

8th July 2026

55th British Isles and Mediterranean Region (BIMR) Annual Conference

The 55th British Isles and Mediterranean Region (BIMR) Annual Conference took place in Gibraltar from 17th–19th June 2026, bringing together parliamentarians and officers from across the region to explore how modern legislatures can respond to contemporary challenges. The event provided both a platform for Sark to contribute to regional discussions and an opportunity to strengthen existing relationships, build new ones, and deepen ties with neighbouring jurisdictions.

The conference opened at Gibraltar Parliament, where Madame Speaker Karen Ramagge Phillips GMH MP welcomed delegates, followed by Chief Minister Fabian Picardo KC MP, who reflected on Gibraltar’s evolving constitutional landscape. Delegates then moved into a combined opening session led by Dr Joseph Garcia CMG MP, who provided a detailed briefing on the forthcoming Gibraltar Treaty - expected to be enacted next month - outlining its significance for Gibraltar’s post-Brexit future, cross-border arrangements and the wider constitutional relationship between the EU and the Commonwealth.

The second plenary session, Future-Ready Economies in Small Mediterranean Jurisdictions, brought together Minister Sir Joe Bossano, Northern Ireland MLA Paul Frew, and Sark’s Treasurer Sarah Hudson, who delivered her address, ‘Sark, Legislation and Building a Future-Ready Economy’. She described the realities of law-making in micro-jurisdictions, noting that ‘legislation is something you hear discussed on the street, in the shop, and at the pub’, and emphasising that Sark’s reputation is its currency. She highlighted the importance of credible legislation proportionate to Sark’s size and capacity, reflecting on recent reforms including Land Reform and ongoing Tax Reform discussions. She stressed that small jurisdictions must be agile and thoughtful, designing laws that fit their scale rather than transplanting frameworks from larger jurisdictions.

Sark’s participation also reflects the growing value of its membership in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Since joining the CPA last year, Sark has benefited from access to a wide network of parliamentarians facing similar challenges, particularly in small, rural or island communities. Attendance at events such as Gibraltar allows Sark to share experiences, learn from jurisdictions that have already navigated comparable issues, and draw on established good practice rather than developing solutions in isolation. Officer engagement with the CPA also provides a valuable avenue for continuing professional development, strengthening skills, broadening perspective and supporting the delivery of high-quality governance on Sark.

Friday's sessions offered some of the most memorable moments of the conference. Plenary III showcased Gibraltar's Youth Parliament, where young people responded to questions with confidence, clarity and genuine passion. Madame Speaker captured the spirit of the session with her reflection that 'the guardian of democracy is the citizen, and it requires engagement, and political power is held by the people'. Seeing future citizens already engaging in decision-making that will shape their countries was a highlight of the event, and Madame Speaker even remarked that one of the panel members may well be a future Chief Minister. The session drew a natural comparison with Sark's own recent first youth forum and reinforced the hope that a follow-up forum can be delivered this term to continue building democratic literacy among Sark's young people.

The day continued with a plenary on Digital Parliaments, which explored the opportunities and risks of integrating AI into parliamentary procedure. Delegates discussed how digital tools can support legislative scrutiny, improve institutional memory and streamline processes, while also recognising the need for safeguards, transparency and human oversight. This is an area Sark could explore further, with potential for direct future engagement with Gibraltar to understand how these tools might be adapted for a micro-jurisdiction.

The afternoon concluded with workshops on LGBT+ Allyship and Accessible Parliaments, both offering practical insights into inclusion, plain language, procedural clarity and modernization - themes increasingly relevant as Chief Pleas continues to refine its own processes.

The conference ended with a visit to Gibraltar's WWII tunnels and a closing dinner hosted by Madame Speaker. Sark's contribution - particularly Sarah Hudson's speech - demonstrated the island's commitment to credible law-making, thoughtful diversification, collaborative governance and active participation within the CPA.

Conseiller Natalie Tighe

Sark Treasurer – Sarah Hudson's Speech to the 55th CPA BIMR Conference

Sark, Legislation and Building a Future-Ready Economy

Ladies and gentlemen

Small jurisdictions see the world differently. We have to. When your population is measured in hundreds, not millions, every decision is magnified. Every legislative choice is felt immediately. And nowhere is this clearer than in Sark — a micro-jurisdiction where scale is not only our constraint but also our clarity.

Sark is part of the Bailiwick of Guernsey, an island group that includes Guernsey, Alderney, and Herm – each with its own identity, strengths, weaknesses, and challenges.

On Sark, with fewer than 600 of us sharing a three mile by one mile of rock in the Channel Islands, legislation is not an abstract exercise. It is something you hear discussed on the street, in the shop, and at the pub. You see the impact almost immediately on the community.

Sark's democratic story is still young. For centuries we were a feudal state; our current legislature is only 18 years old. In democratic terms, we are still finding our voice, still shaping our identity. And that means the quality of our laws matters enormously. We must build trust, build reputation, and produce credible legislation while remaining clear, proportionate, and workable for a tiny administration.

This is the reality that shapes our legislative choices.

Small jurisdictions must compete — for investment, for talent, for relevance. But competitiveness cannot come at the cost of credibility. Sark illustrates this tension acutely. To attract commerce without triggering international blacklisting, we must balance economic opportunity with regulatory integrity. And, as we all know, the so-called “Sark Lark” — the perception that small jurisdictions cut corners — forces us to be better than the stereotype, not defined by it. Our size means our reputation is our currency.

Innovation is essential, but so is stability. Sark's budgetary reality has historically been year-to-year, making long-term planning challenging. Yet future-ready economies require forecasting not for one year, but for ten, twenty, even thirty.

As Treasurer, I see every day how resilience and diversity need to underpin our financial health. With a balanced budget of just £2.5 million for 2026, even a small drop in income or an unexpected cost can have a real impact. We must provide essential services, maintain ageing infrastructure, and prepare for the future — all within tight constraints.

Economic diversification in small jurisdictions starts with modernising our historical frameworks: Recent reforms show this clearly - our Energy Security legislation, to protect Sark's energy supply and lay the groundwork for green energy projects, and Land Reform in 2021, allowing subdivision of tenements, supporting home ownership for Sark families and attracting investment. Tax Reform discussions continue, focused on long-term resilience and capital reserves. And with the Delegation of Royal Assent to the Lieutenant Governor of the Bailiwick, this has significantly streamlined our legislative process enabling Sark to adapt its laws more quickly to emerging opportunities. These reforms show that small jurisdictions can be agile, credible, and forward-looking.

Small jurisdictions are rich in ideas but limited in capacity. The challenge is not imagination; it is translation. Legislation must be proportionate, workable, and realistic for the size of Sark's administration. Our ambition must be matched with implementable design.

In small jurisdictions, legislatures carry a particular responsibility. It is not enough to pass laws. We must ensure they are Clear — understood by the community and administrators alike, proportionate — scaled to our size and capacity, and enforceable — because a law that cannot be implemented erodes trust. In Sark, proportionality is not a luxury; it is a necessity. Every law must be “right-sized” — neither over-engineered nor under-powered. We must always envision the real-world impact on the individuals of Sark’s electorate, and we must ask whether legislation is even necessary.

Small jurisdictions thrive when legislation is tailored, not transplanted. Copying frameworks from large jurisdictions rarely works. Their systems assume layers of regulators and enforcement bodies that simply do not exist on Sark. When we copy without adapting, we waste time, we waste resources and, most damaging of all, we risk losing the confidence of our community. Instead, we must design legislation that fits our scale, our capacity, and our identity. And we must share good practice with jurisdictions of similar size, learning from each other rather than reinventing the wheel.

And we must do this with transparency and consistency to build confidence outside of Sark in a global environment. Transparency builds confidence that our decisions are fair and accountable. Consistency shows that rules apply equally and predictably. These are the pillars of credibility for small jurisdictions — more important than size, budget, or institutional complexity.

Legislation is not just about rules; it is about enabling opportunity. The deregulation of electric bikes is a good example. It has supported tourism, expanded mobility, and modernised our transport options. But Sark’s size imposes natural limits. Every new sector must be introduced with care because unintended consequences can ripple quickly. The rise of electric bikes, for instance, has affected our traditional horse-and-carriage businesses — a reminder that diversification must be balanced with preservation. We must protect what makes Sark unique. Diversification is essential, but it must be thoughtful, proportionate, and aligned with our strong identity as a community.

Small jurisdictions should never operate in isolation. We are strongest when we collaborate. Others have already navigated many of the challenges we face, and there is no value in reinventing processes when we can learn directly from their experience. Recent visits to Alderney — examining their customs post and waste management strategies — show the value of shared practice.

As a small independent jurisdiction, safeguarding our autonomy is essential. But we are realistic about our limitations. Some areas of law are rightly Bailiwick-wide, and Sark acknowledges that its resources for systems and infrastructure are limited.

When new opportunities arise, we must ensure they align with our legal powers, our operational capacity, and our responsibility not to create risk or reputational pressure for

Guernsey. Thoughtful collaboration allows us to remain both confident in our independence and responsible partners within the Bailiwick and further afield.

Sark may be small, but our sense of purpose is strong. Our future will be shaped not by our size, but by the choices we make together — choices grounded in credible legislation, thoughtful diversification, and a commitment to building a future-ready economy. Thank you.