

## ASCENSION ISLAND GOVERNMENT

Clerk of Council's Office  
Ascension Island  
South Atlantic Ocean  
ASCN 1ZZ



[pa.admin@ascension.gov.ac](mailto:pa.admin@ascension.gov.ac)

+ (247) 67000 ext 100

[www.ascension.gov.ac](http://www.ascension.gov.ac)

## Informal meeting of the Ascension Island Council

10:00 on Thursday 11 August 2022 at the Courthouse

### MEETING SUMMARY

Present: HH Carl Mackerras, Acting Administrator  
Matthew James, Crown Counsel  
Shendi Keshet Director of Resources

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

In attendance: William Hardy, Senior Medical Officer  
Diane Baum, Director of Conservation and Fisheries  
Siobhan Stewart, Clerk to Council

Apologies:

The Acting Administrator welcomed all parties. The Acting Administrator passed on his thanks to previous Councillors, Kate Chadwick and Andy Hobsons and present Councillors, Andrew Ellick, Kitty George, Nicky John, Alan Nicholls and Douglas Miller for their hard work and dedication as Councillors, noting that the current Council will dissolve on 01 September 2022. The Acting Administrator also thanked Council Clerks, former Crown Counsel Robert Cheeseman, Attorney General Allen Cansick, Governor Philip Rushbrook, Acting Governor Greg Gibson, Acting Attorney General and Crown Counsel Aine Hurley, and former Director of Resources Gareth Morris. The Acting Administrator highlighted that despite the backdrop of COVID-19 the Council has worked hard with officials to deliver two major pieces of legislation; the Biosecurity Ordinance and the Employment Ordinance. The Acting Administrator thanked Councillors for their support in recognising the much needed capital investment requirements across island and offering their full support to all aspects of the runway project. Councillor Nicholls also highlighted the achievement of the implementation of the Ascension Island Marine Protected Area and the adoption of the Management Plan.

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:** After a meeting with 77 construction in July, we await further feedback on the possibility of them being able to carry out such work and if so an indicator of the likely cost. Alternative plans are being developed in case 77 construction are not able to assist.

**Alternative Flags Flown outside of the AIG Building - Consideration to be given to alternative location/flag pole:** As requested this has been investigated and can be achieved by simply having a second line on the pole. This can be in place within the next few weeks.

**Freezer boxes - Consideration to be given as to whether boxes can be on sale at both the shipping office and post office:** This suggestion has been considered and freezer boxes are now also on sale at the Post Office.

**Contingency planning for Monkey Pox:** The Senior Medical Officer [SMO] provided further information on the Monkey Pox virus, highlighting that unlike COVID-19 the virus is mildly transmissible and is predominantly spread through close physical contact. The SMO explained that he is in receipt of regular updates from expert colleagues in the UK Health Security Agency who have confirmed the risk of infection here is low in Ascension. Further discussion was had regarding the symptoms of Monkey Pox, with the SMO explaining that infections are likely to be mild with

transient symptoms and that vaccine options are currently being considered for Ascension. Councillor Ellick requested that further information be provided to the community in the Islander to offer reassurance, the SMO agreed to do this.

The SMO provided an update on the current **COVID-19** status of the island. The SMO explained that there are currently 10 confirmed positive cases of COVID-19 in the community. The SMO confirmed that all cases were mildly symptomatic, with no one being seriously unwell or requiring hospital admission, indicating the efficacy of the vaccination programme in Ascension. The Acting Administrator explained that public announcements on the latest COVID-19 case numbers are being provided to both employing organisations and the general public on a weekly basis. The SMO conveyed his thanks to Public Health England and the UK Health Security Agency for their excellent support and guidance. The SMO offered reassurance to those in the community with anxiety over contracting COVID-19 that many protective measures are in place in Ascension and that the chances of avoiding infection are slim due to the transmissibility of the disease. The SMO encouraged anyone with concerns or worries over COVID-19 to contact the Georgetown Hospital. Councillor Nicholls thanked the SMO and his team for their hard work and dedication in keeping the community of Ascension Island safe.

The SMO reported on the most recent update from the Department of Health and Social Care within the Foreign, Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO) on the suggested **NHS Quota System** in the UK Government Healthcare Support Review. The SMO explained that it is proposed that five NHS referral slots be allocated to Ascension Island per annum over a three year period. The SMO explained that any unused slots can be shared with other Overseas Territories and likewise in return should Ascension run out of allocated slots, however as these slots are predominantly for long term treatment plans such as cancer patients, it is expected that Ascension is unlikely to require all five slots. The Acting Administrator explained that whilst this is still to go through parliamentary debate, further information will be required on the practicalities of the process. Councillor Nicholls highlighted the pressures and waiting times currently within the NHS system that may affect any referrals from Ascension, the SMO explained that initial diagnosis would still be dealt with through private healthcare providers, following the diagnosis a referral would then be made to the relevant NHS Trust which should avoid the initial lengthy waiting times.

The Director of Conservation and Fisheries (DoCF) provided an update on the **Blue Marine Endowment Fund** following the most recent update provided to Councillors on the 18 April 2022, noting that a draft memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Blue Marine Foundation and the AIG was sent to Councillors for comment on 11 February 2022 following a meeting of the Inshore Fisheries Working Group that was held on 08 February 2022. Councillors requested that the clause stating "*Inshore fisheries management regulations must be in force before any payments can be made from the fund*" be clarified and seek confirmation as to whether Blue Marine would honour local approval and implementation of the inshore fisheries management plan. The DoCF contacted Blue Marine and received agreement with the principle that a system to manage the inshore fishery should be designed on Ascension. This was communicated to Council via an email on 18 April 2022. The DoCF confirmed that there has been no disbursement of funds in Ascension as the MOU has not yet been signed and there is currently no inshore fisheries management in Ascension. The DoCF explained that efforts now need to be focused on specific areas of the inshore fisheries management, such as the enforcement policy, mechanism for including the fishing community in decision making, and licences and registration, of which Crown Counsel is working to provide support with. Councillor George requested confirmation that accumulated funds thus far have been carried forward and have not been lost. The DoCF explained that any accumulated funds will be carried forward and will be made available following the implementation of the inshore fisheries management plan. Further discussion was had around the required criteria for applications to the fund. Councillor Nicholls requested confirmation on what the fund is currently able to release. The DoCF explained that there is currently a donation of £80,000 allocated for a sports facility. Initial discussions had taken place about using this for a sports facility to replace the football pitch at Long Beach. A further £70,000 ring-fenced for conservation projects could also be allocated to this project due to its benefit to nesting turtles. However, following initial quotations, more money may be required for this project to go ahead. The DoCF also highlighted that the Ascension Island Charities fund is also funded by Blue Marine for smaller projects and was oversubscribed this year, investing over £20,000 into community projects in Ascension. Further conversation was had regarding the maintenance legacy plans of any large infrastructure projects and the challenges around procurement and labour expertise. The DoCF explained that the next steps for the introduction of an inshore fisheries management system would be to provide Council with a proposal to change legislation, as well as further public consultation. Crown Counsel thanked Councillors for their input thus far, highlighting that this will allow the next Council to work towards the policy and regulations around inshore fisheries management in the new year. Councillor George thanked the DoCF for attending Council and providing a thorough update.

The Acting Administrator gave an update on the **runway project** reporting that the project is progressing well with the final aggregate ship now expected to arrive in Clarence Bay mid October 2022. Whilst this is later than initially planned due to the availability of aggregate it is not expected to affect the overall runway completion date. The Acting Administrator also confirmed that the bitumen backload ship is expected to arrive in Ascension by the end of December 2022. The Acting Administrator reported that asphaltting of the eastern side of the runway is now complete, with the installation of distance markers, lighting and other navigational aids currently underway. A visit from the Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) to certify the eastern side of the runway is planned for 31 August 2022. Following approval by the FAA, work will then begin on the western side of the runway in September 2022, with a planned completion date of June 2023. The Acting Administrator confirmed that work on the road between the pier and the runway will take place from April to July 2023. Further discussion was had regarding the recent core samples taken from the roads and the possibility of sharing information and specialists in this field.

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

- i. **Airlink Flights:** Councillor George requested that consideration be given for the Airlink flight to depart earlier from Ascension allowing passengers to arrive in St Helena a few hours earlier. Additionally, Councillor George asked whether an earlier departure from St Helena could be considered, enabling passengers (particularly those privately booked) to connect with flights departing South Africa the same day. The Acting Administrator explained that AIG will put this request to colleagues in SHG (as the contract manager) and Airlink (as the operator). Depending on the response received AIG will then engage local stakeholders if appropriate.

The meeting closed at 11:15

Siobhan Stewart  
Clerk of Council