

ASCENSION ISLAND GOVERNMENT

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

10:00 on Thursday 30th March 2023 at the Courthouse

MEETING SUMMARY

Present: Carl Mackerras, Acting Administrator
Matthew James, Crown Counsel
Catherine Leo, Acting Director of Resources
Councillor Kerry Benjamin
Councillor Kyla Benjamin
Councillor Alan Nicholls
Councillor Laura Shearer
Councillor Douglas Miller

In attendance: Denise John, Clerk to Council

Apologies: Simon Minshull, Administrator (overseas)

1. Welcome

The Acting Administrator welcomed all parties and thanked everyone for attending.

The Acting Administrator conveyed condolences on behalf of AIG and all present, to the family and friends of the late Sean Burns, previous Administrator of Ascension, who recently passed away. He said a memorial will be co-ordinated with the other two islands, and the public will be notified in due course.

2. Matters arising were addressed via the actions tracker and discussed as follows:

2.1 ITT for AIG Guest House

Crown Counsel advised that ADoR has prepared the tender document for final review and issue this week. Councillor Nicholls asked if there was a time frame. ADoR confirmed time frames are within the document for receiving and addressing tenders. The Acting Administrator proposed this item could be removed from the tracker until there is an update on the tenders. All councillors agreed.

2.2 Blue Marine Endowment Fund:

Councillors met with the Blue Marine Foundation (BMF) on 16th March to discuss the performance of the fund and likely funds available to Ascension. The Endowment Fund has not increased in value this year due to economic headwinds, but the fund managers have agreed to donate £80,000 to provide funds for community projects on Ascension. An email received from Clare Brook, CEO Blue Marine, has been circulated detailing what was said at the meeting, including the latest version of the MOU. Councillor Nicholls noted that release of funds no longer appeared to be conditional on agreeing the Inshore Management plan. Crown Counsel said it was clear from the conference that BM was committed and that the funds will be released. The Acting Administrator said it was just a case now of looking at what the money can be used for. All agreed this item can be removed from the tracker.

3. Draft Policy for Young People in post-16 Education as Accompanying Dependants

Crown Counsel explained this was brought up by previous council members when looking at the Entry Control and Employment Ordinance. It was previously managed as a gentlemen's agreement that employers continue to look after children in continued education. He proposed extending the definition of a dependant to those in further education which is consistent to how the UK applies child benefits and in compliance with international law and continuation of education and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This is something most employers are already doing and would not have any additional costs to the taxpayer. The draft legislation is being worked on and also being reviewed by St Helena to be consistent, and will be sent to Councillors later this week to consider it.

Councillor Nicholls asked how this would accord with the Constitution. Crown Counsel said everything in law is based on the minimum that should be provided, and AIG should always strive to provide more within the context of what is affordable and this is affordable so it should be done. Councillor Shearer agreed it was important to support young people in their further education and that they should not have the extra stress of not knowing if they can stay on-island to do it.

Runway project

The Acting Administrator advised the full runway had opened ahead of the last Airlink flight and Airlink will return to full capacity on its next flight in April, which will hold 79 passengers going out and 82 coming in, with 30kgs each of luggage allowance. The FAA flyover is due towards the end of April with the airbridge provisionally resuming operations on 8 May. Allocation of seating for AIG is still awaited. Councillor Shearer enquired that given over the last few months a lot of airmail, including cards and letters, have not been able to be sent on the airlink to St Helena, would that now change with the full opening of the airport. ADoR said that it shouldn't be a problem but there would still be a weight restriction that the flight can carry. The Acting Administrator advised that the voyager will wait for the FAA fly over certification, but military aircraft and airlink are able to use the full length of the runway. Councillor Shearer asked if there was any damage after the heavy rains. The Acting Administrator confirmed there was no major impact, but there was a small amount of flooding on the side of the western end which the contractors are looking at how to improve the drainage.

Any other business:

Income Tax Review & Minimum Wage

Councillor Kerry Benjamin asked about an Income Tax Review and for the Council and AIG to look at establishing a minimum wage. Councillor Benjamin was asked to submit a Councillor Enquiry form which AIG would look into and provide an answer.

Health & Safety at the Pierhead

Councillor Shearer raised some concerns about Health & Safety issues around the pierhead, particularly the ladder that goes into the ocean and the hand rail up the steps which is not secure. In general, there was a request for improved seating and a water dispenser for washing kit. ADoR confirmed there is a coin machine which was there previously and should be going back in. Given the Health & Safety issues, the Acting Administrator asked Councillor Shearer to submit her concerns to him in writing and will take this forward to the Director of Operations & Facilities.

Telecoms

Crown Counsel updated councillors on the need for a Public Consultation with regard to the current unregulated issues and how these should be decided in the short term. He advised that the Public Consultation Notice was with the Governor for comments ahead of issue by Friday. He appreciated this was important to a lot of people and councillors were asked to encourage the public to engage and provide feedback. AIG would be willing to answer any questions people might have.

Club Repairs

Councillor Nicholls reported that after the recent heavy rains, Two Boats Club was leaking badly and had to close for a while. The manageress contacted Councillor Nicholls and requested if there is any possibility AIG could assist with repairing the leaks. Councillor Kerry Benjamin said the Saints Club was also affected. The Acting Administrator said AIG would look at what they can do to assist. Although there is a responsibility for Clubs to carry out maintenance themselves, AIG recognises the Clubs have limited funds. The buildings are still AIG assets and there are public safety considerations, so it would be in AIG's interest to look at what can be done to help.

Joint Ministerial Council: Councillors decided Councillor Nicholls would attend the JMC if leaving on the A400 or Airlink in April. If there was a possibility of having access to the airbridge, then Councillor Laura Shearer would also attend.

The meeting closed at 10:45

Next formal: 13 April 2023

Denise John
Clerk to Council