

**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 Monday 03 August 2023 at the Courthouse

MEETING SUMMARY

Present: HH Simon Minshull, Administrator
Catherine Leo, Acting Director of Resources
Councillor Kerry Benjamin
Councillor Alan Nicholls
Councillor Laura Shearer
Councillor Kyla Benjamin

In attendance: Carl Mackerras, Head of the Administrator's Office
Matthew James, Crown Counsel
Siobhan Stewart, Clerk to Council

Apologies: Councillor Douglas Miller (overseas)

The Administrator welcomed all parties and thanked everyone for attending.

There were currently no actions on the actions tracker.

The Administrator confirmed that the annual Overseas Territories Join Ministerial Council (JMC) is due to take place on 14-15 November 2023. The Administrator explained that in preparation for the JMC there is likely to be a number of OT Sherpa meetings in the coming months where the agenda will be set for the political discussion later in the year. The Administrator requested that elected members consider who they wish to nominate to attend the JMC in November on behalf of the Ascension Island Council. Discussion was had regarding the minimising of costs given that when budget setting earlier in the year, only one JMC was budgeted for. Councillors agreed to nominate up to two elected members to attend the JMC at the next formal meeting of Council.

The Head of the Administrator's Office (HoAO) explained that the United Kingdom Overseas Territories Association (UKOTA) exists to advance the interests of the United Kingdom Overseas Territories, facilitate co-operation between them and promote solidarity. The UKOTA Constitution states that Each Member shall be represented in the Association by one natural person duly appointed by them and empowered to act on their behalf, referred to as the Appointed Representative. The Appointed Representative will be required to share information from UKOTA with fellow elected members and seek/provide a co-ordinated response where required, as well as attending regular virtual meetings. The HoAO requested that elected members consider who they wish to nominate to be the Appointed Representative of Ascension Island. Councillor Nicholls highlighted that Ascension is the only Overseas Territory at a disadvantage with no representation based in London. The Administrator agreed to raise the concern with HE the Governor during his visit to St Helena in September 2023.

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

- i. **Creche Facilities on Ascension:** Councillor Kerry Benjamin reported of constituent requests for AIG to consider looking into options and plans in relation to a creche facility on island. The Administrator thanked Councillor Kerry Benjamin for raising this issue and offered reassurance that this will be addressed through the Ascension Safeguarding Children Board firstly, with the intention of further discussion in Council September 2023.
- ii. **AIG Guest House:** Councillor Kerry Benjamin requested an up date on the AIG Guest House future plans. The Administrator requested that a Councillor Enquiry Form (CEF) be submitted to allow a full response following the FCDO/MOD Officials visit next week.
- iii. **FCDO/MOD Officials Visit:** The Administrator confirmed that the FCDO and MOD Senior Officials visit is forecast to take place from 07 to 08 August 2023 where constituent views on the future of Ascension will

- be sought, through Councillors, with the view to making recommendations to ministers.
- iv. **OT Strategy:** Councillor Nicholls requested an update on the OT Strategy. The Administrator confirmed that the Overseas Territories Polar Directorate is leading on this strategy and are expected to be in touch soon.
 - v. **Transit access to the Airbridge:** Councillor Nicholls noted that the Public Notice issued in May 2023 said that the decision to not permit transit bookings would be reviewed once the Airbridge was re-established. Councillors Nicholls requested an update on this review. The Administrator confirmed that an update would be provided following the FCDO/MOD Officials visit next week.
 - vi. **Procedure Committee Enquiry:** Councillor Nicholls explained that the House of Commons Procedure Committee had recently informed him that they are undertaking an inquiry in the procedure of the House of Commons and the territorial constitution, following the Speaker of the House of Commons request for options of representation of the Overseas Territories to be considered, of which the Committee has agreed to do so. Councillor Shearer highlighted the other House of Commons enquiry that was launched in May 2023 that was looking into the UK's relationship with the Overseas Territories in the 21st Century. Councillor Shearer highlighted that it was agreed that that a collated response would be submitted following a period of Public Consultation with a deadline for final response from Councillors of 04 September 2023. The Administrator requested the HoAO to collate responses on behalf of Council.
 - vii. **UKOTA Article:** Councillor Shearer thanked the AIG Policy, Projects and Communications Officer, Khushboo Khatra for her efforts in ensuring Ascension Island is included in the UKOTA Newsletter.
 - viii. **Garden Cottage:** Councillor Shearer requested that an overview of the plans for Garden Cottage be provided to Council, following feedback from constituents in relation to the general condition of Garden Cottage and the surrounding lawn. The Administrator requested that a Councillor Enquiry Form (CEF) be submitted to allow a full response to be provided.
 - ix. **Minimum wage & Income Tax:** Councillor Shearer requested an update from Finance Committee Members following discussion some time ago regarding a review of taxation tiers and the consideration of options of introducing a minimum wage. Crown Counsel explained that during the Public Consultation into the Employment Ordinance the consensus was that a minimum wage was not wanted and was not deemed appropriate for Ascension. Discussion was had regarding tiered levels of taxation with Crown Counsel suggesting that this can be captured and considered during the review of the AIG Business Policy. Councillor Shearer explained that feedback from constituents is that those on the lower incomes are struggling somewhat.

The meeting closed at 10:35

Siobhan Stewart
Clerk to Council