



Informal meeting of the Ascension Island Council

1630 on Thursday 28 May 2020 at the Court House

MEETING SUMMARY

Present: Sean Burns, Administrator
Gareth Morris, Director of Resources
Rob Cheeseman, Crown Counsel

Councillor Katharyn Chadwick
Councillor Andrew Ellick
Councillor Kitty George
Councillor Andrew Hobson
Councillor Alan Nicholls

In attendance: Xander Halliwell, Head of Administrator's Office
Jane Disley, Clerk of Council

Apologies:

The matters arising were addressed via the actions tracker and current topics discussed were as follows:

- **Telecon with Seafish Chandlery Manager** This had been arranged for Tue 2 Jun.
- **Coronavirus testing by Fluor** The subject had been raised at the recent meeting but no decision could be made until the route and other relevant factors were known.
- **Strategic Plan** Previous discussion on this topic had been absorbed into the FY19-20 budget discussions. It would be refreshed later in the year as part of FY20-21 budget preparations.
- **Animal Welfare** It was accepted that there had been no agreement to an annual visit but that a 3-yearly visit would tie in with maintaining currency of the rabies vaccination.
- **Police Complaints** The Administrator reported that the complaint procedure should start with the Police Inspector and, if not addressed satisfactorily, then the complaint should be raised with the Chief of Police on St Helena.
- **Humanitarian flight** Anti-coronavirus procedures for the second humanitarian flight had been tightened slightly; this, along with greater Police visibility, appeared to have provided assurance to local residents.
- **Social care** The Welfare Committee had had a meeting and requested one with the Social Worker.

There was a comprehensive update from HoAO about **coronavirus** (COVID-19) on Ascension. The coronavirus testing machine was due to arrive via RAF flight on 2 June and would then be set up and calibrated. A second machine had been erroneously offloaded at St Helena and would now be sent via the MV Helena which was due to arrive on 22 June. In the meantime, work was ongoing to determine a feasible testing regime that would balance availability of cartridges against the number of personnel arriving and that would be commensurate with established quarantine procedures. Testing would not mean quarantine could be dispensed with but would trigger contact tracing in order to minimise potential spread of the virus. The new ventilator was now up and running, while the air compressor, which was coming from the US, was expected on the next ATI flight. The new medical officer, Dr Lopez, had arrived but was still in quarantine. The 2 additional nurses had been sourced but work to arrange their transit to Ascension was ongoing. The Governor had indicated that he did not expect a regular SA Airlink schedule to resume until at least October, possibly later.

The info note on changes to **waste management** was accepted with one observation that pest problems would vary with the seasons. It was noted that the Environmental Health team would quickly address any issues reported to them.

The memorandum about visas to allow **over-18 students** to complete their course on Ascension (now renamed as "The immigration status of students in Further Education") was accepted. It was noted that the proposed policy would not guarantee a positive decision. However, an early application via this process would bring certainty for parents needing to make a decision on whether to stay or leave. This could now be presented at the next formal meeting and, if approved, would need to be publicised to parents.

Minutes of the **Public Works Committee** meeting had been circulated in advance. Work was ongoing to reduce the water bill at the AIG's Hydroponics facility and the Director of Operations & Facilities would undertake a comparative analysis of solar and LED for street lighting. Councillors were invited to provide preferences on priority areas for lights in Two Boats and Georgetown and to offer suggested priorities for next year's capital projects list.

HoAO provided an **update on the runway project**. He confirmed that the US ban on movement of personnel before July had been lifted, although there would still be hurdles with flight availability and quarantine restrictions. The contractor's aim was to continue to absorb the delay and finish on time, increasing the workforce where needed to meet interim deadlines. To provide quarantine facilities, the USAF base would install 17 housing pods to supplement existing accommodation. The US ship due in early July could carry the first batch of equipment which could be offloaded and stored by Wolf Creek if contract staff had not arrived by then. The potential new supplier of aggregate was expected to formally accept the contract shortly. This was likely to result in a change to the offload process from a beach landing to pier conveyor direct to waiting lorries, although this was still at concept stage.

There were several items of **other business**:

- (i) **Workman's Protection Ordinance / Employment Law Reform**: Cllr Ellick asked when the employment law reform work would be recommenced. The Administrator confirmed that Crown Counsel and the Policy Officer had begun again to work on it following a pause to allow for the demands of urgent and necessary work on Coronavirus, and that he had committed to organising the next meeting soon. He emphasized the importance of establishing a proper, well-researched basis for decisions and actions to update the legislation. He also stressed the need for adequate record-keeping to underpin AIG's corporate memory for the future and demonstrate that policy decisions were based on sound, collective reasoning and not personal whim. Contrary to Cllr Hobson's assertion that AIG had no intention of pursuing employment reforms – based on a perceived lack of action to date – the Administrator gave his assurance that AIG was committed to reform, as was the Governor.
- (ii) **Employers' end-of-contract obligations**: Cllr Hobson raised a question about support for people whose contract had ended but were waiting to leave and who therefore had no income or medical cover. He suggested that employers needed to be reminded of their responsibilities. Some additional details were needed before any action could be pursued.
- (iii) **LGBT flag**: Cllr Ellick asked why the Ascension flag had been lowered in order to put up the LGBT flag on Sunday. The Administrator explained that the Governor had requested this last year for IDAHOBIT¹ but Ascension had only recently received its flag. Flag protocol dictated that it should be displayed on the secondary pole which is the one outside the AIG building. Cllr Nicholls suggested that next year the multipole flag pole constructed for use with St Helena Day celebrations be employed.
- (iv) **Rodents**: Cllr Ellick noted an increase in rodents recently and questioned whether or not Environmental Health team were able to cope. Cllr Chadwick advised that additional help would be recruited from the Conservation team and interns if needed.
- (v) **Finance Committee**: Dir Res reported that the warrant for up to £350k of overspend to cover coronavirus measures had been approved by the Governor; this would be monitored to ensure any spend was directly COVID related. He also reported progress against the auditor's recommendations: a special fund would be set up to account separately for grants and donations; processes had been changed to deliver improved forecasting providing early warnings of accounting areas in need of additional in year funding; the Asst Dir Finance role would be amended to separate the Controller and Processing responsibilities; Asst Dir Finance had created a template to enable the accounts to be compiled more efficiently and this was already saving time for the Finance team.

The meeting closed at 1800.

J Disley

J Disley
Clerk of Council

¹ International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersexism and Transphobia.