

# Governor to Falkland Islands delivers annual address to Legislative Assembly

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

## **Scene setting**

I am pleased to stand before you today to deliver the Governor's Annual Address, which comes as the third Budget of the current Legislative Assembly is put before the House.

In these unprecedented times, one cannot deliver such an address without taking note of the acute global uncertainty and upheaval resulting from the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout the crisis this Government has responded with the health and welfare of residents as its key priority. Going forward, the Government is determined not to allow the pandemic to stand in the way of the bold, ambitious social and economic development agenda of the Falkland Islands; nor will it allow it to obscure the significant progress already made in the term of the current legislative assembly.

Indeed, the Budget being presented today is evidence of the resolve of this Government to overcome challenges that may present themselves, in the delivery of the Islands Plan and the pursuit of long-term progress, health and wellbeing, opportunity and prosperity for the people of the Falkland Islands.

My address today is an opportunity to highlight the steady progress of these islands, the solid foundations on which their future is built, and the optimism that the Falklands has in terms of fostering social and economic progress in order to improve the quality of life for all residents.

## **Fiscal context**

Mr. Speaker, as the Government charts its course towards our future the need for financial stability is ever more important. Through careful financial management, and despite the recent upheaval, the Government is again targeting an excess of income over expenditure this year.

Corporation tax receipts from the fishing industry and other businesses, sale of fishing licences and income from investments, managed as part of the Consolidated Fund, continue to represent the primary contribution to government revenues. Other sectors such as tourism, agriculture and the retail and service sectors also made valuable contributions.

Government finances remain in robust shape, fortified by strong reserves and a prudent fiscal approach to spending.

It is these reserves which have provided the Government the flexibility to not only invest in a range of support measures to address the urgent needs of Falkland Island residents and businesses during the COVID-19 crisis, but also to enable further investment in our capital and service delivery programmes.

This coming year – 2020/21 – will see an operating budget of £81.7 million and a transfer to the Capital Equalization Fund of £29.1 million in support of Capital investments.

Mr. Speaker: the capacity of the Government to plan and execute capital projects is increasing. The projected capital expenditure for 2019/20 is £26 million compared to £23.3m in the previous year: an increase of 11.5%. At this point I would like to note the efforts of our former Financial Secretary, James Wilson for his prudent and considered approach to financial management that helped contribute to the strong financial position of the Falkland Islands. I would also like to acknowledge his work that resulted in providing local businesses access to international banking facilities – including card-based financial transactions – and to opening up the world of e-commerce.

## **Political context**

Internationally, there have been many changes over the course of this year. There is now a newly elected Parliament in the United Kingdom, and closer to our shores new Governments in Argentina and Uruguay. Changes resulting from Brexit may also affect the way in which the Falkland Islands trade not only with Europe but also the world more broadly.

However, something that has not changed is the support of the government of the United Kingdom for the Islands – including the defence of its sovereignty and the right to self-determination. As pointed out by Prime Minister Boris Johnson in his 2019 Christmas address, UK support for the rights of Falkland Islanders to determine their own political status is not going to change.

This ongoing support has been significantly enhanced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The additional support provided by the UK Government has helped safeguard our community, and I know I speak for all when I acknowledge that contribution.

With respect to Brexit, I can assure you that the Falkland Islands Government will continue to work closely with the UK Government to ensure that the interests of the Falkland Islands are fully understood in the United Kingdom.

To that end this government will continue, whilst safeguarding our sovereignty, to develop productive and constructive relationships with South America and across the globe to benefit the community.

An excellent example of international outreach was the Assembly's hosting of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Women's Conference for the British Islands and Mediterranean Region. Delegates came from Cyprus, Gibraltar, Guernsey, Jersey, Malta, Scotland, St Helena, England and Wales. Invitations had also been accepted by senators from both Chile and Uruguay but business

in their parliaments meant they could not attend.

The conference theme was challenging stereotypes, and attendees heard in particular from female leaders from the Falkland Islands and their experiences.

The Government has also been vigorously engaged in its overseas responsibilities – with MLAs attending the C24 Committee meeting at the UN, OAS, CPA events, engaging with UKOTA and OCTA, and of course, supporting engagement with the UK and others on Brexit.

Constructive relationships between countries are not just about institutional engagement. They are fundamentally about relationships between people and with that in mind humanitarian work has continued with Argentina. Early in 2020 the Falkland Islands welcomed Mrs. Elmer Pelozo, the first person to agree to DNA sampling for the Argentine Cemetery Humanitarian project. Mrs. Pelozo visited her son's grave for the first time in March, and I hope this provided a level of closure to Mrs. Pelozo and her family.

The Humanitarian project started in 2017 and continues to highlight the community's compassion and kindness across the world.

## **The Islands Plan 2018-2022 – update on initiatives**

This last year has seen significant progress in many initiatives described in the Islands Plan. A very active Public Diplomacy programme season was completed. Delivered in partnership with FCO, there have now been 32 inbound Public Diplomacy missions since January 2018 with a total of 84 influencers visiting the Falkland Islands. Countries of origin included India, Canada, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Argentina, Peru, UK, and France.

November saw the inauguration of the Sao Paulo to Falklands air route. This long-awaited second commercial air link was already starting to build in popularity before its temporary suspension due to the pandemic. Its value for the economy is wide ranging, will prove substantial, and we all look forward to its resumption at a later date. Richard Hyslop took up his new role as the Falkland Islands Government Representative to the UK and Europe in November, following the retirement of Sukey Cameron after 30 years of dedicated work as the Representative. In furtherance of this Government's objective to raise the profile of the Falklands in the United Kingdom, Richard and the wider FIGO team, have been incredibly busy ensuring that the interests of the Falkland Islands Government and the Islands are heard in media, parliament, elsewhere in the United Kingdom and beyond.

I have been especially pleased to see the focus in representing the wider Island interests. This includes highlighting tourism, promoting Falkland Island products, and helping to secure inward investment into the Islands. There is also work on a Falkland Islander diaspora network in the UK.

I must note the 50th anniversary of the SS Great Britain's return to Bristol from the Falkland Islands. Alongside the Falkland Islands Association, FIG have been working closely with the SS Great Britain Museum to create an

outdoor photographic exhibition telling the modern Falkland Islands story – along with other supporting events. The Government has also continued to work toward strengthening our commercial and social relationships in South America and to that end the Government has extended the full-time Falkland Islands Adviser position for a further two years after a successful first year of activity. The position, which is based in Montevideo, improves our awareness of opportunity and access to markets in the region and strengthens our economic and social ties to the region.

## **The Islands Plan 2018-2022 – update on capital investments**

This Budget remains committed to delivering a number of major capital projects, with £29.07 million in new funds allocated in 2020-21, as part of a capital programme valued at £120 million between 2019 and 2024. These investments include new housing developments, the Tussac House long-term care facility, and the King Edward Memorial Hospital expansion.

A new port is set to be the largest single development in the five years up to 2024– moving on the commitment set out in the Islands Plan.

After a rigorous procurement process, FIG announced in February 2020 its intention to contract BAM Nuttall Ltd to design and build the port. The contract was signed in April.

This Budget includes provision for the design development work to begin in July, with extensive local engagement with port users and the wider community including partners such as the British Antarctic Survey and the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators.

Our Public Works Department continues to deliver our commitment to upgrade the arterial link to MPA. Another 4 miles of the MPA road has been completed, and next season should see an asphalt surface all the way to the south side of Fitzroy ridge.

Works have continued on the Camp roads and an ambitious season is planned for next summer on both East and West Falklands.

The next phase of housing infrastructure development will begin in June and will deliver in total over 100 additional serviced plots. The Government expects to develop around 40 plots, with the rest released to the public.

The Falkland Islands Government housing project on Sapper Hill is also progressing at pace with 8 new houses and 14 more to follow. The next phase of 50 houses will be tendered soon after a slight delay. Private Sector housing provision has grown at pace in a sector that clearly needs extra capacity.

The interim power station project has been delivered with three high-speed engines to support the existing system. Detailed design of the new power station is due to be completed by the end of this year. In realising this plan, the Government is reaping the benefits of work done to identify and

tackle resource constraints, such as workforce and accommodation. Our planning is improved, and we have made significant investments as well in equipment and plant at the quarry.

Aviation services have had another busy 12 months. Investment in the service continues, with the avionics and engine replacement programme near to completion and a new pilot joining the team after finishing her training. The first of two new aircraft is expected to be in the islands around September – ready for the new season with the second following in December.

FIGAS unveiled in March the colours of the new plane, named Sir Miles Clifford, in honour of the Governor who was instrumental in its formation in 1948.

The capital programme recognises the need to strengthen linkages within Camp. The Public Works Department has therefore, alongside the road programme already mentioned, embarked upon a five year programme of investment in upgrades to ramps and jetties at various locations across the whole of the Falkland Islands. The Government continues to work with Sure to support much needed improvements to the Camp network. A new VHF 2m Radio network is due to be completed by August and a comprehensive national radio infrastructure survey was carried out to inform future investment decisions.

In addition to improving the quality of life for residents in Camp, such investments have the added benefit of improving the capacity and growth of tourism businesses outside Stanley.

## **Agriculture**

Agriculture remains of key importance not only to the economy but also to society across the entire Falkland Islands. Agriculture is so important to the identity and the culture of the Falkland Islands. As such the Government will continue to support and help grow our agricultural industry.

Last year I noted a buoyant market for our wool. But in the last two months we have seen how dramatically COVID-19 has collapsed global wool demand.

I therefore commend the Government for acting decisively in implementing a Wool Producers Assistance Programme. This generous government sponsored wool purchase programme will provide revenue replacement for wool producers in the Falkland Islands at a time of great uncertainty in global wool markets. In so doing it will help preserve the ongoing viability of this important sector.

In anticipation of the wool markets recovery, the Falklands will continue to work with partners to provide advice and support to farmers.

In the last two years the Farm Improvement Programme has been reviewed, a Director of Wool Innovation has been hired and the Falkland Islands Development Corporation, the Agricultural Service and other stakeholders continue to work together to provide support for businesses in the light of challenging market conditions. Work has also been undertaken in relation to participation in international organisations and forums that promote

awareness and trade of agricultural commodities, largely based around the newly established relationship with the International Wool Textile Association.

## **Marine and fisheries**

Fisheries remains a backbone of our economy, and a particularly important step was the signing of an Accord between the Government and the Falkland Islands Fishing Companies Association.

The Accord delivers on a commitment made in the Islands Plan for the Government to work in partnership with fishing companies for a responsibly managed fishery, underpinned by improving understanding of the ecosystem. The Government has also approved the opportunity of early renewal of ITQ quota, enabling longer term security for businesses.

The industry enjoyed a successful squid season in early 2020 – total catches of *Illex* squid reached 62,000 tonnes, above the average in the last 4 years. 30,000 tonnes of *Loligo* were harvested as well and a second season is planned to open at the end of July. The government's desire to protect the environment was evidenced by the fact that seabird and marine mammals' bycatch were negligible, thanks to the hard work put into mitigation measures.

Although the effects of COVID 19 on overall demand remain to be fully understood, prices for squid remain reasonably buoyant.

Separately the Government will investigate whether aquaculture of salmon in inshore waters is feasible from an environmental, social, and economic perspective. It is understood that the current proposal presented to the Government is at a very early stage and that we need, over the next few years, to improve our understanding of the industry before potentially deciding on a commitment to proceed further.

The Government has recently updated and modernised our key maritime legislation as it works towards the external International Maritime Organization audit that the UK and her associated Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies will undergo in September.

This long-term commitment started in 2015. The designation of a Maritime Authority in 2018 was a key element and the Government is now working to strengthen it with implementation of our ordinances and ensuring their consistent enforcement.

The Falklands successfully hosted and co-chaired the Red Ensign Group (REG) conference in February which further validated our commitment to all things maritime and raised our international profile as a maritime centre in the South Atlantic.

The Government continues to work towards meeting our international obligations as a Flag, Coastal and Port State and in October this year it will finally commence with a locally-developed and staffed Port State Control

regime to ensure safety of foreign-flagged merchant ships visiting our ports.

## **Oil**

Mr Speaker, the last year has been a rather turbulent one in the oil industry. Since the beginning of 2020, the global economic downturn resulting from COVID-19 has led to the oil price declining sharply, and the Sea Lion project has been paused for the time being.

However, considerable work has been done in the Department of Mineral Resources, and across government, that will ensure that the Falkland Islands is fully prepared for such development, when it makes economic sense for the project to proceed, from a legal, regulatory, fiscal and socio-economic perspective.

This work has been supported by the relevant specialists within the UK Government, and a new approach to project management has been introduced to provide greater focus on the essential elements required to deliver a well informed decision.

The technical and environmental work to inform the necessary applications for project consent is already substantially complete and a revised Environmental Impact Assessment was accepted by Executive Council following public consultation earlier in the year.

As further evidence of its commitment to sound planning, the Government also completed a report on the Socio-Economic Impact of Oil and Gas Development which also involved looking at public infrastructure projects. This report that was considered by ExCo in October provided an encouraging assessment of the effects of growth resulting from private sector developments in the oil sector. In so doing the report considered a wide range of issues including not only oil development but also population growth, national infrastructure and the effects on the labour force in sectors such as agriculture, fisheries and tourism, potential social impacts, public revenues and both overall public and private sector employment.

## **Economic development**

In terms of overall economic development, the Government has continued to work with businesses and key stakeholders such as the Falkland Islands Development Corporation, the Chamber of Commerce, the Falkland Island Tourist Board and the Falkland Islands Tourism Association, the Rural Business Association and the Falkland Islands Fishing Companies Association to better inform its policies and ongoing economic development policy initiatives.

A significant initiative currently underway that will greatly assist in the economic development of the Islands is a project in relation to a Doppler LIDAR solution to help better manage the Mount Pleasant airfield during and around Rotor wind events. This project, being undertaken in conjunction with the Met Office, is the result of a significant financial commitment from this Government and this project will soon proceed to the next stage.

# Environment

Blessed as we are to live in the Falkland Islands, the Government is conscious that there is much to be done to preserve and protect the environment we have.

Both locally, and globally, people have increasingly high expectations that the Falkland Islands Government will proactively and effectively manage its unique and diverse ecosystems in a manner that protects our environment for future generations as well as allowing for sustainable human activity and economic development for the present generation.

To further that, the Government has committed to establishing a new Environment Department with a new Head of Environment position to strengthen its ability to manage and conserve the natural environment in a sustainable and balanced manner for the benefit of all Islanders.

In the meantime, work is continuing on the modernisation of environmental legislation such as the Conservation of Wildlife and Nature Ordinance (1999); the completion of the Falkland Island's Biodiversity Framework; implementation of the Stanley Commons Management Plan; detailed policy work to help support further consideration of new Pollution Prevention Control legislation and regulations; and the completion and implementation of a comprehensive environmental strategy.

I am pleased to note that these sorts of initiatives are starting to have a positive effect. For example, the 2018 Waste Management Strategy is now bearing fruit, with 2019's successful glass recycling scheme now being followed by a can and tin collection programme. Further projects are in train, including a new landfill and waste transfer station, and a modern incinerator plant.

The Government also continues to focus on invasive species and biosecurity to protect our agriculture industry and protect our biodiversity.

In regard to pest control, a highly successful Calafate control programme has now treated over 500 hectares of land.

Elsewhere, our Biosecurity service has inspected 156 flights and 24 boat arrivals and stopped high-risk materials entering our environment.

The Government will also continue to represent the Falkland Islands internationally. The voice of the Falkland Islands was to have been heard on climate change at COP26, but this has now been rescheduled for November 2021 and representatives will be in attendance to highlight and promote the role of the Falkland Islands people as stewards of their environment.

The Government will also continue to encourage and promote the Falkland Islands as a hub for environmental research in the South Atlantic. Research into the Falkland Islands environment is continuously being encouraged with the South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute providing a key link with various research organisations in over 20 different countries.



## **Tourism and sports**

Mr Speaker, in talking of our tourism industry, there is no way of avoiding the very abrupt punctuation mark of COVID-19 that occurred near the end of what was a record breaking tourism season in the Falkland Islands with 72,836 cruise passengers arriving, up 16.5 per cent on the previous season. The expedition cruise market grew significantly, up 30 per cent to 16,931 arrivals. Tourists arriving by air also increased, numbering 1,648 between October and March, up 6.7 per cent.

However as we are all aware, public health related containment measures adopted both locally and globally, as a result of the pandemic, resulted in near cessation of international travel and have had a consequent effect on both the global and the local tourism industry.

Although the effects of the pandemic were felt near to the end of what had been an exceptionally good land-based and cruise tourism season in the Falklands, the effects will be most keenly felt next season. The Government will work with the tourism sector to help forecast and manage the potential short, medium and long term impacts of COVID-19.

In furtherance of this objective, the Government will continue to combine a variety of resources including not only its ongoing funding support for high-level awareness marketing initiatives but also its strategic use of the Public Diplomacy Programme; the ongoing engagement activities of the Falkland Islands Advisor in Uruguay with the South American tourism industry; and the ability of the Falkland Islands Government Office in London to engage with tourism industry stakeholders in the United Kingdom.

Travel is of course two-way, something we again saw enthusiastically embraced by our sports people. With considerable support from the Government, Islanders competed across the world – from China, New Zealand, Europe, to Brazil and the United States.

They covered marathons, sheep shearing, badminton, ice hockey to table tennis, squash and even short mat bowls.

The Islands also hosted the International Island Games Committee this year, with fantastic feedback. When international sporting events begin again the Falklands will continue to impress with our determination, skills, and sportsmanship.

## **Health and wellbeing**

Mr. Speaker I would now like to turn to Health and Wellbeing with a focus initially on investments made in this budget and progress to date on some important initiatives. I will refer to COVID-19 specific issues later in my address.

The guiding principle for the government remains the same – improving the health and wellbeing of our community and ensuring that people can enjoy the best possible quality of life, with our support where and when it is needed.

The Budget continues to make health and wellbeing a priority, investing £25m for further service improvements in health and social services.

Work has continued on the improvements to the hospital infrastructure – for example work on the Mammography Suite is due for completion by the end of June and further preparatory work for the installation of the CT scanner has also continued.

Work on Mental Health services has proceeded, and the final draft of the Mental Health Strategy will be ready this month for consideration.

Progress meanwhile has been made in relation to the Vulnerable Persons Unit, or Tussac House, with groundworks commencing in October 2019 and the project ready for the next stage.

I referred last year to the establishment of a new Public Health Unit. Earlier this year it surveyed nearly 600 residents, resulting in a major and valuable snapshot of health and lifestyle in the Falklands.

This is just the sort of baseline work that can guide us in making better decisions about how to support the health and wellbeing of our people, both in the short and long term.

## **Education**

Mr Speaker, beyond the physical health and wellbeing of the nation, the future will be shaped by how we nurture our youngest generations. I am delighted to report a year of progress for our Education Department. I was able last year to note the strong educational outcomes for our secondary school, and the groundworks being laid for Falkland College.

Falkland College and the Christie Community Library are now open: an impressive new building that widens access to academic programmes, both on and off island, and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Other foundations laid down in education in the past year are also paying dividends. The success and progress of both primary and secondary schools was recognised during an external review in March 2020.

It verified that the schools offer a standard that is above the average and highlighted the rapid, progress that the Falkland Islands Community School has made in the last 12 months by raising aspirations for students and staff, and developing focused leadership and management at all levels.

In our schools, we now have a manager specifically for Camp Education, a new leadership structure, and a quality and performance manager.

Progress measures in 2019 remained good, with the Falkland Islands Community School achieving a positive score for the third year in a row, placing it in the “above average” band of all UK schools for progress. Students who study overseas continue to be great ambassadors. Numbers have remained stable with 20 students in Further Education and 38 in Higher Education. Of the eight

students who completed University in 2019, 5 achieved 1st class degrees and 3 achieved 2nd class degrees in the upper division. This is the highest performing cohort in the last 5 years.

We have invested strongly in our Early Years sector. The Falklands' first Early Years conference in January gave prominence to this crucial stage in child development. The first inspections against the standards from the recent Child Minding and Day Care regulations were positive. This has exemplified the engagement of providers in key learning from the conference and from training courses. There have been 50 enrolments from the sector on local courses with Falkland College; and 14 are now qualified in caring for children.

The Early Years development project has now seen the first capital grants awarded, amounting to over £500,000 in investment. Private childcare providers can now build and maintain premises that offer a safe environment; are fit for purpose and enable the sector to continue to develop the quality of their provision.

## **Safety and security**

Mr Speaker, I would now like to address the topic of public safety and island security. Our police have continued to embed good practice and professional development to build on the positive 2019 review of the Royal Falkland Islands Police Force.

Community policing is at the heart of all the RFIP does and in February, a public perception survey was undertaken to further inform its work. There is a growing confidence in the police and there is a high level of intelligence sharing between the Police, MOD and Customs in support of protecting the Falklands.

Further work on refining career progression for local staff continues as the RFIP seeks to provide a workplace that rewards hard work and talent. Among a larger complement of dedicated staff, there are now five local police officers, a local station enquiry officer and three local reserve constables.

In addition the RFIP continues to develop its capabilities to tackle a range of complex policing demands, including protection and safeguarding of children.

Turning to the Falkland Islands Defence Force, it has continued to make good progress modernising training and equipment. Significant progress has been made in relation to ensuring consistency between FIDF training standards and those of the Ministry of Defence with an independently verified training regime to UK military standards and joint exercises taking place with the Resident Infantry Company. The FIDF played a full and active part in the BFSAI capability day in late 2019.

Our Fire and Rescue service maintains a strong complement of retained fire officers, which is a credit to both the service and the Islands. One example of their professionalism and courage that I observed personally was

demonstrated with the significant gorse fire earlier this year, where swift action in the early hours of the morning prevented loss of life and serious damage.

The Service has also received its new fire appliance, a significant investment of government.

Our capacity as a government to prepare for and manage emergencies was bolstered this year, with an Emergency Planning Manager coming into post just prior to the pandemic, bringing a wealth of experience and knowledge that has served us well in 2020.

Customs and Immigration is also part of our security – and its work has included rolling out an electronic ship's reporting system for certain vessels, assisting exporters registering with the European Union's Registered Export Scheme, and revising the registration procedures of ships in the Falkland Islands.

Work continues implementing the Immigration Ordinance and modernising practices and procedures. Such work is essential to the economic development of the Islands which needs ready access to a pool of qualified workers. I am pleased to report that during the past year, a large number of persons successfully sought Permanent Residence Permits and Falkland Islands Status, bolstering our permanent population.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that the Falkland Islands are now in sight of the final stages of the Demining project.

While it is wonderful that the Islands will soon be mine free – it will be with a sad heart that we say farewell to so many brave men, many of whom have spent a decade dedicated to safeguarding future generations of Falkland Islanders.

## **Legal and regulation**

I would also like to highlight the work of our Legal and Legislative teams which supports so much of Government and helps provide an enabling legislative and regulatory environment for social and economic development on the Islands. It has indeed been an extraordinarily busy year further complicated by changes brought upon by COVID-19.

The teams have worked across government to improve awareness of the policy-to-legislation process and in this regard a new Legal Policy Advisor post has been approved.

Going forward, the Government will progress proposals to provide for registers of beneficial ownership of companies, to comply with international good practice.

Further amendments to tax legislation will seek to ensure that the Falkland Islands remains a competitive jurisdiction in which to do business.

And further improvements are proposed to the laws governing the maritime sector, and fisheries licensing.

Our statutes database has been successfully maintained, ensuring access to the law for all.

A large package of maritime sector legislation was approved, including greater protection for the environment and for the safety of all those working in the sector.

Further improvements were made in telecommunications law and a Spectrum Management Framework was also published this year, ensuring this critical national service will be properly managed.

A comprehensive strategic review of broadband resulted in FIG's decision to invest £3m over three years to increase broadband provision for residents, in many cases doubling data allowances.

The Regulator continues to work with Sure to ensure it complies with its licence obligations, and responds to specific issues and concerns, including those raised by the public.

Regulations were put in place to update the arrangements for air accident investigation to comply with international standards, while the International Civil Aviation Organisation and Air Safety Support International successfully audited the Falkland Islands Civil Aviation Department.

This work is part of the assurance and compliance framework that ensures that all civil aviation operators based in or who visit the Islands keep people as safe as possible.

## **Civil service**

Turning to our civil service, it remains dedicated to delivering on the Islands Plan.

The value of the work, the professionalism and the dedication of government staff has surely been exemplified during the pandemic response where the Civil Service has performed to an exceptionally high standard, developing and implementing important policy measures and new operational procedures in a very short space of time, and under extreme pressure brought about by remote working and social distancing. The ability of our officers to go above and beyond has been extraordinarily reassuring, with many examples of inspiring leadership. But above all, it has been a fantastic example of teamwork.

Going forward the Government will continue efforts to recruit and retain talented individuals in order to maintain and improve upon these high standards. The Government will continue to encourage Falkland Islanders to enter the Public Service and to take up key positions and leadership roles.

Attracting talent requires modern, equitable human resource practices and procedures. To that end a refreshed management code has been completed.

The Government will continue to invest in and develop the Public Service, helping to retain existing staff, and encouraging prospective employees to consider the Falkland Islands Government as a progressive, ambitious career choice.

## **Partnerships and COVID-19**

Mr. Speaker, as I pointed out in last year's address to this Assembly, the Government could not fulfil its aims and ambitions without the input and support of partner organizations.

Partnerships enable the Falkland Island Government to build upon its resources and capabilities by leveraging those of others and, by working together, achieve so much more. Such partnerships are in evidence across a wide range of routine day-to-day government activities.

However, let me take a few moments now to talk about something that was definitely not routine: namely the COVID-19 pandemic. In so doing I hope to be able to touch upon a few of the many examples of how partnerships and team work have helped the Falkland Islands navigate their way through the global crisis to date.

The response by Falkland Islands residents and the Falkland Islands Government together with partners and colleagues at BFSAI, the United Kingdom Government and the private sector has been an impressive example of how organizations and people can achieve so much when working as a team.

Members recognised that confidence in the government and its processes was crucial in carrying the support of the public for measures enacted. To that end, the Government's Infectious Diseases Plan was refreshed, and importantly made public at a very early stage.

The response has been tremendous. People have followed public health guidance and responded to measures that represented significant disruption to normal life.

There has been – understandably – a great deal of focus on our medical resources and capabilities over the last few months and I would like to acknowledge that our hospital has done a tremendous job in reconfiguring to handle a potentially large number of patients who might need intensive care while at the same time maintaining core services.

Since the outbreak of the global pandemic, KEMH has successfully augmented its capacity with new equipment, and further drugs and medical supplies, bolstered by a British Army medical team. Partnerships...

The Government thanks the United Kingdom for rapidly testing more than 400 samples via the South Atlantic Airbridge during the initial stages of the response. Critically, in May the Falkland Islands was able to shift to testing for COVID-19 on island, with the UK Government donating a testing platform. This was a crucial step: the ability to process tests here is a game changer. The King Edward Memorial Hospital now has the capability to

test suspect cases and get results in as little as 24 hours, speeding up public health measures. Partnerships...

As the crisis unfolded, 651 cruise ship passengers on four vessels found themselves stranded by the closure of their planned ports.

Together the Falkland Islands Government, the tour operators, local businesses, Air Safety Support International, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and BFSAI worked to arrange humanitarian charter flights to repatriate the stranded passengers and ensuring that it could happen while ensuring no risk to the population. Partnerships...

Of course, the COVID-19 response has been broad ranging across every government department on the Islands while in the United Kingdom FIGO has played an important COVID-19 role liaising with UK politicians and officials and helping to facilitate travel needed by Islanders, especially our students and medical patients. Partnerships...

The machinery of government has also proved flexible, with Executive Council meeting far more often, deliberating on what must seem like a year's worth of normal policy in a very compressed timescale. Teamwork...

The Government has also worked closely with the private sector throughout the crisis engaging with the Chamber of Commerce, the Falkland Islands Tourist Board, the Falkland Islands Tourism Association and FIFCA to ensure that their perspectives are fully understood in order to better inform government policy responses. Partnerships...

The Government and the Falkland Islands Development Corporation have also worked together to deliver various private sector support packages designed to help workers and businesses weather the storm. Partnerships...

## **Wrap up**

I would like to close by emphasising how well the Falkland Islands has done in the past year.

The Government continues to make tangible progress on The Islands Plan.

The Government continues with this Budget to deliver a stable and prudent fiscal approach with an eye to our long-term future.

The Government continues to work with our people to realise their ambitions, and with our partners here and internationally.

And we have seen the value of all this in the past few months, in rising admirably to the challenges of COVID-19. I would like to close with a few words about an event in February which I think says much about this country.

On February 16 there was a huge turnout for the Port Louis to Stanley 175th birthday celebrations. Falkland Islanders joined a cavalcade.

It was a journey not without mishap. Vehicles became bogged.

As I experienced myself, there was always someone on hand to drag clear the less fortunate. This is the Falklands' way – a community honouring its past but with an eye on making steady progress into the future.

I am sure that will never change.