



Formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council
16:30 on Wednesday 02 November 2022 at the Courthouse

MINUTES

Present:	HE Greg Gibson, Acting Governor [remotely]	Councillor Kerry Benjamin [remotely]
	HH Sean Burns, Administrator	Councillor Kyla Benjamin
	Simon Minshull, Administrator designate	Councillor Douglas Miller
	Catherine Leo, Deputy Director of Resources	Councillor Alan Nicholls
		Councillor Laura Shearer
In attendance:	Luke Atkinson, FCDO Desk Officer [remotely]	
	Carl Mackerras, Head of the Administrator's Office	
	Crown Counsel, Matthew James	
	Siobhan Stewart, Clerk of Council	
Apologies:	HE Nigel Phillips CBE, Governor	
	Catherine Williams, Acting Attorney General	
	Shendi Keshet, Director of Resources	

1. Welcome

The Administrator welcomed all parties and explained who was present for those attending remotely. The Administrator welcomed the Administrator designate, Simon Minshull and his partner Natalie, who recently arrived on Island, and welcomed Acting Governor, Greg Gibson who was in attendance in the absence of HE the Governor, Mr Nigel Phillips. The Administrator congratulated and welcomed elected members to their inaugural formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council and thanked members for running for the position of Island Councillor. HE the Acting Governor congratulated Councillors on their appointment as Island Councillors, adding that both he and Governor Phillips look forward to working closely with Councillors over the coming years. HE the Acting Governor welcomed Simon to the role and thanked Sean and Marina for their hard work and dedication to Ascension, not only in Council matters but in the many voluntary island activities they are actively involved in supporting. HE the Acting Governor highlighted achievements such as the ongoing future of Ascension work and the exemplary effort in managing COVID-19 in Ascension. HE the Acting Governor wished Sean and Marina all the very best in the future.

2. Matters arising

Matters arising were addressed via the actions tracker. There was only one current topic on the tracker which was discussed as follows:

Blue Marine Endowment Fund: The Administrator explained that prior to the dissolution of Council on 01 September 2022 Councillors requested that the Blue Marine Endowment fund remains on the actions tracker for the newly elected Council to continue with.

3. Council Committees

Crown Counsel reported that the AIG are in the process of producing a Councillor Induction pack, with the intention that it will be provided to Councillors prior to the next informal meeting. Councillors were requested to consider who they wish to nominate as the three members of the legislatively required Finance Committee, as well as considering what other committees they may wish to form and to appoint both members and a chair.

Previous committees formed were the Public Works Committee which covered the Ascension Island Government's (AIG) operations and facilities functions and services, and the Welfare Committee which focused on AIG's non-operational work, with a particular focus on health and education.

4. Legislative Agenda

Crown Counsel provided council with an overview of what important matters are likely to be brought before council within the next six months. Crown Counsel reported on some key safeguarding legislation that needs introduction, such as the Sexual Communications with a Child Ordinance that has recently been enacted in St Helena and the introduction of Child Labour Regulations to ensure the current legislation complies with international obligations. Further work is also planned in relation to Ascension's domestic abuse policy and legislation ensuring alignment with international standards, such as the UK. Inshore Fisheries is also expected to be brought before council in the next six months with a view of legislating thereafter. Crown Counsel confirmed that he will provide Councillors with some Inshore Fisheries related documents ahead of the next meeting. Councillor Nicholls requested an approximate timeframe on the update of the Telecommunications Ordinance, Crown Counsel confirmed an expected time frame of around nine months, although highlighted that this may change following a period of consultation with subject matter experts.

5. Budget 2022/23 half year results & budget 2023/24 timetable

The Deputy Director of Resources provided a six month financial update to Council, noting that the AIG is in a good financial position, with an underspend of £274k against the appropriation. The DDoR explained that the underspend is mostly due to vacant positions and the time associated with recruitment, as well as a saving on fuel due to a fault with the incinerator. Whilst income is less than anticipated it is expected to even out over the coming six months.

The DDoR reported on the progress of the capital programme for financial year 2022/23, confirming that plans are progressing well. The inshore sea rescue vessel has been procured and is now in operation on island. Refurbishment work continues at the school and the more general AIG stock of properties, as well as the Two Boats play park where materials have now arrived, awaiting installation.

The DDoR confirmed that some initial meetings have taken place within AIG Departments regarding the 2023/24 budget with the intention to present financial plans to the Finance Committee following its formation in the coming weeks. Councillor Nicholls requested an update on the current figure the AIG hold in reserves, the DDoR confirmed that whilst cash reserves are at around the £11m mark, a commitment of 50% of the estimated cost of the roads replacement project, and 15% of the estimated cost of the hospital replacement project, £3.5m was placed in a key infrastructure special fund for the 2022/23 financial year, leaving a total in reserves of around £7.5m.

The Administrator was pleased to report on other ongoing AIG and Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) funded projects such as the waste water treatment plant replacement in both Georgetown and Two Boats, which is progressing well. The painting of public buildings project has been awarded and is expected to start in December 2022. The Administrator explained that following a recent visit from a team of tree surveyors, several recommendations were made, such as the felling of trees overhanging essential power lines and trees of an unstable nature. A landslide consultant is also on island in relation to the recent landslide on Bishops path on Green Mountain to assess the risk and advise the AIG on recommended options moving forward. Councillor Nicholls requested an update on the road replacement programme, The Administrator confirmed that several options were being considered, recommending further discussion at the next informal meeting.

6. Runway project update

The Head of Administrator's Office gave an update on the **runway project** reporting excellent progress on the western side of the runway. The HoAO explained that whilst the official date for completion is June 2023, this is expected to be brought forward to around February/March 2023. The HoAO confirmed that the last of the aggregate ships is currently being offloaded with the last bitumen ship expected to arrive around the 08

December 2022. Permission has been granted for Sunday working to make up for lost days due to other ships being offloaded and high winds. The HoAO confirmed that on Remembrance Sunday, times of services and silences have been provided to contractors. Schuyler are expected to be demobilised by the end of January 2023, with road works expected to begin in January 2023, lasting six weeks in total.

7. COVID-19 update

The Head of the Administrator's Office (HoAO) provided an update on the current **COVID-19** status of the island. The HoAO reported of nine confirmed cases of COVID-19 last week, with around 57 confirmed cases so far this week. The HoAO explained that the AIG continue to monitor the spread of COVID-19 in the community and confirmed there are currently no cases requiring hospitalisation, with most cases presenting only mild symptoms. This is likely to be due to a number of large social gatherings recently, with numbers expected to reduce again in the coming weeks. The HoAO reported that a further batch of vaccines funded by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) is expected to arrive in Ascension later this month to capture those who are still awaiting their latest booster. A wider spread booster campaign will take place in March 2023 which will capture everyone with the bivalent vaccination.

8. Councillor Enquiry Forms & Councillor Induction Pack

The Administrator encouraged Councillors to use the Councillor Enquiry Form for any questions of issues they may have, highlighting that Councillors do not need to wait for the next Council meeting to raise a concern to the AIG. Councillors are also invited to come to the Administrator's Office should they have any concerns.

9. Joint Ministerial Council 07-09 November 2022

The Administrator thanked Councillor Nicholls for agreeing to attend the Joint Ministerial Council in London and gave his regrets that it was now postponed until the new year. Councillor Nicholls highlighted the importance of the bilateral meeting with the Overseas Territories Minister, however understood that due to no appointed Minister it had to be delayed. The Administrator confirmed that the new Overseas Territories Minister is The Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith which was welcomed by Councillors due to his previous involvement with the Ascension Island Marine Protected Area. The Administrator confirmed that HE the Governor Nigel Phillips has been invited by the Speaker in the House of Commons to lay a wreath on behalf of Ascension Island in the remembrance garden, with Chief Minister Julie Thomas laying one on behalf of St Helena.

10. Any other business

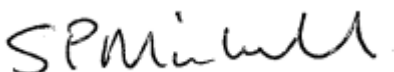
There was one item of **other business**:

- i. **Council representation at the Service of Remembrance:** Councillor Nicholls requested that Councillors consider who they would like to represent elected members at the Service of Remembrance on Sunday 13 November 2022. Councillors agreed that Councillor Kerry Benjamin would attend and lay the wreath on behalf of elected members.

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 17:05

Siobhan Stewart
Clerk of Council

I certify that this is a true record of the meeting to which it relates.



Simon Minshull
On behalf of HE the Governor, Mr Greg Gibson