



# UKOTA Annual Report to Political Council

13 NOVEMBER 2023

Prepared by the Association

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Anguilla • Ascension Island • Bermuda • British Virgin Islands • Cayman Islands • Falkland Islands • Gibraltar • Montserrat • Pitcairn • St Helena • Tristan Da Cunha • Turks & Caicos Islands

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### Introduction

The United Kingdom Overseas Association (UKOTA) was founded in 1994 and exists to promote both the interests of the Territories and cooperation between them, whilst also working to ensure good collective and individual relationships between Territories and the United Kingdom Government. The Association's work is governed by regular meetings of the Representatives of the Overseas Territories who are based in the United Kingdom.

The head of the Government of the Chair of the Association is the President of the Political Council and the President of the Association. With the appointment of the Falkland Islands as Chair, The Hon. Teslyn Barkman MLA, member of the Falkland Islands Legislative Assembly, is the President of the Political Council. The Political Council is the highest body of the Association, consisting of the individual representatives of each Member Government, which sets the policies of the Association and approves the decisions requiring its approval. All prerogatives necessary to the achievement of the Association's aims are vested in the Political Council.

Full Members are represented in the bodies of the Association by individuals duly appointed by their Governments to represent their interest in the United Kingdom, referred to as UK Representatives.

### Mission Statement

The Association exists to advance the interests of the United Kingdom Overseas Territories, facilitate co-operation between them, and promote solidarity. The Association demonstrates the collective partnership between the Territories and HM Government of the United Kingdom.

### The Annual General Meeting and Secretariat

UKOTA's Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 08 February 2023

**Chairman:** Richard Hyslop, UK Representative for the Government of the Falkland Islands

**Honorary Secretary:** Janice Panton MBE, UK Representative for the Government of Montserrat

**Hon. Treasurer:** Chris Carnegy, UK Representative for the Government of Tristan da Cunha

**Secretariat:** Karen Mentiplay

### Treasurer's Report:

Cash received in the year has totalled £24,000 (a further £3,000 having been previously paid in advance by one Territory).

The financial year runs to 31 December. As at 27 October, expenditure stood at £23,194 and the bank balance was £25,421. Principal costs have been Secretariat services, and events in Westminster. The full year will see a deficit of £5k+, funded from reserves.

## **The Work of UKOTA**

### **Financial Services Sub-Committee**

The Financial Services Sub-Committee is chaired by Kimberley Durrant, UK Representative for the Government of Bermuda.

In 2023, the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) continue to play a significant role in global finance. These territories serve as important financial centres, attracting businesses, investment, and capital from around the world. The report to the Political Council aims to provide an overview of UKOTAs, focus on three key areas: Public Registers of Beneficial Ownership, the influence of the European Court of Justice, and other recent developments impacting our Territories.

Several noteworthy developments have occurred in UKOTs' financial centres in 2023. These include:

- **Diversification of Services:** Many territories have expanded their financial services beyond traditional offshore banking, emphasizing fintech, asset management, and sustainable finance. This diversification reflects the evolving nature of the global financial industry.
- **Cybersecurity Measures:** UKOTs have taken steps to strengthen their cybersecurity infrastructure, recognizing the increasing importance of protecting financial data in the digital age.
- **Sustainable Finance Initiatives:** A growing emphasis on sustainable and responsible finance has led to the creation of green finance initiatives, further aligning UKOTs with international trends in environmental responsibility.

Engagement with the UK Government has enhanced through specific technical working groups to develop increased engagement and cohesion in the UK OT approach. The Ministerial on the illicit finance dialogue will be featured following the JMC to provide an opportunity for higher level dialogue.

### **Environment Sub-Committee**

The Environment sub-committee is open to all members of UKOTA with Kedell Worboys, UK Representative for the St Helena Government, selected to chair the committee following the Annual General Meeting on 8 February 2023.

Virtual and in person meetings were held throughout the year.

At an in-person meeting on 5 July 2023 Kylie Bamford, FCDO Head of Marine Conservation, and Marianne Teoh, Head of Marine Management, Marine Management Organisation (MNO), provided an update on the Blue Belt programme in the OTs. Marianne also gave a presentation on “Supporting UKOT financial resilience for long-term marine protection”.

Work continued with DEFRA including two Roundtables on 16 February and 17 July 2023 which discussed Darwin Plus funding, review of Darwin Plus Fellowship, the Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy, Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, looking back on the CBD COP15, APHA’s Biodiversity Initiative, and the Green Overseas project managed by Expertise France.

Darwin Plus Main round 12 closed 31 May 2023 – 23 applications were received from OTs ranging from £179,971 - £870,727.

Darwin Strategic – first round closed 24 July 2023, only one application received.

Third round of Darwin Plus local closing date 29 November 2023 and is for grants of up to £50,000 for organisations, and up to £20,000 for individuals – this is only available to organisations/individuals who are territory-based.

Representatives met with DEFRA Minister Trudy Harrison MP in two groups on 13 and 19 September to discuss environmental issues in their territories.

Liaison continued throughout the year with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). Workshops to inform the Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy have taken place in Turks & Caicos, Montserrat, St Helena, Gibraltar, British Virgin Islands, Cayman, Falklands, and Anguilla. Remote consultation/desktop studies are being undertaken for Bermuda, Pitcairn, Ascension, and Tristan.

The Chair held a virtual meeting with JNCC on 11 July to discuss follow-up actions from the UKOTA engagement event with JNCC on 25 April 2023. It was agreed that JNCC would formally invite a member of UKOTA to join the ‘OT and international sub-group’ of Joint Committee. The small sub-group meet virtually 4–5 times a year for a morning or afternoon session. Other members of UKOTA would be welcome to join meetings based on agenda and need. It was also agreed to explore with DEFRA if Overseas Territories’ representatives could be included in delegations to future MEA COPs and JNCC will continue to share the MEA newsletter with UKOTA.

Representatives were invited to JNCC’s Strategy to 2023 - Together for Nature Launch, <https://jncc.gov.uk/about-jncc/our-strategy> which included the OTs on 22 May 2023.

The Chair of the UKOTA Environment Working Group sits on the Steering Group for the Overseas Territories Biosecurity project and the MCCIP Overseas Working Group. MCCIP is embarking on a new OT project “Climate smart marine spatial planning in the UKOTs” which will be open to all OTs who may wish to participate. She is also now an observer to the Darwin Plus Advisory Group.

## **PR Sub-Committee**

The PR sub-committee is open to all members of UKOTA with Dorothea Hodge UK Representative for the Government of Anguilla selected to chair the committee following the Annual General Meeting.

Over the last year, the sub-committee has been working diligently to enhance the communication, visibility, and engagement of the association. In this report, we will provide an overview of our recent activities and plans.

Meetings: We have had three meetings where we discussed agenda items, including the annual newsletter.

Annual Newsletter: The sub-committee worked to draft, develop, and issue the UKOTA annual newsletter which highlighted how the Overseas Territories marked the Coronation of HM King Charles III. The newsletter also highlighted significant developments, success stories, and opportunities within the Overseas Territories. The front cover was graced by HM King Charles III and the newsletter included an article from The Rt Hon Sir Lindsay Hoyle, Speaker of the House of Commons.

UKOTA Strategy: The sub-committee facilitated an away day on 06 July, that focused on the development of a future UKOTA strategy. Further to this, the sub-committee Chair has worked to develop a comprehensive two-year strategy in line with UKOTA's overarching mission. This proposed blueprint encompasses intricate planning, specific activity targeting, and structured resourcing plans. It is primarily focused on ensuring the Overseas Territories' presence and influence are maximised during key dates and events, whilst simultaneously advancing our broader objectives. This document is currently being discussed amongst Representatives and will be shared with Political Council for comment and approval at a later date.

Future Plans: In the forthcoming year, the sub-committee is, in addition to our existing responsibilities, prepared to support the implementation of the UKOTA strategy, subject to approval by Political Council.

## **Child Safeguarding Working Group**

The Safeguarding Working Group, Chaired by Dr Tasha Ebanks Garcia, UK Representative for the Government of the Cayman Islands, developed a child safeguarding survey which was shared with the Overseas Territories via the Representatives in London in July 2023.

The objective of the survey is to help to create a picture of the existing arrangements in the child safeguarding policy and operational space across the Overseas Territories (OTs). The survey questions seek to draw out areas of excellence/expertise that provide opportunities for sharing and support across the OTs and gaps that provide opportunities for future work. The results of the survey will be used to support the OTs in identifying projects that benefit multiple OTs, make

a case for accessing resources (i.e. funding and technical expertise), and create dialogue between the OTs for the purpose of sharing practices and supporting each other in the child safeguarding policy and operation space.

Each OT was invited to submit one survey response. The response can be completed by a single person or a collective group and should represent the collective view of the Government and provide a snapshot of the existing arrangements. The following OTs have completed the survey: Anguilla, Cayman Islands, Falklands, Pitcairn, and Turks & Caicos Islands.

Once all OTs complete the survey the data will be analysed, shared with the OTs and will enable the Safeguarding Working Group to develop a proposal for next steps for consideration by Political Council.

### **Consular Affairs Working Group:**

The Consular Affairs Working Group is Chaired by the BVI Government UK Representative, Tracy Bradshaw.

The delivery of consular services in the UK to British Overseas Territories outside of passports and visas is the responsibility of the representative offices of the various UKOTA member territories. The offices continue to upgrade the delivery of their consular services and share best practice ideas and solutions to common issues and concerns. The provision of consular services and number of requests for information and assistance from BOT citizens varies depending on the OT office and the nature of the support required. Our offices make it easier for BOT citizens to access services while away from home, providing accessible, relevant, and timely guidance to support in accessing local services in times of need, including bereavement, hospitalisation, or as a victim of crime, with an option to speak to a member of consular staff.

### **Mental Health Working Group:**

The Mental Health Working Group is Chaired by Kedell Worboys, UK Representative for the St Helena Government.

The working group met virtually several times to plan the webinar which took place on 19 April, the latest in a series on Mental Health to take place. The topic for this was Mental Health Stigma as suggested by previous participants through the feedback forms. Over 100 participants from the OTs participated. Speakers were Sue Baker OBE from Changing Mind Globally, Dr Anna Neilson-Williams and Ms Grant-Simmons from Bermuda, Dr Virginia Rubaine from BVI, and Dr Alicia Malcolm from TCI.

### **Relationship with Overseas Countries & Territories Association (OCTA)**

UKOTA's ongoing relationship with OCTA is led by Tracy Knight, UK Representative for the Government of TCI and Janice Panton, UK Representative for the Government of Monserrat.

Following the establishment of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between OCTA and UKOTA in June 2021 both organisations have continued to seek opportunities to cooperate.

In June discussions commenced on the possibility of a joint OCTA-UKOTA event at COP28. A bid for an event along with the GO programme under the theme ‘Climate financing,’ aligning with the EDF11 Regional and Thematic Programmes was submitted to UNFCCC. Due to the large volume of applications we were subsequently advised by UNFCCC to merge our application for an event with another organisation. The final application that was submitted and approved was with the OACPS (Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States) under the title “The Role of Multidimensional Vulnerability Index to access concessional finance for resilience building”. The event is scheduled to take place at COP28 in Dubai on Sunday 10 December at 6:30pm.

Unfortunately, due to the now large number of event organizers it is unlikely that UK OT Ministers present at COP28 will be provided an opportunity to participate in the panel of speakers. However, OT Ministers will have an opportunity to make short interventions from the floor.

### **EDF 11 Thematic Programme for the EU Overseas Countries and Territories and the UK Overseas Territories – EU Green Overseas**

During the year under review, Expertise France, the contractor for the EDF 11 Thematic Programme for the EU Overseas Countries and Territories and the UK Overseas Territories held a meeting on 21st June 2023 with the programme’s Operational Steering Committee (OCS) to report on its progress. The meeting was chaired by the EU, and the contractors provided an update of the programme, now known as EU Green Overseas (GO) and reported on the identification of focal points in each of the EU and UK OCTs and on the implementation status of the three GO Communities: Climate Finance, Climate Resilience, and Energy Transition.

Expertise France stated that of the 25 OCTs, 20 had already identified their local focal points, and that several Territories had submitted proposals for their GO Facility project. They advised that the deadline for submission of proposals is 31 December 2023, beyond which it would be assumed that the Territory has no interest in doing so.

The activities of the three Communities, Climate Finance, Climate Resilience and Energy Transition comprise of Online training/workshops, hybrid workshops and in-person site visits, and the production of guidance tools and materials.

The importance of getting political support from the OCTs was emphasised and OSC members were urged to raise awareness at the highest level in their respective governments. In this regard, Expertise France visited London during the JMC earlier this year and held bilateral meetings with some Territories.

### **COP28**

UKOTA commenced engagement with FCDO and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero regarding COP28 and the participation of the Territories in July with a letter from the Chair

to the lead official within the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, indicating that the OTs wished to send one minister and one official from each OT, and to host an event/reception within the UK Pavilion. We were delighted to be informed that we would be allocated 28 places, the largest ever number of places allocated to the OTs at a COP, thus allowing each OT that wished to attend to send two representatives. The OTs who have taken advantage of this are: Anguilla, Bermuda, BVI, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Montserrat, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, St Helena, and the Turks and Caicos Islands. Each OT attending, will be responsible for their own costs. UKOTA will also have an event in the UK Pavilion on 08 December focussing on the theme of adaptation and resilience. In addition to this OTs are working with the UK and the Crown Dependencies on another event that will also take place, later in the day on 08 December. UKOTA continues to engage with others to explore wider opportunities for us to make our voices heard at COP28. Representatives of each of the OTs attending COP28 meet on a regular basis to plan these events and to discuss logistics and our wider engagement programme. UKOTA continues to engage regularly with a variety of relevant officials within various UK Government departments.

## **Girlguiding**

Girl Guides in the UK Overseas Territories are part of Girlguiding UK through British Guiding Overseas. On 19 April, Girlguiding UK announced that from 01 September 2023 (subsequently extended to 31 December) they will end organised guiding in the 36 countries and territories around the world. Their statement read:

“The board of trustees has decided to change how Girlguiding UK operates overseas and end organised guiding run by Girlguiding UK (units, volunteer structure, trips and online meetings) in these countries and territories from 1 September 2023.”

Girlguiding UK acknowledged that “guiding for girls who live in British Overseas Territories, has been a valued part of Girlguiding UK for much of our 113-year history.” This decision was not based on any concerns that Girlguiding UK had about how guiding was run in the UK Overseas Territories and it was taken without any consultation.

There are nine UK Overseas Territories in which Girlguiding operates, and according to the Chief Commissioner of British Guiding Overseas, there are 618 Girl Guides in the Overseas Territories and 182 volunteer leaders.

All nine Overseas Territories will be equally impacted by this decision. It is a decision that will affect Rainbows, Brownies, Guides, and Rangers. It will mean that they will no longer be able to use UK programmes and resources; leaders will also no longer be able to take advantage of training programmes.

Representatives of the impacted Overseas Territories have been active in Parliament and elsewhere to raise our concerns regarding this decision and to fight on behalf of our Girl Guides to have the decision reversed. We have engaged senior politicians, the Royal Household, and are working



closely with the office of the Speaker of the House of Commons. On the 19 September, we supported a Westminster Hall debate on this subject, organised by Dame Caroline Dinenage MP.

### **The Coronation of HM King Charles III**

The Leaders and Governors of the Overseas Territories were invited to attend the Coronation of HM King Charles III. In addition to this, they were invited to a reception hosted by the King and a concert in the grounds of Windsor Castle.

Members of the Overseas Territories Defence and Police Forces were invited to formally take part in the Coronation and a special reception was hosted by the Speaker of the House of Commons to welcome them.

### **Parliamentary Affairs**

**Select Committee Inquiries** – The Procedure Committee of the House of Commons is currently holding an inquiry entitled, The Procedure of the House of Commons and the Territorial Constitution Inquiry. In addition to this, the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee are also holding an inquiry looking at the status of the UK's Overseas Territories in the 21st Century. OTs have individually submitted evidence to both inquiries and some will be providing oral evidence at a later date.

**Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Room** – Thanks to the Speaker of the House of Commons, the Overseas Territories now have a dedicated room in Parliament. The room is located just off Westminster Hall and each Overseas Territory is able to book the room as and when they need it, subject to availability. In order to access the room, each Representative has been issued with a parliamentary pass.

**UKOTA Exhibition** – In May, the UKOTA, in collaboration with the Speaker of the House of Commons, held a month-long exhibition in Portcullis House. The exhibition, aimed at parliamentarians, was aimed at showcasing the Overseas Territories based around a number of themes, including trade and people. In addition to the information on the panels, QR codes linked to the UKOTA website where more information was available.

**UKOTA Parliamentary Conference** – In May, UKOTA also held an afternoon conference in Parliament. Alongside the leaders of the Overseas Territories, speakers at the conference included: The Rt Hon Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP, Speaker of the House of Commons; The Rt Hon The Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park, Overseas Territories Minister; and Stephen Doughty MP, Shadow Overseas Territories Minister. Over 100 people attended to hear speakers and panellists discussing the role of the Overseas Territories as environmental superpowers and what life is really like in the Overseas Territories for our people.

**UK Youth Parliament** – A young person from each Overseas Territory has been invited to take part in the UK Youth Parliament, on the floor of the House of Commons, on Friday 17 November 2023.

**UKOT Project Management Board** – The Chair of UKOTA is required to sit on the UKOT Project Management Board to ensure representation from Governments of the Overseas Territories. The purpose of the Project Management Board (PMB) is to provide strategic oversight and advisory support to the delivery of the UK Overseas Territories Project – Phase II (UKOTP – Phase II). Funded by the FCDO, the Project is managed and delivered by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK Branch (CPA UK) as the lead agency, in consortium with the UK National Audit Office (NAO) and the Government Internal Audit Agency (GIAA).

Membership of PMB:

- One member of the House of Lords acting as Chair/Vice Chair of the Board
- One member of the House of Commons acting as Vice-Chair/Chair of the Board
- The CPA UK Chief Executive
- The Chair of the UK Overseas Territories Association (UKOTA)
- A representative of the FCO: the CSSF Governance Programme Manager, Overseas Territories Directorate (donor)

The Chair of UKOTA attended the Project Board meeting that was held on 07 March 2023.

**Engagement with the Speaker of the House of Commons** – Throughout the year, we have continued to engage with the office of the Speaker of the House of Commons. Mr Speaker is a tremendous supporter of the Overseas Territories and UKOTA has worked closely with him and his team to advance issues of concern to our Territories and to further raise awareness of our Territories and people within Parliament.

### **Acknowledgment**

The Chair wishes to acknowledge the support of all Members in working together during another challenging year for our Territories.