

ASCENSION ISLAND GOVERNMENT

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Informal meeting of the Ascension Island Council

17:00 on Thursday 24 February 2022 at the Courthouse

MEETING SUMMARY

Present: HH Sean Burns, Administrator
Gareth Morris, Director of Resources

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

In attendance: Carl Mackerras, Head of the Administrator's Office
Dr Diane Baum, Director of Conservation and Fisheries
Siobhan Stewart, Clerk to Council

Apologies:

The Administrator welcomed all parties and thanked everyone for attending. The Administrator expressed that his thoughts are with those in Ukraine, adding that the impact for Ascension following the unacceptable Russian invasion of Ukraine is currently unknown. A message from the Governor was handed to all councillors with his own thoughts.

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

- **Progress of Employment Legislation and estimated timeline requested:** The Administrator confirmed that the Policy Officer has been working with the legislative drafter and a draft of commencement Regulations has been produced. However, the various elements of the Employment Ordinance provisions (contractual between employer and employee, obligations on procedures for employers, etc.) need to be implemented in a way that meets the objectives of the Ordinance without causing undue disruption to the market, so further work remains ongoing to finalise these.

Whilst this remains a priority area of focus for AIG, progress on this has been constrained by the lack of policy capacity and the fact that the Crown Counsel post is currently vacant. Nonetheless, it is expected that the Regulations will be ready shortly and can then be introduced, subject to approval from the AGs chambers. Based on the initial drafts and discussions between AIG and drafters, we expect to submit a draft to the AGs chambers within the next two weeks (12/03).

Given the additional time it has taken to get to this stage it is now also proposed that a date for commencement for most of the provisions be set at shortly after the Regs are introduced. This will see these brought into effect on that date, rather than in line with the timelines as previously suggested (such as three month subsequent for particular elements). AIG considers that this is justified in that the original timelines envisioned late March as the beginning of the implementation periods (three months after the end of the consultation with employers), so employers should already be prepared to abide by the new requirements.

- **Commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the liberation of the Falkland Islands:** The Administrator explained that there are no plans for AIG holding a large event to mark the commemoration.
- **Strategy for controlling the rat population:** The Director of Conservation and Fisheries (DoCF) was in attendance to provide Council with an overview of the Environmental Health teams' current capacity and a breakdown of what is being achieved on a week to week basis. It was reported that work is ongoing entering

GPSs of bait boxes to provide a mapped overview of how frequent the bait boxes require replenishing, ultimately creating a measuring tool to allow more efficient working by aiming to always have bait in the bait boxes. Discussion was had regarding the various ingredients in the poisons used in the bait boxes, the DoCF explained that they were using a combination of three active ingredients: bromadiolone, brodifacoum and difenacoum to reduce the risk of resistance developing. Results from camera traps had shown the rats are more attracted to the wax blocks rather than the grain and so the blocks were now being used where possible. Discussion was held regarding Waste Management on island, with the DoCF reporting that the incinerator is expected to be operational again at the end of March 2022. The DoCF went on to explain that bait boxes are being staked into the ground to prevent sheep and donkeys kicking the bait boxes around, Councillor Miller highlighted that this is also an issue on Travellers Hill, recommending the continued sharing of best practices with MITIE. The DoCF explained that whilst increasing the head count within the Environmental Health team will assist with being able to check bait boxes more frequently and allow for further data analysis, it will not stop people from getting rodents in their homes and there being a rat population on island. Councillor Ellick raised concern over where the One Boat dump rat population may go if the food source were to be removed, the DoCF explained that that the ending of open pit burning will be a planned event, and an intense targeted control effort would be undertaken at the same time to reduce the likelihood of rats relocating to the settlements. Discussion was had regarding unavoidable population increases in rats on the island, such as when there are long periods of heavy rain that creates ideal breeding conditions for rodents. It was agreed that the first step going forward was to recruit an additional person to the Environmental Health team. Councillors also expressed concerns about damage to people's gardens by rabbits and sheep. The DoCF agreed to explore funding bids for feasibility studies on methods to eradicate rabbits and sheep from the island and emerging methods for rodent control.

The Administrator provided an update on the **Queen's Platinum Jubilee** Celebrations following a meeting of the Platinum Jubilee Working Group on 14 February 2022. The Administrator was pleased to report that plans are well underway, with a Platinum Jubilee T Shirt design contest having started this week and orders have been placed for bunting. Activities such as a float/carnival parade, arts and crafts exhibition and Platinum Jubilee Dew Pond run are being considered. Councillor Nicholls suggested mementos for the children, such as a Jubilee Coin. Further discussion was had regarding the minting of coins and the relating proclamations. It was suggested that Commonwealth Mint, who currently hold the commemorative coins contract, be approached to see if they would sponsor a coin for each child on the island.

The Director of Resources (DoR) provided an update on the **Budget** proposal for 2022-2023. The DoR reported that following several informal Finance Committee meetings he was confident that following the formal meeting of the finance committee meeting due to be held on Tuesday 02 March 2022 a budget will be in place ready for recommendation to the Governor around the second week of March 2022. The DoR reported on AIG's financial strength and was pleased to see investment in capital projects. Councillor George requested an update as to whether the AIG were still assisting retailers with freight cost. The DoR confirmed that financial assistance is still in place and is likely to continue until the reopening of the airbridge. The Administrator thanked the Finance Committee for their hard work.

The HoAO provided an update on the current **COVID-19** status of the island. The HoAO explained that the island is currently in Level 1 Amber, confirming that there are currently no positive COVID-19 cases in Ascension. Early discussions are taking place regarding a strategy plan for living with COVID-19 in an Ascension specific context. An update was provided on the vaccination of five to 11 year olds, with the first doses expected to be delivered and administered in the coming weeks. Councillor Ellick recommended that information be provided to parents of children in this category to ensure maximum uptake in the vaccine.

The HoAO gave an update on the **runway project** reporting that the testing of the asphalt mix remains ongoing, however, this is not expected to impact the overall completion date. Councillor Ellick asked if the conflict in Ukraine is likely to have any impact on the completion date of the runway project. It was not anticipated that this would lead to a delay at this point. Councillor Ellick requested an update on the road resurfacing following the runway completion and the DoR confirmed that quotations have been requested for various options.

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

- i. **Single use Plastics:** Councillor Nicholls requested an update on the regulation of single use plastics in Ascension. The Administrator explained that whilst this remains on the agenda for the Policy Officer,

other priorities meant this had not been progressed any further.

- ii. **Employment Legislation:** Councillor George thanked the Policy, Projects and Communications Officer Alasdair Bain for his update on the Employment Legislation.
- iii. **Sure Telecommunications Licence:** Councillor George requested details on the conditions set against the current telecommunications licence holder and whether there are any terms around exclusivity set and when it expires. The Administrator confirmed that although it was not an exclusive license, at present only one organisation holds a telecommunications licence.
- iv. **Preparations for the return of the Airbridge:** Councillor George asked if there will be ITT (Invitation to tender) process for the buildings previously known as the Obsidian Hotel. The DoR explained that whilst some interest had been received, the AIG are planning to consult with a specialist regarding the best course of action before proceeding.
- v. **Assistant Harbour Master Role:** Councillor Ellick raised concerns over the Assistant Harbour Master role being at conflict with volunteering for Sea Rescue. The Administrator explained that with a second Assistant Harbour Master appointed to cover periods of absence or when one is on the Sea Rescue Boat there was no conflict.
- vi. **Glass bottles at the One Boat Dump:** Councillor John requested further information on the recycling strategy around glass bottles. The DoR recommended that this is raised with the Director of Operations and Facilities at the next Public Works Committee.

The meeting closed at 18:35

Siobhan Stewart
Clerk of Council