

ASCENSION ISLAND GOVERNMENT

Clerk of Council's Office
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Formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council

15:00 on Thursday 09 June 2022 at the Courthouse

MINUTES

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

In attendance:	Luke Atkinson, FCDO Desk Officer
	Carl Mackerras, Head of the Administrator's Office
	Crown Counsel, Matthew James
	Francesca Bennett, Clerk of Council

Apologies:

1. Welcome

The Administrator welcomed all parties. The Administrator informed that it had been a busy few weeks leading up to the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and the weekend of the celebrations. The Administrator reported that the celebrations did Ascension proud with the Platinum Cup Challenge, Beacon lighting, Through the Decade's music gala, Arts and Crafts, The Queen's Platinum Jubilee Garden party and the presentation of Emergency Service medals, Dewbilee Run, Queen's Canopy tree planting, float parade, Special Service of Thanksgiving and finally the Street Party with a great display of fireworks. The Administrator thanked everyone involved, whether they were organisers or participants, with a special vote of thanks to Catherine Leo for leading the organising of the celebrations.

2. Approval of Minutes

Decision: The summary of the Informal Council meeting held on 12 April 2022 was accepted with no feedback comments received. In accordance with the Council rules these had already been agreed by Council members and published on 22 April 2022.

Decision: The minutes of the Formal Council meeting held on 21 April 2022 were accepted with one feedback comment received. In accordance with the Council rules these had already been agreed by Council members and published on 05 May 2022.

3. Coronavirus update [standing item]

The Head of Administrator's Office provided an update on the current **COVID-19** status of the Island. He informed Council that Ascension remains at Level 1 Amber, with 21 individuals in compulsory isolation with no positive cases and a total of 16 convalescent COVID-19 cases having been approved thus far. With preparations for removal of compulsory isolation from 31 July 2022, the Senior Medical Officer has been undertaking consultation sessions with organisations and their staff, and work is underway to develop guidance documents and wider public information pieces. The Head of Administrator's Office confirmed that there will be 800 Moderna vaccines arriving on the next A400 flight which will allow the rollout of boosters for all adults on the island before 31 July 2022. Councillor Nicholls questioned why there is a change in the vaccine brand and if it

would impact the effect of the vaccine. It was confirmed that the change in vaccine brand is due to what vaccines are available. The Administrator asked the Attorney General if there were any updates as to when St Helena will be removing compulsory isolation in the near future. The Attorney-General said that an update would be provided by the Governor in due course.

4. Runway Project [standing item]

The Head of Administrator's Office gave an update on the **runway project** reporting that the asphalt laying on the eastern side of the runway is in progress with the second layer out of the five underway, the works on the eastern side are still on track to be completed by the end of August 2022, followed by the Federal Aviation Authority's visit to certify the eastern side of the runway before works begin on the western side. All works are on track for the completion of the full length of the runway by May 2023. The Head of Administrator's office confirmed that the last sand/aggregate ship will be arriving in August 2022. Councillor Nicholls questioned if the alternative road that will be used when works begin on the Western end of the runway has been completed. The Head of Administrator's Office confirmed that the construction of the road is currently in progress. The Administrator suggested a site visit to the runway for Councillors once the first half of the project has been completed. Councillor Ellick questioned if the completion of the runway is still on track after the delay with starting the first layer of asphalt. The Head of Administrator's Office confirmed that the completion of the runway project is still on track and is to be completed by May 2023. It was hoped that because the asphalt mix has been approved there will not be any further approvals needed for the western side.

Councillor Ellick questioned if the road from the pier to the runway would be resurfaced following the last aggregate ship in August. The Administrator confirmed that it would not be done in August 2022 as there will need to be back load of equipment and the completion of the runway takes priority. The Administrator explained that a quote has been requested from 77 Construction for the resurfacing of the roads more generally across the island and AIG is following up on a response.

Councillor Ellick questioned whether AIG should advertise the resurfacing of roads project to other possible interested contractors. The Administrator confirmed that AIG will follow up with 77 Construction on their interest in the resurfacing of the roads and for a quote in the first instance but noted the councillor's request.

5. Matters arising

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

ITT Process for the buildings previously known as the Obsidian Hotel: The Administrator explained that as per the paper tabled ahead of the meeting, AIG is seeking a steer from Councillors as to what course of action to take. Councillors were invited to provide a recommendation as to whether or not AIG should tender for an expert advisor to provide support and advice and to help AIG be assured that it had taken appropriate steps to ensure value-for-money. Councillor Nicholls expressed his concern with the lack of tourists that are likely to visit Ascension Island and the repairs that would need to be carried out on the hotel, as well as the high cost of utilities which would reflect on the charges to customers. Councillor Nicholls continued to explain that there could be difficulties in obtaining interest for the running of the Obsidian Hotel when there is no right of abode in Ascension Island and with the future of Ascension unknown. The Administrator asked the Acting Director of Resources if there was an average cost of keeping the Obsidian Hotel dormant. The Acting Director of resources explained that the Obsidian Hotel is still being used, examples being storage for medical supplies that needed air conditioning, Air Crew accommodation and Compulsory Isolation accommodation so therefore could not give a true reflection of the cost. Councillor George agreed that due to not having the expertise on Island that AIG should procure an expert advisor. The Administrator questioned whether the general view would be that it would be good to see the Obsidian Hotel open again, whilst also providing a restaurant and bar venue. Councillors George and Nicholls agreed that the public would be happy to see the Obsidian Hotel open again providing those services. The Acting Director of Resources suggested that the majority of those that reside in the Falkland Islands would prefer to transit through Ascension to fly to St Helena once the runway had been restored. Councillor Ellick questioned whether flights and seat allocations for civilians wanting to travel through Ascension are guaranteed; without access to the Air Bridge flights there would be a negative impact on the Obsidian Hotel. Councillor John questioned whether AIG would assist with capital investment and work force as they did when Seafish Chandlery decided to take on business. The Acting Director of Resources confirmed that

Seafish Chandlery made the capital investment but with agreed arrangement from AIG that their investment would be refunded on a sliding scale dependant on the number of years in operation, should the business fail. Councillor Miller suggested that AIG should consider investing in the Obsidian Hotel. Councillor Nicholls questioned if a consultant is required for another project to be able to fully utilise the opportunity. The Administrator concluded that AIG will require expert advice with any negotiations with interested investors however this is something that will be done at a later date when the future of Ascension is clearer and whether there will be access to flights.

Progress of Employment Legislation: The Administrator reported that changes to the layout of the employment legislation have now been completed. The Administrator thanked the Crown Counsel, Policy, Projects & Communications Officer and the Attorney-General's Office for their work in completing the Legislation which had been sent to Councillors to review ahead of the Formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council. The Crown Council and the Policy, Projects and Communications Officer had drafted the memorandum for Councillors that had also been distributed. The Crown Council informed Councillors that the layout now looks different as opposed to the previous Ordinance, but that all the provisions had been moved over to the new suite of Regulations and main powers included in the new draft Ordinance. There had been one specific addition that was not in the old Ordinance, which is the addition of the paid leave to those that are on household contracts. This had been overlooked previously and now reflects what was intended on the first draft. The Crown Counsel thanked Councillor Nicholls for the notes he had received on the draft Ordinance that had been previously distributed. The Administrator stated a recommendation was being sought from the Council that the Employment Ordinance 2021 be repealed and the Employment Ordinance 2022, along with subsidiary regulations which are in annexes A to H, be made into law.

	Proposal	AE	KG	NJ	AN	DM
1	Employment Legislation is made into law	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

The Administrator thanked Councillors, the Crown Counsel and the Attorney- General's office. Councillor Nicholls thanked the Crown Counsel for bringing this period of Employment Legislation reform to a satisfactory conclusion.

6. Any other business

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

- i. **JMC:** Councillor Nicholls informed that there is currently no one attending the JMC preparatory meetings from Ascension Island Council. With the upcoming elections Councillor Nicholls asked who would be attending these meetings. Councillor George suggested that the meetings be shared among Councillors.

The Administrator thanked Francesca for covering as Clerk to Ascension Island Council while Siobhan Stewart had been away on annual leave. The Administrator informed that it was the Governor and the Attorney-General's last Ascension Island Council meeting and thanked them for their support; both the Governor and Attorney General had visited Ascension Island on a number of occasions. The Administrator wished the Governor and Attorney General well for their future endeavours. Councillor Nicholls addressed the Governor on behalf of the Ascension Island Council commenting that it had been a pleasure working with him during his tenure in office. On a personal note Councillor Nicholls expressed his gratitude to the Governor for taking great interest in Ascension Island, which was noticeable during his visits to the Island. Councillor Nicholls thanked the Governor for his governance and support during his time in office. Councillor Nicholls thanked the Attorney-General for pulling out all the stops when dealing with employment legislation reform and thanked him for the additional support he has given more generally. Both the Governor and the Attorney General were wished all the best for the future from the Ascension Island Council.

The Governor thanked Councillors for their best wishes, and a warm appreciation for what he had tried to achieve on Ascension. The Governor highlighted that he has always enjoyed his time on Ascension and had been impressed by the way Ascension Island is able to get things done which is a credit to Councillors, AIG and

other employers, with its 'can do' environment. The Governor expressed that he is leaving with a heavy heart but collectively is pleased with what has been achieved during his time in office. The Governor highlighted the completion of the Marine Protected Area management plan and an updated and modernise Employment Regulations and Ordinance. The Governor commented that the main aim must now be to get the island ready for the opening of the runway, now that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. The Governor wished everyone personally and collectively a successful, enjoyable and financially profitable future.

The Governor confirmed that he has accepted the recommendation from Council to put the Ordinance and Regulation for employment changes into effect.

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 11:00

Francesca Bennett
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 blue background.

Sean Burns
On behalf of HE Governor, Dr Philip Rushbrook