

Response to Premier's Question
Delivered by Hon. André M. Ebanks MP
Answered on 24th June 2026

Mister Speaker

I thank the Member for raising this question because it provides an opportunity to reiterate, on the record in this Honourable House, why we chose to organise Cayman Forward, and why that matters for every Caymanian.

Mister Speaker, before turning to the costs, the general public deserves a summary of the problem we are trying to solve, because this is no ordinary policy question.

The Problem

For more than a decade, the Cayman Islands has been caught in a cycle of conflict between two different stakeholder groups – one group focused on the built environment, and one group is focused on the natural environment. This conflict has manifested itself between two Government statutory bodies: the Central Planning Authority and the National Conservation Council.

The consequences and costs are real. Government entities have expended public funds to fight each other in court. Caymanians with legitimate applications have faced months, and in some cases, years of delay and uncertainty.

The polarisation between those who champion development and those who champion conservation has deepened, not eased, with every passing year.

Mister Speaker, I note that this very issue was raised from the Opposition bench just yesterday. That is not a coincidence. It reflects how well-known this problem truly is.

It is yet another longstanding problem that the NCFC Government inherited and is working diligently to resolve. And resolve it we must, because it causes unnecessary strife in our relatively small community.

What began as an understandable tension between statutory frameworks and the responsible agencies has hardened, over time, into entrenched polarisation. The willingness to look dispassionately at the evidence, to sit across the table from those who see things differently, and to work together toward practical solutions has, in too many quarters, given way to litigation, obstruction and personal attacks.

Meanwhile, in truth, we need both policy areas to join forces. Cayman needs development. We need access to housing, robust infrastructure and the conditions for a thriving economy. We also need to be responsible stewards of the natural environment that defines, sustains and protects these Islands. These are not opposing goals. They are both imperatives. The task is therefore to build a framework in which both can be achieved. That is what this Government set out to do.

The Approach

This NCFC Government committed to end the cycle of conflict and litigation. We recognised that repeating the same approaches and patterns would produce the same outcomes.

So we chose a different path, we chose collaboration and innovation.

We commissioned an independent, neutral, professionally-facilitated process, the Cayman Forward Initiative, to address this problem in a new way: a structured, evidence-based dialogue that separates fact from fiction, fosters shared ground, and generates a joint reform roadmap.

The facilitators and delivery partners appointed were ForgeFront, a UK-based policy and futures consultancy whose team comprises former senior officials from the UK Cabinet Office, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and HM Treasury. They have facilitated similar complex, high-stakes projects for the UK Cabinet Office, the Northern Ireland Executive, the Dubai Future Foundation, and the UK's Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, among others.

Importantly, ForgeFront has no prior relationship, financial or otherwise, with any party to this initiative in the Cayman Islands. Accordingly, they can be impartial and independent (and avoid any assertion of favouring any particular stakeholder group).

This approach, Mister Speaker, might be novel in our public sector context, but it is standard practice in the private sector when facing deeply entrenched, structurally complex problems.

What would have been negligent, is doing nothing, or repeating what has already failed.

The Process

Turning now to the answer concerning the process and outcomes; the Cayman Forward Initiative ran across four structured pillars, each pillar containing key deliverables, from May through June 2026. It engaged dozens of participants from across Government, including

Ministers, Chief Officers, officials from both the Planning Group and the Environment Group and representatives from non-governmental agencies. The Official Opposition and the Independent Opposition were both invited to participate in the stakeholder consultation, and although the Official Opposition decided not to participate fully, at least they were given the opportunity and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition appeared on one phone call.

Representatives of the wider community also had an opportunity to participate and have their voice heard by responding to a survey shared widely.

The process was designed and conducted under the Chatham House Rule to encourage candour, and every stage was grounded in the evidence, not in outdated opinion or lobbying.

The Policy Summit itself was held on 5 June 2026. It brought together approximately 30 people representing the elected Government including Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries, senior civil servants, representatives from key Govt agencies, as well as private citizens legal experts, and representatives from non-governmental agencies from both sides.

It was a structured, full-day facilitated session using a three-phase methodology: mapping the drivers of the conflict, building a shared vision for what success looks like in future, and working backwards from the shared vision to identify the specific legislative, regulatory, policy and operational changes needed to get there.

Mister Speaker, the engagement on the day was excellent. People who have not been in the same room in years sat down together, in good faith.

They spoke to each other respectfully, asked questions and shared information in a professional, collaborative tone and made helpful contributions. That alone has not happened in years, if ever, and made the entire endeavour worth it.

Crucially, the day produced substantive, concrete steps that will form the basis of a post-Summit report and roadmap for reforms.

The Post-Summit Report, a substantive document covering methodology, findings, areas of agreement and disagreement, and prioritised reform recommendations, is due to be submitted to the Office of the Premier in early July.

Upon receipt, the findings will be shared first with Caucus and Cabinet. We will carefully review the report, together with any recommendations, decisions and actions stemming from it, with the aim of making it available to Parliament at the anticipated September 2026 meeting (and thereby disclosed to the public). We are determined to be deliberate, responsible, transparent.

The Cost

In response to the question on costs:

This comprised:

- **CI\$68,814.60** for the ForgeFront facilitation team's fees and associated expenses for the deliverables under the four pillars; and
- **CI\$14,953.83** for venue, catering and audio-visual costs for the Summit on 5 June 2026.

We view the facilitators fees as a relatively modest investment for a credible, independent, internationally experienced team to assist with a problem that has cost

this country millions of dollars in litigation, in delayed development, in the destruction of our pristine beaches and natural drainage areas, in important habitats, and in a decade or more of governance conflict.

Doing nothing would not have been 'cheaper', doing nothing would result in more of the same expensive and unpredictable conflict.

In terms of the cost of the venue and associated costs, Mister Speaker, Government has few facilities capable of accommodating a group of this nature and size for this type of structured, technology-supported dialogue. A modern, fit-for-purpose space was a prerequisite for the process to work effectively.

In Closing

Mister Speaker, this Government does not pretend that the Cayman Forward Initiative resolved every disagreement or healed every strained relationship. It did not set out to do that. What it did was create, for the first time, the conditions for an honest, evidence-based conversation about what needs to change and how.

The NCFC Government is solutions-oriented. We are forward-looking. And we are committed to governing in a way that serves not just this generation of Caymanians, but the generations that will inherit what we build, and what we protect.

This House will hear more from this Government on next steps as the process continues. We will keep Parliament and the public informed.

Mister Speaker, that is the answer to the question. And it is this Government's commitment: to keep moving Cayman Forward.

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