



**Formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council**  
**1400 on Tuesday 25th March 2019 at the Court House**

**MINUTES**

Present: HE Lisa Honan, Governor  
HH Steven Chandler, Administrator  
Councillor Samantha Arms-Lawrence  
Councillor Nicky John  
Councillor Alan Nicholls  
Councillor Terence Young  
Gareth Morris, Director of Resources  
Allen Cansick, Solicitor General

In attendance: Nathan Millington, Director of Operations & Facilities  
Sarah Roberts-Favell, Head of Administrator's Office  
Catherine Leo, Asst Director of Finance  
Jane Disley, Clerk of Council

Apologies: Councillor Keturah George [overseas]

**1. Welcome**

The Administrator welcomed all to the meeting. He reminded everyone that this was outside the normal cycle of meetings in order to discuss and recommend approval for the FY 19/20 budget. He reported that although Cllr George was absent, she had telephoned earlier in the day to confirm that she was happy to endorse the decision of her fellow councillors.

**2. Approval of minutes**

Minutes from the formal meeting on 28 Feb had been provided ahead of the meeting. The Administrator apologised for their lateness, which was due largely to the unusual intensity of activity over recent weeks; he committed to tightening the process to ensure this did not happen again. He explained that the previous Administrator had now had chance to review those minutes and had made some amendments; these would need to be incorporated and then the updated set of minutes would be circulated for councillors' review. In the meantime, since the amendments did not change the substance of the record, he proposed that the meeting continue to work from the existing draft in order to review actions.

**3. Matters arising**

The following matters arising from the minutes of the previous formal meeting on 28 Feb 19 were

discussed.

3. Animal welfare: Dir Cons would attend the next informal meeting in order to present a paper on animal health and welfare.

4. Marine Protected Area (MPA): Dir Cons had communicated the Council's MPA decision to UK Govt officials and advised that the next step would be to await the formal response with regard to funding. The Administrator advised that although we had had clear indications of funding support via the Chancellor's 13 March Spring Statement, the Spending Review (SR) toward the end of summer should provide greater clarity. Cllr Nicholls asked if the SR would still happen in the event of a UK election. The Administrator suggested that any government would probably prefer to hold an early review, but a no-deal Brexit might affect the timing. He thought that since there was broad support across the UK Parliament continuing support would be likely. The Administrator also explained that a Marine Management Plan (MMP) would need to be drafted, along with appropriate legislation, both of which would be brought before the Council in due course.

**Action: Dir Cons to draft an MMP. Appropriate legislation to be prepared with inputs from Dir Cons and Crown Counsel.**

4. MPA decision communicated to Lord Ahmad: Councillors confirmed they had written to Lord Ahmad on 7 March.

5.a) Joint Ministerial Council (JMC) – policy on safeguarding vulnerable adults: The Administrator confirmed that there was to be a meeting of the Ascension Island Safeguarding Children Board (AISCBS) on 4 Apr and he would raise the topic for discussion.

**Action: The Administrator to seek the AISCBS's advice.**

5.b) JMC – availability of CSSF funded training for safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults: The Administrator confirmed that contact had been made with St Helena Government's Director of Safeguarding and the FCO to ask them to highlight training opportunities. He would also mention this at the AISCBS meeting on 4 Apr.

**Action: The Administrator to raise at the 4 Apr AISCBS.**

6.c) Employment legislation: The Solicitor General confirmed that he would aim to look at the employment legislation while on Ascension but warned that it was a significant task. Cllr Nicholls said that it had been going on for years with no progress. The Administrator advised that work had been done but it had been halted pending greater clarity on the future of Ascension. The Governor confirmed that the cessation of the air bridge had become the focus of attention and so employment legislation had been suspended until more was known. Cllr John recalled that, aside from the future of Ascension issue which came later, the employment legislation had been ready for public consultation, but one of the employing organisations was dissatisfied with the content. He stressed that the new ordinance was needed because the current 1926 ordinance provided little protection for both employers and employees.

**Action: The Solicitor General to revisit the employment legislation review, and ensure the correct current version was available on the AIG website.**

6.d) Disaster Management Plan: The Administrator reported that the disaster plan was almost complete but that Police Inspector Kewley wanted to do a little more work on secondary skills training, eg for volunteer responders. Inspector Kewley was also planning to hold an exercise in due course.

6.e) Minutes on AIG website: The Clerk confirmed that a new login for the website had been received and on completion of a tutorial with HR she would be able to upload the recently

approved formal meeting minutes. The Administrator asked to confirm his understanding that the Council would normally publish the full formal meetings minutes unless they contained sensitive information, eg they recorded discussion from a (rare) closed session. Cllr John confirmed that this was the case and that informal meetings were closed and so minutes from these were not published. However, he asked if the useful details about the Development Fund projects provided by Dir Ops at the informal meeting on 19 Mar could be included in the formal minutes of this meeting. He also suggested that extra detail be added about the speed of the new crane and therefore improved safety implications. All agreed and the notes are attached at the end of the minutes.

**Action: The Clerk to prepare a summary of the information provided by Dir Ops in the informal meeting on 12 Feb for publication [enclosed with these minutes].**

6.f) Summary of responses to concerns: The Administrator confirmed that a summary of information to respond to concerns had been distributed via public notice. While formal meetings would have minutes published, informal meetings would not. He proposed that a summary of topics covered at informal meetings be produced for publication. All agreed.

**Action: The Clerk to draft a summary after each informal meeting for public release.**

6.g) Petrol station: Dir Ops confirmed that once suitable timings had been agreed there would be a trial early morning opening of the fuel station. If successful this could lead to the opening hours being adjusted permanently.

7. Summary of the 28 Feb meeting: The Clerk confirmed that work on a draft had begun and it would be completed as soon as possible.

There were no further comments on matters arising.

#### **4. Budget**

The Administrator thanked the Dir Res for his work in preparing the budget information and councillors for engaging with the process via the Finance Committee and a number of informal meetings.

Dir Res read out the following summary of the budget and process:

“As reported a part of last year’s budget setting exercise, AIG are still operating within financially difficult circumstances. Revenues have continued to fall, and forecast to continue that trend next year. We have attempted to put forward a budget to counter as best we can the impact of falling revenues, without making rash or rushed decisions on savings that could be deemed unsustainable, or that would impact adversely on services offered.

Where possible, we have sought to make efficiencies across AIG and have made operational decisions on spends such as training and overtime, and have introduced more stringent questioning over each new vacancy. The one area we have allocated additional expenditure to is the central consultancy budget, where we feel expert advice and guidance on a number of key areas may help us to achieve greater efficiency savings in the future.

As such, the budget presented for approval requests 7 million, 107 thousand pounds for operational expenditure through the Consolidated Fund. This, when offset by forecast revenue, would budget for an operating deficit of around £1.2 million. The cash impact of this on reserves after non-cash adjustments would be around £0.3 million.

Alongside the Consolidated Fund request, we would also like to request a capital budget funded

through the Development Fund of £816 thousand. We have proposed a series of capital projects that we would like AIG to jointly fund with CSSF, as well as some that we feel AIG should fund alone. The entire AIG spend on capital would impact directly on reserve levels, but is set at a level we believe to be necessary.”

The Administrator asked if there were any questions.

**Cllr Nichols asked if there were fee or tax increases.**

Dir Res confirmed that there would be no such rises this time but that he would have to look at it for the next budget. Such increases would need liaison and negotiation and there had not been time to go through that process on this occasion.

**Cllr Nicholls asked about the source of the savings.**

Dir Res explained that savings predominantly would come from the overtime budget (director level approval now required rather than team leader level); training budgets (director level approval again); and from reducing internal refurbishment budgets. Advice would be provided by Dir Cons about energy saving, messaging and fuel consumption targets. He also reported that he, Dir Ops and Asst Dir HR had agreed to a monthly meeting about vacancies to challenge one another’s positions.

**Cllr John asked about the 380.2% Ops Directorate figure on the Expenditure by department sheet.**

Dir Res explained that the overtime and training budgets would move from the individual teams and into the Ops management budget, whereas the director posts would move out of Admin budget codes, eg Dir Ops cost would now sit within the Ops directorate budget. This was therefore a shift in emphasis rather than an increase in costs. Dir Ops also explained that the Roads & Grounds section had been externally funded by the roads levy, but that that funding had ceased last year and the roads team had been reemployed to fill vacancies elsewhere within Ops. Roads would henceforth fall under the Plant team and so the assets were now shown as with them and they would have a cyclical plan of maintenance, focusing on the main supply routes.

The Administrator asked if the Governor had any additional questions. The Governor was content with the concept of cost sharing between AIG and CSSF as she felt it was the right thing to do because it gave the Council an overview, but she asked for a sense of why AIG had chosen to do it this way. Dir Ops explained that the Year 1 programme had been achieved but there were learning points raised at both Council and FCO level. There was an option with the million pound capital commitment for both organisations (AIG/CSSF) to work together toward the same aim but to achieve greater impact. The Governor asked how accountability was achieved with shared costs. Dir Ops explained that projects that were jointly funded would still sit comfortably within the CSSF framework, although there remained issues for AIG/the Council, whereas projects associated with the Capital Fund only would generally sit outside the CSSF framework. In other words, they had tried to avoid conflict as far as possible.

The Administrator then asked if the Council were in a position to give their decision on the budget:

Cllr Young – approve

Cllr Nicholls – approve

Cllr Arms-Lawrence – approve

Cllr John – approve

Governor – content to accept the Council’s recommendation to approve the budget.

The Governor thanked Dir Res and his team for their work. The Administrator echoed this and added his thanks for the guidance provided to councillors and for councillors recognising the need for savings as this time.

Cllr Nicholls reminded everyone of the need to approve the proposed ordinance:

Cllr Young – approve

Cllr Nicholls – approve

Cllr Arms-Lawrence – approve

Cllr John – approve

Governor – content to accept and approve.

## 5. Any Other Business

Christmas flights: The Administrator reported that he had received only one item in advance of the meeting. Cllr Young had asked about the additional SA Airlink flights over Christmas: given the weather issues around that time he questioned why the dates had been chosen and why PCA members did not appear to have been consulted. The Administrator explained that there had been negotiation between relevant parties, which had been complicated by such issues as the change of departure airport in South Africa and by school term dates. This was therefore the best compromise possible between the interests of Ascension, St Helena and SA Airways. However, he recognised that a pertinent lesson for next year was to start the negotiation much earlier. Cllr Young asked if a notice could be prepared for heads of the other organisations to explain the situation and demonstrate that this had been raised at the Council meeting. The Administrator confirmed that the minutes would achieve this purpose, but he would raise the subject at his meeting with heads of employing organisations scheduled for Wednesday 27 March. Dir Res advised that the AIG myth buster email also contained brief information on the flight scheduling.

Additional AOB points were raised as follows:

a) Hydroponics: Cllr John explained that there had previously been a committee for hydroponics, but one member had since left Ascension. Given the current dissatisfaction, he proposed that this be reinvigorated, with Cllr Nicholls as the new member. It could then meet on a monthly or bi-monthly basis to discuss and review hydroponics. Cllr Nicholls accepted the nomination and the proposal was endorsed by other councillors.

**Action: The Hydroponics Committee to meet in due course and report back.**

b) Two Boats pool – use by divers: Cllr John asked if the diving club could use the pool at different times as there were potential safety issues with their using it at the same time as families. Dir Ops offered to look into this as he had also recently become aware of the issue.

**Action: Dir Ops to look into the timings of divers' use of the pool and report at the next meeting.**

c) Two Boats playground: Cllr John reported that there was hazardous debris around the Two Boats playground, eg bottles, cans and sheep faeces. Dir Ops offered to arrange for it to be inspected.

**Action: Dir Ops to arrange an inspection of the Two Boats playground and any necessary follow-up action.**

d) EFFI update: Cllr Arms-Lawrence asked for an update on the EFFI water problems. Dir Ops explained that excessive rainfall kills the bacteria in the sewage works which means that the decrease in the quality of water makes it no longer safe to use. The Plant and Environmental Health teams would continue to monitor it and the EFFI distribution would restart once the water was safe again. He offered to produce a public notice to explain.

**Action: Dir Ops to produce a public notice containing an update on the EFFI issue.**

e) Food supplies: Cllr Arms-Lawrence, on behalf of Ascension Island residents, expressed how grateful they were for AIG stepping up to ensure there would be sufficient food supplies on

Ascension, given the short notice of the FIRS delay.

## **8. Date of next meetings**

It was proposed that the next informal meetings and formal meeting would be held on the following dates:

- Informal – Thursday 11 Apr at 1630
- Informal – Thursday 25 Apr at 1630
- Formal – to be confirmed

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 1450hrs.

**J Disley**

Jane Disley

Clerk of Council

Enclosure:

Information from recent informal AI Council meetings



### **Information from recent informal AI Council meetings<sup>1</sup>**

1. Public lighting: There are more than 100 towers currently broken and the WYG report states it would cost at least £800k to replace them; this was extremely expensive so an alternative solution was needed. The plan was to trial 20 solar powered lights which would be installed in small groups in places of greatest need. This trial offers an opportunity to test a solution that does not rely on the underground cabling maintained by Encompass. Encompass currently do not have the resources to upgrade the cabling and AIG do not have the funds or expertise to do so. An off grid solution would be welcome so if this trial proves positive more of the same could be purchased in future. [Street Lighting will arrive on the May ship. 20 towers will be replaced in trial areas and will be monitored through 2019; their performance will determine whether this type is rolled out across the island or if an alternative proposal is required.](#)
2. Georgetown swimming pool: There is capacity to refresh the pool within the next 6 months, including installing a new salt water pump. This would not include any refurbishment work, but would bring the pool back into operation for around 2-3 years. Research would continue into the best long term solutions for a new pump and for the pipe so that it would be more resistant to the environment [a shorter one would be less vulnerable to the strong tides, but would be more likely to clog with sand and vice versa]. The Council agreed on the priority to get the pool open as soon as possible without the need for improvements to its cosmetic appearance. [Collaboration with Encompass on the procurement of a suitable pump is on-going; once a suitable replacement is procured this will be installed and temporary ducting to the sea installed. This will allow short term operation of the pool pending a full refurbishment.](#)
3. Hospital: In order to address the dilemma of a short term fix of current facilities versus long term improvement/new build there is a need for a feasibility study into a new hospital. This would take a wide view and articulate appropriate standards. It would also help while the future of Ascension was uncertain as it would allow AIG to make progress and be ready to communicate options and funding bids with specific details once more is known. Although the ideal was a coherent plan for the future rather than a series of piecemeal fixes, there was still a lot of work to do in the short term to maintain and fix current problems. [A draft scope of works has been developed for the hospital feasibility study with this intended to be procured in Q3 of 2019.](#)
4. Petrol station: Although the tanks have been installed successfully, key elements of the system were not delivered and the supplier was chased to find out why. In the meantime, work was begun in order to try to fill the gap by determining what – if anything – could be made locally to provide a temporary fix until the correct items had been delivered. [Installation of the petrol station is complete with commissioning currently underway. Currently the MEP teams are installing the final emergency systems before fuelling can be attempted. We will continue to liaise with the Council on when fuel is expected to be retailed. To date the missing components have not been delivered; however a local solution has been found where items are missing.](#)
5. Hydroponics: Concerns had been raised about the effectiveness of hydroponics due to the limited amounts of fresh produce available recently. It was agreed that there was a need to find out what – if anything – had been going wrong and whether or not it was possible to make practical improvements. [A](#)

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<sup>1</sup> As per minutes of formal AI Council meeting on 25 Mar 2019 - Item 3. 6.e)

proposal has since been made in a recent Council meeting to reinvigorate the previous Hydroponics Committee, which AIG welcomes. We are currently trialling substrate bag systems which are proving to be successful with certain crop types. We are currently dealing with rodent control issues; however it may be prudent to commence the committee with a site inspection.

6. Effluent water: The recent heavy rainfall has affected the operation of Georgetown and Two Boats sewage works. Unfortunately the volume of water passing through the works has affected the bacteria and microbes present; these organisms break down the waste and reduce the harmful nature of the effluent before being collected. Effluent water could not be issued until the quality returned to normal as a matter of public health. AIG have conducted regular tests and when this returns to an acceptable quality we will begin distribution to the public once more. We apologise for the delay to this normal service and will keep the public informed as the situation progresses. [Sampling has been undertaken since the recent heavy rainfall and the distribution of effluent water has resumed in limited quantities. There have been some maintenance issues with Two Boats treatment plant which have now been resolved and so we expect the quantities of effluent water to increase to normal levels over the next few weeks.](#)
7. Crane replacement: AIG's previous/existing cranes were not designed to do the work that AIG put them to. They were construction cranes that could lift a load and place it precisely, whereas AIG needed a maritime crane that could sit next to the sea without corroding and lift repeated loads quickly. The new crane is considerably faster than the existing one; this is not to increase the speed of lifts but rather to ensure we are able to control the load better in changing sea conditions. This makes the operation much safer as we can get loads to and from the pontoons with less risk of containers hitting the pontoon or those nearby. Similarly, we did not need a 160 tonne-capacity crane for off-loading because the FIRS and MV Helena have a 20 tonne cargo limit. The benefit of the new one is also that it can spread the load across a wider base and thus have a much smaller impact on the pier. This is a specialised item and Dir Ops is absolutely confident that no other crane would come close to it in terms of being fit for AIG's purpose. It comes with a 5-year spares package and an in-built fault-finding programme with an automated connection to the manufacturer in Germany. The package also came with operator and maintenance training.
8. Forklift replacement: AIG's existing equipment was near the end of its life and needed to be replaced. A like for like replacement would limit operations because the current machine is unable to lift fuel containers and so AIG depends on assistance from Wolf Creek with an additional crane. Options would include specific types of lifts for certain jobs; some could handle and manipulate containers but not stack them, whereas others had attachments that could do more [hooks for aggregate bags] but the attachments carry an additional cost and might not be useful for AIG operations. The aspiration was to purchase something that was multi-purpose in order to boost our resilience and to speed up our operations, thus allowing more revenue to be generated. The aim therefore was to determine what piece of equipment would best serve that purpose. Currently there was only one machine, but AIG mixed and matched other machines to cover the spectrum of lifting tasks. Rationalising the fleet would also bring down the current maintenance costs and allow AIG potentially to raise revenue by selling some items of machinery. Having one machine instead of several would also reduce costs by needing fewer operators during ship work.
9. Asbestos survey: Asbestos was a real concern and so the facilities management plan was intended to keep people safe and would incorporate a management document for each property that would show the location of any asbestos and the property's current state. That way, occupants and workmen would be sure about any asbestos questions. There was a risk associated with the fact that AIG currently did not have the right information about its properties and therefore an asbestos survey was the priority. It was impossible to predict where any asbestos would be because it had been so widely used when the properties were constructed. However, once we knew where it was we could manage it [not remove it as that would be an unnecessary job]. Surveys would be valid for ten years unless refurbishment work was required.



10. Corrosion shelter plan: AIG's aim was to not to protect everything, but the majority of and the valuable assets. Currently, the maintenance teams spend a considerable amount of time on a losing battle to address corrosion. The AIG plan was to have several shelters spread over different locations, but the detail had not yet been determined as it would depend on the size of assets and their usage, eg there was no point in having a remote shelter for something that is in almost constant use.
11. Refuse vehicle replacement: Rather than replace the refuse truck with one the same it was better to look at the different options as a multi-purpose vehicle might offer better value. There was therefore a need to investigate alternatives.
12. Quarry feasibility study: The purpose of this survey is to determine what is needed currently, the aim being to reduce long term expenditure on the import of sand, aggregates etc and instead use the materials we have on island. The survey will tell us the source of the deposits that had been used previously [1992] and give an indication of whether or not the same material would be usable for our current/future needs. The information would allow AIG to plan ahead more effectively.
13. Electrical rewire project: The option to keep this work within AIG had been investigated, but Ops didn't have the resources both to maintain and refurbish the AIG estate, albeit AIG staff would be involved in the project. Ops staff were fully committed elsewhere, currently on reactive work, albeit the aspiration was to change the focus to being more proactive. There were 2000 work chits last year, mostly for electrical and plumbing. Much of the work came from the fact that the wiring was 50 years old and not compliant with current standards, but there was a shortage across the island [not just AIG] of electricians. As a result it would be necessary to bring in tradesmen from off-island. The absence of a dedicated facilities manager for 10 years had resulted in forward maintenance being neglected. A hybrid approach would be employed to improve standards. Currently, many properties were in such a condition that AIG could only fix things that broke, which was an ineffective cycle; a change is needed to create the capacity to be more proactive and thus allow staff to carry out planned maintenance based on strategic planning, not local response. Dir Ops explained that people would need to move out in order to do the rewiring work and using AIG staff [2 people] the work would take 1-2 weeks on average but this would vary considerably between properties. This was one of the reasons an outside contractor was being proposed: with more manpower per team the time taken would reduce to just a few days per house.
14. Property refurbishment project: The aim was to make better use of the AIG estate via a property rationalisation plan because while the estate was huge it didn't necessarily meet AIG's needs. In the past we had expanded into what was available rather than working out what was needed and using only that. Rationalisation might mean bringing some properties up to standard but for others it might mean sub-dividing large houses [for which there is limited demand] and making them into smaller flats. In the longer term this might mean removing some hard to maintain properties from the AIG estate altogether. The aim was to refurbish 10 properties in the coming year. In the past work had been limited to a 'fit and finish' only [eg new kitchen/bathroom plus repainting] and had not considered any structural or external requirements. By addressing such considerations as part of this refurbishment plan it was unlikely that further work would be required for up to 10 years.

**J Disley**

Jane Disley

Clerk of Council