

## ASCENSION ISLAND GOVERNMENT

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## Formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council

17:00 on Thursday 10 June 2021 at the Courthouse

### MINUTES

Present: HE Dr Philip Rushbrook, Governor [by phone] Councillor Alan Nicholls  
HH Sean Burns, Administrator Councillor Kitty George  
Allen Cansick, Attorney General [by phone] Councillor Andrew Ellick  
Gareth Morris, Director of Resources Councillor Nicholas John  
Councillor Douglas Miller

In attendance: Robert Cheeseman, Crown Counsel Siobhan Stewart, Clerk of Council  
Luke Atkinson, FCDO Desk Officer [by phone] Caitlin Thomas, Clerk of Council  
Xander Halliwell, Head of Administrator's Office  
Diane Baum, Director of Conservation and Fisheries

Apologies:

### 1. Welcome

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

### 2. Approval of Minutes

**Decision:** The summary of the Informal Council meeting held on 13 April 2021 was accepted, with one feedback comment received. In accordance with the Council Rules the summary had already been agreed by Council members and published on 30 April 2021.

**Decision:** The minutes of the Formal Council meeting held on 22 April 2021 were accepted. In accordance with the Council Rules these had already been agreed by Council members and published on 17 May 2021.

**Decision:** The minutes of the Formal Council meeting held on 20 May 2021 were accepted with one feedback comment received. In accordance with the Council Rules these had already been agreed by Council members and published on 03 June 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. It was noted there was a possibility for a vet to arrive in August if, as planned, Titan operates two flights.
- **Single-use Plastics:** It was agreed that this would go up on the list of priorities and that the Policy Officer would send an email out to Councillors providing an update. Councillors noted this was particularly relevant due to COP26 in November.
- **Connection Issues with telecommunications in Court House:** A network connection from the Police Station to the Court is expected to be in place by the end of June 2021. Following this, further consideration will be given to the equipment to be purchased.

- **Flight details over the festive period:** A double shuttle has been confirmed in August. A discussion will be held next week with SHG and Titan for a long term plan in looking to secure more certainty of the flights going forward.
- **Policy Offer to write to Starlink regarding services:** The option of Starlink has been looked into and it had been confirmed via their website that this would only be possible commencing 2022. The AIG has reached out to Starlink in order to see if a possible service can be provided here on Ascension; a response was received welcoming the invitation.
- **No Flag on the Naval Flag Staff:** Repairs completed - Flag is now flying and the action will be removed from the tracker.
- **Explore the options/measure that may be enforced regarding the dumping of fish waste at the pier head:** Update provided to Council by email on 07 June 2021. Discussions were still being held amongst Crown Counsel and Councillors on how to proceed.
- **Arrange a meeting of the ERWG before the next formal meeting:** A meeting was held on Thursday 03 June 2021. Item removed from the actions tracker.
- **Councillors to nominate Councillor to attend JMC:** Alasdair Bain will attend a Sherpa meeting on 10 June 2021, then report back to Councillors.

#### 4. Inshore Fisheries Strategy Consultation

The Administrator introduced the Inshore Fisheries Strategy to Council and welcomed the Director of Conservation & Fisheries (DOCF). Dr Baum explained that a public consultation was held on the 03 June along with questionnaires and articles distributed via the Islander and on social media inviting the public to provide a response, adding that the majority of the feedback was quite positive. The public were concerned about how some of these issues would be enforced. The Director of Conservations and Fisheries said the details would be discussed between a working group with Council to develop the policy further, and would then seek public consultation once a firm proposal is made on those details.

The Administrator thanked the DOCF and asked if all Councillors were in agreement that a working group be formed. Cllr John expressed concerns although, content with the decision that a working group be formed, Council should be mindful of how much work they are taking on whilst assisting in the best possible way.

	Proposal	KG	AE	AN	NJ	DM
1	Decision for an Inshore Fisheries Working Group to be formed	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Dr Baum provided an update on the Marine Protected Area (MPA) fund explaining that a private donor has provided a £2 million endowment through the Blue Marine Foundation. It was then discussed that certain challenges have arisen with the fund regarding the legal aspect and who would be responsible and liable for making sure the community projects that are funded go ahead. A requirement from Blue Marine Foundation was that a legal counterparty on Ascension would take on this responsibility; however, options are still being explored on this matter.

Cllr Ellick queried whether the option of setting up a bank account here on Ascension had been explored; however, the DOCF explained that the main issue is the legal entity of which it involves and who would stand responsible for dispersing the fund. The Administrator was in agreement and reassured Council that the risks associated with being a legal counterparty and whoever took it on would need to be fully aware of their responsibilities and liabilities.

## 5. Employment Law Reform

Crown Counsel (CC) provided an update on the Employment Law Reform. Hard copies of the latest “tracked changes” version of the draft Ordinance were distributed.

Crown Counsel circulated a memo ahead of the meeting which set out a summary of the process to date and key features of the draft Ordinance. The memo was also accompanied by a detailed “transposition table” which showed how each paragraph of the policy mapped across to the Ordinance, the purpose of which was to allow Councillors to identify and to scrutinise how the policy had been implemented in the draft Ordinance.

Addressing the draft Ordinance, Crown Counsel explained that the various earlier versions had been circulated and examined previously, both in Council and in the ERWG, and the current version differs very little from the most recent version. Crown Counsel also confirmed that further proof reading will take place before the Ordinance becomes law, so any minor errors of punctuation etc will be addressed.

A recommendation was then sought from Council that the Employment Ordinance becomes law.

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

Cllr John was not in favour and expressed concerns that certain aspects were missing with regards to isolation costs on repatriation, and also including the provision for maternity, paternity and compassionate leave along with medical referrals.

The Administrator explained that the vote is four in favour and one against with HE the Governor accepting the majority vote to adopt that the Regulation of Employment in Ascension Ordinance becomes law. The Administrator thanked all parties who had been involved in this significant piece of work that had been a major priority for the current Council. It had taken 18 months and despite ‘COVID’ rightly taking priority, this had all still been agreed within the planned timeframe.

## 6. Coronavirus update [standing item]

Head of Administrators Office (HoAO) provided an update about **coronavirus** (COVID-19) confirming that the first stages of the vaccination campaign has now been completed with Ascension Island receiving 2000 doses from the UK Government earlier in the year; the final doses were used within the date margin by the 31 May. In total Ascension had 941 eligible adults; of those 930 were able to receive the first dose of the vaccination along with 853 receiving their second dose, taking into account a disparity for people who have since left the island. This results in a 90% coverage rate for the eligible adults, factoring in children and those who are medically exempt results in an 80% vaccination rate of the total Island population.

In terms of future vaccinations, it was confirmed that the UK Government are looking to distribute a further set of vaccines pending the numbers needed and expiration dates.

The quarantine period was discussed and it was explained that being fully vaccinated reduces the level of risk to the island. A discussion was had with regards to St Helena’s quarantine reduction being lowered from a period of 14 days to 10. It was confirmed that the AIG is working closely with Public Health England (PHE) to explore the possibility of a reduction in quarantine periods here on island.

Cllr Nicholls requested that an update be given on the direction of travel and what is needed in order to confidently make changes to the compulsory isolation protocols. The Administrator explained that professional advice given to St Helena in the press release is hopefully the same that will be given to Ascension from Public Health England (PHE) however he also confirmed that we are still awaiting a response so that the risk can be assessed.

Cllr Nicholls also expressed concern over the Delta variant; however the Administrator confirmed that the data given proves that the vaccine still covers these variants along with the boosters that will be issued later in the year. Cllr Nicholls also raised a question on whether or not children would be eligible to receive the Pfizer vaccine. The HoAO explained that AIG has secured a chiller that has the capacity to freeze at low enough temperatures in order to store the Pfizer vaccine; the difficulty remains the logistical arrangements of getting it to Ascension due to the amount of movements you can take before the vaccine is no longer effective.

The Governor expressed that the achievement from the two doses at 90% is extremely impressive adding that caution should be taken with regards to the under 18s explaining that even though the medical regulators have licenced the Pfizer vaccine, it is not yet recommended by PHE and further clarification would be needed

## **7. Runway project update**

The HoAO provided an update on the runway project explaining that the offloading of aggregate continues with only a small proportion left on board. The runway itself continues to make good progress despite a delay in the first stages with the offloading of aggregate. A number of repairs have been made on the roads due to repetitive motion of the trucks coming through. It was also confirmed that the road from the Pier would be resurfaced within the next week; however, this is still pending a final request.

Cllr John queried whether the option had been considered to keep the contractors on to carry out maintenance of the roads in the future. The DoR expressed that it is certainly something that the AIG is exploring.

## **8. Any other business**

Director of Resources (DoR) informed Council that with regards to Two Boats School recruitment has been going well, resulting in five teachers already recruited.

Cllr Ellick raised concerns that in terms of recruitment the turnover of staff seems to be an apparent issue throughout AIG. Cllr Ellick suggested that an adequate amount of notice should be included in the terms of contract of the employee. DoR informed Council that at present the majority of employees have a two month notice period; there being a three month period for senior management staff. Crown Counsel explained that there is no legal obligation for an employee to serve their full term of notice, however, there will be a financial penalty in place if they wish to leave before their notice is served.

Cllr Nicholls raised the issue of sharks and inquired if the AIG would look into the possibility of reinstating the shark net at Comfortless Cove. The Administrator explained that a number of options were discussed in the Public Shark Forum meeting on the 03 Jun 2021 as well as a number of proposals with the regards to a shark net. Cllr Ellick raised concern that Comfortless Cove would prove to be too small to offer it to the public as a safe swimming destination. Cllr Ellick expressed that the option of culling is certainly a reasonable solution and would like to have more information on the subject. The Administrator confirmed that following the meeting a number of options would be explored.

Cllr Miller requested an update regarding the Waste Water Treatment Plant. The Administrator confirmed that this would be carried out this financial year with the DoR adding that they are in the second phases of the tender process and currently awaiting the accounts to ensure that they are reputable and can carry out the role. The supplier should be picked within the next week.

Youth and trainee schemes were discussed with Cllr George expressing concerns that with regards to the youth trainees on island, there would be one space left to fill. The DoR confirmed that Mitie is prepared to offer a position and would like to see what the students are interested in. Cllr Ellick questioned if students who are staying back to study would still be eligible to take on a job. The DoR confirmed that this was possible but would be something that would need to be discussed with the Line Managers during the interview process.

The DoR also added that the Two Boats School are looking to set up an area for the over 16 year olds which would result in moving the exam room into the resource library and potentially moving the library to the old Tasty Tucker building. An email would be circulated to Councillors for further discussion.

The issue of an extension and relocation of the lab at the hospital was raised by Cllr Ellick. The DoR reported that two options are currently being explored.

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 18:30

Caitlin Thomas  
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 be 'Sean Burns', written on a light-colored background.

*Sean Burns*  
*On behalf of HE the Governor, Dr Philip Rushbrook*