



## **Formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council**

**17:00 on Thursday 03 February 2022 at the Courthouse**

### **MINUTES**

**Present:** HH Sean Burns, Administrator  
HE Mr Greg Gibson, Acting Governor [remotely]  
Allen Cansick, Attorney General [remotely]  
Gareth Morris, Director of Resources

Councillor Andrew Ellick  
Councillor Kitty George  
Councillor Nicholas John  
Councillor Douglas Miller  
Councillor Alan Nicholls

**In attendance:** Carl Mackerras, Head of the Administrator's Office  
Siobhan Stewart, Clerk of Council  
FCDO Desk Officer, Luke Atkinson [remotely]

**Apologies:** HE Dr Philip Rushbrook, Governor

#### **1. Welcome**

The Administrator welcomed all parties and explained who was present for those attending remotely. The Administrator welcomed Head of the Administrator's Office (HoAO), Carl Mackerras to Ascension. The Administrator welcomed back from holiday Councillor's George and Ellick and thanked Councillors for their support during HE the Governor, Dr Philip Rushbrook's recent visit to Ascension Island.

The Administrator reported that the proposed UK ministerial visit had been postponed, despite the initially positive outlook following the Join Ministerial Council held in November 2021. Councillors will write to the Minister.

#### **2. Approval of Minutes**

**Decision:** The summary of the Informal Council meeting held on 04 November 2021 was accepted with one feedback comment received. In accordance with the Council Rules these had already been agreed by Council members and published on 22 November 2021.

**Decision:** The minutes of the Formal Council meeting held on 18 November 2021 was accepted with one feedback comment received. In accordance with the Council Rules these had already been agreed by Council members and published on 10 December 2021.

**Decision:** The summary of the Informal Council meeting held on 12 January 2022 was accepted with one feedback comment received. In accordance with the Council Rules these had already been agreed by Council members and published on 31 January 2022.

#### **3. Matters arising**

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

- **Connection Issues with telecommunications in the Courthouse:** The appropriate microphone and webcam system has been procured and is expected on the MOD FIRS arriving tomorrow. It was agreed that this action will now be removed from the actions tracker.

- **Progress of Employment Legislation:** The Administrator reported that the Policy Officer is continuing to work with the AGs chambers and is in discussions with legislative drafters. It was agreed that a timeline would be provided to Council.
- **Commemoration of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of the Falkland Islands:** The Administrator confirmed that whilst Ascension will be marking the occasion with a government holiday, AIG does not currently have plans for holding a large event to mark the commemoration.
- **Darwin Project – Mexican Thorn Communications:** Email sent to Councillors 08 Sep 2020 detailing the bids submitted to the Darwin fund (which included the Mexican Thorn Control Project). Public Notice distributed on 26 August 2021 confirming that £1Million in external funding had been secured, along with an illustrative funding tree providing a breakdown of the various projects (including the Mexican Thorn project). Public Notice distributed introducing the new Mexican Thorn Control Officer on 22 December 2021. It was agreed that this action will now be removed from the actions tracker.
- **Night time flight landing during the runway refurbishment:** Night time flying during phase 2 (i.e. reconstruction of the Eastern end of the runway) will be avoided where possible, although if needs be, aircraft can still land during hours of darkness. It was agreed that this action will now be removed from the actions tracker.

#### 4. Coronavirus update [standing item]

The HoAO provided an update about **coronavirus** (COVID-19). The HoAO reported that the Response Level has now been reduced from Level 2 Orange to Level 1 Amber following consecutive negative results from persons who previously tested positive whilst in compulsory isolation. The HoAO reported that a passing Japanese vessel contacted the AIG and requested the emergency disembarkation of an injured crew member. The crew member was brought ashore to receive essential medical attention, whilst ensuring all COVID-19 protocols were followed at all times. They were placed into an isolation ward at Georgetown Hospital and were tested for COVID-19, the result of which was negative. As a precaution, noting the incubation period for COVID-19, they remained on the isolation ward and were subject to further testing. The HoAO confirmed they have since departed on a medevac plane.

The HoAO reported that guidance is being sought from the JCVI (the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation) to advise on paediatric doses of vaccination for five to 11 year olds. Georgetown Hospital are currently preparing for this roll out in anticipation of eventual approval. It was confirmed that 12-17 year olds would be offered a second dose of the Pfizer Vaccine in March 2022, three months after the initial dose was administered. Councillor Ellick requested clarity around the second dose being given to 12-17 year olds as initially it was only one dose that was to be given to this age group. The HoAO explained that staff at Georgetown Hospital are following guidance<sup>1</sup> from the UK Health and Security Agency in offering a second dose 12 weeks after the initial dose.

#### 5. Runway project update [standing item]

The HoAO provided an update on the runway project, reporting that the process around the testing of the asphalt mix is slightly delayed, however this had not so far impacted the overall completion date. The Administrator reported that the second phase start date that had previously moved from March to April has since moved from April to May due to essential quality control measures. The Administrator added that the MV Inthira Naree offload is complete, with three more aggregate ships left to arrive and offload, with complete offload expected to be completed by August 2022. Following the removal of the jack up barge at the completion of offloading of all the aggregate, the span and other small mooring can be returned to their previous position. Back loading of equipment is likely to take place from May to July 2023, although it has not yet been agreed if the AIG will be required to assist with the back loading process.

<sup>1</sup> [For further information please go to: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-resources-for-children-and-young-people/covid-19-vaccination-a-guide-for-eligible-children-and-young-people-aged-12-to-17>]

The Administrator provided an update on an announcement confirming the resumption of the Airlink inter-island service, explaining that a press release will follow soon with Airlink having recently received formal permission and approval from the USAF. The Administrator confirmed that there will be additional flights at the peak periods of the main school holidays and at Christmas/New Year. Councillor George thanked the Administrator for the update, highlighting what good news this was for people on Ascension, offering people the option of being able to plan ahead. Councillor Nicholls asked if the passenger load will be likely to increase with the Airlink operational again. The Administrator explained that he hoped so but there are several factors currently being considered, such as the model of aircraft, particularly the Airlink's Embraer which is lighter than the Titan 757 aircraft and that the Airlink will be landing and taking off from the new section of the runway. Passengers embarking and disembarking the Airlink will be transported to the terminal and aircraft by bus following the move to using the Western end for flight operations, and it was highlighted that where possible, there would be no more than one aircraft on the runway at any one time. Councillor Ellick requested clarification on whether the contract with SHG and Airlink is in alignment with the AIG's and Airlink's agreement. The Administrator explained that the AIG charters the Airlink between Ascension Island and St Helena, with a localised cost sharing mechanism in place with Employing Organisations on Island called the Preferred Customer Agreement (PCA).

## **6. Queen's Platinum Jubilee 2022 [standing item]**

The Administrator provided an update to Council on the formation of a working group for the Queens Platinum Jubilee celebrations, and thanked Assistant Director of Resources, Catherine Leo for taking the lead role on this. A working group is currently being formed from a cross section of the community, with representatives requested from Employing Organisations and volunteer community members. Responses are expected by Tuesday 08 February 2022, followed by an initial introductory meeting of the group. Feedback has been favourable to the formation of the group and celebrating of this very special occasion. Councillor Nicholls explained that he had been requested to be part of the group in his capacity as a Councillor and fellow Councillors offered their support and thanks to Councillor Nicholls for taking on this role.

The Administrator provided a brief description of events taking place in the UK over the four days (02 to 05 June 2022), with the Queen's Birthday Celebrations and lighting of the beacon on the Thursday, followed by a church service on the Friday. Fairs, sports activities, street parties, platinum pudding competitions and finally which is of significant importance to HM the Queen (The Queen's Green Canopy project), a tree planting ceremony to signify a lasting gesture are planned on Ascension over the Saturday and Sunday. Councillor George recommended a type of citrus fruit tree be planted that would thrive in the Ascension climate and the community may pick its fruits. Councillor Nicholls recommended the ordering of mementos to give away to recognise this monumental occasion.

## **7. Any other business**

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

- i. **Recruitment of Crown Counsel:** Councillor Nicholls requested an update on the recruitment of a Crown Counsel. The Administrator explained that someone has been appointed and is expected to arrive in April 2022.
- ii. **Transit passengers heading to St Helena:** Councillor Nicholls highlighted that following the resumption of the RAF operated south Atlantic air bridge between the UK and Ascension there is likely to be an appetite for St Helenians to travel via Ascension to get to St Helena, however Councillor Nicholls brought the lack of available accommodation to the Council's attention. The Administrator explained that it is the intention that the building formally known as the Obsidian hotel will reopen in some capacity and will be operated by a private provider; however conversations were on-going as to who will own and operate the business. Councillor George highlighted the importance of a transparent tender process, inviting a wide range of expressions of interests, ensuring the best deal for the people of Ascension. Councillor Ellick requested an update on the availability of seats to persons living in Ascension to travel on the voyager aircraft to the UK, adding that it may have an effect on the demand for seats on the Airlink between Ascension and St Helena. The Administrator explained that the option of travelling on the voyager aircraft will be available for members of the public wishing to travel to the

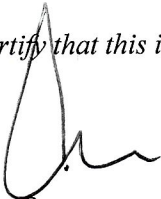
- UK. Further discussion was had regarding passengers transiting through Ascension to both the Falklands and St Helena.
- iii. **Meeting with Ministers in St Helena:** Councillor Nicholls asked about a meeting Councillor Ellick had with Ministers in St Helena. Councillor Ellick explained that he had arranged an unofficial meeting with ministers in St Helena to discuss topics such as post-16 education, tourism and medical facilities. The Administrator requested that Councillor Ellick provide a short memo on the topics discussed for submissions to Council. Councillor Ellick provided a brief update on topics covered such as the sharing of medical facilities, although discussions determined this would not be possible. The topic of post-16 year old work place training was also covered, such as the sharing of training providers. Councillor John requested confirmation that it was made clear in the meeting that Councillor Ellick was not representing Ascension Island Government, or the Ascension Island Council. Councillor Ellick confirmed that it was a private discussion, however there appeared to be a misunderstanding where the St Helena Council may have thought it was an official meeting when it was not as Councillor Ellick had no mandate from the Council.
  - iv. **Flag at half-mast:** Councillor Nicholls requested clarity as to why the Ascension Island flag outside of the Government building has been flown at half-mast on Saturday 30 January. The Administrator reported that there was no reason for the flag to be at half-mast, that this was not done in an official capacity and that the flag has since been returned to full mast.
  - v. **Mental Health Practitioner:** Councillor Miller requested an update on the recruitment of a mental health practitioner. The Administrator explained that whilst mental health is a concern on Ascension there is not the justification for a full time mental health practitioner, therefore recruitment for a nurse with mental health experience and capability was already underway. The Administrator added that the Social Worker and Senior Medical Officer currently offer mental health support to persons on Ascension, with the option of further remote support where needed.
  - vi. **Driving examinations for specific vehicle classes:** Councillor Miller raised concern over the process of issuing driving licences, specifically around the issue of the "J" class of vehicles on driving licences, and these being required for each specific vehicle, despite, for example, all operating on a 10 tonne chassis. The Administrator confirmed that the AIG are aware of the issue and are currently looking into the process further. The Administrator requested that Councillor Miller submit detailed concerns by email to allow full consideration of the issue. Further discussion was had regarding the history of the "J" class of vehicles in the licencing regime, and internal policies of private companies that required drivers to hold a "J" class licence. Councillor Ellick provided a further example where if someone were to pass their driving test on a bus, they would still have to sit a further driving test to be able to drive a car.
  - vii. **Rat control strategy:** Councillor John requested that this topic is added to the actions tracker until a clear strategy direction is formed. The Administrator explained that the incinerator is expected to be repaired in March 2022 following a visit from a specialised engineer. Discussions were ongoing with employing organisation on island regarding the disposal of their waste with the aim to end open pit burning by ensuring all organisations utilised the incinerator and ultimately removing the rats' food source. Councillor Nicholls requested an update on the car crusher and whether it was operational. The Administrator explained that whilst the car crusher is operational, the DoOF is currently liaising with SHG colleagues as to what to do with the vehicles once crushed. Councillor Ellick raised concern over where the One Boat dump rat population may go if the food source were to be removed, highlighting that they may relocate to the settlements. Councillor John recommended further consideration as to whether the type of bait used has become less effective. Councillor Nicholls highlighted that it was only recently that the size of the Environmental Health team was reduced from three to two. Councillor Ellick explained that Council was assured at the time that the wider Conservation and Fisheries Directorate would pick up any shortfalls within the Environmental Health team. The Administrator asked if this was recorded anywhere. If the size of the team dealing with rat control was a concern, The Administrator encouraged councillors to express their views regarding head count to the Finance Committee when setting the budgets for next year in the coming months. The Administrator pointed out that several roles within the Conservation and Fisheries Directorate are externally funded, therefore it would not be deemed appropriate for those resources to be dedicating time to working in the Environmental Health team at the expense of the role for which they have been externally funded to deliver.
  - viii. **Road repairs:** Councillor John requested that the road between One Boat and Two Boats Village is given priority for pothole repairs, highlighting that several of the potholes have become very deep. The Administrator confirmed that the road repairs team are currently working from Green Mountain down

- to Georgetown and should be working on this road soon.
- ix. **SLNC Ferry Service:** Councillor John raised concern over a new issue regarding the SLNC Ferry Service. The Administrator relayed the agreement made in 2020 during a meeting of SLNC and boat owners at the boat yard. The agreement was made for shuttle times of 08:00 / 12:00 / 16:00 Monday to Saturday, subject to ongoing operations and sea conditions, with Sunday service by agreement of SLNC if requested by no later than the Friday beforehand. Councillor John highlighted that most people are working Monday to Friday between 08:00 and 16:00 and are unable to get to their boats after working hours during the week to conduct general maintenance. The Administrator explained that requests should be submitted with sufficient notice through the Assistant Harbour Master, who will then liaise with SLNC directly, who have previously accommodated requests for midweek shuttles after working hours where this has been possible. Councillor John explained that whilst this ad-hoc service is helpful, an agreed scheduled day during the week would be more helpful. The Administrator provided an update on the availability of petrol, offering reassurance that there is no shortage of petrol on Ascension Island as had been erroneously suggested by third parties previously.

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

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 Acting Governor, Mr Greg Gibson*