

**ASCENSION ISLAND
GOVERNMENT**

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



siobhan.stewart@ascension.gov.ac

+ (247) 67000 ext 100

www.ascension.gov.ac

Informal meeting of the Ascension Island Council

10:00 on Thursday 12 January 2023 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 Alan Nicholls

In attendance: Carl Mackerras, Head of the Administrator's Office
Diane Baum, Director of Conservation and Fisheries
Siobhan Stewart, Clerk to Council

Apologies: Councillor Laura Shearer
Councillor Douglas Miller

The Administrator welcomed all parties and thanked everyone for attending.

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 explained that the Blue Marine Endowment Fund could only be accessed following the implementation of an Inshore Fisheries Management Plan. The DoCF explained that the period of Public Consultation has begun, with a second Public Meeting being held this evening. The DoCF requested that should Councillors receive any feedback directly from members of the public in relation to the proposed Inshore Fisheries Strategy and Policies that they send through said feedback to be included in the consultation response. Councillor Nicholls requested confirmation on how much money was currently in the fund. The DoCF confirmed that a figure would be provided to Councillors nearer to the end of the financial year.

The DoCF reported of some minor changes and additions to the draft **Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan** following the recently agreed Convention on Biological Diversity targets. The DoCF thanked Councillors for their feedback thus far and requested that Councillors now consider formally recommending the Strategy and Action Plan at the next formal council meeting due to be held on Thursday 26 January 2023. A final version of the Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, highlighting the changes made will be distributed to Councillors prior to any formal recommendation being requested. Discussion was had regarding the foreword and definitions, Councillors agreed to provide the final foreword to the DoCF prior to the next formal meeting.

The Administrator reported that in 2022 AIG sought a recommendation from Councillors as whether or not AIG should tender for an expert advisor to provide support and advice in relation to the AIG Guest House and to help AIG be assured that it had taken appropriate steps to ensure value-for-money. At that time, it was agreed that while the AIG will require expert advice with any negotiations with interested investors this will be done at a later date when the future of Ascension is clearer and whether there will be access to flights for tourists. The Administrator explained that whilst the definitive future of Ascension is still unknown, a clearer steer was offered following a familiarisation visit from the Deputy Director of Overseas Territories (FCDO) in August 2022. It was agreed that due to the imminent return of the airbridge, accommodation options will be needed. Discussion was had regarding the many unknowns and moving variables that may affect any potential business investment, however it was agreed that expert advice was now required. Discussion was had regarding the deterioration of the AIG Guest House buildings and potential interim options available. The Administrator invited Councillors to consider making a formal

recommendation as to whether or not the AIG should tender for an expert advisor to provide support and advice on this issue at the next formal meeting of Council. Councillors noted the difficulty in making a recommendation when civilian access to the voyager was still unknown, however, Councillors felt that it was now time that the AIG seek expert advice to allow for an informed decision to be made at a future date when civilian access to the voyager is known and the future of Ascension is agreed. The Administrator thanked Councillors for their advice and feedback.

The Head of the Administrator's Office gave an update on the **runway project** reporting that the project is progressing well with the asphaltting of the runway now in its final stages of completion. Following this, works will then resume on the resurfacing of the roads from the airhead to the pier head which is expected to take around three to four weeks. Remaining runway works such as electrical installations, concreting and erection of signage will commence following the completion of the asphaltting. The HoAO thanked Councillors for the feedback regarding the speedbumps on the USAF Base and the road markings at the junction below Command Hill. The HoAO confirmed that the height of the speedbumps has now been reduced and new road markings are being considered for the junction. The HoAO explained that a tour of the runway project has been arranged for Councillors and HE the Governor during his visit to Ascension to allow for any questions or feedback to be provided directly. Discussion was had regarding Fire Service cover for both the AIG estate and the additional flights following the return of the airbridge. The Administrator confirmed that adequate provision and cover is and will be available. Councillor Nicholls raised concerns over deterioration of the road to the airhead already, having only recently been resurfaced. The HoAO agreed to liaise with the runway contractors regarding this and provide an update to Councillors.

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

- i. **Requirement to vacate Beach Huts by 9pm:** Councillor Nicholls reported that constituents feel that 9pm in the evening is too early for people to vacate beach huts, despite the occupiers only using red lights. The Crown Counsel explained that the National Protected Areas Regulations, 2014 stipulates that beach huts within Nature Reserves must not be occupied after 9pm from December to July each year to avoid disruption and distress to nesting green turtles. It was agreed to redistribute guidelines as a reminder to the Public.
- ii. **Emergency Defibrillator:** Councillors Nicholls reported that the Emergency Defibrillator located at North East Bay instructs the public to dial 999 for a code to access the Emergency Defibrillator within, however there is no mobile telephone signal at North East Bay. Councillor Nicholls explained that the code provided on the external casing did not work when entered. It was noted that access was attempted in a non-emergency situation. The Administrator agreed to address this with the relevant Directorate.
- iii. **Airlink Luggage Allowance:** Councillor Kerry Benjamin asked whether the luggage allowance for Airlink passengers will return to being 30KG following completion of the runway. It was agreed that this would be submitted through a Councillor Enquiry Form (CEF) where a formal response can be provided.
- iv. **Interim solution to replace the MV Helena:** The Deputy Director of Resources explained that the AIG are currently in discussion with a shipping provider to provide an interim shipping service between St Helena and Ascension. A proposal with three options will be provided to Councillors at a later date.

The meeting closed at 11:10

Siobhan Stewart
Clerk of Council