. I am very grateful for your initial statements. Not every question is for every person; we will try to target them to ensure we get the most out of this.

Q167 Priti Patel: Thank you for your opening statements. It is good to hear from you all. We have not heard a great deal about the overall benefits of being a British Overseas Territory. We have heard a range of issues and challenges. Could you please, in the few minutes you have, extol the virtues, if there are some, of being a British Overseas Territory, whether or not you consider your territory to be part of the United Kingdom? As we will unpack during this evidence session, where do you think the areas of blockage exist on the very points you have already made in your representations? Premier, why don't we start with you?



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Donaldson Romeo: I would say the policies declared by the British Government and already in place are perfect; in fact, some refer to Montserrat particularly. However, Her Majesty's Government are not implementing the policies as they state them. Having first call on British aid is a tremendous advantage, but it does not really happen in real life.

Sharlene Cartwright Robinson: The ability to draw on UK resources following the storms, having the ship come in and the assistance we got from the UK military, was very critical. We do not think that everything is lost, which is why we want to strengthen the relationship, but I see the blockage in the fact that it is too much a matter of personalities. The policies are there. We have Ministers who come in and go out, but the same policies, and we have Ministers who are more engaging than others, who have the OTs at heart. I think I can speak for all of us about Lord Ahmad. He continues to be applauded by the Overseas Territories because he is more engaging, but it ought not to be about personalities; it must be about the institution of governance itself, between both countries.

Ms Barkman: For us, obviously we have an active sovereignty claim over the Falkland Islands, so probably the first and most obvious elephant in the room is to point out that we enjoy the protection of the self-determination of the people of the Falkland Islands, as a result of our being a British Overseas Territory, but it is important to note that that referendum result is because it is very much part of our national identity.

There are areas of mutual benefit here wherever you look, in terms of having the MoD present in the Falkland Islands. They have the ability to train in the best and most free place in the world to fly planes. In fact, we complain if they don't fly them loud and low enough. There is also a direct economic mutual benefit. We receive assistance in best practice to develop our economy in different areas. In turn, that benefits UK contractors, who, with the assurance from the UK Government, are keen to engage in the economic activities as well. A good example would be the burgeoning hydrocarbons industry. When we do draw first oil, which is certainly along the way, there will be an opportunity for UK contractors to draw \$7 billion of revenue directly from that development. There has been about \$2 billion so far that has gone directly to UK companies.

Other than that, we are an environment hub. Everyone is aware of the Falkland Islands penguins. We do marry sustainable use of our natural resources and our burgeoning economy very well. We are also a regional hub for climate change research and we invest a lot into that as the Government.

Victor F. Banks: There is a lot of good in our relationship. The only concern that we have is that there is a bit of the luck of the draw in terms of who you get as a Minister or who you get as a senior official or as a Governor. I must say that we have been fortunate since Hurricane Irma that we have got a Governor who we believe has been very engaged in assisting us and achieving our objectives and in understanding the issues that impact us, as well as in Lord Ahmad, who has been very involved and engaged in trying to find ways and means to assist us in going through the



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process. I must also mention you, Ms Patel, with regard to the statement you made about ODA eligibility, which has now come to be a very important aspect of the future for us. We are very happy for your hand in that process.

So there is a need for more certainty. There is a need to ensure—I mentioned this fact—that Governors should not just come from public service. They should come from other parts of the British Government or the country, with skills that are able to really deliver on what we need in the territories and that cause them to be more engaged, much like you do with ambassadors, I would think—make sure that they have a sense of the territory to which they are going. These are the things that are positive.

We don't want it to be the luck of the draw; we want it to be a relationship that is based on a certain level of certainty. I made a point about constitutional change. We continue to try to improve our constitutions and have more devolution of powers. At the end of the day, if the structure in the relationship does not change, it will be useless.

Q168 Mike Gapes: First, I declare an interest. I am chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Anguilla, which we set up this year. I want to ask a more general question, which follows on from the remarks about defence and security. It is very apparent with regard to the Falklands, but to all of you, do you consider that the UK should remain responsible for defence and security?

Victor F. Banks: Definitely. I don't think we have the capacity to deal with that, and those are areas that are important for us in maintaining the relationship with the UK Government. Obviously, we cannot fund a lot of those requirements for defence and security.

Ms Barkman: That is possibly pointed most at the Falkland Islands, so thank you for raising the question. It is one that we consider every day, in terms of the very welcome contribution that the UK MoD makes to the defence of the Falkland Islands. It is worth noting that the Falkland Islands Government contribute 1.3% of our GDP—that is on a par with the UK's own contribution of 1.8%—to the defence of the Falkland Islands, into developing MOU contracts and looking at other opportunities for co-development and contracting with the MoD. They are part of the Falkland Islands, even in terms of best practice policy strategy in areas such as waste management and trying to identify new power stations. We are always looking at opportunities to try to invest together.

I do think this is very relevant. Obviously, a community of just over 3,000 people is going to struggle to fend off a country of 40 million people with an active sovereignty claim; it is just basic maths. So thank you for drawing attention to that.

Chair: May I move us on, because we have only about 20 or 25 minutes left?

Sharlene Cartwright Robinson: You can't move on unless Turks and Caicos—



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Mike Gapes: You want to say something, Ms Cartwright Robinson—please do.

Sharlene Cartwright Robinson: We are a 40-island nation and a wide-open chain, so we are subjected—I have a Minister of Border Control—to anyone and everyone being able to come and breach our borders. That is what we face. We would not want all the responsibility. There are things that can be divested towards us, such as the strategic direction of the police force, as I say. But earlier this year, in March, we had about five illegal Haitian sloops that came in in four days, and we were able to call the UK and say, “We need back-up.” We got permission for the ship to come in and it served as a deterrent. We can’t afford the services that the UK can offer, but there are certain aspects that can be devolved to us.

Mike Gapes: We will hear from Mr Romeo briefly and then I will ask my next question.

Donaldson Romeo: It seems that we are all in agreement on that matter. It is a question of dealing with human trafficking and drug trafficking. Especially since the exclusion zones are away from our population—where we live—there is a tendency for vessels to come in and smuggle anything, and certainly that is beyond our resource. Recently the British Government have provided a vessel that has helped us. And we have no idea where terrorism will show its head, so certainly we need your support on that.

Q169 **Mike Gapes:** Thank you. One aspect of security was highlighted in the report that the Committee produced earlier in this Parliament. We talked about the role of dirty Russian laundered money in corruption and the attempt to destabilise our country and about financial crime having implications for our national security and for countries around the world. Do you agree that is also a security matter?

Sharlene Cartwright Robinson: Absolutely, and we have just concluded a strategy that addresses all of that.

Q170 **Mike Gapes:** Given that it is a security matter, why is there such resistance? Ms Cartwright Robinson, you referred to constitutional over-reach. Why is there such resistance to the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act—it has now become law—which has been introduced by our Parliament and agreed to by our Government, and will come into effect in 2020?

Sharlene Cartwright Robinson: Turks and Caicos have been early adopters. We have complied with every standard agreed, in terms of cost, time and resources. The amendment that was brought forward for public registers by 2020 is not a global standard. It actually negatively impacts our economy, because you are creating less than a level playing field. Anything that has been global we have complied with.

Q171 **Mike Gapes:** So you are saying that you would rather keep to the lowest common denominator rather than having high standards based on our rules—having best practice rather than going to the lowest level, which



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would presumably mean that it would be less effective?

Sharlene Cartwright Robinson: It couldn't be so much a low level, because it does not even extend to Crown Dependencies, so the UK must be interested in not just the OTs, but also the Crown Dependencies. What we are interested in is protecting our industry. We have complied with everything that we need to comply with. On anything that has been a global standard, you did not have a fight from us.

Q172 **Mike Gapes:** So if it also applied to the Crown Dependencies as well as the UK Overseas Territories, you would be happy with that, would you?

Sharlene Cartwright Robinson: If it applied to all of the persons that are competitors for us, an industry that we can grow in, if it is a global standard—

Q173 **Mike Gapes:** You are saying “lowest common denominator” then. You are saying that Panama, Delaware or some other jurisdiction would be able to determine what level of controls there are.

Sharlene Cartwright Robinson: I don't believe you think it is a low common denominator, either, as you would be fighting for the same standard to be upheld by Crown Dependencies. What we are saying is that there is an elected Government who are responsible for the economy. I am the Minister of Finance, and we are trying to grow that sector. We have never dodged away from any global standard. We do not entertain dirty money. We have a strategy where we are looking at all of that as a security issue, as I have just said to you, but it is not that we are looking at lower standards. We have complied with all global standards, and it is an industry where we need to ensure that we are on a level playing field. You have, by that decision, insulted the Parliament of the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Donaldson Romeo: Montserrat is not as affected as other territories. However, we support their positions in principle, in that our main concern is that legislation without consultation is not right. What is the highest common denominator for democracy, Sir? Would you want the same thing to be done to you by the EU, or anyone else? That is our main concern. There is provision for consultation. There is time for consultation, but it was not done.

Chair: We have voted to leave the European Union.

Donaldson Romeo: And we are forced to comply.

Sharlene Cartwright Robinson: Today, it is financial services; tomorrow, it is something else. That is our concern.

Q174 **Mike Gapes:** You claimed, Ms Cartwright Robinson, that Turks and Caicos had the highest standards. I do not have the data for Turks and Caicos numerically, but I do know that there are a number of Overseas Territories—the British Virgin Islands is one of them—that have been mentioned by Transparency International and in the Panama papers, and there are suggestions of billions of pounds'-worth of properties have been



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bought in the UK with suspicious money that has come through companies that are incorporated in the jurisdiction of the BVI and so on. This is why Parliament has concerns about this matter.

Sharlene Cartwright Robinson: Absolutely, and we have concerns about it as well, but the point is that today, as I have just said, it is financial services. We are not ducking or dodging, or wanting to abide by any low standard. We have complied with all global standards, and you say that I have claimed, but you can check the record and see that Turks and Caicos painstakingly—even after the storms—continued to comply with the exchange of notes, the guidance notes, the beneficial ownership register, and all of those recently. Of course, the territories all have work to do, because this is becoming a global phenomenon very quickly, and things that were working before, people are having challenges with.

Q175 **Mike Gapes:** Excuse me—you are talking about beneficial ownership registers, but the key thing here is public registers. That is the essence of the question, so that there is transparency about who is the owner and who is—

Sharlene Cartwright Robinson: Unfortunately, you are not following my train. I said we have complied, even when we had guidance notes following the storm. That is a separate issue from public registers. I said we have complied, even when the recent instruction came from the UK with guidance notes that we had to have beneficial ownership. We went quickly after and changed our companies ordinance. I am saying that we have a history of compliance. Those are two separate issues, and I am just giving you the history of compliance.

Q176 **Mike Gapes:** Transparency International yesterday published a report that said that there were 1,201 companies from Overseas Territories that had featured in cases of corruption and associated high-end money laundering. It said 1,107 of those were from BVI, so presumably almost 100 others were from other Overseas Territories.

Sharlene Cartwright Robinson: But do you believe your country is corruption-free?

Q177 **Mike Gapes:** No country is corruption-free. That is why we are trying to legislate to stop it—

Sharlene Cartwright Robinson: I do not want you to sit here while BVI is not here and make those sorts of statements. The truth is that, as small island nations, we are all fighting to comply in a pond with big fish that we are not even swimmers in. The point is that we are committed to do what we have to do, but not at the death of our economies. We do not frown on transparency, and neither do we seek to go for the low standard; we just want to be treated fairly. No country is corruption-free.

Mike Gapes: Absolutely, and no island is corruption free either.

Donaldson Romeo: Sir, I am hoping that you will be responding to the issue of democracy here, in that we would be useless to our constituents if



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laws are forced upon us without consultation. The other point is: what's next? Would you want the same thing to be done to you by the EU?

Mike Gapes: The EU is in a completely different relationship with the UK. You can have a debate about Brexit, but we are over-Brexited today.

Donaldson Romeo: Would you like the same thing to be done to you?

Victor F. Banks: These are solutions that have been put forward in the form of regulatory guidelines and standards, but they are not necessarily the solutions that can really deal with the problems. Sometimes we have questions as to whether the solutions that have been put in place are adequate to ensure that we are able to survive in the industry. Nobody determines what those standards of regulation should be to achieve a particular objective. We want to be at the same table, making the rules that apply to the industries that we are part of and that are a critical part of the services we sell.

Chair: Can I stop you there? Andrew—very quickly or do you want to wait?

Q178 **Andrew Rosindell:** I want to come in very briefly on this. Could I ask the representatives of the Overseas Territories, does this very discussion that we are having—that Mr Gapes has initiated—demonstrate the lack, in your view, of understanding about the dilemmas that Overseas Territories face? Is it about your struggle to survive being British but having no say, no representation and things being imposed upon you from afar, with complete lack of understanding of the challenges you face?

Ms Barkman: I was going to say something a while ago, on a similar note. I am very conscious that this is a public forum and that people can watch this. I don't know if people remember when the beneficial ownership instruction was issued. It plays into that common misconception that one policy fits all, for all OTs. Certainly, our economy in the Falkland Islands is based on trade and tourism, and there are no financial, international services that we provide. In fact we are quite limited in some respects, but that is a conversation for another day. As topics that apply to all OTs, it is unfortunate that this gets perpetuated, and in fact a leading news agency issued this instruction with a picture of Stanley waterfront on the top, which I am sure confused quite a few people. When you think of OTS, you can't think of us as a single group. I think the point has been well made here, from other members of the UK family, that you need to engage with us separately and address how these policy directives and instructions are relevant to these different territories.

Q179 **Andrew Rosindell:** But Ms Barkman, my point is that there is a lack of democracy here. This Parliament can legislate—it can legislate you out of business, if we choose. We can close you down.

Ms Barkman: I would not go that far. It is certainly not something you would want to promote.

Q180 **Andrew Rosindell:** At the moment, you have no vote and no say. You



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are treated as not fully British. You do not have the same representation and the same voice. You are at the mercy of whichever Government Minister happens to be sitting in the Foreign Office at that time, as we found about with how TCI was treated. Surely this whole discussion is about democracy and about how you fit into the British constitution.

Ms Barkman: Andrew, I appreciate where you are going with this democracy point. I am conscious of it. I am trying to come at it from a specific angle. The purpose of this Committee is to find a better way to avoid this situation, possibly not to try and create ultimatums as we go along. I think that the relationship that the Falkland Islands wants to see is one that gives us greater ministerial contact, in a way that we have shown is very beneficial in some areas of high policy and we can avoid these specific miscommunications and assumptions being made along the way. I am hoping that that feeds in quite well to what you are thinking.

Sharlene Cartwright Robinson: I think I can speak for my colleagues when I say that that is exactly correct. We are part of a family, and families listen to each other; they do not prejudge and believe that we are all criminal by nature, but those are the prevailing attitudes that we see too often. We had the opportunity of listening to debates on the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Bill, and the truth is that some of the statements were made by persons millions of miles away—you don't know us. Families try to get to know each other. There is not that judgment of what you are never going to be or what you are, but you actually know who you are. The truth is that we have been complying. It is not so much about the financial services sector. Today it is the financial services sector. What we are resisting is the fact that we all put ourselves on the line to be democratically elected, people hold us responsible and persons millions of miles away can legislate for us without us even knowing.

Q181 **Chair:** Forgive me—we have a very short amount of time left and I would really like to move on, but I think we have got the message. May I ask a very quick question: will you be following Bermuda's step to legalise same-sex marriages?

Ms Barkman: We have already.

Chair: I realise that you have.

Sharlene Cartwright Robinson: We consult our people when we make major changes—that is what I will say. There has to be consultation. As much as we ask you for consultation, we do the same with our people.

Donaldson Romeo: Also, we would expect Her Majesty's Government to respect our right under article 73 and resolution 1541—

Chair: I'll take that as a no.

Donaldson Romeo: —which recognises the fact that, as separate territories, with ethnic diversity from your territory and cultural differences, we ought to be allowed to make decisions on matters such as same-sex marriages.



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Victor F. Banks: This is a cultural issue in our part of the world, and it is necessary to have consultation, education and a clear understanding of what it will mean to our society, going forward.

Q182 **Royston Smith:** Can I talk about Belonger status? I think in the Falklands it might mean something different, but in general what does Belonger status mean in your individual territories? How does that work for things like the ability to vote for people who live in any of the OTs?

Sharlene Cartwright Robinson: Our 2011 constitution actually changed the term from Belonger status to Turks and Caicos Islander status. We amended our immigration ordinance in 2015 to allow for Belonger status to be given by grant, alongside the other ways—through marriage, descendancy and adoption. What does that mean? It means that that person has the same right as every citizen in Turks and Caicos to vote, to own property and to have access to scholarships. It is full citizenship. Of course, we do have other, lower forms of status, such as the permanent residence certificate, that do not allow those benefits, but it is basically free from immigration control and other standards.

Victor F. Banks: The Premier explained it well, so I don't think I can go any further. Belongership in Anguilla is something that we now want to move to being Anguillian, rather than Belongers. That is what Turks and Caicos has done, and it is something that we are aspiring to. The benefits that she outlined are exactly as they apply in our territory. We are looking to extend it even further to grandchildren; right now it is to children. The whole idea of Belongership is now under the caption of Anguillian for us.

Chair: May I ask a very brief question on that? Anguillians, Turks and Caicos Islanders, Montserratians or Falkland Islanders who reside in the United Kingdom have the right to own property and vote—is that correct?

Victor F. Banks: Yes, if they are registered as voters.

Q183 **Chair:** Would British citizens be allowed the same rights in reverse?

Ms Barkman: May I please expand on that? I am conscious that I haven't replied yet. Falkland Islands status holders are from birth, or you can apply after seven years. There is also permanent residence, similarly. Something that has been considered quite widely in the Falklands very recently is eligibility criteria for certain things like welfare. The Falklands do open their doors up; for instance, there is free healthcare and free education for all British citizens—indeed, for all its community, British or not, in certain areas. But there is this comment that if you are British in the Falkland Islands, maybe you should be able to vote, whether you are a Falkland Islander, British or UK, British. It is a separate nationality.

Because we are such a minute population in comparison to the large and vast UK family, we don't want cultural appropriation of any sort. We have a distinct culture that is very particular to being a Falkland Islander British citizen. It is the same as being Scottish British or Liverpudlian and British. There is a certain importance in enshrining what it is to be a Falkland Islander, so we have to put these gates up somewhere in terms of voting



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or being able to buy land or sell it on just to ensure that that identity, not least for political reasons, is protected, as we are often accused of being a British implanted population, which we are certain we're not. For wider political reasons, but certainly for cultural enshrinement reasons, we need to avoid cultural appropriation.

Chair: Andrew, do you want to be very brief on your FCO question?

Q184 **Andrew Rosindell:** I do. I can be brief, but it is quite a fundamental question. How does it feel to appear in front of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee? Does it please you?

Chair: The Chief Minister has already answered that.

Victor F. Banks: We are not foreign.

Sharlene Cartwright Robinson: I said in my introductory comments that we find it a useful platform. Coming from a background as Leader of the Opposition, I know about oversight committees and that you can make a difference through reports and can continue to follow them through, so we are here subjecting ourselves. As a former Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, I am saying that our position is clear. We obviously want to remain for the foreseeable future a part of the British family, but we believe there are certain things that need to be fixed.

Victor F. Banks: And there is a process.

Q185 **Andrew Rosindell:** How can it be effective for you as British citizens in British territories to be lumped into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office when you are not foreign and you are also not members in your own right of the Commonwealth? You are appearing in front of a Foreign Affairs Select Committee in a Parliament in which you have no say and no influence on anything, where laws can be imposed upon you without any democratic accountability. Do you not agree with me that the time has come to modernise the relationship completely and treat all territories equally as British?

Victor F. Banks: That is the point we're making—

Ms Barkman: I am conscious that I have not replied to the first question or this one. Sorry, Victor. Diplomatically there is great strategy in having the Foreign Office. It has a base globally around the world that is useful to someone as logistically and geographically distinct as the Falkland Islands. It is a very long flight to get there. I know some of you have visited recently. There are distinct issues, not least from a diplomatic angle, that relate to the need to be accountable. As for the FCO, as I mentioned in my opening statement, it can sometimes feel a bit like a management position. We work well, particularly in certain areas, but we need to be a bit tactful and take advice. Certainly we don't feel like a foreign entity. We are British and we are a part of the UK British family.

Q186 **Andrew Rosindell:** There is no constitutional status for the UK British family. It's a phrase that people use, but if you try and have any



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influence on anything as a Falkland Islander, you have no influence.

Ms Barkman: We have our own territorial waters, which were declared in 1987. We have our own fisheries and our own economy, and very distinct domestic affairs that we run through. There are benefits to having such a robust constitution, even though we will keep working on it. Certainly we cannot think of where we would fit better, if that makes sense. I know you have a particular passion for having OTs directly represented in the House of Commons.

Q187 **Andrew Rosindell:** I have not mentioned that today. I am talking about which Department you belong under. You mentioned Liverpoolian, Scottish and English earlier. The Falkland Islands and all the Overseas Territories may be British, but in so many ways they are not treated the same as the rest of the British family.

Ms Barkman: It is not what you can do for us; it is what we can do for ourselves a bit more.

Q188 **Chair:** I was very interested to hear you say you were happy under the Foreign Office.

Ms Barkman: It is the best—

Chair: It is the best fit.

Ms Barkman: It is the most suitable Department, but the door needs to be a bit wider open.¹

Donaldson Romeo: The negative impact of the name is not the name itself; it is how you are treated. The International Development Committee in 1998, after reviewing the Montserrat situation, just in the middle of the crisis, stated that the responsibilities of Her Majesty's Government were of a higher and greater order than even having first call on British aid.

The British Government have the opportunity to support Montserrat using outside aid. That is all the more reason for the British Government to be kind in implementing the policies that favour giving adequate and timely aid to Montserrat in particular, and any other territory like St Helena.

Chair: Forgive me—I am going to move straight on because we are so tight on time.

Q189 **Ian Murray:** First, I declare an interest: I was invited by the Falkland Islands Government to visit the Falklands in 2013, at their generosity.

You have touched on this already, but do you think that the Overseas Territories, individually, as a bloc or geographically, should be represented in the House of Commons?

Victor F. Banks: Yes, I think so.

Q190 **Ian Murray:** How would that work?

¹ Clarification from witness: 'For encouraged direct ministerial or department contact if relevant.'



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Victor F. Banks: We need to figure that out, but certainly we need to have a voice in the House of Commons so that we can be represented by a person or persons who understand us and clearly have a channel of communication or protocol to put forward our interests in the British Parliament.

Q191 **Ian Murray:** Do you think it would be a voting place—that you would have voting rights—in the House of Commons?

Victor F. Banks: We would have to figure that out, but I think we should have a voice.

Ms Barkman: From our point of view, we disagree. Currently we can appeal to 650 Members of Parliament, whereas we would be funnelling and bottlenecking our issues from a vast number of Overseas Territories, or even a singular territory, through one.

We struggle with being recognised as the authority of the Falkland Islands Government. It may even be more of a struggle from the public diplomacy side of things to have someone in Westminster seen as the authority over the Falklands Islands Government. We would then have challenges in terms of how you even choose that person. Certainly, our standpoint is that it would not work.

Victor F. Banks: I do not think they are mutually exclusive, Teslyn.

Donaldson Romeo: As it stands, we are dependent on you to represent us. As it stands, we cannot vote. However, there are 7,000 Montserratians evacuees in Britain right now who came on a one-way ticket with no help or any plan in place to have them repopulate Montserrat.

Q192 **Chair:** They can vote in the UK.

Donaldson Romeo: They can, but at present they are not being represented, in that the delay in the development of Montserrat prevents them from returning home. The decision to come here was forced because of the depravity and the failure to deliver aid in a timely and adequate manner.

Were I in your position, should you give us the chance to interview DFID, the FCO and others before the public, perhaps that might help. At the moment we depend on you, on your fairness and on your democratic principles and commitment to consult us before you legislate.

Sharlene Cartwright Robinson: One sentence: there is no appetite in Turks and Caicos for it.

Ian Murray: I would add that I am concerned, if they did have a vote in the House of Commons, how they would vote on Tuesday.

Chair: They would vote for you, Ian.

Q193 **Andrew Rosindell:** Not on that particular point, but on a closely related issue, Teslyn can rest assured that the FCO would never allow the



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Overseas Territories to be represented, so it is not going to happen. However, one thing that could happen is the creation of a dedicated Committee in your sovereign Parliament, which is here, that specialises on a day-to-day basis in all the problems and issues that you are facing.

Every 10 years we have three sessions to talk about 16 territories that we ultimately have sovereignty over. Do you not think that it is time that we had a dedicated Committee of Parliament, rather than the Foreign Affairs Committee, that properly considered, respected and dealt with on a day-to-day basis all the issues that you are facing, with MPs who are, on a day-to-day basis, taking account of the problems? With respect to our Committee, we have America, the Middle East, Europe and the whole world to deal with. Is it not time for a special Committee dedicated to all the external territories of the United Kingdom?

Ms Barkman: That is a relatively new concept that has been brought up in this Committee from watching previous submissions. The point you highlight, that we need to be able to communicate with Westminster and strategise how we get our message out—

Q194 **Andrew Rosindell:** It is every 10 years, through this Committee. It is nearly 10 years since we have done a report.

Ms Barkman: Yes; maybe we need to be using our APPGs—

Q195 **Andrew Rosindell:** Is that really effective to help you and to monitor you?

Ms Barkman: Can I finish my point? We need to work our APPGs better and look at membership requirements or broadening the scope of their interaction with the rest of Parliament. Certainly, I am willing to take that on board and look at it with you, Andrew, at a later date—I am conscious of the pressure of time.

Sharlene Cartwright Robinson: While it may be new, we will accept that.

Victor F. Banks: Obviously, we need to have a much better flow of communication and ideas between the Overseas Territories, a better representation of our interests and a better arrangement. What you suggest, Andrew, may be a good way to go, but we need to look at it and ensure that it is really better than what we have today. I do not think that representation in the House of Commons and the kind of representation we get in the present system are mutually exclusive. We can have both.

Donaldson Romeo: I support Andrew Rosindell's keen desire to see Montserrat and other Overseas Territories better represented. I think there needs to be some action in that direction, such as a special committee that focuses on us, allows us to present questions to Parliament and the like. I really think something needs to happen. However, please realise that politicians on your end make decisions for your constituents and your voters, and we are forced to live with them, although it affects us politically.

Chair: I understand. Premiers, Chief Minister, Member of the Legislative Assembly, thank you very much indeed. We are really very grateful.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Councillor Leslie Jaques OBE, Councillor Derek Thomas, Mr Ian Lavarello and Councillor Keturah George.

Q196 **Chair:** Welcome again to this afternoon's session, and thank you very much indeed, Councillors and Chief Islander. May I ask Councillor George to start us off?

Councillor George: I have only three points to make: the Wideawake agreement, marine protected areas and access. Ascension Island is a small, self-sufficient community with economy of scale constraints, only one option for natural resources, that being fisheries, and no right of abode to encourage enterprise that takes full advantage of a biased agreement between themselves and the Government of the United Kingdom. We would like the UK Government to fulfil their obligation to the Overseas Territories by revisiting the Bahamas agreement extension to Ascension Island with the United States Government, with amendments stipulating a fair financial contribution and compliance with the laws of Ascension. This must include border control and flexibility of the Wideawake airfield utilisation in order to revise the agreement so that it satisfies both the population of Ascension and the US Government's security interests in the island.

The second point is the marine protected area. Unfortunately, the UK Government's commitments in their party manifesto mandated the creation of a marine protected area within the Ascension exclusive economic zone without first consulting the elected members of the Ascension Island Council. Consequently, no consideration was given to whether an MPA was achievable by deferring cost responsibility on to the local population. While we support the MPA in principle, we would like the UK Government to commit to providing the funding to meet all expenses incurred with the fully operational MPA; Ascension Island simply does not have the resources, including the funding, to facilitate a properly policed MPA. To be more specific about our economic state, it is estimated that the Ascension Island Government will become bankrupt within the next few years, but even before then there will be serious adverse consequences for public services and employment numbers in order to try to mitigate this.

My final point is the access problems. Since the suspension of the RAF air bridge in April 2017, Ascension's only access is via the monthly SA Airlink flight to St Helena. This has caused huge access problems for those who work on the island and tourism is now almost non-existent, as travel is now too expensive and services too infrequent. We anticipate that the island's income will further reduce with delays to the start of the runway works. It is expected that the payload of that SA Airlink aircraft will be



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reduced further once the runway works commence, which will exacerbate our access and economic problems. Recruiting and retaining staff remain difficult due mainly to restricted access and uncertainty about the future. There is a military or tactical aircraft, the A400, which makes a twice-monthly flight between the UK and Ascension Island, connecting with the Voyager as it travels from the Falkland Islands and Cape Verde. Seats are used only for medical referrals, urgent business cases and the military. The aircraft is desperately underutilised, though, and at times has had fewer than 10 people travelling on it.

We would ask the UK Government to work with the MoD to provide a monthly flight from Ascension to the UK, which would allow any workers or potential tourists to travel directly to the UK, particularly during the next two years. This would help alleviate the access problems and stimulate tourism until a regular air bridge returns. Thank you.

Chair: Mr Jaques, can I urge you to try to stick to two minutes? I would be very grateful.

Councillor Jaques: In the early 1990s, the Pitcairn Islands had a sustainable economy from philately and domain names. Accumulated reserves were then used to offset the losses that followed, and in 2003 those reserves were exhausted, leaving the islands in need of UK budgetary aid. DFID provides aid to meet the island's essential needs under the obligations confirmed in the 2012 Overseas Territories White Paper. In addition, over the years Pitcairn has been a beneficiary of the European Development Fund, BEST and Darwin Plus for infrastructure and environmental development.

Like other Overseas Territories, Pitcairn is concerned about the replacement mechanism for EU funding post Brexit. It is imperative that funding continues and a solid commitment on this is given by HMG. The Island Council, in collaboration with HMG, has worked to ensure a bright future that brings opportunities in economic growth in both the public and private sectors. We are grateful for the new, more frequent shipping service, which we hope will allow sustainable private sector development in agriculture and increase revenue for the public and private sectors.

The Island Council's future vision is based on five pillars: economic development, repopulation, community, governance and environment. The Pitcairn Islands tourism industry focuses on history, culture, biodiversity and blue-green economy. An application is also under way for the Pitcairn Islands group to be declared as one of the four world-class dark sky sanctuaries on earth. Pitcairn fully supports the UK's vision of sound global environmental management and halting climate change. The Pitcairn Islands marine reserve—the third largest in the world—contains abundant biodiversity, two of the most southern coral atolls in the world, and the deepest well-developed tropical coral reef. It also contains world heritage site Henderson, which we are using to spread global awareness of the importance of sustainability and reducing the use of plastics.



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Pitcairn is grateful for the role that the United Kingdom Overseas Territories Association plays in the Overseas Territories, providing strengths and support. UKOTA is an important forum for collective discussions. Pitcairn is the only Overseas Territory in the South Pacific. That gives the UK a voice in South Pacific forums, where we can encourage others to match the UK effort on environmental management. In the coming years, we will be working hard to increase global recognition for our environmental management and to attract scientists and scientific research in a way that, along with tourism, will help make our small island community more sustainable.

Chair: Thank you very much. Chief Islander, again the request is for brevity, but carry on.

Mr Lavarello: To get here today, I left home on October 23, starting with a week-long sea passage to Cape Town. I will not be able to get back until the end of January. That is life in the remotest community on our planet. Our isolation is one reason why Tristan is strategic for the UK. Having no neighbours means we are in sole command of three-quarters of a million square kilometres of ocean, so Tristan is preparing to make one of the biggest global contributions to the blue belt. Your Government have recognised that our blue belt must be island-led, and have pledged full financial support for it. Today, I want to thank you for the help that we have already received, and also to state for the record that support will be needed long term. Protecting the oceans has enormous cross-party backing, so I hope that is uncontroversial.

Few communities are so in touch with their natural environment. We are proud stewards of our part of the South Atlantic, and are stepping up to the blue belt challenge. We do not seek a major change to our constitutional relationship with the UK. We certainly do not want to limit our links with Parliament, by funnelling everything through a single, distant MP of a single party. We want some basic safeguards against our council being overruled. Tristan is a hardworking island, with a lobster fishery, which is certified sustainable and pays for our day-to-day costs. We will carefully strengthen and diversify our fishing effort to keep us out of core budgetary aid, but specialist staff, such as doctors and education advisers, are provided by the UK, and we are grateful for them. We also look to the UK—and for now, to the European Development Fund—for help with vital infrastructure. That help will still be needed in the years ahead.

Tristan da Cunha treats people as equals in every respect. Our founders wrote those words two centuries ago. We are proud to be a part of the UK family and we hope that the UK is proud of us. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you.

Councillor Thomas: I would like to start by stating that St Helena welcomes this inquiry into the future of the Overseas Territories. Indeed, the future of St Helena is an uncertain one. St Helena has been permanently linked to Britain since 1657, when the island was formally handed over to the East India Company. Since that moment, St Helena

has always been reliant, to varying degrees, on support from the United Kingdom.

The impact of British support has been significant, turning us from a small dot in the middle of the south Atlantic to a modern, connected country, but we are determined to be more self-sufficient. We are focused on driving forward our economic growth and, despite challenges, our tourism industry. We are trying to capitalise on our stunning marine environment and biodiversity, which represents 30% of the total biodiversity of the UK and Overseas Territories.

As part of the UK family, we will continue to require ongoing assistance from the mother country. We want our future relationship to reflect our role as an intrinsic part of the UK family, and a partner, not a dependent.

We do not always feel that we are treated as partners by the British Government. We are in receipt of foreign aid from the UK through DFID, but we are British, not a foreign country. Decisions are made by DFID on our future funding, yet we are not involved in that process. We would like to be fully involved in the decision-making process that leads to the agreement regarding the amount of budgetary aid we receive. We would like to understand the basis on which the final decision is made.

Even more worryingly, we are close to reaching the threshold where we will no longer be eligible for overseas development aid, which will have an impact on the overseas aid we can receive, but we are not self-sufficient—nor likely to be for some time. We fear a future where the people of St Helena are plunged back into severe poverty, but we lack the means to safeguard against that. We do not have access to key institutions that could support us, such as the Commonwealth Development Corporation, because we are an Overseas Territory, yet we do not have access to many international institutions or funding streams either.

We advocate for a new approach to the Overseas Territories that operates as a true partnership. We would like the Overseas Territories' relationship with the UK to be considered as part of the UK's own strategic global Britain ambitions. We would like to be not treated as foreigners, but recognised and acknowledged as British citizens, with a shared history that spans more than 400 years.

More importantly, we would like to work with the UK Government to better understand the implications of Brexit—particularly as we stand to lose considerable support from the European Development Fund, which supports key associated infrastructure, and therefore, our growth and development—and furthermore, to ensure that the people of St Helena are safeguarded from harm into the future, including beyond the end of overseas development aid eligibility.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Q197 **Andrew Rosindell:** All of you have, as expected, shown your absolute determination to be British, to stay British, and to be part of what we now



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call the British family, but there is no such thing, constitutionally, as the British family. Do you consider yourselves to be part of the United Kingdom?

Mr Lavarello: Absolutely. If you look at Tristan, or any other Overseas Territory, the flag has our own coat of arms. On that flag is a Union Jack, which represents the United Kingdom, of which part is our Overseas Territories.

Q198 **Andrew Rosindell:** But constitutionally, whether you call it an Overseas Territory, a colony or whatever you have called it in the past—it used to be a Crown colony—the reality is that you are still not part of the United Kingdom. Is that something you would like to be part of? Mr Banks, I think, mentioned in a previous session being countries of the UK. Is that something you aspire to, or are you happy permanently to be not the same as the UK, as a separate territory with separate constitutions? Although, in the UK we have four different countries with different types of Government; even in Parliament, we have different voting on different issues depending on what affects them. This is the nub: where do we develop this in future?

Councillor Thomas: I feel that St Helena would like to be part of Britain, because we follow the British rule of law and we have policies and legislation to aspire to, the same as British citizens. Especially when it comes to safeguarding human rights, we have to follow all those rules and introduce legislation, the same as if we were in Britain. We feel a part of Britain. We have to do that and we might receive initial funding, but then we are expected to pick that up from existing budgetary aid. That hampers our progress and development, because we get the technical and financial support initially, but when it is all set up and running, all that is withdrawn. We are expected to pick up the tab from our budgetary allocation.

Q199 **Andrew Rosindell:** Does it feel to you, as my constituents or those of Mr Gapes or any other Members present might feel, that you are treated the same as British people living anywhere else in the UK when—I will come to you in a moment, Leslie—in Pitcairn's case, you have a Foreign Office that negotiates and potentially gives Pitcairn away to another country; in Ascension Island's case, the citizens do not have proper status as people with sovereignty over their own territory and are not treated democratically equally to other territories; and, in the case of St Helena and Tristan da Cunha, you literally have to fight to get a port or an airport in order to survive? You have to go to International Development to beg for money over many years to get the cash just for you to be able to survive as a remote British territory. Does it feel to all of you that you are treated as equally British, as you would expect constituents in mainland UK to be treated?

Councillor Jaques: Global Britain might be a cliché, but we like it. We like to feel that we are part of global Britain. We would like a relationship based on mutual respect and trust. Pitcairn is on budgetary aid; the time when Pitcairn needed help was from 1990 to 2000, when our reserves



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were extinguished. The FCO sent a person to Pitcairn and all he did was cut people's salaries. The sum total of capability of the FCO at the time—all the economic clout—was to cut people's salaries to make ends meet. We have moved on from that. All the people working for Pitcairn and on its behalf, including your good self, and at the FCO and DFID are battling for us, we believe. Is it a master-servant relationship? We would like to think not, but the reality is it probably is.

Q200 Andrew Rosindell: How did it feel when DFID was openly arguing that Pitcairn should be handed over to another country? Did that feel like you were being treated as equally British?

Councillor Jaques: We were not told about that.

Andrew Rosindell: No, of course you weren't, but you heard about it afterwards.

Councillor Jaques: I was told about that by a New Zealand politician. That is where they were trying to dump it. That was difficult, but we have moved on from that. I would like to think that we can be part of global Britain. I would like to think we can have a relationship based on mutual trust and mutual respect. If you have the purse strings, it is different. DFID has just funded a new shipping service for us. That will help our economy and the public and private sectors. In terms of what HMG are doing for us right now, we cannot complain. Do we want to be part of Britain? Yes, we do. I like your concept of a parliamentary group dealing with Overseas Territory issues. I certainly would prefer that to having one representative, which, as Teslyn said, would perhaps cloud things a bit.

Q201 Andrew Rosindell: I don't think anyone is suggesting that there would ever be one representative anyway. That is a misnomer, which has been added to.

Councillor Jaques: Thank you for the clarification.

Q202 Andrew Rosindell: In reality, how does a territory like Pitcairn seriously have any kind of voice or influence over anything in this place? Who do you go to?

Councillor Jaques: We go to our Governor, I suppose.

Q203 Andrew Rosindell: So you go to Wellington.

Councillor Jaques: Yes. Or our Deputy Governor. The 2012 White Paper says something to the effect of devolving operational responsibility to the maximum degree possible. In our own case, we are small, and we have capacity issues or whatever, but we do our best within that framework. Certainly, we do rely on and need the support that HMG provide us.

Councillor George: As you know, Ascension is unique to almost all the other territories. It is primarily a working base and we don't receive any overseas development aid. However, Ascension is of huge importance to the United Kingdom for its strategic position in both military and communications, and also to the European Union as well. I think all of us

feel that we do benefit from our relationship with the UK. We wouldn't survive on our own.

Q204 **Mike Gapes:** As I understand it, Councillor George, Ascension is very important to the BBC. It has its BBC World Service relay station for broadcasts not just in the English language but in many other languages that go to the African continent from Ascension. I have been told that there are problems with the sustainability of that, because of the problems you have got with aircraft landing, which you referred to earlier. Could you clarify for me what the position is? How many people work for the BBC on Ascension? Is that BBC relationship in some kind of question because of this problem of communications?

Councillor George: I am not sure. Can I come back to you with that information?²

Q205 **Mike Gapes:** I am happy for you to do that. I understand that they have about 50 people who work there—that is what I was told; I don't know if that is correct—and that it is very important for the future of the BBC's relay of its broadcasts. It is potentially a national soft power issue for us as a Committee—that is why I am raising it.

Councillor George: I am aware that recently we had some problems getting people into Ascension.

Q206 **Mike Gapes:** Because they were not able to fly in.

Councillor George: Again, they were unable to fly in on the A400—on the military flight into the island. I need to find out exactly and get back to you.

Q207 **Mike Gapes:** Sure, but clearly as long as there is this problem of the inability of people to fly in, that is going to mean that the sustainability of those kind of things is in question.

Councillor George: Yes.

Q208 **Royston Smith:** I just wanted to ask about money. Some of us—Andrew ~~—Rosindell for example—~~are very well versed in the Overseas Territories.

² Clarification from witness: 'The BBC Atlantic Relay station is operated by Encompass Digital Media (formerly Babcock International Ltd). They employ 60 members of staff of which:

In total we are responsible for 125 individuals (Staff and dependants) of which:

113 from St Helena

8 from the UK (2 families)

4 from the Seychelles (1 family and 1 single status)

Please also note that the access problems are affecting all of the workers on Ascension Island and we would be grateful if the Ministry of Defence could consider some flexibility on the use of seats on those flights which are desperately underutilised.'



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For others of us, this is something of a learning opportunity as well as anything else. I know bits, I have been briefed and I have looked a bit deeper into it, but we hear things, for example about the runway at St Helena. I read in Mr Lavarello's submission about the harbour in Tristan da Cunha. Those are big-ticket items, aren't they, in addition to DFID, ODA and budgets, and all the rest? Can you say something on that harbour issue, and explain to us what it is? It is the sort of thing that I might hear about, in the way that I heard about St Helena's runway, for example.

Mr Lavarello: I actually thought that the UK Government had decided to wish away this problem that we have. Our harbour is our only link to the outside world for about 51 weeks of each year when we are not visited by a ship with a helicopter. It is vital for trade, transport and healthcare, and it is really not strong enough to cope with the huge south Atlantic storms. The current UK policy is to patch and mend, but a reliable harbour is vital for our existence, so I would be grateful if the Committee could recommend taking a fresh look at this.

Q209 **Royston Smith:** I do not know if we can do that. I was wondering what it actually entailed, because I read about it in your submission. Your having said that is probably your making a representation. I do not know if we can do any more than that. How big? How much?

Mr Lavarello: It is totally reliant on DFID funding. Would you like some figures?

Q210 **Royston Smith:** In our brief we saw how much St Helena's runway was, for example. Those are the sorts of things that we hear, if we are not across the rest of the detail about populations, whether it is sustainable and all the rest of it. Now this port thing has come up. Don't go mad, but give us some of the details.

Mr Lavarello: Basically, we rely on European Development Fund funding for infrastructure. We get a portion of the pot that is split between St Helena, Ascension and Tristan, which is spent on emergency repairs for the harbour. That is mostly our main source of—

Q211 **Royston Smith:** If it were to be replaced in the way that, say, St Helena's runway was, what would that cost?

Mr Lavarello: You are looking at a substantial—

Q212 **Royston Smith:** Tens of millions?

Mr Lavarello: I think more than that. The last quote from DFID would have been between £80 million and £90 million. We would have to sit down and seriously look at that and also consult our contractors.

Q213 **Andrew Rosindell:** That point about the harbour is the same as for the airport and the situation that the Premier of Montserrat spoke about earlier. You are British territories, not foreign countries. Many Overseas Territories do not need money and are self-sufficient, but others are not. I think that the four representatives here at the moment need funding



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from the UK of one sort or another.

Do you not think that it is very short-sighted of HMG to drip-feed money to Overseas Territories that need that benefit over such a long period and in such a long, drawn-out process? If the money were to be allocated much sooner, and if projects were begun much quicker, would that put you in a better, more sustainable position in the long term than the “patch and mend” approach we have heard about and the drip-feeding of money, a lot of which goes on big bureaucracy rather than the needs of the territories?

Councillor Thomas: Certainly where St Helena is concerned, we are really grateful for the significant amount of money that was put towards the construction of our airport, which hopefully will eventually take us off aid and lead to real economic growth. However, it is disappointing that we have not been given the funding for our critical infrastructure, to see the real benefits from our airport. For example, we have a jetty in Rupert’s Valley, which was funded mainly by the British Government, but we are not allowed to use it fully because the road needs to be done and there needs to be cliff stabilisation. We transport containers from Rupert’s into Jamestown, which costs loads of money. If that funding for our critical infrastructure had been allocated, we would be much more advanced today. We are now trying to negotiate a capital programme to deal with some of these issues.

Andrew Rosindell: I know this is not the Select Committee that deals with DFID, but clearly territories are dependent on this money. Why is it that everything takes so long? You have a project that is desperately needed to make you sustainable. Why is DFID so protracted in getting these things under way to ensure that you can stand on your own two feet and not depend on British taxpayers’ money?

Councillor Thomas: That is for DFID to answer. Certainly it hasn’t been for lack of understanding. As a Government, we have had video conferences and face-to-face discussions. The infrastructure that has been placed there is not being protected, really. Millions went into the jetty at Rupert’s, but we are not able to use it to its full potential, and it is costing us more money, from grant in aid, to transport our cargo to James Valley. These statements have been made. As I say, we are hopefully working on and negotiating a capital programme, but if that funding had been forthcoming, we certainly would have been much more advanced today than we are now.

Q214 **Mike Gapes:** I have a further question on St Helena. You have mentioned, in passing, the fact that you receive European Union funding. Have you had any assurances from the UK Government about the long-term position in that regard? There is EU funding not just for you; Anguilla is another Overseas Territory I am aware of that—

Councillor Jaques: And Pitcairn.

Mike Gapes: And Pitcairn. They also get the European Development Fund funding. Have you had any assurances about the long term?



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Councillor Thomas: That is a very worrying factor for St Helena, because we have not had any assurance that this funding, or a similar type of funding, will be made available. Our infrastructure on the island of St Helena is in critical condition. Over the years we have relied heavily on EDF funding to fund major infrastructure requirements. With the loss of EDF funding at the end of EDF 11—we have the funding secured, I understand, for the fibre-optic cable, which will bring about huge improvements, but beyond that there has not been any reassurance that this funding will be available, or that a similar type of funding will replace it, to develop our economy.

Mr Lavarello: Can I say something on that subject as well? We are assured of funding by the UK Government until 2020. After that, it is a big question: will the UK cover us as the EDF did? But at the moment it is until 2020; we have been reassured on that.

Councillor Jaques: We are very concerned about that, for two reasons. One is that, despite repeatedly asking, we have been given no assurance—in fact, no word at all. The Brexit Ministers wrote, saying, “Oh well, we’ll consider that after we leave the EU,” and for us that is not really acceptable, because we don’t know where we will get our funding from in the future. The other thing that concerns us, just as importantly, is how this funding would be disbursed. The EU have an equitable, prorated distribution under the EDF. From the little bit we have heard, DFID intends to have perhaps a bidding process of some kind. If that is the case, it will marginalise smaller, less capable territories such as ourselves. We would like assurances that funds will be distributed on an equitable, prorated basis in the same way as they are under the EDF.

Q215 **Mike Gapes:** Finally, can I go back to the questions that Andrew touched on earlier about the basis of representation of Overseas Territories? Because you are all relatively small by population, there is clearly no means by which you could—for example, I have nearly 90,000 electors in my constituency. If I add together all your populations, it makes about one of my wards. How can we best deal with this? Would the idea of an MP or two or three to represent all the complexity of the Overseas Territories do anything? Or is there another mechanism that we could have, such as an appointed Member of the House of Lords who was like a French senator for the French overseas departments? I met the senator for Réunion once, who was very nice. She represented Réunion in the French Senate. I wonder whether you have a view on that.

Councillor Thomas: All the Overseas Territories have their own different problems, but I see the selection of a committee to represent the Overseas Territories as a positive way forward, because in terms of enabling economic growth and development, we all have different issues and problems—

Q216 **Mike Gapes:** Do you mean a committee made up of people from the Overseas Territories, or would it be a committee of UK parliamentarians who had an interest or a role?

Councillor Thomas: I am looking at it more as a dedicated Select Committee to deal with issues and to represent the Overseas Territories.

Q217 **Mike Gapes:** Made up of Members of Parliament.

Councillor Thomas: Yes, made up of Members of Parliament.

Q218 **Andrew Rosindell:** To follow up on what Mike has said, that is an important issue, because this is a once-in-a-decade chance to state where you want to be in the future. All the discussion about getting an MP is pointless because it is not going to happen. What could happen is that the Overseas Territories could have a dedicated Select Committee or a Grand Committee or something.

Chair: A Joint Committee perhaps.

Andrew Rosindell: it would be something in Parliament whereby parliamentarians can invite witnesses and have discussions on individual issues, but also, where Chief Ministers and Premiers could request to appear before it to state an issue about something that is going wrong and they need help with, or where they are not being treated correctly by a Government Department or whatever it may be, so it is a two-way process.

We know there are divisions about whether you should have Members of Parliament. As I say, the FCO would go crazy if that was even considered as a serious option, so you can discount that, but having a proper committee that properly scrutinises and specialises in all 16 territories on a day-to-day basis is realistic. But it would happen only if all the territories said, "Yes, we like this idea and we would like it to be put forward." As smaller territories, with even smaller voices than some of the bigger ones, what would your view be on that?

Councillor Thomas: I would fully support that. I would like for that to be taken forward. As far as St Helena is concerned, it would be a real positive move.

Mr Lavarello: Certainly a Select Committee could work okay. Coming back to MPs, we have to be careful. Am I correct in saying that every MP who sits in Parliament knows exactly where Tristan da Cunha or Pitcairn are? We have to be careful who we select for the Committee in Parliament, because you might get an MP who does not even know where any of the Overseas Territories are—

Q219 **Chair:** The traditional way that we select Members for Committees is that we allow the whole House to elect the Chair and the parties to elect their own representatives, and then we expect them to educate themselves.

Mr Lavarello: Absolutely, because my good friend Andrew Rosindell knows straightaway where Tristan is, but if you ask another Member of Parliament, they would probably have to get out their tablet and google it.

Q220 **Mike Gapes:** One of the things about being a Member of Parliament is that you quickly learn about many things that you have never heard about before, so I think you can be reassured on that.



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Councillor Jaques: I would support the Select Committee or the committee concept as a backstop, and as someone who can get things done that we can come to in case of need—very much so—and who could be more involved, on a regular basis, with the affairs of the island.

Chair: Can I thank you all very much, Councillors and Chief Islander? It is extremely generous of you to be here with us this afternoon.