



Formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council

17:00 on Thursday 22 April 2021 at the Court House

MINUTES

Present:	HE Dr Philip Rushbrook, Governor HH Sean Burns, Administrator Allen Cansick, Attorney General	[by phone]	Councillor Alan Nicholls Councillor Kitty George Councillor Andrew Ellick Councillor Nicholas John Councillor Douglas Miller
In attendance:	Robert Cheeseman, Crown Counsel Siobhan Stewart, Clerk of Council Luke Atkinson, FCDO Desk Officer Catherine Leo, Assistant Director of Resources	[by phone]	
Apologies:	Xander Halliwell, Head of Administrator's Office Gareth Morris, Director of Resources		

1. Welcome

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

2. Approval of Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the Formal Council meeting held on 25 February 2021 were accepted. In accordance with the Council Rules these had already been agreed by Council members and published on 11 March 2021.

Decision: The minutes of the Formal Council meeting held on 01 March 2021 were accepted. In accordance with the Council Rules these had already been agreed by Council members and published on 24 March 2021.

Decision: The minutes of the Formal Council meeting held on 11 March 2021 were accepted. In accordance with the Council Rules these had already been agreed by Council members and published on 06 April 2021.

3. Matters arising

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:** The matter is now resolved and will be removed from the actions tracker.
- **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 Administrator explained that there is no further update following the most recent update provided to Council on the 13 April 2021, however following the FIRS and the Manitou being tasked elsewhere the Director of Operations and Facilities will provide an update in due course.
- **Connect Issues with telecommunications in Court House:** The Assistant Director of Resources reported that a quotation has been received from Sure with regards to upgrading the current IT system within the Court House, adding that the quotation provided several options which were now being considered.
- **Flight details over the festive period:** The Administrator explained the difficulty in predicting the flight schedule so far in advance and whether the service operating would be Titan or Airlink over this period. Whilst the next two flights are confirmed for May and June, the St Helena Airport Directorate/Authority have

been made aware of a potential need for an additional flight over the Christmas period and also the school holiday period of August/September 2021. The Administrator explained that due to the reduction of the runway length the number of passengers outgoing is limited to 70, however upon return to Ascension is limited to only 40.

- **Rodent Control:** An update was provided to Council by email on 28 April 2021. The Administrator provided clarification from the Director of Conservation and Fisheries regarding the manning of the Environmental Health team. Whilst the team now consists of two employees, if one of those employees were to be unwell or on holiday, resources from within Conservation Directorate will be diverted to support the Environmental Health team to ensure the team remains as a two person team. Clarity was provided that the departments within the Conservation Directorate such as the Seabird's and Endemic Plant teams will manage rodent control within their own areas. Councillor Nicholls felt that this was not what was agreed at the time of reducing the team to two persons. Councillor Ellick noted that whilst resources can be found within the Directorate to cover leave periods, he would like to see resources found to cover peak rodent periods, not necessarily a full time position. The Administrator said the Environmental Health Team were doing a good job to keep rodents under control and doing so in difficult circumstances with very limited resources. He highlighted the difficulty in forecasting and planning for peak periods, unlike periods of annual leave, providing the example of the heavy rain in 2020. Councillor George conveyed the need for people living on Ascension Island to also take some responsibility, following recent reports that some people prefer the use of humane traps, where it is alleged the rodents are then released alive within residential areas. Residents have reported up to 20 mice sightings at one BBQ. Councillor George conveyed her frustration on behalf of both the community and the Environmental Health team who are trying their best to eradicate the rodents from the residential areas. The Administrator recommended that wider discussions continue within the relevant committees to discuss any budgetary changes that would increase the size of the Environmental Health team. Councillor John highlighted the potential link between rodent's numbers and an increased number of Mexican thorn bushes creating ideal habitats for rodent populations to flourish. He requested if there were any updates on the Darwin Plus grant application, where it was proposed that a specific moth be introduced to Ascension that specifically attacks Mexican thorn bushes, ultimately reducing the rodents' habitat. Councillor John recommended that a longer term solution approach be used to tackle the issue, including reaching out for external funding from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) who were instrumental in the removal of cats from the island which has ultimately contributed to the current rodent problem. Finally, Councillor John suggested that consideration be given to the additional duties taken on within the team, such as the maintenance of the Two Boats swimming pool.

4. Inshore Fisheries Strategy Consultation

The Administrator introduced the inshore fisheries strategy to Council and explained the proposal to launch a public consultation on the strategy with an aim to maintain the sustainability of the inshore fisheries around Ascension Island. It was proposed that following a period of public consultation the response will be brought back to Council for further discussion. The Administrator highlighted the importance that the strategy is community led, with specific concerns around potential fees now and in the future when there are changes of personnel within Directorates and Council being addressed. The period of public consultation will be between the 14 April and the 14 May 2021, during which time public meetings will also be held to encourage engagement. HE the Governor fully supported a period of public consultation and looks forward to hearing the feedback received and a revised strategy. Councillor John noted previous difficulties in capturing revenues and managing regulation within the sports fishing industry, offering his support to the strategy. HE the Governor conveyed the importance of implementing this strategy before the runway completion and the return of the air bridge.

5. The UK's new Global Anti-Corruption sanctions regime

Crown Counsel explained the UK's new Global Anti-Corruption sanctions regime, noting the similarity to the Human Rights sanctions imposed previously. 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 confirmed there will be minimal impact to Ascension Island.

6. Employment Law Reform

The Administrator provided a summary on the progress of Employment Law reform on Ascension Island. Following the last General Election, work began in November 2019, however in February 2020 work was delayed due to resources being diverted elsewhere to support with the COVID-19 response. Work restarted in late 2020 where a policy document went out to Employing Organisations for consultation between 20 August 2020 and 12 October 2020 following a request for an extension. This was followed by a period of public consultation between January 2021 and February 2021. The policy document was then revised and in March 2021 the Employment Reform Working Group (ERWG) held a meeting where it was recommended that the policy be taken to formal council for recommendation to HE the Governor that the policy be adopted. The Administrator acknowledged that both Councillor John and Miller have previously requested more time to look over the document, however Councillors Nicholls, George and Ellick felt that after 18 months of work it was time to move forward and were therefore reluctant to reopen the draft policy stage.

Councillor John explained that whilst he has reached out with an invite regarding discussing the Employment Law Reform only Councillor Miller has responded. Councillor John conveyed the importance of a face to face discussion with Crown Counsel regarding the Policy and an example regarding no reference in the contracts of employment being made having to comply with local legislation, being enforceable and subject to the jurisdiction of Ascension Island. Councillor John noted that whilst Crown Counsel has responded to questions asked and worked with himself and Councillor Miller, nothing can substitute being given the opportunity to have a face to face conversation upon Crown Counsel's return. Councillor John also expressed his concern over the uncertainty between employee and employer with regards to repatriation and isolation costs, adding that he believes there should be no ambiguity whatsoever between employee and employer.

Councillor John requested that his fellow elected members vote to allow himself and Councillor Miller sufficient time to meet with Crown Counsel and review the Policy document with him, highlighting the importance of addressing issues now, ultimately making it easier later down the line.

The Administrator confirmed that at this stage it is simply the adoption of policy, explaining that the policy will not go into that level of detail. The Administrator provided an example of the recent issue of quarantine and whether the period of quarantine was to come out of employees leave allowances or to be unpaid. By not legislating for every term and condition ensured that there was a level of flexibility offered to both employee and employer. Crown Counsel explained that when regulating, it should be considered what is necessary and what is proportionate based on evidence of an issue. Crown Counsel added that as much freedom as possible should be left to employers, bearing in mind that looking for solutions can often be the creator of problems. Further discussion was had regarding Ascension Island's unique economy and job market. Finally, Crown Counsel assured Council that this is the first step after 96 years of no legislative changes, adding that changes can be made to the legislation in the future.

Crown Counsel explained that following the recommendation of adopting the policy the final stages of drafting the legislation can take place, where the draft ordinance then be will returned to Council for scrutinisation and if required, amended. He added that it may also be considered appropriate to consider reconvening the Employment Reform Working Group (ERWG) if the work required on the draft ordinance was more than deemed appropriate to be dealt with within a formal council meeting.

The Administrator sought a recommendation from elected members that the Employment Law Policy be adopted so that the drafting of the appropriate legislation could be completed for further consideration by council in June 2021.

	Proposal	KG	AE	AN	NJ	DM
1	Employment Policy to be recommended to HE the Governor	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

The Administrator explained to HE the Governor that the vote is four in favour and one against. HE the Governor accepted the four to one majority to adopt the Employment Law Policy.

7. Corona Virus Update

The Administrator provided an update about **coronavirus** (COVID-19) on Ascension, confirming that the island remains at Level 2 Red following a positive case being detected during routine arrival testing, however he highlighted that the individual remains in isolation with minimal risk to the wider community. Testing will take place again on Friday where if a negative result is returned the island will return to Level 1 Amber. Whilst there is no evidence to suggest community spread and the AIG believe there is minimal risk to the community, the level is raised to Level 2 Red to ensure there is a heightened awareness in the community and allow individuals to make their own decisions. Councillor Nicholls expressed his disappointment over a Disco that took place at the Volcano Club despite the heightened level, and considering St. Mary's church had cancelled the memorial service for HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. Councillor Ellick expressed concern that AIG are too quick to move to Level 2 Red. The Administrator explained moving to Level 2 Red simply gives people the choice to decide if they wish to take extra precautions or not. The daily life of the island was not impacted in any significant way. Councillor Ellick pointed out that the UK has 5 levels, recommending that Ascension adopt an additional level as the Level 2 Red is losing the desired effect, therefore recommending that Level 1 Amber is applied when a case is an isolated case in quarantine, Level 2 Red when there is spread within the isolation bubble and Level 3 Black if there were to be community spread. The Administrator noted councillor Ellick's comments but said that although these policies are under constant review, in AIG's view the current system was working for the moment. Councillor George added that Level 2 Red is simply a heightened state of awareness as a result of a contained positive case.

Councillor John explained that the COVID19 response measures currently in place are effective and have been proven to work successfully, adding that he does not feel there is any requirement to change the alert levels currently in place. Councillor John also thanked the Senior Medical Officer for attending the informal meeting held on 13 April 2021 and presenting to council the proposed travel corridor.

Councillor George asked if there were any changes in the agreement of the travel corridor as a result of the positive case on Ascension Island. HE the Governor explained that he is not aware of any changes to the agreement, adding that St Helena have recently found themselves in a similar situation where a positive results was returned from a person in isolation, followed by a negative test two days later, simply showing that the compulsory isolation measure in place work.

The Administrator reported that the SMO has been working closely with Public Health England (PHE) to explore the possibility of a reduction of the 14 days isolation period for passengers returning from non COVID19 free areas, noting that the current 14 day compulsory isolation period is having a significant impact on employing organisations. Whilst there is no timeline at the moment of when a reduction may be possible, a number of factors are being considered such as pre arrival testing, proof of vaccination and a compulsory isolation period. Councillor Nicholls conveyed concerns that the under 18 year old category is unable to be vaccinated yet, the Administrator explained that whilst the under 18 year old category can still contract COVID19, the consequences are low with very low risk of sickness or hospitalisation.

HE the Governor conveyed the importance of the AIG beginning to prepare to open its borders, explaining that other Overseas Territories such as the British Virgin Islands have opened their borders to allow anyone who has been fully vaccinated to visit following a negative COVID19 arrival test, adding that Barbados are planning to apply the same procedure starting in May 21. HE the Governor explained that the UK will publish their green, amber, red system on the 17 May 2021, where countries will be categorised based upon rates of infection. HE the Governor added that it was imperative that St Helena and Ascension Island are on the "green" list to ensure

there is no requirement to quarantine, recommending that St Helena and Ascension Island should consider adopting a similar approach in the future. Councillor John highlighted the need for caution, adding that Overseas Territories such as TDI and Barbados are hugely reliant on tourism and the revenues that come with that, whilst Ascension Island is not.

The Administrator was pleased to inform Council that the uptake of the vaccine on Ascension has been very high compared to some OTs. He also added that people living on Ascension Island will be invited to receive their second dose of vaccine very shortly. Similar levels of uptake were hoped for and expected.

8. Runway project update

The Administrator provided an update on the runway project explaining that the sand has now been offloaded and the aggregate offload started today. The Administrator was pleased to inform Council that the sand was successfully offloaded, stating that in terms of Biosecurity only one dead leaf was found.

The Administrator addressed a recent Saint FM radio announcement where it was announced that the delay in offloading the runway project ships was due to biosecurity restrictions, adding that it was claimed that the source was well informed and had recently arrived in St Helena on the recent Titan flight. However, the reporter said the story was unconfirmed. Following some discussion the Administrator said he would consider whether to correct this or leave it.

Councillor Ellick requested an update on the excavation of the runway date. The Administrator confirmed the date remains the 03 May 2021 following a certification flight in a few days for the shortened runway.

8. Any other business

No items of AOB were raised.

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 18:10

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 'Sean Burns', is written on a light-colored background.

Sean Burns

On behalf of HE the Governor, Dr Philip Rushbrook