

## ASCENSION ISLAND GOVERNMENT

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### Formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council Finance Committee

1400 on Friday 05 February 2021 at the Court House

#### MINUTES

Present: Gareth Morris, Director of Resources

Councillor Alan Nicholls

Councillor Kitty George

Councillor Andrew Ellick

In attendance: Catherine Leo, Assistant Director of Resources

Siobhan Stewart, Clerk of Council

Mark Thomas, Motor Transport Team Leader

Jonathan Thomas, Police Inspector

Charles Poole, Director of Operations and Facilities

#### 1. Welcome

The Director of Resources welcomed all parties and explained that the invited guests will be attending today to explain their capital bids and answer any questions Councillors may have.

#### 2. Resource bid – Vehicle Replacements

The DoR introduced the Motor Transport Team Leader to Council, adding that Councillors had already been provided the business cases and quotations, as well a breakdown of maintenance costs for the vehicles over the last three years. He explained that nine vehicles have been highlighted as in need of replacement, with most between the ages of 14 to 16 years.

Councillor Nicholls explained that whilst he fully supports a bid for the replacement busses, he would like to see the option of EDF funding being considered for at least one of the buses, the DOR explained that it was a possibility, especially for the school bus. Councillor Nicholls thanked the MTTL for bringing very informative business cases to Council, allowing Councillors to make fully informed decisions. Councillor Ellick suggested that perhaps a business case over a three year period would be beneficial, rather than year by year for future meetings. The DOR acknowledged the need for an entire fleet cost projection plan, although an investment should be considered for now as cost prevention for the future. Councillor Ellick highlighted the need for extra care to be taken when considering which brand to invest in. MTTL explained that IVECO is the preferred brand with no DPF and no AdBlue, however Ford vehicles have caused some concern.

The DOR asked Councillors whether they would be content to approve one tractor unit be purchased this financial year, with a decision on the second deferred until the 2022/23 budget, when the current units can be kept for spare parts. Councillors supported this suggestion.

The MTTL provided more information regarding the business case for the five Vivaro vans, highlighting the three priority ones. Firstly, one for the Electricians, where the current vehicle being used is not suitable to carry all the necessary equipment, Councillor Nicholls added that having a more suitable vehicle will reduce the amount of trips required to a job and ultimately be a cost saving investment. The second priority replacement is the Metal Workers vehicle, which has recently failed its British Engineering Services (BES) survey and finally one of the carpenter vehicles that has reached the end of its life.

The Director of Resources asked Councillors if they were happy to consider that the three priority vehicles be approved with the decision on the remaining two to be deferred until the 2022/23 budget.

Committee Members voted to approve funding for the replacement of the following:

- 1 Mini Bus
- 1 Tractor Unit
- 3 Vivaro Vans

The DOR committed to updating the budget pack to reflect the decisions made, and thanked the MTTL for attending.

### **3. Resource bid – Policing Resource**

The DoR introduced the Police Inspector to Council, noting that business cases have been submitted for Police staffing, Sea Rescue Staffing, Construction of a slip way and Police equipment.

Police Constable and Administrative support: The PI provided businesses cases for an additional Police Constable and an Administrative support role for the Police department, reporting that since the introduction of Overseas Territories Regional Crime Intelligence System (OTRCIS) the demand on resources has increased. The PI added that additional resources would allow a more strategic plan to be put in place, resulting in a more proactive policing approach rather than reactive. The PI went on to explain that with the additional demands of co-ordinating Sea Rescue resources are stretched to capacity. Further discussion was had around contractor vetting, and the demands this was putting on the existing resource.

Councillor Ellick suggested that perhaps instead of recruiting a PC, a Special Constable could be recruited. The PI explained that whilst this is an option that was considered, there are currently no facilities to offer training and therefor equipping the SC with the knowledge to fulfil their role.

The PI went on to explain the need for an admin support role within the department, highlighting the additional duties now expected, such as immigration and Visa's, as well as passport applications. Councillor George asked whether there is a requirement to recruit additional administrative support or whether the work can be picked up elsewhere within the AIG, having received some complaints from constituents regarding the availability of the police when trying to submit a passport application. Further discussion was had around the options within the AIG and the service agreements with St Helena Police.

Personal safety equipment: The PI explained the need for new personal safety equipment for the policing team, however Councillors asked that the list be reviewed and redistributed identifying priority items.

The DoR explained that an initial investment is required to bring the current safety equipment up to an acceptable standard, then going forward it is expected that the expenditure will come from the annual operational budget. The PI added that he is working on a five year budget plan to spread the level of expenditure whilst implementing a thorough maintenance plan to maintain the existing equipment.

Consultancy to review potential of slipway for Sea Rescue Boat: The PI explained that he would like to invest in a consultant to explore the options of a slip way for the Sea Rescue Boat to reduce response times in an emergency. Councillor Ellick felt this was looking a little too far ahead.

Additional Resource for the Sea Rescue Team: The PI provided an update on the plans for Mr Phil

Bostock from the Marine Coast Guard Agency (MCA) to visit Ascension Island to assess the Sea Rescue Service. The PI went on to report that Mr Bostock has recommended that the Sea Rescue Team requires a Training Manager and a Marine Mechanic. The PI explained he has been reviewing both training and Standard Operating Procedures whilst liaising with St Helena, although St Helena does not have the capacity to send a trainer down to Ascension. Councillor Ellick expressed concern over the lack of intense training.

The PI proposed a full time Training Manager to support the on-going development of the sea rescue team and ensure consistency in training as well as a full time Marine Mechanic to offer support to the Training Manager and manage the vessels maintenance. Councillor Nicholls supported this suggestion and emphasised the importance of having an effective sea rescue service. Further discussion was had around the role of the Training Manager role and where it would sit within the AIG.

The DoR requested that the business case document be refined to reflect today's meeting.

The PI added that in the near future the current sea rescue vessel is in need of replacement, however this will have to be raised separately whilst considering EDF funding as an option. Councillor Ellick asked why the vessel needed replacing, noting that a new engine was fitted to the vessel around two years ago. The PI Inspector explained that the boat is around ten years old now. Councillors thanked the Police Inspector for attending.

Committee Members agreed they were happy to advise that the additional posts for Sea Rescue should be funded, as well as an administrative support post for the police on the proviso that post could be appointed to on a household status contract. The Consultancy for a new Marine Slipway did not gain approval, while it was agreed to look again at the request for Police PPE at the next meeting after the PI has prioritised his asks.

#### **4. Resource bid – School Upgrade and Marine Equipment**

The DoR introduced the Director of Operations and Facilities, highlighting the four business cases proposed; surface water drainage and playground resurfacing at Two Boats School, Roads upgrades and lifting equipment.

Lifting Equipment: The DoOF explained that every six months lifting equipment is inspected by British Engineering Service (BES), reporting that after a recent inspection lifting equipment has been declared condemned and can no longer be used. The DoOF added that there is a need for lifting equipment to be replaced, particularly lifting nets for heavy goods vehicles. Further conversation was had with regards to the expected life span of lifting equipment and the procurement process. Councillor Ellick highlighted the importance of planning for the future, and incorporating replacement equipment into the operation plan and budget as opposed to just replacing broken equipment.

Surface water drainage and playground surface at Two Boats School: The DoOF explained that the playground surface was not laid correctly when originally put down, adding that the surface is no longer able to be stuck back down and is becoming increasingly dangerous. Councillor Nicholls explained without more details of what the money will be spent on Councillors are unable to approve the spend with so little information. Councillor Ellick agreed. The DoOF agreed to produce a more detailed business case with a breakdown of costs for the next meeting, and explained he was withdrawing the bid for funding to tackle the water surface drainage issue at the school as he did not think it was practical to take on the two projects in the same year.

Road Upgrades: The DoOF withdrew this application on the basis he felt it was ill timed given the current Runway Project.

Property Refurbishment: The DoR explained the need for property and introduced the proposal to create six one bedroomed apartments for single living personnel in Campbell Block at a cost of around £140,000, as well as refurbishing Bungalow 225 in preparation for new posts being filled at an estimated cost of £25,000. Finally the DoR reported the need for an electrical rewire at Two Boats School at an estimated cost of £45,000. Councillors were happy to advise that funding for the projects should be approved.

The DoR provided an overview of the budget pack with the revised decisions, noting that the budget will still show a cash operating surplus and ultimately an increase in the reserves, with a similar outcome expected in the next financial year. Further discussion was had with regards to property investment and planning in relation to the future of Ascension. Councillor Ellick highlighted the importance of a future maintenance plan, particularly the conditions of the roads around the island, adding that whilst appreciating how difficult it is, the roads are a public safety concern.

## 5. Resource bid – IT investment and replacement

The Assistant Director of Resources explained the requirement for replacement equipment and investment in the current IT systems of the AIG, highlighting the three key areas in need of investment. Firstly an upgrade is required in the current accounting system SAGE, noting that it has been six years since the last update, resulting in compatibility issues. Secondly the ADoR reported on the need for new servers, one for storage and two mail servers, underlining the issues with the current mail server such as duplicate emails, slow sending and receiving as well as the inability to use out of office. Finally the ADoR explained the need for replacement IT equipment for both the Georgetown Hospital and Two Boats School.

The DoR requested an updated business case as well as a supporting statement from Sure recommending the upgrades and replacement equipment.

## 6. Overall proposed positions

	Proposal	KG	AE	AN
1	Operation Pay Inflation	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	Recruitment of Marine Mechanic & Training Manager	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	Additional Police Constable	No	No	No
4	Administrative support	Yes	Yes	Yes
6	Marine lifting equipment	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	Surface water drainage at Two Boats School <b>(detail required)</b>	No	No	No
8	Playground surface at Two Boats School <b>(detail required)</b>	No	No	No
9	Road upgrades (withdrawn)	No	No	No
10	Property refurbishment	Yes	Yes	Yes
11	One Public Transport Bus and one School Bus (School bus to be EDF funded)	Yes	Yes	Yes
12	Three Vivaro vehicles	Yes	Yes	Yes
13	One tractor unit	Yes	Yes	Yes

The DoR thanked Councillors for their time, not only today but over the previous weeks.

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 16:35

Siobhan

Siobhan Stewart  
Clerk of Council

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Morris', with a stylized flourish at the end.

*Gareth Morris*  
*Director of Resources – Chair of the Finance Committee*