



## **Formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council**

**16:30 on Thursday 26 January 2023 at the Courthouse**

### **MINUTES**

Present:	HE Nigel Phillips CBE, Governor HH Simon Minshull, Administrator Catherine Leo, Deputy Director of Resources Attorney General, David Ballantyne	[remotely]	Councillor Kerry Benjamin Councillor Kyla Benjamin Councillor Douglas Miller Councillor Alan Nicholls
In attendance:	Luke Atkinson, FCDO Desk Officer Carl Mackerras, Head of the Administrator's Office Crown Counsel, Matthew James Diane Baum, Director of Conservation and Fisheries Siobhan Stewart, Clerk of Council	[remotely]	
Apologies:	Councillor Laura Shearer		

#### **1. Welcome**

HE the Governor welcomed all parties and explained who was present for those attending remotely. The Governor conveyed how pleased he was to attend Council in person during his inaugural visit to Ascension Island, noting how helpful it has been to be able to meet with Employing Organisations, Councillors, AIG Officials, and Voluntary Organisations. The Governor offered his support to Councillors ahead of the JMC in May 2023 and recognised the need for a resolution on the future of Ascension soon. Adam Pile OBE, Deputy Director Overseas Territories (FCDO) carried out a familiarisation visit to Ascension in August 2022 and it is still hoped that a full Joint Ministerial visit will take place at a future date.

#### **2. Approval of Minutes**

**Decision:** The minutes of the Informal Council meeting held on 24 November 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 09 December 2022.

**Decision:** The minutes of the Formal Council meeting held on 08 December 2022 were accepted with no feedback comments received. In accordance with the Council Rules these had already been agreed by Council members and published on 23 December 2022.

#### **3. 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 the Blue Marine Endowment Fund could only be accessed following the implementation of an Inshore Fisheries Management Plan. The Administrator explained that it is hoped that an estimate figure of what is in the fund can be provided to Councillors following the return of the Director of Conservation and Fisheries.

#### **4. Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan**

The Administrator thanked Councillors for preparing a foreword for the Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan.

	Proposal	KylaB	KerryB	DM	AN
1	Implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

The Administrator invited Councillors to formally recommend that the Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan for implementation. By a show of hands all Councillors present voted in favour, HE the Governor thanked Councillors for their advice and accepted their recommendation.

## 5. Assessing future Options for the AIG Guest House

The Administrator explained that the AIG are seeking a steer from Council as to whether or not AIG should initiate the tendering process for expert advice and support in relation to the AIG Guest House. The Administrator suggested that a range of options be generated by the expert advisor whilst considering a variety of factors, with the intention of presenting these options to Councillors at a later date for consideration. The Administrator explained that whilst it was agreed by the previous Council to wait until the future of Ascension was clearer, with the imminent return of the airbridge expert advice was now required. Councillor Nicholls noted difficulty in making a recommendation, especially given the unique circumstances with the future of Ascension still unknown.

	Proposal	KylaB	KerryB	DM	AN
2	Engage an expert advisor to provide support and advice on the condition and future utilisation of the AIG Guest House properties	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

The Administrator invited Councillors to formally recommend that the AIG Engage an expert advisor to provide support and advice on the condition and future utilisation of the AIG Guest House properties. By a show of hands all Councillors present voted in favour, HE the Governor thanked Councillors for their advice and accepted their recommendation.

## 6. Runway Project Update

The Head of the Administrator's Office gave an update on the runway project reporting that the project is progressing well, with an expected completion date of the end of March 2023, subject to the final electrical, signage and concrete work being finished and the final FAA certification. The HoAO thanked Councillors for taking the time to attend the runway tour earlier in the week and hoped they found it useful. Resurfacing of the roads have been underway in Georgetown with the AIG Stores to Pierhead section expected to be completed in the coming weeks. Councillor Nicholls requested clarity on when the runway contractors are expected to depart Ascension, especially given the need for accommodation. The HoAO explained that the demobilisation is a staged process and will not cause any delay to the return of the airbridge. Councillor Nicholls reported excessive dust and damage to road surface, caused by large trucks and construction machinery, in the Cuba area of Georgetown following the recent road works and diversion routes. The Administrator agreed to raise these points with the Runway Project Manager and the AIG Operations and Facilities Director.

## 7. Any other business

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

- i. **Emergency Defibrillator:** The Administrator addressed a previous report from Councillors Nicholls 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 had reported that the code provided on the external casing did not work when entered. The Administrator explained that whilst the box encasing the AED had a combination lock on it, the lock was not active and could be opened by simply turning the handle, however a new AED box has been fitted that has no lock and access remains unobstructed. The Administrator conveyed his concern that there have been at least two recent reports of emergency lifesaving equipment being tampered with

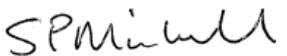
in non-emergency situations. A Public Notice will be issued in the coming weeks in the hope of deterring this behaviour.

- ii. **Interim solution to replace the MV Helena:** The Administrator reported 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 soon followed by an informal meeting to allow Councillors to discuss and raise any concerns and questions. Councillor Nicholls relayed the concern from constituents on Ascension.
- iii. **Legislative Programme:** The Attorney General provided an update to Council on the legislative programme for St Helena, which is progressing well. Whilst resources are limited, Ascension priorities are being considered and are being prioritised where possible. HE the Governor thanked the Attorney General for his update, highlighting that the programme will be of assistance in allowing Councillors to better prioritise legislation.
- iv. **Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan:** Councillor Nicholls noted the mention of the AIG Strategic Plan on page 29 of the Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. The Administrator explained that this plan is an internal working document for the AIG Senior Management Team. HE the Governor highlighted the difficulty in planning strategically when the future of Ascension remains unknown.

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 17:00

Siobhan Stewart  
Clerk of Council

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



*Simon Minshall*

*On behalf of HE the Governor, Mr Nigel Phillips CBE*