



## Formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council

16:30 on Thursday 01 June 2023 at the Courthouse

### MINUTES

Present: HE Nigel Phillips CBE, Governor [remotely] Councillor Kerry Benjamin  
HH Simon Minshull, Administrator Councillor Kyla Benjamin  
Catherine Leo, Acting Director of Resources Councillor Alan Nicholls  
Councillor Laura Shearer

In attendance: Jamie Mansbridge, FCDO Head, Falklands & Ascension [remotely]  
Carl Mackerras, Head of the Administrator's Office  
Siobhan Stewart, Clerk of Council

Apologies: Councillor Douglas Miller  
Matthew James, Crown Counsel

#### 1. Welcome

HH the Administrator welcomed all parties present and those attending remotely.

#### 2. Approval of Minutes

**Decision:** The summary of the Informal Council meeting held on 30 March 2023 and published on 17 April 2023 was accepted and in accordance with the Council Rules these were agreed by Council members.

**Decision:** The minutes of the Formal Council meeting held on 13 April 2023 and published on 24 April 2023 was accepted and in accordance with the Council Rules these were agreed by Council members.

#### 3. Matters arising

There were currently no actions on the actions tracker.

#### 4. Joint Ministerial Council

Councillor Nicholls and Councillor Shearer provided an update on their recent attendance at the Joint Ministerial Council (JMC) that took place on 11 and 12 May 2023 in London. Topics covered were Law Enforcement and Irregular Migration, Economic and Financial Resilience, Environment and Climate Change, Healthcare, and finally, Maritime Strategy. Councillor Nicholls provided an update on each of the topics covered and the interventions made on behalf of Ascension Island. Councillor Nicholls noted that an intervention was made thanking the UK Government for the timely provision of COVID-19 vaccinations and the procurement of crucial medical equipment.

Councillor Nicholls highlighted several matters worth of note, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's attendance on day one, where he met with all Overseas Territories (OT's) representatives. Councillor Nicholls also reported on a very productive Bilateral meeting with the Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith where the main subject discussed was the future of Ascension Island, of which he was very responsive to the community of Ascension Island. Councillor Nicholls explained that the Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith agreed to follow up with a meeting with the MOD.

Councillor Nicholls made note of the change of wording in the UK and Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council Communiqué in relation to the spending of reserves and granting of future funding, indicating recognition of Ascensions efforts in reducing its reserves, this is evident in the 2023 AIG Capital Budget has risen by over 100% compared with the previous year’s spend.

Councillor Shearer reported on the value of meeting with fellow Overseas Territory (OT) representatives, Government Ministers and other officials to discuss shared concerns and celebrate the unique relationship, making note of the recent introduction where each OT has an appointed minister in all UK Government departments. Councillor Shearer thanked Council for the opportunity to attend the JMC and represent Ascension Island.

The Administrator thanked Councillors for attending the JMC, and encouraged all Councillors to consider who they would like to represent Council and attend the next JMC in November 2023, ensuring all Councillors have an opportunity to attend a JMC during their tenure.

HE the Governor thanked Councillors for attending what was a successful and encouraging JMC and for providing a thorough report back to Council. HE the Governor concurred with Councillors that the Bilateral meeting with the Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith was very positive, noting that Lord Goldsmith was a real advocate for the OTs. HE the Governor highlighted the significance of the Prime Minister recently having written to all Government Departments advising them that they should have a responsible minister to act on OT affairs, as recognition of the mutual benefits of the strong relationship between the UK and the OTs. HE the Governor also noted the respect that was shown to the OTs with the attendance of both Royalty, senior officials, and the Foreign Secretary.

HE the Governor expressed his gratitude to Ascension, St Helena and Tristan da Cunha for having presented themselves in a progressive and positive manner at this year’s JMC.

**5. His Majesty the King’s Birthday – Date of Public Holiday**

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. Whilst previous years have seen the QBP celebrations and public holiday observed in June, this year Overseas Territories are being given the option to celebrate in either June or November. The official birthday of His Majesty the King is listed as a statutory Public Holiday, However the Island Council may give directions for this day to be observed on another day, such as in November when His Majesty the King’s unofficial birthday is, which is when St Helena will be taking the Public Holiday. The Administrator proposed that Councillors may wish to consider directing that the official birthday of His Majesty the King be observed on either Monday 19 June 2023 or Friday 17 November 2023, in line with St Helena.

	Proposal	KylaB	KerryB	AN	LS
1	To observe the official birthday of His Majesty the King on Friday 17 November 2023.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

The Administrator invited Councillors to formally recommend that the official birthday of His Majesty the King be observed on Friday 17 November 2023. The Administrator explained that all four Councillors present have voted in favour of the November date, HE the Governor thanked Councillors for their advice and accepted their recommendation.

**6. Runway Project Update**

The HoAO gave an update on the runway project reporting that the demobilisation ship is expected around mid-June, with the exact date still to be confirmed. Backloading is expected to last for three weeks, pending sea conditions and MOD FIRS arrival. Following the completion of backloading the remaining runway personnel will begin to depart Ascension, with the final personnel departing around the end of July 2023.

## 7. Any other business

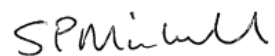
There were seven items of **other business**:

- i. **Two Boats Playground:** Councillor Nicholls explained that he had received concern from a constituent regarding the lack of safety barriers at the Two Boats playground resulting in children playing on half built, potentially dangerous equipment. The Administrator agreed action was required and requested that Councillor Nicholls submit the enquiry through a Councillor Enquiry Form to allow a full and thorough response.
- ii. **Feral Donkeys:** Councillor Nicholls reported that he has received a number of complaints and concerns raised by residents living in Georgetown in relation to the disturbance feral donkeys in the area are causing. Councillor Nicholls explained that the donkeys often congregate to seek shade beneath the large Mexican Thorn bushes in the CUBA area of Georgetown, to deter this Councillor Nicholls requested that these Mexican Thorn bushes are removed, especially given its close proximity to the school bus stop. Further discussion was had regarding people feeding the donkeys in Georgetown, it was agreed that the recent Public Notice requesting the community not to feed the donkeys would be redistributed.
- iii. **Street lights and MUGA light in Two Boats Village:** Councillor Kyla Benjamin reported that she has received feedback from constituents that there is an area of street lights, as well as the MUGA complex flood lights not working. Councillor Kyla Benjamin highlighted the health and safety risks around having no street lights in a well-used area and requested that the issue is investigated with haste. Acting Director of Resources explained that the AIG are aware of the fault and are awaiting Encompass to fault find the issue. The Administrator requested that Councillor Kyla Benjamin submit the enquiry through a Councillor Enquiry Form to allow a full and thorough response.
- iv. **ITT for AIG Guest House:** Councillor Kerry Benjamin requested an update on the tendering process for the AIG Guest House. The ADoR explained that whilst the tender documents went out and the tender window has now closed, insufficient responses were received to proceed. The ADoR explained that the AIG senior management team would meet the following week to consider the next steps, following that an update will be provided to Council.
- v. **Future of Ascension:** Councillor Kerry Benjamin thanked Councillors for their report on the recent JMC and Bilateral held in London and asked if there has, to date, been any progress on the Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith following up with a meeting with the MOD regarding the future of Ascension and whether there is any correspondence that can be shared with Councillors at this time. The Administrator explained that there are currently plans underway for a senior official's visit from both the FCDO and the MOD scheduled for the beginning of July 2023, acknowledging that one of the key elements of that visit will be engagement with the Island Council. Councillor Nicholls asked whether the aforementioned official visit will be in conjunction with the official opening of the airfield, the Administrator explained that it has not yet been decided when the official airfield opening would take place.
- vi. **Drop in Sessions:** Councillor Shearer reported on a productive Councillor drop in Session recently held in Two Boats where a range of topics were discussed with constituents. Councillor Shearer noted that as most feedback was in relation to Public Works; these issues would be addressed at the next informal Public Works Committee meeting due to be held on 14 June 2023. Councillor Shearer reported engagement with constituents regarding the various ongoing public consultations that are taking place, with all feedback being collated and provided to the respective directorate.
- vii. **Telecommunications in Ascension:** HE the Governor spoke about reports of unpleasant behaviour being directed towards staff working for Sure. HE the Governor requested that Councillors, as community leaders, use their influence and contact with constituents to re-iterate the need for mutual respect and make sure unacceptable behaviour was called out. The Attorney General explained that as the AIG engage with various parties on complex telecommunications issues it is imperative the engagement takes place with diplomacy and in a calm atmosphere. Councillor Nicholls said he had heard reports of Sure staff being unpleasant to customers who were cancelling their contracts and that respect was needed in both directions. The Administrator explained that the Attorney General will be visiting Ascension Island from 10 to 13 June 2023 on a familiarisation visit during which Councillors will have an opportunity to meet and discuss issues with him.

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 17:15

Siobhan Stewart  
Clerk of Council

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Minshall'.

*Simon Minshall*

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