



## Formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council

16:30 on Thursday 21 March 2024 at the Courthouse

### MINUTES

Present: HE Stephen Thwaites, Acting Governor [remotely] Councillor Kerry Benjamin  
HH Carl Mackerras, Acting Administrator Councillor Kyla Benjamin  
Peter Thomas, Director of Resources Councillor Alan Nicholls  
Councillor Laura Shearer  
Councillor Gordon Worthington

In attendance: Matthew James, Crown Counsel  
Ailsa Hearne, FCDO Desk Officer (remotely)  
Siobhan Stewart, Clerk of Council

Apologies: David Ballantyne, Attorney General

### 1. Welcome

HH the Administrator welcomed all parties present and those attending remotely. The Administrator conveyed his congratulations to Councillor Gordon Worthington on his appointment as an Island Councillor, adding that he looks forward to working collaboratively in the future. The Administrator conveyed his commiserations to the other Election Candidates who also ran for Council and thanked the Returning Officers, Presiding Officers, Assistant Presiding Officers and Counting Clerks for their hard work on polling day. HE the Governor also conveyed his congratulations to Councillor Gordon Worthington and welcomed him to the Island Council.

### 2. Approval of Minutes

**Decision:** The summary of the informal Council meeting held on 18 January 2024 and published on 13 February 2024 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 01 February 2024 and published on 21 February 2024 was accepted and in accordance with the Council Rules these were agreed by Council members.

### 3. Matters arising

Matters arising were addressed via the action's tracker. There were two topics on the tracker which was discussed as follows:

**Pets on the MOD FIRS:** The Administrator explained that the Ministry of Defence (DSCOM, MOD) have recently confirmed there has been a change of policy and that dogs and cats (unless owned by a member of the UK Armed Services, or a MOD Civil Servant) are no longer permitted on the Falkland Island Resupply Ship (FIRS). Whilst bookings are still currently being permitted for dogs and cats to be transported on the FIRS back to the UK from Ascension, no bookings are being accepted for pets to be transported from the UK to Ascension. The Administrator confirmed that the same policy change has been applied to the Falklands Islands. The Desk Officer in Overseas Territories and Polar Regions Directorate in the FCDO has been requested to raise this issue with the MOD. An update will be provided to Council following these discussions.

**Future vet visit plans:** The AIG has written to the Veterinary Practice Manager on the Falklands Islands in an attempt to explore the possibility of adding a stopover for pet owners on Ascension as part of their regular travel

plans. The Falkland Islands Veterinary team have agreed to consider the request at their next staff meeting. The Administrator reported that a member of AIG SMT will be visiting the Falkland Islands in the coming weeks where it is hoped that a face to face meeting can be arranged. Failing this, the AIG will continue to explore other potential options.

#### 4. 2024/2025 Operational and Capital Budget Appropriation

The Director of Resources (DoR) reported that the Finance Committee has met both informally and formally to scrutinise business cases and papers which details the Government’s proposed Revenue and Expenditure estimates for the financial year 2024/2025. Following scrutiny, on 11 March 2024, the Finance Committee recommended to the Island Council an appropriation of funds, as follows.

- From the Consolidated Fund a sum of £8.115M for operational expenditure.
- From the Development Fund a sum of £410.2K for capital projects expenditure.

The DoR advised Council that the Attorney General has reviewed the draft Appropriation Ordinance with no comments made.

The DoR expressed his thanks to colleagues within the Resources Directorate for producing the budget, Officers throughout AIG for their support and Councillors for their diligence and contributions made throughout the whole budget setting process. Prior to taking the vote the DoR opened the floor to Councillors to make comment and ask questions.

Councillor Shearer requested confirmation that the budget for rodenticide bait had been increased to reflect the increase in the rodent population on island. The DoR confirmed that the procurement budget for the Environmental Health team had been increased accordingly.

**The DoR asked each Councillor in turn if they are happy to take the proposal for an appropriation of £8.115M for operational expenditure to the Consolidated Fund for the 2023/24 financial year, as well as an appropriation of £410.2K for capital projects expenditure to the Development Fund for the 2024/25 financial year forward as a recommendation to the Governor?**

	Proposal	Cllr Kyla Benjamin	Cllr Kerry Benjamin	Cllr Alan Nicholls	Cllr Laura Shearer	Cllr Gordon Worthington
1	<p><b>For an appropriation of £8.115M for operational expenditure to the Consolidated Fund for the 2024/25 financial year to be taken forward as a recommendation to the Governor and;</b></p> <p><b>For an appropriation of £410.2K for capital projects expenditure to the Development Fund for the 2024/25 financial year to be taken forward as a recommendation to the Governor</b></p>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

**HE the Governor acknowledged Councillors recommendation and accepted, thanking Councillors for their advice.**

HE the Governor thanked the DoR and the Finance team for their hard work on delivering this year’s budget and thanked Councillors for their recommendation today, whilst conveying particular thanks to the Finance Committee members for their diligence and necessary oversight over the last few months.

## 5. Business Levy

The DoR explained that following discussion and consideration the Finance Committee recommended to the Island Council that the Business Levy remain at the same level for the next financial year, at £1.6M with the breakdown to the employing organisations based on employee number statistics.

The DoR advised Council that the Attorney General has reviewed the Business Levy Draft Ordinance and has made two comments, both of which are minor changes to titles.

Prior to taking the vote the DoR opened the floor to Councillors to make comment and ask questions. No questions or comments were made.

**The DoR asked each Councillor in turn if they are happy to take the proposal of leaving the Business Levy at the same level forward as a recommendation to the Governor.**

	Proposal	Cllr Kyla Benjamin	Cllr Kerry Benjamin	Cllr Alan Nicholls	Cllr Laura Shearer	Cllr Gordon Worthington
2	<b>The proposal of leaving the Business Levy at the same level to be taken forward as a recommendation to the Governor</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>

**HE the Governor acknowledged Councillors recommendation and accepted, thanking Councillors for their advice.**

## 6. Any other business

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

- i. **Public Works Committee:** Councillor Nicholls reported that following the departure of Councillor Douglas Miller in February 2024 there is now a resulting vacancy within the Public Works Committee. Councillor Nicholls noted that Councillor Gordon Worthington has expressed a willingness to join this Committee and invited Councillors to confirm their contentment. Councillors agreed that Councillor Gordon Worthington should be recommended to HE the Governor to be appointed as a member of the Public Works Committee. Discussion was had regarding the vacancy on the Health and Social Care Committee with Councillors agreeing to confirm membership by email.
- ii. **Employment Ordinance:** Crown Counsel agreed to set out the process for Councillors in proposing changes in legislation to Council for consideration and agreed to meet separately to discuss if Councillors wished to do so.
- iii. **Public Works:** Councillor Shearer commented that since her recent return to island she has noticed significant progress in community project work such as improvements to campsites and flood defences. She expressed her thanks to AIG for these improvements.
- iv. **Clerk to Council:** The Administrator requested that Councillors note that the Clerk to Council will be on overseas leave until the end of May 2024. During that time Mrs Denise John will be covering Clerk to Council duties.
- v. **Overseas Territories Strategy:** The Administrator referred to the discussion paper shared with Councillors regarding consultations on the UK Government Strategy for the Overseas Territories. The Administrator confirmed that the Sure high-speed internet suite had been reserved for Councillors to attend the meeting with David Rutley MP, Minister for Americas, Caribbean and the Overseas Territories on 16 April 2024. Councillor Kerry Benjamin suggested to her fellow Councillors that they meet separately beforehand to consider the discussion paper. Provisional dates have also been pencilled in for Becky Richards, Deputy Director of the Overseas Territories Polar Directorate to visit Ascension between 07-10 May 2024 to discuss the strategy in detail with Councillors.

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 16:45

Siobhan Stewart  
Clerk of Council

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



*Carl Mackerras*  
*On behalf of HE the Acting Governor, Mr Stephen Thwaites*