



Formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council

1230 on Friday 05 February 2021 at the Court House

MINUTES

Present: HE Dr Philip Rushbrook, Governor [by phone] Councillor Alan Nicholls
HH Sean Burns, Administrator Councillor Kitty George
Gareth Morris, Director of Resources Councillor Andrew Ellick
Robert Cheeseman, Crown Counsel

In attendance: Graeme Knibbs, CSSF Projects Manager [for item 4 only] Xander Halliwell, Head of Administrator's Office
Charles Poole, Director of Operations and Facilities [for item 5 only] Luke Atkinson, FCDO Desk Officer [by phone]
Siobhan Stewart, Clerk of Council

Apologies: Allen Cansick, Attorney General

1. Welcome and approval of minutes

The Administrator welcomed all parties and explained who was present for those attending by phone, in particular, HE Governor Rushbrook who arrived on Ascension on 29 January 2021. The Administrator expressed how Council are looking forward to meeting with the Governor during his two weeks on Island after his period of Compulsory Isolation.

2. Approval of Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the previous Formal Council meeting held on 03 December 2020 were accepted. In accordance with the Council Rules these had already been agreed by Council members and published on 29 December 2020.

Decision: The summary of the previous Informal Council meeting held on 14 January 2021 were accepted, following one amendment below from AIG. In accordance with the Council Rules these had already been agreed by Council members and published on 25 January 2021.

*The HoAO provided an update about **coronavirus** (COVID-19) on Ascension. With the Island recently experiencing another detected case, this time of an individual whose results demonstrated confirmed recent infection and was determined to have significantly infectious levels of virus, the HoAO was pleased to confirm the island had returned to Level 1 Amber following two negative test results. Further discussion was had regarding the different alert levels and whether a review was required as there were concerns that the current process was causing some confusion, the HoAO agreed to review and provide feedback.*

3.a Matters arising – actions tracker

- a. **Animal Welfare [pets]:** This would remain on the tracker until more information was known about the future flight schedule.
- b. **Illumination of flags:** Lighting at the naval flagstaff has now been repaired, providing illumination to the flag at night. Further options for lighting the Ascension Island flag are being considered.
- c. **Public works Committee:** Membership to be addressed following a successful by-election on 04 March 2021.

- d. **Single-use Plastics:** The Ascension Island Council and AIG consulted on proposals to restrict the import, sale and distribution of certain single-use plastics items between October 2018 and August 2019. Following positive reaction to informal approaches made to employing organisations and island businesses in late 2018, a consultation was held in November 2018 to canvas views from the general public for these proposals. This asked four basic questions and also requested further information if those surveyed were willing to provide it. The response was overwhelmingly in favour of taking action to reduce the import and usage of single-use plastic items on Ascension, with 100% of respondents supportive from a response rate of over 6% of the island population. As such, a further consultation was then undertaken with businesses operating on the island to gather information on the likely impact of related legislation on their operations. This sought views on the proposals and invited suggestions as to potential alternate approaches to deliver the same policy outcomes. Responses from island businesses were supportive, although it was noted that sufficient lead-in time would need to be given in order to allow operations to sufficiently adapt to the new rules and regulations. Due to extremely limited policy and legal resources within AIG and the necessary refocusing of this scarce resource on priority areas such as supporting the runway project delivery, COVID-19 and reform of employment law, this work is currently awaiting capacity availability before being progressed.
- e. **Street Lighting in Georgetown:** Temporary lighting in the form of portable solar lights set in pre-cast bases have been placed in China Town and Long Beach, additionally some of the existing mains street light fittings are being replaced where feasible. Where it is not possible to replace lamps on existing lamp standards a review of the electrics and need for replacing fuse boxes and wiring needs coordination with Encompass and a more extensive programme for the remedial work is being developed. The work is a priority and will continue to be progressed within the limits of available resources and competing priorities.
- f. **Copy of Blue Marine Endowment Fund email to be sent to Councillor Ellick:** Councillor's will share email with Councillor Ellick.
- g. **Meeting with Councillors regarding the Blue Marine Endowment Fund:** Information to be shared regarding Tristan de Cunha's process prior to meeting.
- h. **Confirm Finance Committee Date:** Meeting scheduled for 05 February 2021 at 14:00.
- i. **Summary of Budget review to be sent to Councillors:** Summary sent to Councillors on 18 January 2021.
- j. **Provide update on Vaccine Questionnaire:** Returns indicate overall positive attitudes towards COVID-19 vaccination. SMO conducting focus group meetings with employers to talk through the COVID-19 vaccine, what to expect once it arrives and discuss any concerns staff may have. This is to allow those who may have concerns to speak with the SMO in an open but comfortable forum, and also to try and arm employees with the facts about vaccination which they can then take back to the workplace and generate discussion around. SMO and Policy Officer will also be leading a public meeting on 11 February to cover vaccination and wider issues around this with the general public. Councillor Ellick asked if there were any early indications of people for or against getting the vaccination. The Administrator explained that the questionnaire was to gauge interest and highlight any key concerns people may have, the HoAO added that the questionnaire feedback is being used to guide conversation when the SMO is visiting Employing Organisations and during the public meeting next week. Councillor Ellick explained that early feedback would have been helpful when lobbying constituents, Councillor George added that she felt there are sufficient meetings for the public to attend, both within Employing Organisations and the separate public meeting, reporting that she felt it would be more beneficial to know the level of vaccine acceptance after all communications have taken place. The Governor highlighted the potential future travel restrictions if people were to defer from having the vaccine.
- k. **Review COVID-19 alert levels/colours:** The Administrator explained that a review had taken place as to when AIG moves the alert to red especially when there were cases involving low

level readings which were borderline ‘negative’. In those cases where the level was so low that it might only be the trace of a previous infection, AIG may initially decide to remain at Amber. That said, anyone who did test positive at whatever level would still be monitored and the public informed. Clearly if subsequent tests proved that the individual was positive with a higher level reading, indicating an illness was developing and they may be becoming infectious, then the level would move to Red to reflect the increased risk to the public.

- l. **Approach Kate Downes Family regarding memorial options:** Director of Conservation and Fisheries has been liaising with Blue Marine who are in touch with the Downes family to discuss options.
- m. **Liaise with EO’s regarding liaison officer support for employees during quarantine:** Update to follow in due course.
- n. **Confirm hospital ventilation capacity:** Update provided to Council on 04 February 2021 via email. Councillor Ellick requested details of which of the ventilator equipment has been purchased recently and are new. The HoAO explained that the oxygen generator was purchased recently in preparation for COVID-19, along with five new CPAP machines that were provided by the FCDO, however the HoAO will provide a detailed list of ventilator equipment to Council, at a later date.
- o. **Director of Operations and Facilities to attend Council to provide an update on Public Works Committee topics:** Attending today, 05 February 2021.
- p. **CSSF Project Manager to attend Council meeting to provide an update of CSSF Projects:** Attending today, 05 February 2021.

3.b Matters arising – Business Levy

The Administrator provided a brief history of the Business Levy on Ascension Island, highlighting the increase of 27% in 2021 after a five year freeze. The Administrator reported an expected cash operating surplus of £500,000 for the year 2022/2023, indicating that where we predict a surplus, it should be considered whether an increase in the Business Levy is required. The Administrator recommended that an increase is not applied, subsequently offering some clarity to the employing organisations in terms of their financial planning, which may assist organisations in their decision making around price increases on island.

The Director of Resources proposed to Councillors that due to the size of the increase imposed on employing organisations last year, that the Business Levy should be frozen for the next two years. The results of voting to recommend the proposal to the Governor were as follows:

Proposal	KG	AE	AN	Governor
2 Business Levy freeze	Yes	Yes	Yes	Accepted

The Governor accepted Councils recommendation, with two caveats. Firstly, that the two year freeze period is based on current circumstances, if during the two year period extraordinary circumstances were to occur, the AIG reserve the right to review during that time. Secondly, that there is clear written notice informing Employing Organisations that a review will take place in year three.

The Administrator thanked the DoR for his hard work.

Crown Counsel addressed the Council on the draft Business Levy (Amendment) Ordinance, 2021. This Ordinance amends the Business Levy Ordinance so that it continues to have effect during the forthcoming financial year. In accordance with Director of Resources’ policy decision, the amount payable remains unchanged.

4. CSSF Update

Waste Water Treatment Works - The CSSF Projects Manager (PM) provided an update of CSSF projects that have taken place during the financial year of 2020/2021. The PM began with the Waste Water Treatment Works, explaining that a specialised consultant came to Ascension Island in September 2020 to review the islands current waste water treatment facilities. Consideration was given to the potential for refurbishment of the current systems as well as considering a new, more advanced technological system. Following the visit, the final report is expected by the end of February 2021. Councillor Nicholls asked if there was an indication as to which option would be focussed on? The PM reported that whilst all options are being considered, early indications show that due to issues with keeping a running facility and refurbishing the old one in tandem, it is expected that a full replacement system will be required. Councillor Ellick asked where the waste water treatments sites would be relocated to. The PM explained that whilst a new system would have to be relocated, they are expected to be in close proximity to the current sites, although the precise location has not yet been determined. The Administrator reported that following a meeting the previous day regarding the waste water treatment facilities, the draft report that has been created is of an excellent standard and is very thorough. Once CSSF funding has been allocated, this project will be deemed a high priority due to the potential public health risk. The Administrator added that a by-product of this project is that it will offer some cost benefits to the Hydroponics site with the waste water being filtered to an exceptional standard, suitable for the watering of plants which could potentially reduce the Hydroponics biggest expenditure substantially.

Councillor Nicholls asked what the next step is and how much funding is required? The PM explained that the securing of funding is the key next step, requiring approximately £1.2m. The Head of the Administrator's Office added that it is likely that Ministerial sign off of the budget will be in the next few weeks, explaining that once a figure has been allocated it can be established if the project can be funded fully by CSSF, which is the hope, or whether a capital bid may be required to support the budget. Councillor Ellick asked if the predominant workforce for this project will be external contractors or resources within AIG? The Administrator explained that it is planned that the bulk of the work will be carried out by AIG resources, although it is expected that an external Commissioning Engineer will be required to oversee the project. Councillor Ellick welcomed this response.

Asset Refurbishments - The PM reported that the CSSF and AIG Capitally Funded Asset Refurbishments are near completion, detailing the breakdown of AIG's costs with the Asbestos removal costing around £75k and the Electrical rewiring around £150k. He went on to explain that the Asbestos removals were completed in December 2020, allowing the electrical rewiring to be completed safely. Concept are currently on island, having arrived in January 2021. The team are currently working on residential properties across the island, which will be followed by four key commercial assets being completed, the AIG Marine Workshop, AIG Stores Building, AIG Building and Civils workshops and AIG Motor Transport. Councillor Nicholls asked if the Two Boats School was being rewired during this project. The Director of Resources reported that this was in the proposed budget for 2021/2022, to be discussed at the Formal Finance Committee meeting later that day. The Administrator added that whilst in quarantine, the contractors rewired the properties they were staying in, with four properties being completed in the two week period, noting an excellent use of time and resource.

Fire Service Report - The PM provided some background to the Fire Service Report, explaining that following an initial report in 2019 of the AIG's Fire Service, Defence Infrastructure Estates (DIO) have since been providing Emergency Response Cover for the AIG Estate. A draft report has been produced by the Fire Service College, providing detail of requirements in providing an efficient and effective Fire Service, with the final report expected by the end of February 2021. Councillor Nicholls provided feedback from his meeting with the Fire Service College consultant, the Administrator agreed to a follow up meeting with Councillor Nicholls to discuss.

Hospital Design Study - An update was provided in relation to the Hospital Design Study. After the first stage completion, the project has progressed on to design, where a team of architects are working on more detailed plans, such as floors plans, elevations, 3D room layouts, itemised medical equipment and detailed costs for attracting future funding. A final report is expected by the end of February 2021. Councillor Nicholls asked if renovating the existing hospital building was an option being considered. The PM explained that the reports being submitted are purely for a new building, adding that in the WYG infrastructure report it was deemed not feasible to refurbish the existing building and continue to provide suitable health care to the island.

Councillor Ellick asked why the process was taking a long time. The PM explained that it has been two years since the original feasibility study was planned, detailing that in that time the architects need time to consider options and design in meticulous detail, especially in a build project with a current starting cost of around £15.85 million pounds. The Administrator explained that this year's achievement has been successful in getting the architect to Ascension Island, especially during a pandemic, adding that in his experience on Tristan da Cunha it took around nine years from initial concept to build completion. Councillor Nicholls explained whilst he welcomed the progress, he hopes the momentum continues after the studies are complete. The PM reported that the next stage is to consider one of two options and when to involve contractors, suppliers and shipping agents: firstly using the architect to complete the full drawing package before it goes out to tender; or to involve contractors, suppliers and shipping agents as part of the tender process and that this decision would depend on when the funding is anticipated. Councillor Nicholls asked what would be the process for requesting funds, when the final amount was yet unknown. The PM explained that in the report expected at the end of February 2021, a more accurate cost breakdown will be provided.

Ship-to-Shore Barge - The PM was pleased to inform Council that the Ship-to-Shore Barge and the refurbished engine have now arrived on Ascension and were awaiting assembly. He reported that the barge and engine were commissioned and tested at the boat builders (Manor Marine) in the UK prior to shipping to the island, with both expected to be operational for the MV Helena in March 2021. Councillor Ellick asked why a new engine was not purchased at the same time as purchasing the new barge to allow some redundancy in equipment. Whilst the PM agreed with the need for redundancy, he explained that due to limited funding it was not possible to purchase both items brand new, with a new engine costing between £200k to £250k, whilst the refurbishment of the existing engine cost around £50k. The HoAO asked Council to note that the CSSF budget was reduced from £2m to £800k for the year 2020/2021 as a result of the COVID19 pandemic. Councillor Ellick recommended that when money is given, it should be spent quickly, before the figure is reduced. The HoAO explained that whilst in February 2020 an amount of £2m was indicated, authority to spend had not been given, therefore purchasing could not have commenced.

The Administrator thanked the PM for his excellent work in achieving a full spend this financial year, appreciating his hard work, whilst adding that he looks forward to next year's projects. Councillors thanked the PM for attending and providing a thorough update.

5. Public Works update

The Director of Operations and Facilities (DoOF) began by reporting that the Public Works Committee have not met since August 2020, and therefore he would like to provide an update on some of the key areas that were being discussed.

Hydroponics - The DoOF explained that Hydroponics has been doing quite well over the last few months, where to a large extent production outweighs demand, adding that some small infrastructure works have been completed in relation to water collection, although additional funding has been granted through a FCDO funding programme that will be used to increase the water catchment area,

add a solar solution to the system and UV filtration. Although financial data is not yet available, the DoOF reported an improvement in the consistency of yields in comparison to 2020.

The DoOF reported that the Electrical property upgrades were on schedule to be completed on time, adding that the sea water pump for the swimming pool arrived around three months ago, as well as the winch and that the pier head works has now been completed. The hard standing for the Motor Transport area is progressing whilst the cattle grid upgrades require further progression.

The DoOF explained that work had generally continued despite the challenging circumstances of COVID-19, having an increased workload and assisting with tasks particularly relating to the hospital, such as the installation of the oxygen generator and upgrades in quarantine areas. Whilst several key employees have left over the last twelve months, recruitment is now underway and properties are being refurbished in preparation for the arrival of newly recruited staff across AIG.

Some discussion was had regarding AIG's role in supporting subcontractors, although it was established that AIG Employees typically only support where projects have been capially funded, sometimes the capital funding is in tandem with CSSF funding during shared projects.

Councillor Nicholls raised an enquiry from a constituent regarding the type of street lighting being used. The Administrator requested that the enquiry be submitted via the Councillor Enquiry Form so a full and accurate response can be provided.

6. Coronavirus update

The Head of the Administrator's Office was pleased to report that Ascension's allocation of the COVID-19 vaccine is expected to arrive on the next A400m on 15 February 2021. Contingency plans are in place if this option was not available, as the chartered flight at the end of February 2021 could be used. The number of vaccines expected is 1950 and will meet the requirements of the adult population on island. The HoAO explained that a thorough communications plan is in place, with Public Notices having been issued with more planned; the Senior Medical Officer is meeting with Employing Organisations, adding that there will also be a public meeting on Thursday 11 February 2021 led by the AIG Policy and Communications Officer and the SMO. The HoAO reported that planning for the administering of the vaccine is well underway, confirming that when people receive their dose of vaccine, a certificate will be given, detailing when the vaccine was received, which vaccine and the batch number of the dose. The Administrator added that the hospital will be aiming to vaccinate hospital and emergency workers first, followed by the high risk categories, then the remaining adult population. Councillor Nicholls asked if AIG had any plans to change the current Coronavirus protocols following a successful vaccine roll out. The HoAO confirmed that whilst COVID-19 policies are always under review, there are currently no set plans to change the protocols. Councillor Ellick welcomed this news, adding that there is still a risk, particularly with children not yet being vaccinated.

7. Runway project update

The Head of the Administrator's Office provided an update on the runway project explaining that the aggregate offload has not yet taken place due to electrical issues with the conveyor system and outstanding Biosecurity actions from the contractors. Due to an inspection on the floating fuel line in Clarence Bay starting week commencing 08 February 2021, no offloading can take place at the pierhead; however, the project will continue its momentum, with the next ship filled with sand is expected to arrive at Ascension on 21 February 2021. The HoAO advised that these small delays are not expected to impact the completion date of the runway project.

Councillor Nicholls requested further detail on what the biosecurity issues are in relation to the aggregate offload delay. The HoAO explained that for the contractors to offload the aggregate, a biosecurity licence must be issued which includes conditions to protect Ascension's environment. At present, several of these conditions are yet to be met, such as a comprehensive pest management and mitigation plan being in place. The AIG is working collaboratively with the contractors to guide their work.

8. Any other business

Two AOB points were raised:

- a. **Tasty Tucker:** Councillor Nicholls requested details around the building work that was completed at the property known as Tasty Tucker, including details of the financial investment made. The Administrator requested that Councillor Nicholls submit the enquiry using the Councillor Enquiry Form where a full and accurate response will be provided.
- b. **Solomons Claim:** *The Administrator provided an update to Council regarding the claim made against AIG by Solomon & Company (St Helena) Plc ("Solomons") for compensation in excess of £400k following events in early 2017 concerning One Boat fuel station. Crown Counsel added AIG had successfully applied to strike out Solomons' claim, judgment having recently been handed down. The Administrator thanked Crown Counsel for his hard work in protecting AIG's position; Councillors also thanked Crown Counsel for his work on the case.*

9. By-election

The Administrator reported the **by-election** is planned for 04 March 2021 and that the deadline for nominations is 17 February 2021.

10. Date of next meetings

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

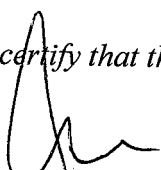
- Informal – Thursday 25 February 2021 at 1630
- Formal – Thursday 11 March 2021 at 1630

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 14:10

Siobhan

Siobhan Stewart
Clerk of Council

I certify that this is a true record of the meeting to which it relates.



Sean Burns

On behalf of HE the Governor, Dr Philip Rushbrook