



Formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council
1215 on Friday 27 September 2019 at the Court House
MINUTES

Present: HE Greg Gibson, Acting Governor
HH Steven Chandler, Administrator
Catherine Leo, Assistant Director Finance
Rob Cheeseman, Crown Counsel
Councillor Katharyn Chadwick
Councillor Andrew Ellick
Councillor Keturah George
Councillor Andrew Hobson
Councillor Alan Nicholls

In attendance: Jane Disley, Clerk of Council
Apologies:

1. Welcome

The Administrator welcomed all parties and congratulated the new Councillors on their election success. The Acting Governor added his own welcome and congratulations.

2. Swearing in of the new elected Island councillors

The newly elected councillors were sworn in by the Administrator and signed the written copy of their oath or affirmation.

The Administrator noted that the turnout for the election had been low (29%). He asked if low turnouts had also been the case in recent previous elections and sought initial thoughts on how councillors might better engage with the Island community. Cllr Nicholls felt that many people did not know what the Council does, although recent efforts to provide more information had improved that. Cllr Hobson stated that most people felt the Council was a waste of time, while Cllr Chadwick pointed out that although there had been greater engagement recently, more was needed, eg via workshops and maybe a Facebook page to engage with younger voters. Cllr George noted that experience from public meetings in the past showed people would engage more on matters they felt directly affected them. Cllr Ellick noted an occasion in the past where engagement had taken place, but the Council decision went against the majority public opinion, which had resulted in a lack of confidence in the Council. The Administrator considered that more engagement and more explanation were required to emphasise how the Council was relevant to people's lives. This subject would be raised at a future Council meeting for further exploration.

Action: Councillors to consider possible reasons for the low turnout and potential ways of improving participation in future elections in preparation for discussion at a future Council meeting.

3. Approval of minutes

The Administrator explained that this was a procedural issue. The minutes from the 22 August final meeting of the previous Council had been circulated and approved by some Council members, but that they needed to be formally accepted before they could be published. All agreed to approve the minutes.

Action: Clerk to place the minutes on the AIG website/noticeboards and circulate by email.

4. Code of Conduct for Elected Members of the Island Council and Register of Interests

An information pack was provided for all elected councillors. The pack contained a selection of introductory information. This included a copy of the Code of Conduct that outlined the standards expected of councillors. The Code included a register of interests that councillors were asked to complete and submit before the next Council meeting.

Action: Councillors to complete the register of interests and send to the Clerk before the next Council meeting.

5. Presentation of Indicative Ascension Island Council Agenda 2019-22

The Administrator introduced a list comprising an initial set of AIG priorities. He noted it was not an exhaustive list but indicative of AIG priorities for the incoming Council. He noted that there might be other items Council members wished to add and that the list could be maintained as a living document. Cllr Nicholls asked if the 1926 Workmen's Protection Ordinance would be "updated" as noted on the list, or rather replaced. The Administrator confirmed that the intention was for there to be new legislation to replace the current Ordinance.

6. Overseas Territories/UK Joint Ministerial Council (26-27 November 2019)

The Administrator referred councillors to the JMC Note in the information pack. He explained that it was relatively urgent that councillors familiarise themselves with the document and the role of the JMC, and decide amongst themselves who would attend the event in London in November. Cllr Hobson asked if the JMC would go ahead in the event of a UK general election. The Administrator thought it almost certainly would. Cllr George suggested that consideration be given to sending two councillors. Despite the financial burden, she felt it was merited given that Caribbean OTs normally send a Premier/minister and entourage. St Helena sends two councillors plus their UK representative, while Tristan da Cunha also has a UK representative as well as one councillor. She stressed that it involved long days with meetings during working hours, evening events and evening preparations for the next day's business. The Administrator understood Cllr George's point, but emphasised the higher financial cost to the AIG budget, potentially exacerbated by the need for the Ascension representative(s) to spend more than 2.5 weeks off-island owing to the flight Airlink and RAF flight schedules.

7. Council Committees

The Administrator asked councillors to consider their recommendation to the Governor about which Council committees they wanted to see established, including the mandatory Finance Committee, and with what membership. He noted that in the past there had been a number of committees, eg biodiversity & fisheries, hydroponics etc. In response to Cllr Chadwick's question, the Administrator confirmed that it was possible for Council members to sit on multiple committees.

Action: Councillors would consider their preference for Council committees and report back.

8. Any other business

Several AOB points were raised as follows:

- a) Guide for new councillors: The Administrator advised that he and the Clerk to Council were working on a guide to support new councillors. It was currently somewhat generic, but the aim was to achieve something bespoke for current/future councillors. Cllr Nicholls enquired about the previous work on Council protocols and the Administrator agreed to inform himself further.

Action: Administrator to investigate previous work on Council protocols and report back.

b) Lord Ahmad teleconference: The Administrator advised that Lord Ahmad (FCO Minister for OTs) had arranged a teleconference with OTs' representatives on 10 Oct to provide an update on Brexit. The Administrator would be dialling in to the conference and councillors were invited to join him.

Clerk's note: The teleconference is now scheduled for 1430 on Monday 7 Oct.

c) Hydroponics: Cllr George reported that following the previous Council discussion about hydroponics she had been contacted by Leigh Morris from Blue Marine who is currently based on St Helena. He is due to leave in December but was willing to continue to provide advice and could arrange training here on Ascension if required. It was agreed that Cllr George would pass on his contact details to AIG to allow further enquiries to be made.

d) Ideas for indicative agenda: Cllr Hobson expressed his concern about the range of topics on the indicative agenda, in particular the ratio of issues that benefit Islanders compared to those related to administrative arrangements. He was especially concerned about the ongoing AIG budgetary constraints and the requirement to match income to expenditure within the context of a forward-looking budget. In the light of these concerns he made suggestions (and provided a paper proposal on 'Sustainable Finances') with regard to a review of AIG-provided services and their respective priorities and to a more effective utilisation of staff skills. There followed a brief discussion about the UK Government's Future of Ascension work and how that, and the runway repairs, had had a significant impact on AIG's ability to make any firm plans for the future. The Administrator concluded that there would be more detailed discussion about the future budget once the Director of Resources returned from leave in October when he would begin work to prepare the next budget and would be consulting councillors to inform that work. Volunteers would therefore be requested to sit on the Finance Committee with him in order that councillors could discuss and better understand AIG's priorities and the work that had been done to date to manage the decrease in income since the suspension of the Airbridge.

9. Date of next meetings

The Administrator asked if Council members were content to continue with the current fortnightly structure of two informal meetings followed by a formal meeting. All agreed in principle, although it was noted that there would be times when some members might not be able to attend. The provisional plan was therefore as follows:

- Informal – Thursday 10 Oct at 1630
- Informal – Thursday 24 Oct at 1630
- Formal – Thursday 7 Nov at 1630

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 1315.

J Disley

Jane Disley

Clerk of Council