



Formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council

1630 on Thursday 18 June 2020 at the Court House

MINUTES

Present: HE Dr Philip Rushbrook, Governor
HH Sean Burns, Administrator
Catherine Leo, Assistant Director of Resources
Allen Cansick, Attorney General

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

In attendance: Xander Halliwell, Head of Administrator's Office
One member of the public

Rob Cheeseman, Crown Counsel
Jane Disley, Clerk of Council

1. Welcome and approval of minutes

The Administrator welcomed all parties and explained who was present for those attending by phone.

2. Approval of Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the previous formal meetings on 30 Apr and 13 May were accepted. In accordance with the Council Rules these had already been agreed by Council members and published.

3. Matters arising – actions tracker

- a. **Animal welfare:** This would remain on the tracker until more information was known about the future flight schedule.
- b. **Welfare Committee:** The Committee had met last week with the Social Worker who had agreed to write an article about her role. This would be circulated in advance of publication.
- c. **End of contract obligations:** The Administrator confirmed that this had been raised at a recent meeting and the employing organisations (EOs) did appear to be honouring their obligations. He emphasised that anyone with a claim to the contrary should first approach their employer and, if required, seek advice from the Public Solicitor.
- d. **Capital projects:** Cllr Hobson confirmed that he was waiting for any feedback from his fellow councillors on their preferences and priorities.
- e. **Solar lighting trial:** Cllr Hobson advised that this had been discussed during the Public Works Committee meeting and the list of locations for lights was a long one, so would need to be prioritised. He confirmed that the minutes of the meeting would be circulated shortly.
- f. **Hydroponics statistics for 2018-2019:** These had been provided as requested.
- g. **Airlink schedule:** The Administrator confirmed that the latest information indicated that resumption of the monthly Airlink schedule would be October at the earliest, but more likely toward the end of the year or possibly early 2021. The Governor added that there had been little progress in South Africa toward reducing the crisis level from 3 to 1 which would be

necessary for regional flights to resume and to level 0 for international flights, so resumption in October was increasingly unlikely. He advised that there would be a meeting of the Incident Executive Group (IEG) on Monday and he would also speak with the Air Access Team, so would pass on any relevant information.

- h. **Compressor:** The HoAO provided an update on the air compressor currently being built in the US. A short delay had been reported previously and the delivery would now most likely be via the next ATI flight which was expected in early July.
- i. **Strategic Plan:** The budget process had begun for 2020-2021 and the Finance Committee would meet in July. Cllr Ellick questioned the connection with the budget on the basis that a strategic plan should be over a longer period. Cllr Nicholls suggested that the budget should be part of the strategic plan not vice versa. The Administrator agreed that they should certainly be aligned. He advised that work had been done in the past on a 10-year strategic plan and this work now needed to be brought up to date via liaison with the AIG's senior management team and then the Council.
- j. **Telecon with Chandlery Manager:** The Administrator reported that he had spoken to Neville Hayward. Since it was his first conversation with him the tone remained fairly high level but he had passed on some of the feedback from Ascension and provided examples. Mr Hayward said he was open to suggested improvements and so people were encouraged to use the suggestions box in the store. Given the flight situation there was little prospect of his visiting soon, but he agreed that it would be a good idea when possible.

4. Immigration status of students in further education

The Administrator thanked all those involved for pulling together the updated memorandum and expressed his hope that this now provided the surety sought by parents. He felt it adequately addressed the main issue of continuity such that a policy had been established that would remain beyond the tenure of individuals. He explained that it also exemplified the new way of policy formulation by providing for future AIG post holders and councillors the supporting background and explanation for decisions that had been made. He felt that although this took extra time, he hoped all would agree the outcome was worth it. Cllr George echoed the Administrator's thanks to all involved and the Governor observed that it was a pragmatic, sensible and realistic way forward.

Decision: All agreed that they were content with the memorandum's recommendation, including the Governor. The policy would therefore now need to be publicised to parents. The Administrator suggested this might best be done via the Head Teacher. Crown Counsel added that heads of Employing Organisations would also need to be informed.

Action: Administrator to explore options with the Head Teacher for publicising this policy and circulate a draft prior to publication.

5. Coronavirus update

The HoAO reported updates in two areas:

- **Testing:** The testing machine that came from the UK had now been set up and calibrated. Tests had been carried out on the two medevac patients. The second machine was on the MV Helena and was therefore due to arrive on Sunday; this would need to be set up and calibrated before it could be used.
- **Business continuity:**
 - During the recent FIRS visit, ship to shore procedures had been handled as if at Level 3 in order to test the plans. The process had been largely successful but some useful lessons had been learned.

- The food delivery plan had been practised the previous day. Initial feedback suggested it had gone well but there would be a wash-up meeting shortly via which lessons could be identified and captured.

The HoAO advised that the live exercise showed areas for improvement that would be discussed next week and a second exercise could be held if required. The Administrator also advised that various scenarios had been considered to ensure that key roles would be covered even if the main incumbents were unable to work, although he stressed that it was impossible to cover all eventualities. Recent business continuity work had involved the AIG only so far, but there had already been some outreach with other EOs to ensure overlap of support, and training where necessary, in critical areas.

6. Runway project update

The HoAO reported updates in two areas:

- **Date for personnel to arrive:** The date for the majority of personnel to come to Ascension had been put back to September. This decision was largely based on when they could get key equipment here and when they could realistically start to move people here.
- **Contractor meeting:** Related to the first point, a decision had been taken between the AIG, USAF, RAF and the contractor to not increase the number of contract personnel coming to Ascension [it would still be approximately 200]. As a result, the end of contract would now shift from May to around early August of 2022. This was largely due to the Island's capacity to accommodate and support all new arrivals through the 14-day quarantine arrangements. There would be further discussion about the possibilities and limits of testing that might affect key decisions. The AIG had also raised the topic of pre-travel testing and this was still being considered. The AIG message remained that the priority for all decisions was safety of the community.

Cllr Ellick suggested that for people who had tested negative on Ascension there would be no need for them to quarantine. The Administrator confirmed that this was incorrect. The HoAO agreed and explained that despite a negative test and no contact with other people there could still be a subsequent positive test result within the 14-day period because symptoms might develop. It was necessary therefore to carry out multiple tests within the 14 days; for example the RAF crews and passengers would have one at the beginning, one in the middle and one toward the end of their quarantine period prior to a flight. The Administrator emphasised the point that it was only possible to be sure someone was clear if they had experienced no symptoms with the 14-day quarantine period.

Cllr Ellick also asked if people returning to the UK from Ascension who had isolated here for 14 days would still have to undergo quarantine in the UK. The Administrator confirmed that they would because all territories maintained their respective quarantine arrangements; for example Ascension would not accept a person from the UK without their undergoing the 14-day isolation on arrival. He added that this policy was being applied to all contractors, hence the delay to the contract. The HoAO also added that quarantine procedures were still applied to RAF crews while staying on Ascension between inbound and outbound flights.

7. Any other business

Several AOB points were raised:

- a. 14-day quarantine in St Helena. Cllr George had circulated an email asking if it might be possible for people returning to their own homes on St Helena to self-isolate there rather than at Bradley's

Camp. This would make it easier for them to make the most of a visit and reduce the financial burden on EOs/travellers. Since Ascension did not have such an option and yet had managed the situation successfully the procedures employed here could be applied on St Helena. Both the Administrator and Governor thought this was a sensible suggestion, so the Administrator proposed that he write to the Chief Secretary to explain the processes in place on Ascension. The Governor added that it was a sensible time to discuss the establishment of mutual corridors between our islands with a more liberal regime in place. He would raise the issue for discussion at the IEG.

Action: Administrator to write to the Chief Secretary to explain Ascension's quarantine arrangements.

Cllr George also asked about where the cost of a stay at Bradley's Camp should lie, since it had been suggested that some EOs had tried to make their employees pay and some people had been encouraged not to take overseas leave. The Administrator advised that he had already asked the Financial Secretary in SHG about the charge itself and the policy on charging. The policy was still being formulated but once the details had been received he would circulate them to EOs for consideration.

Action: Administrator to circulate the Financial Secretary's response about Bradley's Camp charges to EOs.

b. Sure Internet Service. Cllr George had circulated a request that Sure be made more accountable for their services given the level of complaints and the fact that customers were not satisfied with Sure's responses. The Administrator said he was aware that they had undertaken a customer service exercise some time ago and he was in regular contact with the Head of Sure Ascension. He had asked for the results of the exercise, but had not yet received them, presumably as they were still being collated. He stressed that in order for there to be improvements customers needed to keep providing feedback. He himself had experienced a considerable loss of allowance over the weekend and Sure had advised that he would need to change his settings to prevent automatic downloads. Cllr Nicholls explained that this issue had been going on for some time but nothing seemed to have been done to actually fix it, while Cllr George said that blaming automatic updates was the standard answer from Sure. Cllr Hobson said that preventing automatic updates was easy to do, but Sure did a poor job of explaining to customers how to do it. The Administrator explained he had recently been advised that customers could bring their devices into the Sure offices and buy P-A-Y-G time to download updates via their faster service. This was not widely known. Cllr Hobson suggested that every new customer to the island got caught out by not knowing the system and Sure therefore ought to do more to provide some top tips for customers to manage their accounts.

c. Stop signs. Cllr Nicholls said he welcomed the Police campaign around the stop signs. However, some people had complained that the stop sign by the Saints Club was too far back, so that drivers had to go beyond it in order to see down the road. Cllr Hobson advised that it had been mentioned at the Public Works Committee meeting and Dir Ops & Facilities had agreed to confer with the Police about improving the stop lines and the pedestrian crossing.

d. IDL waste. Cllr Nicholls explained that IDL were still dumping and burning their rubbish which encouraged rats. He asked if they could be persuaded to join the drive toward greater incineration of waste and the Administrator agreed to look into it.

Action: Administrator to consider liaison with IDL about their waste management activity.

e. Condition of flags. Cllr Nicholls reported that the Ascension flag outside the AIG Admin building was in a poor state and asked why the flags were flown all day every day rather than being put up and down as per the flag protocol.

Action: Administrator to review the situation.

f. Illumination of flags. Cllr Nicholls also said he believed the Union flag should be illuminated at night. **Action: Administrator to review the situation.**

g. Beneficial steroid drug. Cllr Nicholls asked about recent reports that a steroid drug had been shown to have possible benefits in fighting coronavirus. The Administrator was unaware of the medical details but offered to check with the SMO.

Action: Administrator to ask SMO for information about the steroid drug's potential usefulness.

h. Merger of FCO and DFID. Cllr George asked if there were likely to be any major implications for Ascension of the merger between the FCO and DFID. The Administrator explained that not much information had been provided as yet so it was too early to tell. The Governor suggested more would become known between now and September. He had received assurances from DFID that there would be no paralysis in decision making; however, it was inevitable that there would eventually be some changes within the OT Directorate. Information would be shared once the respective governments knew more.

i. Employment Reform Working Group (ERWG). Cllr Ellick asked if the ERWG progress could be a standing item on the agenda. The Administrator explained that a draft policy document had been circulated that afternoon ahead of the meeting due to take place on 23 Jun. He explained that a lot of work had gone into the draft and he believed it was 75% ready. He explained that councillors could meet on 23rd or postpone the meeting till later to give the AIG more time to finalise the draft. Councillors would respond to the Policy Officer's email once they had had chance to read it.

j. Resignation of Cllr Chadwick. The Administrator advised the Council that Cllr Chadwick had resigned from her position as councillor as she would be leaving the island to work elsewhere. He congratulated her on her new job, thanked her for her work and for her valuable contribution and wished her well for the future.

k. RSBP letter. Cllr Nicholls noted receipt of a letter from the Chief Executive of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds which congratulated Ascension on its decision to create biosecurity legislation.

8. Date of next meetings

The proposed dates for the next few meetings are as follows:

- Informal – Thursday 9 Jul at 1630
- Formal – Thursday 23 Jul at 1630
- Informal – Thursday 20 Aug at 1630
- Formal – Thursday 3 Sep at 1630

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 1730.

J Disley

Jane Disley

Clerk of Council