

ASCENSION ISLAND GOVERNMENT

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Formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council

17:00 on Thursday 07 October 2021 at the Courthouse

MINUTES

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

In attendance: Xander Halliwell, Head of the Administrator's Office
Siobhan Stewart, Clerk of Council

Apologies: Councillor Kitty George
Councillor Nicholas John

1. Welcome

The Administrator welcomed all parties and explained who was present for those attending remotely. The Administrator thanked the Head of the Administrators Office (HoAO), Xander Halliwell for his hard work in the role of Acting Administrator in his absence.

2. Approval of Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the Formal Council meeting held on 26 August 2021 were accepted with no feedback comments received. In accordance with the Council Rules these had already been agreed by Council members and published on 09 September 2021.

3. Matters arising

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

- **Animal Welfare [pets]:** A seat has been reserved on the 05 January 2022 Titan inter-island charter in the hope that circumstances will allow the vet from St Helena to visit Ascension.
- **Single-use Plastics:** Councillors provided a steer on 17 October 2021 to the Policy, Projects and Communications Officer that they would like to see work on restricting the sale and distribution of single-use plastic in Ascension progressed, although ideally not at the expense of other important policy work. Council agreed to remove this from the Actions Tracker.
- **Connection Issues with telecommunications in the Courthouse:** Audio and visual equipment continue to be considered for procurement. Councillor Nicholls requested that this be dealt with expeditiously. The DoR (Director of Resources) explained that thorough consideration is being given to what equipment is required for not only Council but also Court requirements.
- **Schuyler ferry service to and from the Pierhead:** The Administrator explained that SLNC has notified the AIG that they wish to change their ferry service, previously agreed and published in February 2021. A seven day service was originally agreed, with Sunday requests required to be booked 48 hours in advance through

the Assistant Harbour Master. A Saturday service at 08:00, 12:00 and 16:00 was also agreed. Whilst the new notice provides more detail such as an obligation for users to wear life jackets, no smoking, suitable containers for fish and no one in an unfit state to use the service, which Council agreed are all sensible requirements, it was not agreed that the Sunday service to the public should be removed. The Administrator reported that he has requested USAF to liaise directly with Schuyler on the matter explaining that the agreement was made prior to the arrival of the jack-up barge and the removal of the span, emphasising the importance that boat owners need to be able to get to their boats seven days a week.

- **Progress of Employment Legislation and estimated timeline requested:** The Policy Officer will be writing to the ERWG (Employment Reform Working Group) shortly regarding the Implementation schedule timeline, before then consulting with employers.
- **Advisory Signage regarding the dumping of fish waste to be clearly displayed at the pier head:** The Administrator explained that signs are being created and will be in place shortly with future plans to work closely with the school in creating a poster regarding the dumping of fish waste along with Turkish translation. Councillor Nicholls requested that the signage, which did not need be to overly complicated, is put in place as soon as possible. The Administrator agreed.
- **Update requested on the Blue Marine Endowment Fund:** The Director of Conservation and Fisheries spoke to the Blue Marine Foundation on Wednesday 18th July 2021. She had explained that AIG was keen to progress the MPA Endowment Fund, but repeated that the AIG needed to understand what, if any, legal responsibility the AIG is being asked to take on for approving and overseeing projects that the fund supports. Blue Marine was unable to provide this information during the call, but have undertaken to do so as soon as possible. The Administrator agreed to liaise with Tristan da Cunha which has a similar arrangement with an Endowment Fund and see if their arrangement might provide a way forward.
- **Green Mountain Infrastructure and Future plans for the Red Lion:** At present the Red Lion is used infrequently for school visits and events, and the former kitchen is a workshop for the Park Warden Team. The building condition survey recently completed suggested Red Lion requires £75k of investment in the next five years to maintain the building, and further investment would be required to repurpose it and update the mountain electric and water supply. The original idea was to make it into dormitory and teaching accommodation for international field trips, Island youth organisations and larger family groups. Given the significant predicted 30 year maintenance costs (£288k) we would need to think carefully about whether this is a priority. Councillor Nicholls expressed concern of history repeating itself where the building was not maintained or protected from encroaching vegetation following the previous refurbishment around thirteen years ago which was funded externally. The Director of Resources reported that there is currently no annual budget for repairs and maintenance to the Red Lion. Councillor Ellick explained that following investigation, originally both the Red Lion and adjoining building were meant to be refurbished, however, the project ran out of money, indicating the project was not fully thought through from the start resulting in a derelict building alongside a half decent building. Councillor Nicholls added that if the building were to have been utilised as it was meant to, it would not have fallen into such disrepair in the first place. The DoR explained that whilst Garden Cottage is used regularly, using the Red Lion for conferences seemed impractical due to its location, however, it was agreed that maintaining the building was important for heritage reasons. Further discussion was had regarding future uses of the Red Lion and a process of consultation. Councillors requested details on where the financial figures had come from. The DoR explained that following funding from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Conflict, Stability and Security Fund), property condition surveys reports were provided for most Crown assets within Ascension. Councillors requested that the future of the Red Lion is considered fully and a plan implemented. Councillor Ellick recommended that in the meantime as a minimum the vegetation should be kept back from the building.
- **Public Notice regarding Convalescent COVID-19 rules:** A Public Notice will be distributed prior to the policy being implemented. The Administrator explained that the AIG will be reaching out to Employing Organisations to offer meetings to the employees through their employer.

4. Supplementary Budget Appropriation

Following meeting with and recommendation from the members of the Finance Committee it was agreed to bring to Council three business cases for recommendation, the first being a replacement minibus, the second for a replacement water tank and the third being for refurbishment of the dental clinic.

The DoR explained that originally the bid was to fund the resurfacing of the playground at Two Boats School although it was later agreed that this would be funded through the EDF (European Development Fund).

The Administrator invited Council to formally recommend the Supplementary Appropriation Ordinance to the Governor of £106k of additional capital expenditure as an addition to the agreed 21-22 budget.

	Proposal	AN	AE	DM
1	Supplementary Budget Appropriation	Yes	Yes	Yes

Councillor Nicholls expressed his approval of the business cases, particularly the importance of the replacement school minibus in ensuring the safety of the children and the investment in the dental clinic, ultimately bringing it to UK standard. The Administrator explained that all three Councillors present have voted in favour, with HE the Governor accepting the Councillors vote and approving the proposed spending plan.

5. Coronavirus update [standing item]

The Administrator provided an update about **coronavirus** (COVID-19). The Administrator explained that a Public Notice will be issued soon regarding the treatment of Convalescent COVID-19 individuals in the entry control process, followed by the offer of the SMO (Senior Medical Officer) to attend work places to further explain the science behind the decisions being made and answer any questions people may have. Although final confirmation is pending, it is looking very likely that booster Pfizer COVID-19 vaccinations will be at Ascension near the end of 2021 for all eligible adults, as well as 12 to 17 year olds who would be offered a single initial dose.

Councillor Nicholls requested clarity on the recent policy changes in the UK for people travelling. The HoAO explained that there are no longer red, amber or green countries; instead countries are listed as either “**Red List**” or “**rest of the world**”. For countries listed as the rest of the world there will be no requirement for pre-departure COVID-19 testing as long as you are fully vaccinated. A day two arrival test will still be required even if fully vaccinated as well as a day eight test if not fully vaccinated. For countries listed as the rest of the world, there will be no requirement to quarantine as long as you are fully vaccinated. For countries listed as Red List countries the requirement to quarantine remains even when transiting England. For persons travelling from Ascension Island to the UK pre departure test will still be required if transiting through St Helena or Dakar.

The Administrator reported of much speculation that South Africa may be removed from the Red List soon following an improvement of case numbers and vaccination statistics in South Africa. The reopening of South Africa is likely to have an effect on the mobility of Airlink as the start of the South African tourist season begins. HE the Governor reported that there is a planned meeting on St Helena next Tuesday of the ASSG (Air Strategy and Safety Group) to consider the impact of today’s decision on SHG’s future travel arrangement, with no change expected to the use of Titan until after March 2022.

The Administrator reported of two cases in the Magistrates Court yesterday following a breach of COVID-19 Regulations where two individuals were prosecuted and fined.

5. Runway project update [standing item]

The Administrator provided an update on the runway project, reporting of continuing progress following a site visit. Whilst the aggregate offload is running slightly behind schedule, it has not impacted on the project completion date which is currently anticipated to be near the end of 2022. The Administrator explained that the first half of the runway is due to be completed in February 2022 where the turning and parking of aircraft will need further management, particularly if more than one aircraft were to be on Ascension at any one time. HE the Governor requested that all information is shared with Mr Mark Souter, detailing any impact it may potentially have on the Titan schedule.

6. Any other business

There was three items of **other business**:

- **Internet for post 16 year old education:** The DoR announced that Sure have kindly provided a free Gold Business Package to support post 16 year old education at Two Boats School. The DoR also thanked Sure for supporting the hospital with a free internet package to support with consultations with specialists overseas for patients. Councillors were also grateful for this gesture from Sure.
- **COBIS Audit:** The DoR reported that a date has been set for the Two Boats School COBIS (Council of British International Schools) Compliance audit on 14 March 2022. COBIS accreditation will be applied for virtually with submissions having begun already. The Administrator took the opportunity to recognise the hard work of the Two Boats School management team having successfully recruited all the new teachers and the inevitable challenges that come with a large changeover of staff. Councillor Ellick offered his thanks to Mrs Tania Maggott.
- **Double vaccination requirement for arrivals:** Councillor Ellick requested an update on the consideration of putting into legislation the requirement for arrivals to be double vaccinated. The Administrator explained that there would be no need to make being double vaccine a legal obligation if the island's Employing Organisations made it a condition of employment. This may take a while as consideration must be given to the availability of the vaccine as some countries where the AIG and other Employing Organisations recruit have limited supplies and therefore the vaccine is not readily available. The Administrator added that US Federal Government employees already issued a mandate (subject to certain exemptions) for employees to be fully vaccinated, with an implementation deadline of January 2022. One employer on island has already denied one employee from returning to the island under their own policies due to a refusal to be vaccinated. Councillor Ellick recommended that persons who are not double vaccinated be required to be insured. The HoAO explained that all persons regardless of their vaccination status are required to have either hold a valid insurance policy with COVID-19 cover or have cover provided by their employer. Councillor Ellick requested that details of such insurance providers be placed on the AIG website so the information is readily available to potential visitors. It was agreed that further guidance would be offered on the website.

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 17:50

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 Governor, Dr Philip Rushbrook