

ASCENSION ISLAND GOVERNMENT

Clerk of Council's Office
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Formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council

16:30 on Thursday 11 March 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
Allen Cansick, Attorney General [by phone] Councillor Nicholas John
Councillor Douglas Miller

In attendance: Robert Cheeseman, Crown Counsel
Xander Halliwell, Head of Administrator's Office
Siobhan Stewart, Clerk of Council
Charles Poole, Director Operations & Facilities

Apologies: Luke Atkinson, FCDO Desk Officer [by phone]

1. Welcome

The Administrator welcomed all parties and explained who was present for those attending by phone. The Administrator congratulated Councillor John and Councillor Miller on their appointment as Island Councillors, adding that he looks forward to working collaboratively in the future. HE the Governor, Dr Philip Rushbrook also conveyed his congratulations to both Councillors. The Administrator conveyed his commiserations to Lucy Rodwell who also ran for Council and thanked the Returning Officers, Presiding Officers, Assistant Presiding Officers and Counting Clerks for their hard work on polling day.

2. Approval of Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the Formal Council meeting held on 05 February 2021 were accepted. In accordance with the Council Rules these had already been agreed by Council members and published on 23 February 2021.

Councillor Nicholls reminded Council that when Councillors agreed the freeze of the business levy, it was agreed that employing organisations on island would be informed of the planned review in year three. Councillor Nicholls requested an update on whether employing organisation have been informed and the Director of Resources explained that the communication has not yet taken place.

Decision: The minutes of the Formal Finance Committee meeting held on 05 February 2021 were accepted. In accordance with the Council Rules these had already been agreed by Council members and published on 23 February 2021.

Decision: The minutes of the Formal Finance Committee meeting held on 11 February 2021 were accepted following two amendments below from AIG. In accordance with the Council Rules these had already been agreed by Council members and published on 05 March 2021.

	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 (detail required)	No	No	No

8	Playground surface at Two Boats School (detail required)	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 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. Councillor George explained that one of the crew on a visiting yacht is a qualified vet and has kindly offered to meet with any owners and pets with concerns. The Administrator suggested that a public notice be distributed to inform pet owners of the opportunity to meet with the vet. Crown Counsel recommended that the agreement remain directly between the owner and the vet, to ensure liability protection for the AIG. The DoR suggested that perhaps the old mortuary at the hospital can be utilised. Councillor George agreed to distribute a notice to pet owners in a personal capacity.
- **Illumination of Flags:** The Director of Operations and Facilities attended Council to provide an update.
- **Single-use Plastics:** As previously advised, this was on hold pending the return of the policy officer who was on leave.
- **Street Lighting in Georgetown:** The Director of Operations and Facilities attended Council to provide an update.
- **Councillor Nicholls to send feedback document on legislation to Crown Counsel:** Councillor Nicholls has sent the relevant feedback to Crown Counsel.
- **Director of Conservation and Fisheries to provide confirmation of future funding commitments:** Update provided to Councillors on 26 February 2021 [via email].
- **Crown Counsel to consider changing the map in page 10 of the MPA Management Plan:** Update provided to Councillors on 08 March 2021 [via email].
- **Crown Counsel to confirm if any light dues are being applied to the runway contractor vessels:** Crown Counsel confirmed that vessels are being charged. Councillor Nicholls sought clarity as he had heard conflicting reports from within the AIG. Crown Counsel added that further investigation is required in relation to the Bahamas agreement, followed by further discussion around which vessels are exempt.

2. Operations Update

Street Lights: The DoOF explained that a schedule of works is being prepared to provide clarity regarding the street light roll out, however he emphasised the challenges faced by the directorate in some areas. Firstly, many of the lights that are connected to the Encompass underground cables are proving challenging due to out dated fuse box's that Encompass are replacing. Secondly competing demands and the requirement for both the AIG Plant and Electrical teams to be available simultaneously, is causing some delays. The DoOF explained that currently on island there are five different kinds of lamps installed, each are being replaced with new fittings. The DoOF requested that Council members give the directorate some space to get the job done. The DoOF explained that temporary lights are being put around the island where it is not possible to rewire the historical lights. The DoOF requested that all queries regarding the street lights are channelled through the helpdesk.

Councillor John conveyed his concern over the length of time the issue of street light is taking to resolve, requesting that works are progressed with a level of urgency. The DoOF explained that with limited resources and complexities around fittings and electrical wiring it will take time, Councillor John stated that a planned written schedule, highlighting the problems faced, would be helpful. The Administrator explained that whilst Councillors no doubt understood the limitations and challenges faced, a schedule of works with a detailed timeline is required. The DoOF explained that following a survey of both Two Boats village and Georgetown, key areas have been identified, however if Councillors are aware of any additional areas that are of concern to the public they are invited to feed it back to the helpdesk. Councillor Nicholls highlighted that he and Councillor George had already identified the key areas some months ago, questioning why it needed to be done again. Councillor George added that both Councillors Ellick and Hobson also completed a survey of the street lights in

Two Boats some months ago. The DoOF explained that removable temporary lighting is being placed in some areas, this followed some discussion around the network capacity and areas of responsibility between the AIG and Encompass, with the DoOF confirming that the network has sufficient capacity. The DoOF agreed to provide the relevant documents requested to Council by the 19 March 2021.

Illumination of Flags: The DoOF reported that the wiring of the light fitting is scheduled for Monday 15 March 2021, followed by the installation of the lamp. The DoOF explained that initially a halogen lamp will be trialled, if this lamp is deemed not suitable a sodium lamp will be ordered and fitted.

Councillor John requested that Council is kept up to date on the progress of both projects, showing particular interest around the move from mains powered street lights to LED. Councillor John suggested that before beginning the rollout it may be helpful to get in writing from Encompass that the network infrastructure is in a good state and can support the new lights. The DoR provided some background on the decision making process around the move from mains powered lamps to solar powered, Councillor Ellick explained that if there were concerns over the capacity in the network, LED lamps will use substantially less energy than the traditional lamps currently in situ. Councillor Miller explained that several solar powered lamps have been trialled on Travellers Hill with limited success, recommending that LED is the best option.

It was explained that initial discussions have taken place and a follow up meeting has been set up with Encompass to discuss the street lighting roll out in the next few days. Encompass will be working closely with the AIG to isolate some of the existing poles, however some poles are in need of replacement due to corrosion. Four concrete plinths per week are being made and then fitted with the solar powered street lights to address key black out spots across the island.

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

6. Coronavirus update

The HoAO provided an update about **coronavirus** (COVID-19) on Ascension. 753 first doses had been administered as of the 11 March 2021, equating to 94% of the eligible adult population. The HoAO explained that there will be a wash up session at the end of March 2021 to capture those that arrived on the recent flights that will be staying on Ascension Island long term. The HoAO also reported a planned round of second doses at the end of March 2021 for those that will be departing on the next flight to capture them within the 12 week recommended time frame. The bulk of the second doses will begin at the end of April/beginning of May to ensure the highest efficacy possible.

The HoAO was pleased to inform Council that pre departure testing remains not required when flying on the Titan aircraft, however the RAF have confirmed that from the next A400, passengers will be required to have a COVID-19 test prior to departure. The HoAO explained that conversation is continuing in the hope of forming a travel corridor between Ascension Island and St Helena, in preparation a trial of the necessary testing procedure will take place on the March 2021 Titan flight, with the intention to go live in May 2021. The HoAO emphasised that passengers travelling from the UK will still have to isolate as normal. He went on to report that by the end of May everyone in St Helena and Ascension will have received both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine and certain criteria and conditions will apply to the exemption from Compulsory Isolation.

Councillor George conveyed her support of removing isolation for those travelling between islands, adding that constituents were hopeful of a reduction in isolation; a removal will be well received. The Administrator added that initial conditions may apply, where a couple of days of isolation may be enforced as a precautionary measure. Councillor George asked if HE the Governor could provide an insight to whether St Helena will be supportive of a reduction/removal of isolation for passengers travelling from Ascension Island. HE the Governor explained that it is for the Incident Executive Group (IEG) to look into, with a planned meeting on Tuesday to discuss.

The Administrator expressed his willingness to write a letter to the Chief Secretary detailing the minimal risk levels and the measures in place to mitigate risk, enabling the removal/reduction of isolation. HE the Governor highlighted that the Councillors of Ascension Island may wish to write to St Helena Council's Public Health Committee in support of a removal/reduction in isolation.

Councillor John encouraged Council to approach the removal of isolation with caution as the AIG management of COVID-19 has already proven successful, and rely on recommendations and support from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and science based facts. The Administrator added that the risk profile has been dramatically reduced with the introduction of the vaccination programme and a thorough testing regime. Councillor Nicholls raised concern over the risk to under 18 year olds on Ascension Island who have not been vaccinated. HE the Governor added that with Ascension Island being such a rural setting, the risk was in fact even lower.

The Administrator suggested that Councillors may find it helpful if the Senior Medical Officer (SMO) were to attend a future Council meeting to explain from a medical risk point of view. Councillor Ellick explained that he would like to see the detailed road map, with how and when the implementation is likely to take place. The Administrator explained that following further investigation into the various options, a plan will be shared with Council, although this will take time. Following a practice situation with the incoming March 2021 Titan flight, if successful segregation of passengers can be achieved, then the roll out will begin officially on the May 2021 Titan Flight. This was the current plan and there was no immediate plan to lift any quarantine restrictions for arrivals from elsewhere.

Councillor Nicholls asked if vaccination cards will be issued to people as proof of vaccination. The HoAO explained that upon receiving your second dose of the vaccine you will be issued with your National Health Service (NHS) produced vaccination card detailing the date the doses were given, batch number and type of vaccination. The Administrator added that the SMO is willing to organise a public meeting to explain the measures in place to protect the community, detail the mitigation being applied, offer reassurance and allow the opportunity for the public to ask questions.

The Administrator reiterated that the travel corridor being considered will not apply to UK passengers, with no immediate plans to change current Compulsory Isolation measures for passengers returning from the UK.

Councillor George thanked the SMO for reassuring and communicating with the public before and during the vaccine roll out, noting that the feedback from the community was very positive.

7. Runway project update

The Head of the Administrator's Office provided an update on the runway project explaining that the jack up barge is expected to return to its position in front of the pier head in the coming days pending sea conditions, adding that the AIG have allowed Sunday working if required for this specific task. Following the approval of the Biosecurity licence the sand on board the MV Magothy will be offloaded first, followed by the MV Severn with the aggregate on board. The HoAO reported on measures that have been approved to facilitate these offloads, where approval has been given from now until the end of March to allow offloads to take place Monday to Saturday from 07:00 to 19:30, however Sunday working has not been approved to allow residents of Georgetown some rest and recuperation from the noise and dust pollution.

The HoAO confirmed that the initial digging of the runway will take place provisionally around the 03 May 2021, changing from 26 April 2021, resulting in a reduction in length of the runway from 10,000 to 5,000 feet. The Administrator added that the runway contractors have been encouraged to do public communications and bulletins in the Islander to update the community.

Councillor John requested further detail on the planned completion date and clarity around the delay in the project. The Administrator explained that the reason for the change in the digging date is not known, however he confirmed that the Biosecurity requirements are not one of them. Councillor John requested further information as to why the runway contractors' request to work Sundays had not been granted. The HoAO explained that the runway contractor requested to work every Sunday in March, the only Sunday approved was Sunday 14 March 2021 to facilitate the movement of the jack up barge. The Administrator explained that the decision to not allow Sunday working was community based, taking into consideration that one truck every three minutes will be driving through residential areas in Georgetown. Councillor John acknowledged the decision, however felt that the community of Ascension desperately wants the runway repaired and understands that reasonable sacrifices and tradeoffs have to be made. Councillor George added that the

concern is not only the trucks through Georgetown, but also the noise and dust from the conveyor belt system. The HoAO explained that if Sunday working was to be authorised it would not bring the project completion date forward.

The Administrator informed Council of a second request for extended working hours for the runway project on the following days in April 2021 and asked for their consideration and thoughts. The Administrator added that communications to the public have offered reassurance that only during exceptional circumstances will work be authorised on Sundays and Public Holidays, adding that the AIG are awaiting the reasons for the request.

- Monday to Saturday 07:00-19:30
- Every Sunday [in April 2021] 07:00-19:30
- Public Holiday Good Friday [02 April 2021] 07:00-19:30
- Public Holiday Easter Monday [05 April 2021] 07:00-19:30

Councillor George explained that during consultation with constituents, it was clear that keeping Sunday as a work free day was important to allow residents of Georgetown to be able to hang laundry outside, and make plans knowing that there would be no disruption. She added that the proposal is not only one isolated Sunday, but potentially multiple, consecutive Sundays. Councillor George conveyed her understanding of Councillor John's point regarding sacrifices needing to be made, however felt that the sacrifice was too great in this instance.

Councillor Nicholls acknowledged the struggle in weighing up the pros and cons in the decision making process, noting that whilst Councillors fully support the runway project there is also a level of empathy for the residents of Georgetown to be considered, especially those living in close proximity to the road. Councillor Nicholls expressed his support for Sunday working not to be authorised. Councillor George highlighted the difficulty in understanding the level of disruption to Georgetown residents until the sand and aggregate offload has begun, the public may find that it is much less intrusive than initially thought and may be supportive of Sunday working.

Councillor George highlighted the significance of Good Friday and Christmas day in the Church calendar. Councillor Ellick explained that in St Helena they now allow Christmas day working and perhaps this should be considered here if organisations wish, and employees are willing.

8. Any other business

Five AOB points were raised:

- a. **Maintenance of equipment at the Georgetown Hospital:** Councillor Ellick requested details around the frequency of testing equipment at the hospital and whether there is a separate budget set aside for this. The Administrator requested that Councillor Ellick submit the enquiry using the Councillor Enquiry Form where a full and accurate response will be provided.
- b. **Time of Council meetings:** Councillor John requested that the meeting time be changed from 16:30 to 17:00 to allow sufficient time to get from work to the Council meetings. Councillors conveyed their contentment at the proposed change of time. The Administrator asked more generally if employers were allowing their staff time to attend to civic duties such as coroner, councillor, advocate. The view was they should and the Administrator agreed to check.
- c. **Connection issues with St Helena via telephone:** Councillor John suggested that Microsoft Teams is used as an alternative to the spider phone due to the poor quality of sound being relayed. The DoR explained that the court house does not have a permanent internet connection, however options are currently being discussed with Sure and Teams could be considered for the future.
- d. **Budget Approval:** Councillor John requested details around the 2021/2022 budget approval. The DoR explained that whilst the budget has already been approved by Council several weeks earlier, he plans to meet with both Councillor John and Councillor Miller to provide an update on the forecast.

- e. **Committee Membership:** Discussion was had regarding the membership of the three existing Committees and the following was proposed by Councillors:
- **Public Works Committee** – to cover the Ascension Island Government’s (AIG) operations and facilities functions and services. Nominated councillors are: and Councillor John, Councillor Miller and Councillor Nicholls.
 - **Welfare Committee** – to focus on AIG’s non-operational work, with a particular focus on health and education. Nominated councillors are: Councillor Ellick, Councillor George and Councillor Miller.
 - **Finance Committee** – Nominated councillors are: Councillor Ellick, Councillor John and Councillor Nicholls

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 18:05

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