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Chief Pleas Media Release.

Policy & Finance Committee prepare an update to Chief Pleas on Sark Electricity resilience

The Policy & Finance Committee ('the Committee') will shortly bring a report to Chief Pleas to provide an update on discussions with Sark Electricity Limited (SEL) and to set out proposals to progress this matter to provide access to a resilient and safe supply of electricity for every Sark home and business. These proposals will include a request for Chief Pleas to support the Committee to establish a tender process in order to construct a new electricity system through a commercial supplier working in collaboration with Chief Pleas, which is considered to be the best option to secure electricity supply in Sark for the longer term.

On 21 June 2021, Chief Pleas directed the Committee to commence negotiations to purchase SEL. At this time, Chief Pleas also directed the preparation of legislation to enable a compulsory purchase should it become necessary. The Compulsory Purchase (Electricity) (Sark) Law, 2021 has since been enacted, but remains a last resort put in place following threats that SEL could cease trading.

Since June 2021, the Committee and SEL have appointed a mediator to assist both parties to establish the terms needed to commence negotiations. However, this has not proven possible. The opening position of SEL is based on terms, which have been stated as non-negotiable and that are considered to be fundamentally unacceptable to the Committee. Further to this, reports undertaken by independent bodies, published since June 2021 have raised serious health and safety concerns in relation to the condition of the electricity grid in Sark which is highlighted as outdated and in a state of repair which does not meet basic British industry standards as used in the UK and Guernsey. These are well known standards for the generation and supply of electricity. It is considered that, SEL has a duty of care to the public, both Sark residents and visitors, as well as to their own work force. This applies to all other business that operate in Sark, Guernsey and the UK without the need for specific legislation.

The Committee is of the view that, given the state of discussions with SEL and the concerns about the condition of the infrastructure, the installation of a completely new system is the best option to secure energy supply in Sark. The Committee will be asking Chief Pleas for the mandate to open discussion with commercial suppliers, using industry experts to provide independent advice to Chief Pleas during this process.

Conseiller John Guille, Chair of the Policy & Finance Committee said:

"Following a year of mediation, it is disappointing that a starting point for negotiations has not yet been reached. Based on the current circumstances the Committee is firmly of the view that it needs to find an alternative model of supply that provides long term resilience. This is a fundamental concern that affects the welfare of all islanders.

For example, SEL has recently suggested that it would replace the link across La Coupée to Little Sark, which is losing its protective shielding, by burying a new connection beneath the roadway subject to it receiving the necessary permissions from government. This is not as simple as Chief Pleas granting permission for the works. The engineering considerations to ensure the integrity of this historic and vital causeway are significant. It is not clear why this expensive and disruptive option is more favourable to SEL than replacing the current externally mounted cable with a similar arrangement that meets modern standards. This one example indicates the complexities involved with replacing the electrical infrastructure which need to be properly researched and costed before permissions are granted.”

The Committee will be publishing a report to take to Chief Pleas to seek a debate and this policy direction as soon as possible in early July.”

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