

ASCENSION ISLAND GOVERNMENT

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

17:00 on Thursday 14 July 2022 at the Courthouse

MINUTES

Present:	HE Greg Gibson, Acting Governor	[remotely]	Councillor Andrew Ellick
	HH Sean Burns, Administrator		Councillor Kitty George
	Aine Hurley, Acting Attorney General	[remotely]	Councillor Alan Nicholls
	Shendi Keshet, Director of Resources		
In attendance:	Luke Atkinson, FCDO Desk Officer		
	Carl Mackerras, Head of the Administrator's Office		
	Crown Counsel, Matthew James		
	Siobhan Stewart, Clerk of Council		
Apologies:	Councillor Nicholas John		
	Councillor Douglas Miller		

1. Welcome

The Administrator welcomed all parties. The Administrator welcomed the new Director of Resources, Shendi Keshet, who has recently arrived on Island and welcomed both Acting Governor, Greg Gibson, and Acting Attorney General, Aine Hurley.

2. Approval of Minutes

Decision: The summary of the Informal Council meeting held on 19 May 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 16 June 2022.

Decision: The minutes of the Formal Council meeting held on 09 June 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 11 July 2022.

3. Matters arising

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

Resurfacing of roads after the completion of the Runway Project: The Administrator explained that whilst initial discussions have taken place with 77 Construction on the resurfacing of the roads following the completion of the runway, a roads engineer will be required to assist in the design process. Further consideration will also be required regarding aggregate procurement and the logistics of an on island asphalt plant. Councillor Nicholls requested further information on which roads are planned for resurfacing. The Administrator explained that the ring road around the island is likely to be the main priority, however further analysis of costs per meter is required before any commitments can be made. Further discussion was had regarding previous road repairs and the results of recent core samples taken from the islands current road network.

NASA road and Comfortless Cove road - large gullies along the sides of both roads: The Administrator confirmed that since the last meeting many of the areas highlighted have been dealt with and the pattern of focused work

maintenance and improvement activities on the road network will continue during July and beyond. The Plant team, who cover road maintenance as part of their duties, are working to a plan however their operations in respect of roads have been disrupted recently due to covering other essential duties and a problem (now fixed) with the tar truck.

Alternative Flags Flown outside of the AIG Building - Consideration to be given to alternative location/flag pole: The Administrator explained that the Facilities team are currently looking at this request and are optimistic that a solution can be found. Councillor Nicholls suggested a cross piece for the existing flag pole may be an acceptable solution.

Freezer boxes - Consideration to be given as to whether boxes can be on sale at both the shipping office and post office: This suggestion is being considered as requested and an update will be provided for the next meeting.

Contingency planning for Monkey Pox: The Administrator explained that whilst the Senior Medical Officer (SMO) is in receipt of regular updates on the current increased worldwide prevalence, currently this is not at threat of causing an epidemic in Ascension. Councillor Nicholls conveyed his concerns regarding monkey pox and emphasised the need to be prepared in the event that it reached Ascension. The Administrator explained that the AIGs public health planning is guided by the SMO, who is in close liaison with expert colleagues in the UK Health Security Agency and who have confirmed the risk of infection here is low based on the island's community makeup. Councillor George explained that the lack of information available to the public may be heightening concerns, and recommended that the SMO provide further information to the community. The DoR confirmed that she would convey the feedback to the SMO.

4. Special Warrant

The DoR explained that as the AIG prepares to implement its COVID-19 exit strategy and quarantine restrictions are removed, additional staff and Lateral Flow Tests (LFTs) will be required to assist in being able to effectively manage community infections of COVID-19. The DoR reported that during the 2022 budget setting, the COVID-19 exit strategy was not a consideration, hence why a Special Warrant is now required for additional staff and consumables. The DoR confirmed that following a favourable recommendation from the Island Council Finance Committee, Councillors are now requested to consider making a recommendation to the Governor for a Special Warrant up to the value of £90,000. The DoR explained that £82,000 is for additional staff and the purchasing of LFTs, with a further £8,000 on consumables such as masks, gloves, overalls, hand sanitiser and disinfectant sprays. Councillor Ellick requested confirmation that the consumable products are for AIG directorates, other than Georgetown Hospital. The DoR confirmed that this is correct. Councillor Nicholls asked what was going to happen to the substantial supplies currently being stored in the AIG Guest House, he suggested that consideration be given to current stock levels before ordering more. The Administrator explained that the most recent HMG funded delivery for the hospital that arrived is likely to have been the final externally funded order, highlighting that any monies approved can only be used for consumables and that in the event there is no need, none will be purchased. The DoR reassured Councillors that the money is ringfenced for both staffing and consumables and will only be used for this function.

5. Supplementary Appropriation

The DoR requested that an additional £135,000 is provided for the development fund to procure a road sweeper and an ice machine. The DoR explained that whilst £270,000 of development fund funds have been carried over from financial year 2021/2022, as well as £1,000,000 for the financial year 2022/2023, this money is already ring fenced for other projects, hence this additional request being submitted to Council for consideration. The DoR reported that whilst the purchase of the road sweeper has a particularly long lead in time, funds can be carried over to the next financial year. The DoR explained the various benefits of the road sweeper, highlighting in particular an improvement in efficiencies. The DoR agreed to circulate to Council the predefined use of the road sweeper. The DoR requested that Councillors consider a spend of up to £10,000 to procure a new ice machine to support with AIG critical operations, and confirmed that the cost of the machine is expected to be around £8,000 with a further £2,000 included in the bid for delivery and freight. The DoR explained that a new ice machine is essential for employees that work ship work operations, remote offsite working, hospital requirements, as well as various large functions carried out across the AIG, including the Residency. Councillor Ellick requested clarity on the use of ice for the Residency. It was confirmed that whilst the Residency has its own FCDO funded ice

machine, for large community events such as the Queen’s Birthday Party and Christmas Carols, additional ice is required. The DoR confirmed that following a two thirds favourable recommendation from the Island Council Finance Committee, Councillors are now requested to consider making a recommendation to the Governor for an appropriation of £10,000 for capital expenditure to the Development Fund for the 2022/23 financial year.

The Administrator invited each Councillor in turn to formally recommend the draft Supplementary Appropriation Ordinance and the Draft Special Warrant to the Governor as an addition to the 2022/2023 budget package.

	Proposal	AE	KG	AN
1	Special Warrant up to the value of £90,000	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	Supplementary Appropriation up to the value of £135,000	Yes	Yes	Yes

HE the Governor acknowledged Councillors recommendation and accepted.

The Administrator thanked the DoR and Finance Committee members for their hard work and contributions.

6. Coronavirus update [standing item]

The Head of the Administrator’s Office (HoAO) provided an update on the current **COVID-19** status of the island. The HoAO explained that the island is currently in Level 2 Orange following two positive COVID-19 test results from individuals in compulsory isolation, having arrived in Ascension on the most recent USAF and A400 flights. There are 49 people are in compulsory isolation and five people in restrictions short of compulsory isolation. The HoAO reported that a meeting was recently held with employing organisations where draft guidance was reviewed. Employing organisations were given the opportunity to raise any concerns and discuss any issues. Following no major issues or concerns raised, it is expected that the guidance will be ready to be distributed widely across all employing organisations by the middle of next week, ensuring that everyone knows what to do if you catch COVID-19. The HoAO reported a low uptake on vaccinations from 77 Construction employees, however, the AIG will continue to encourage uptake of the booster vaccination, with general vaccination levels sitting at around 86% of the population. Councillor George conveyed her disappointment in the lack of uptake from 77 Construction employees, especially since the island is about to lift COVID-19 isolation requirements. The Administrator explained that the SMO has informed 77 Construction that it is in their best interests that they have their work force vaccinated and the benefits it offers.

7. Runway Project [standing item]

The Head of Administrator’s Office gave an update on the **runway project** reporting that the laying of asphalt on the eastern side of the runway is now complete. The HoAO explained that the installation of distance markers, lighting and other navigational aids will be followed by a visit from the Federal Aviation Authority’s (FAA) to certify the eastern side of the runway on 31 August 2022. Following approval by the FAA, work will then begin on the western side of the runway in September 2022. The HoAO confirmed that work on the road between the pier and the runway is still expected to take place between April and July 2023, with demobilisation of the Schuyler operation expected to begin following the last ship being offloaded in September 2022, with an expected project completion date of mid-2023. Councillor Nicholls asked whether the implications of COVID-19 in the community were being taken into account when considering the expected completion date. The HoAO explained that the projects workforce has substantial contingency plans in place to ensure there is minimal disruption to the project itself, such as separate accommodation bubbles and mess feeding facilities.

6. Any other business

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

- i. **Blue Marine Endowment Fund:** Councillors Nicholls and George requested an update on the Blue Marine Endowment Fund. The Administrator explained that the Director of Conservation and Fisheries has recently returned from overseas leave and is planning to hold a meeting of the inshore fisheries working group soon where an update will be provided. Following further discussions, the

Administrator requested that Councillors collate their concerns within a Councillor Enquiry Form to allow a full response to be provided at a later date. Councillor George requested that the item be placed on the actions tracker to ensure there is no loss of momentum on the topic following the general election in September 2022.

- ii. **Seats on Voyager Aircraft:** Councillor Ellick requested an update on the availability of seats to persons working for the AIG to travel on the Voyager aircraft to the UK instead of travelling to St Helena. The Administrator explained that the option of travelling on the Voyager aircraft is likely to be available for members of the public wishing to travel to the UK, noting that discussions are taking place with employers in the Falkland Islands who may wish for employees to transit through Ascension to both St Helena and the Falklands to make use of both the Voyager and the inter-island Airlink charter. Councillor Nicholls explained that since the commencement of the Airlink flights, most employers in Ascension are now members of the Preferred Customer Agreement [PCA] which means they are prepaying for their employees to travel to or via St Helena, noting that employers may be unlikely to pay for employees to travel to the UK too. The Administrator explained that as the arrangements for the Voyager have not yet been released, the AIG are not yet able to begin planning for how they manage their own internal processes for their own staff. How other employers manage travel for their staff is an internal matter for that employer. Crown Counsel explained that the Employment Ordinance, 2022 allows for a mid-tour holiday location to be agreed between employer and employee, meaning that there are no restrictions on the location of the vacation in the law. Further discussion was had regarding the future of Ascension and available accommodation for transit passengers.

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 18:00

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 Governor, Mr Greg Gibson