I am delighted to be here to open this seminar. And delighted that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) has come to St Helena to hold this post-election seminar for the new Legislative Council in order to strengthen parliamentary practice and procedure following elections last July. The CPA is the only Commonwealth body that works to strengthen territorial assemblies and legislatures such as LegCo and we are very grateful for this assistance. More broadly the relationship between St Helena and the CPA is important in providing a platform to develop good parliamentary practice within the UK Overseas Territories and to share good practice with other similar legislatures across the Commonwealth.

I think it is worth reflecting on last year's elections. We must not underestimate that they were free and fair elections. We take this for granted but it is something which many countries in the world fail to achieve. The elections demonstrated the islands' commitment to democratic ideals and standards. They show that St Helena lives up to the ideals on which the Commonwealth is founded and that St Helena can take her rightful place at the Commonwealth table. We also should not underestimate that the election resulted in women again being elected, signifying a strong commitment to gender equality and the importance of women’s political leadership. We lowered the voting age for the last election, so I am particularly pleased that the CPA Roadshows will provide an opportunity for our young people to learn about the political values of the Commonwealth such as diversity, development and parliamentary democracy.

This CPA Seminar provides an opportunity for newly elected Members and former Members to ask questions about parliamentary practice and procedure and will provide Members with a better understanding of the parliamentary system and democratic processes in other Commonwealth jurisdictions. I encourage Elected Members to take full advantage of this opportunity. But I think it is also important to recognise the significant steps this Council has already taken towards transparency, openness and accountability. I believe they could share this best practices on the Commonwealth stage. In particular they have opened up the workings of government by sharing papers ahead of and after meetings, declared their financial interests as a way of assuring the public their of integrity, and opened up more channels of communication by which they can engage with the public and the public can engage with them. I congratulate them. All of this is a strong demonstration of their commitment to, and implementation of, open government. Having said that, there is more to be done with, particularly the media, to take fuller advantage of this greater openness. But generally I hope that this post election seminar will give us all more ideas as we seek to strengthen our democracy, improve governance and move to a better future for St Helena and st Helenians. I look forward to a fascinating week.