

**ASCENSION ISLAND
GOVERNMENT**

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

09:30 on Thursday 24 November 2022 at the Courthouse

MEETING SUMMARY

Present: HH Simon Minshull, Administrator
Matthew James, Crown Counsel
Catherine Leo, Deputy Director of Resources

Councillor Kerry Benjamin
Councillor Kyla Benjamin
Councillor Douglas Miller
Councillor Alan Nicholls
Councillor Laura Shearer

In attendance: Carl Mackerras, Head of the Administrator's Office
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 explained that the setting of an informal meeting is with the intention to allow free and frank discussion on topics prior to formal minuted meetings.

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 DoCF provided a brief background update to Council on how the £2 million Blue Marine Endowment fund came about following the designation of the Marine Protected Area around Ascension, and how the intention is that the interest accrued and capital gain on the £2 million would be used to fund community projects on island.

The DoCF provided Council with a summary of Blue Marine's proposed MoU on recent discussions: Projects would need to fall within one of four categories being; community, education, environment and heritage to be viewed as eligible to apply for funds, with a committee based in the UK deciding what funds would be available each year working on the recommendation of projects from the Ascension Island Council and the AIG. The DoCF explained that a draft Memorandum of Understanding has been drafted, which includes a requirement that before any payments can be made there should be inshore fisheries regulations in place first, as well as satisfaction that the MPA Management Plan is being followed. Councillors asked whether any monies have been spent to date and how much was remaining in the fund. The DoCF explained that no monies have been released from the fund as yet and a figure would be provided to Councillors at a later date. It was proposed that the financial management of projects will be managed by the AIG Finance Department. Further discussion was had in relation to the management of larger projects and the associated liability AIG would be taking on. Crown Counsel highlighted the benefits this fund could potentially bring to community projects on island, adding that Councillors will be invited to make recommendations of worthy projects. The Deputy Director of Resources noted that the £10k Charities fund would continue to be available for smaller community group projects.

The DoCF reported that Ascension Island supports globally-important biodiversity and, as part of its commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity, AIG is required to produce a Strategy and Action Plan setting out how it will be protected. A draft **Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan** was prepared and sent out to public consultation in August 2022. Conversation was had regarding the introduction of Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA's), with

the DoCF reporting on recent testing of the EIA procedure on internal AIG projects and developments. The DoCF invited Councillors to consider the Strategy and Action Plan with the hope that collectively Councillors may wish to write a foreword for Strategy prior to publishing. Discussion was had regarding the removal of structures from beaches, the DoCF assured Councillors that this was in relation to the removal of non-essential barriers that were preventing the natural landward migration of the beaches, not the removal of beach huts or bbq areas. Councillors requested more time to consider the Strategy and Action Plan fully.

The DoCF provided some back ground and an update on the **Inshore Fisheries Strategy** to Councillors. The DoCF explained that following multiple meetings of the inshore fisheries working group, made up of the previous Council and recommendations from the fishing community, an inshore fisheries strategy was formed. Following in-depth discussion with the working group, the AIGCFD are now in a position to evolve the strategy into implementation policies for public consultation and Councillors' consideration. Discussion was had regarding the proposed requirement for everyone to Register, The DoCF reassured Councillors that protections were being put in place to ensure that no fee could be introduced for local fishers now or at a later date. Conversation was then had regarding the collection of data and how this may be used to apply measured and reasonable interventions if required. Councillors emphasised the importance of collecting accurate data when considering interventions. Further discussion was had in relation to the various methods that will be applied to collect data, such as fixed point cameras, sea bed mapping and fishers' catch data. Conversation moved onto the monitoring of catch data and allowing fish to reach sexual maturity. The DoCF confirmed that the Public Consultation period will begin in December 2022 and continue throughout January and into early February 2023 to ensure maximum public engagement and consultation.

The Head of the Administrator's Office gave an update on the **runway project** reporting that the project is progressing well with Schuyler having now completed the aggregate offload with a new completion date of around February/March 2023, although this is dependent on the bitumen container delivery expected around 12 December 2022. The removal of the jack up barge is expected to take place this coming weekend (26/27 November) with resurfacing of the road at the pier head expected to take place in January/February 2023. Further discussion followed on the Voyager flights and the logistical challenges relating to their return. Councillors requested an update on civilian access, noting that this is of particular interest to people living in Ascension. The Administrator explained that follow confirmation from the MOD on the arrangements for civilian access to the Voyager Councillors and the Public will be informed accordingly.

The Administrator provided a brief update and back ground to the declaring of **Public Holidays** on Ascension Island highlighting the schedule in the Public Holidays Ordinance where the official Public Holidays are listed. As Ascension Day in 2023 falls on Thursday 18 May, The Administrator proposed that Councillors may wish to consider directing at the next formal meeting that the Ascension Day Public Holiday be observed on Friday 19 May 2023 in order to provide a more efficient working week and greater flexibility to island residents. The Administrator explained that provisions are in place to formally announce any additional Public Holiday that may be approved in respect of the coronation of King Charles III.

The Crown Counsel explained the challenges the Royal St Helena Police Department, Ascension Island Police Detachment face with recruitment due to the stipulation within The Police Services Ordinance, 1975 that requires members of the police force to retire at the age of 60, subject to an additional 5-year continuation period. Crown Counsel requested that Councillors provide a recommendation to the Governor that secondary legislation is implement to allow applicants over the age of 60 to be considered for positions in Ascension.

The Crown Counsel reported that in June 2022, St Helena passed the Sexual (Communications with a Child) Offences Ordinance 2022, which outlaws a person having communication with a child for sexual gratification and any matter connected therewith or incidental thereto. The Crown Counsel explained that a draft Ordinance for Ascension which will mirror the St Helena Ordinance will be provided to Councillors prior to the next formal meeting for their consideration and recommendation to the Governor.

Councillors requested that a Public Works Committee be formed which covered the Ascension Island Government's (AIG) operations and facilities functions and services, and a Welfare and Social Care Committee which will focus on AIG's non-operational work, with a particular focus on health and education. Councillors directed the following membership:

Councillor Alan Nicholls
Councillor Kerry Benjamin
Councillor Kyla Benjamin

Councillor Alan Nicholls (Chair)
Councillor Douglas Miller
Councillor Kyla Benjamin

Councillor Laura Shearer (Chair)
Councillor Kerry Benjamin
Councillor Douglas Miller

There were three items of **other business**:

- i. **Joint Ministerial Council:** Councillor Nicholls notified Council that the JMC has been confirmed for 11-12 May 2023. The Administrator confirmed that the AIG would be in touch with the Councillors' delegate to arrange briefings and logistics.
- ii. **AIG Guest House:** The Deputy Director of Resources asked Council whether they feel that they wished to restart the process of tendering for an expert consultant in relation to the operation of the AIG Guest House (formally known as the Obsidian). The Administrator agreed to review previous documents and that the Council should return to the topic at a later date.
- iii. **MV Helena future shipping:** Councillor Kerry Benjamin asked whether there was any update in relation to the MV Helena shipping service to Ascension Island. The Administrator explained that a replacement service is being sought following the departure of the Andrew Weir Shipping service. The frequency will be confirmed following completion of the tender process.

The meeting closed at 11:10

Siobhan Stewart
Clerk of Council