



Informal meeting of the Ascension Island Council

1000 on Thursday 24th October 2019 at the Court House

MEETING SUMMARY

Present: Gareth Morris, Director of Resources
Rob Cheeseman, Crown Counsel
Councillor Katharyn Chadwick
Councillor Andrew Ellick
Councillor Keturah George
Councillor Andrew Hobson
Councillor Alan Nicholls

Apologies: Steven Chandler, HH Administrator

In attendance: Linda Hardiman, Head of Administrator's Office
Diane Baum, Director of Conservation & Fisheries
Alasdair Bain, Policy Officer
Karan Singh, Customs Officer
Jane Disley, Clerk of Council

2. Matters arising (from informal meeting on 10 Oct): **Georgetown pool** (Update: progress was still on course for reopening at the end of October); **Actions tracker** (Update: the draft comprised more details than required so a simpler version listing actions and progress would suffice); **Strategic Plan** (Update: Dir Res had had a meeting with Cllr Hobson to discuss the plan and other meetings to kickstart the budget planning process which he would follow up initially via the Finance Committee in early November. Other topics were discussed as part of specific agenda items below or held over until the next meeting owing to the Administrator's absence.

3. Biosecurity: Director of Conservation & Fisheries provided a summary of the draft Biosecurity Strategy and associated documents previously sent to Councillors ahead of a proposed wider consultation with island residents. The purpose of introducing biosecurity controls is to try to control invasive species for health, economic and conservation impacts. The aim is to take a risk-based approach to minimise as far as possible both the likelihood of damaging introductions and the cost and disruption to AIG and importers. The Strategy is based on the recommendations of a specialist consultant who visited the island in 2016. External funding from RSPB and a Darwin Plus grant were being used to pay for training and upfront equipment costs and expert assistance in developing the strategy had been provided through the CSSF-funded OT Biosecurity Project. Concerns were raised that a 'light touch' at the beginning could become a heavy hand in due course. This would not be in line with the principles set out in the Strategy and so it could be made explicit that any major tightening of restrictions would require approval from the Council. Given the potential for damaging species to be introduced via vessels and aircraft from Florida, there was discussion about compliance with the Strategy by the US Base. Consultation with the USAF and Wolf Creek would clarify this issue. Concern was also raised that future costs had not been articulated in the Strategy papers and the potential burden on AIG was highlighted. It was explained that initial costs would be borne by external funding sources and that the system had been designed to minimise ongoing costs to AIG and these had been estimated in the 'Financial Implications' section of the 'Risks and Consequences of Biosecurity Strategy Implementation' document. Longer term costs to importers had also been considered but were difficult to quantify

until further research was undertaken, hence the need for more extensive liaison with employing organisations across the island. Before any decisions were made there would be public consultation to incorporate the views and concerns of the public, military, employing organisations and shipping companies before further review by the Council. There was some discussion about the appropriate manner, timing and level of Council involvement with this Strategy, but Council members welcomed the opportunity to review and discuss the information provided at this stage.

4. MPA letter from Lord Ahmad: Lord Ahmad had written to advise of additional UK Govt funding to support the implementation and management of Ascension's MPA via a funding commitment for 2020/21. After some discussion it was agreed that although this was welcome the Council position remained that implementation could not begin until the UK Govt committed long term funding support. It was confirmed that access to the funding was not contingent upon implementation having begun. Action: Dir Cons would produce a draft response from Councillors for their review and amendment as required.

5. JMC Update: Cllr Nicholls and the Policy Officer had met to discuss preparations for the JMC. Cllr Nicholls had provided details of the travel and subsistence required in order that the Administrator's PA could make the necessary arrangements.

6. Any other business: (a) **Further education**: Cllr Chadwick reported on her meeting with the deputy head during which they discussed liaison with St Helena, sources of extra funding and potential partnerships, NVQs and adult education, while Director of Resources confirmed that the new head teacher had indicated a keenness to pursue such options and for greater communication. (b) **Optician**: a number of people were again dissatisfied with the service provided by the optician, although had been reluctant to come forward officially and so it was felt that a survey might be a useful way to initiate feedback to inform a decision on the way ahead. Action: Dir Res would take this forward. (c) **Widespread flu-like sickness**: with many Island residents having experienced flu-like symptoms recently it was proposed that advice from the health care professionals would be helpful. Action: Dir Res would seek advice and take action as necessary. (d) **AIG overtime**: a question was raised about the use of overtime, specifically with regard to Ops staff filling potholes over the weekend which was considered to come with greater risks to the public. Dir Res explained that each directorate dealt slightly differently with overtime requirements but agreed that it needed closer examination. Action: Dir Res would seek assurance from Ops about their overtime protocols and report back at the next meeting. (e) **Street lighting trial**: there was disappointment that no progress had been noted in the past two weeks, although Ops had previously reported that some parts were outstanding. Action: The Policy Officer would clarify the status of the scheme and report back to the Council.

7. Date of next meetings: The proposed dates for the forthcoming meetings would be:

- Formal – 7 Nov at 1630
- Informal – 21 Nov at 1630
- Informal – 5 Dec at 1630

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 1140hrs.

J Disley

Jane Disley

Clerk of Council