

## ASCENSION ISLAND GOVERNMENT

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## Informal meeting of the Ascension Island Council

1700 on Tuesday 13 April 2021 at the Court House

### MEETING SUMMARY

Present:	HH Sean Burns, Administrator Rob Cheeseman, Crown Counsel	[by phone]	Councillor Andrew Ellick Councillor Alan Nicholls Councillor Kitty George Councillor Douglas Miller Councillor Nicholas John
In attendance:	Siobhan Stewart, Clerk of Council Catherine Leo, Assistant Director of Resources Dr Diane Baum, Director of Conservation and Fisheries Dr Bill Hardy, Senior Medical Officer		Apologies: Xander Halliwell, Head of Administrator's Office Gareth Morris, Director of Resources

The Administrator welcomed all parties and gave his condolences on the passing of HRH Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh. The Administrator thanked Councillors for their letter of condolence which will be sent to Her Majesty, The Queen. Confirmation was provided that the period of mourning would last until Sunday 18 April 2021 at 08:00, at which point the flags will return to full mast.

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

- **Animal Welfare [pets]:** This would remain on the tracker until more information was known about the future flight schedule.
- **Illumination of Flags:** A temporary light has now been fitted, however a more permanent solution is expected to arrive on the June 2021 FIRS.
- **Single-use Plastics:** Progress has been postponed due to conflicting priorities, the Administrator also noted that the Policy Officer would soon be returning from annual leave.
- **Street Lighting in Georgetown:** An updated schedule was provided to Councillors on 13 April 2021, however agreeing isolation dates with Encompass to complete some areas was ongoing. Councillor John requested that the updates be presented in more detail, the Administrator recommended that this be raised with the Director of Operations and Facilities in the Public Works Committee.
- **Connect Issues with telecommunications in Court House:** Options continue to be explored.
- **Maintenance of equipment at Georgetown Hospital:** CEF submitted and response provided to Councillors and the public on 09 April 2021. Councillor Ellick explained that whilst the enquiry and response is published on the website, he would like to see the information in the islander or public notice also. It was agreed that Councillors would set up a Councillor page in the Islander for these communications.
- **Director of Resources to update new Councillors on financial forecast:** Completed 23 March 2021.
- **SMO to attend Council to provide an update on travel corridor:** SMO attending today to provide an update.

The Director of Conservation and Fisheries provided an update on the **Inshore Fisheries Management Strategy**. The DoCF began by explaining that the strategy has been formed around the recommendations from the Inshore Fisheries Advisory Committee (IFAC). The DoCF explained that the intention is to present the strategy to the wider public and encourage feedback, suggestions and areas of concern through community engagement. Engagement will consist of public meetings, potentially at people's place of work with employing organisations support, newspaper articles, social media posts and questionnaires. The DoCF encouraged Councillors to provide any feedback they receive from members of the community, suggesting the introduction of an inshore fisheries working group, similar to what has been used recently for the Employment Law reform, which worked well.

The DoCF explained that the aim of the strategy is to ensure Ascension Island fisheries remain sustainable for generations to come. Whilst the fishing pressure around Ascension Island is currently relatively low, there is a limited area of shallow water habitat available for some fished species, which can make them vulnerable. A monitoring system supported by data from fishermen and AIG Conservation will facilitate decision making. Management interventions would only be brought in if there is a problem and they are needed to ensure the fishing effort is in balance with what the fish populations can sustain. The IFAC and Council would be involved in deciding whether measures are needed and what measures would be most appropriate. Further conversation was had around the different factors affecting the island's fish stocks and the control measures that may be considered to ensure sustainability if the data show a stock is in trouble.

Councillor George thanked the DoCF for attending and recommended a level of preparedness for a very emotive response from the people of Ascension Island. Conversation was had around different interpretations of intervention when necessary, however it was agreed that fishermen will be at the core of decisions. Councillor John encouraged careful thought when considering restricting fishing in areas, whilst making clear the tangible benefits for fishermen. The DoCF reported the intention to rejuvenate the IFAC and include the committee in decision making and allocation of funding. Councillor Nicholls raised some concern with regards to policy enforcement and legislation, asking how that may change depending on different people appointed in the role of DoCF in the future. Reassurance was provided that the policy has been written to ensure both Council and IFAC have full input in decisions, therefore ensuring the onus does not sit with one person's opinion. Councillor Ellick asked that the issue of sharks around the island is also addressed, with the DoCF explaining that this will be addressed separately from the inshore fisheries management strategy. Further discussion was had around data analysis frequency, the introduction of changes and the policing of any restrictions that may be put in place. Councillors supported the DoCF proposal to present the inshore fisheries management strategy to seek feedback and consult with the community of Ascension Island. Councillor George requested that all fishermen are given the opportunity to become part of the IFAC and that if fishermen drop out then others are given a chance to join. DoCF confirmed that they would ask for volunteers at the public meetings and through the Islander to ensure everyone has a chance to be part of it.

The Senior Medical Officer provided an update on the **travel corridor between St Helena and Ascension Island**. The SMO began by highlighting the benefits of the travel corridor for both islands, pointing out the measures that will ensure there is no additional risk to the community. The SMO explained the measures airlines use to ensure their air and cabin crew remain COVID-19 free, such as regular testing, social distancing, PPE and testing upon arrival to Ascension Island. Upon the aircraft arriving at Ascension Island UK and STH passengers will be separated and tested immediately, then sent to quarantine facilities whilst test results are processed. Following negative test results from all cabin crew and UK originating passengers, St Helena passengers can then be released from quarantine, however the UK originating passengers must remain. Conversation was had around potential vaccine passports and the definition of a St Helena passenger. The SMO explained that whilst the quarantine period for UK originating passengers was not being considered for change at this time, once the UK vaccination programme has been completed more data will be available for analysis to make informed decisions. Councillor Ellick requested an update on the vaccination rollout for under 18 year olds. The SMO explained that the Oxford Astra Zenica Vaccine trial on under 18 year olds is paused at the moment, adding that it is unlikely that it will be restarted in the near future.

The SMO addressed the recent reports in the press relating to blood clots and the COVID-19 vaccination. He explained that recipients of the vaccination that have a very rare genetic predisposition cause the antibodies of which the vaccine produces to react with platelets in the blood stream and ultimately cause blood clots. The SMO reassured council that the condition is extremely rare and it is based on a genetic predisposition, with an average of only four cases in every million vaccinations given. Further conversation was had with regards to the under 30's category being at 0.2% higher risk although after administering six million second doses in the UK there have been no reports of clotting. Councillor Nicholls requested an update on the roll out of the second dose of the vaccination on Ascension Island. The SMO was pleased to report that the second dose roll out will begin at the end of April, as the evidence suggests if you wait between eight to 12 weeks before administering the second dose the antibody response is much higher. Councillor George asked why St Helena are applying a much shorter period of 28 days whilst Ascension Island were applying a eight to 12 week interval period between first and second doses considering St Helena has a much more elderly and vulnerable population. The SMO explained that both islands received the same advice and were then allowed to make their own decision based on the information they had, bearing in mind that the first dose alone offers 60% protection. Further discussion was had regarding the

possibility of COVID-19 booster shots in the future. Councillor John highlighted the importance of taking into account the under 18 year old category when considering the travel corridor, the SMO reassured council that if there were to be any change in the COVID-19 free status between the islands the corridor would be closed with immediate effect. Further discussion was had regarding the protocols in place around sick seamen on vessels arriving into St Helena and Ascension Island.

The Administrator thanked the SMO for attending and providing an update to Council.

The Administrator introduced the topic of the Employment Law Reform and provided a brief history of the topic. Assurance was offered to both Councillor John and Miller that whilst they had not been part of Council for the past 15 months whilst the policy has been progressing, records of those meetings have been provided.

Crown Counsel explained that the policy had for the most part been intended to put existing employment practices on a statutory footing for the first time, rather than to bring about substantial reform. CC encouraged Councillors to view the policy document ahead of the next formal council meeting where they will be asked to decide if the adoption of the policy should be recommended to HE Governor Rushbrook. The draft Ordinance provided was intended to give Councillors a sense of what the implementing legislation might look like; if and when the policy is adopted, the legislation will be finessed and brought to Council in the usual way.

Councillor John raised concerns in relation to the policy, with some topics remaining open to interpretation. Discussion was had regarding the sequence of drafting the policy and legislation and which should be completed first. Councillor George emphasised the importance of recognising how far the policy has developed over a relatively short period of time, offering substantially more protection to workers on Ascension than what is currently in place. Councillor George conveyed concerns of the impact of further delays. Councillor John and Miller felt that they have not had the opportunity to go through the policy in sufficient detail to be able to agree with it and make a positive recommendation at this time. The Administrator recommended that the longstanding Councillors update both Councillors John and Miller on the background to the Employment Law Reform, including Councillors recommendations and decision making. Further discussion was had regarding the period of and method of consultation with both employing organisations and members of the public.

The Administrator sought an indication from elected members as to whether they would support a recommendation that the Policy be adopted and recommended at the next formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council so that the drafting of the appropriate ordinance and legislation could be completed for further consideration in June 2021.

	Proposal	KG	AE	AN	NJ	DM
1	Employment Policy to be recommended at formal Council	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No

Crown Counsel explained that he is available to take both Councillor John and Miller through the history of the Employment Reform step by step either via telephone or upon his return to the island later in the month. Councillor John conveyed his disappointment in his fellow Councillors decision to recommend, ultimately not allowing an extension of time to himself and Councillor Miller to consider the policy.

Crown Counsel introduced the **UK's new Global Anti-Corruption sanctions regime**. The proposed autonomous Global Anti-Corruption sanctions regime will allow the UK Government to impose sanctions in order to prevent and combat serious corruption anywhere in the world, in cases where a foreign public official has been involved. The two sanctions measures available under this regime are an asset-freeze and/or a travel ban, the UK Government has decided that this regime should be extended to the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies in order to minimize the risk of circumvention or asset-flight, and in line with the UK's foreign policy ambition to be a force for good in the world. Crown Counsel clarified that there would be minimal impact to Ascension Island.

The Administrator provided an update about **coronavirus** (COVID-19) on Ascension. The Administrator explained that St Helena Government have offered some clarity with regards to future flights, confirming one flight week commencing 21 June 2021 and one week commencing 10 August 2021.

The Administrator provided an update on the **runway project**. He confirmed that the offloading is progressing well, with the planned dig date of 03 May 2021 and completion date remaining at October 2022. Councillor George explained that feedback from the public regarding noise disruption from the aggregate offload has been minimal, indicating that the level of disruption has been far less than people may have initially expected.

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

- (i) **Flight Schedule:** Councillor George requested an update on the flight schedule over the festive period of 2021/2022. This would be looked into to see what information was available.
- (ii) **Platinum Jubilee:** Councillor George requested that the AIG and other Employing Organisations on island come together to consider a street carnival type occasion to mark the Platinum Jubilee of Elizabeth II. Council supported this suggestion.
- (iii) **Afternoon tea with HM The Queen and A Gift from the Overseas Territory:** Councillor George explained that following being contacted by United Kingdom Overseas Territories Association (UKOTA) it was suggested that each Overseas Territory Government would select a small number of people who represent and volunteer in the local community to have virtual afternoon tea with HM The Queen. This would be followed by a private event where a gift would be presented from UKOTA to HM The Queen. Council supported this suggestion.
- (iv) **Royal St Helena Police Service proposal:** The Administrator explained that the Governor seeks Councils support in making an application to change the police service's name from the St Helena Police Service to the Royal St Helena Police Service. Council supported this suggestion.
- (v) **Rats:** Councillor Nicholls requested an update on rodent control on the island. Councillor Nicholls had received a number of complaints from constituents regarding sightings of rats in and around their properties. Further discussion was had regarding reported sightings and funding considerations. The Administrator agreed to pass the feedback onto the Director of Conservation and Fisheries for comment.
- (vi) **Review of Income Tax:** Councillor George raised an enquiry on behalf of a constituent regarding the level of income tax on Ascension Island. The Administrator requested that the enquiry was submitted in a Councillor Enquiry Form where a thorough response can be provided.

The meeting closed at 19:10

Siobhan Stewart  
Clerk of Council