



Formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council
16:30 on Thursday 05 September 2024 at the Courthouse
MINUTES

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

In attendance: Matthew James, Crown Counsel
Madeleine Roper, FCDO Desk Officer
Siobhan Stewart, Clerk of Council

Apologies: Attorney General, David Ballantyne
Carl Mackerras, Head of Administrator's Office
Ailsa Hearne, FCDO Desk Officer

1. Welcome

HH the Administrator welcomed all parties present and those attending remotely. The Administrator acknowledged Councillor Kerry Benjamin's Registration of Interest in relation to her employment with Sure South Atlantic Ltd [SSA] and as per S9.(3) of the Island Council (Procedure) Rules, 2020 (Sections 12 and 16), ordered that Councillor Kerry Benjamin be allowed to remain at the meeting but may neither participate in the discussion nor vote in relation to agenda item four.

2. Approval of Minutes

The summary of the informal Council meeting held on 04 July 2024, and published on 29 July 2024, was accepted and in accordance with the Council Rules were agreed by Council members.

The minutes of the formal Council meeting held on 17 July 2024, and published on 06 August 2024, were accepted and in accordance with the Council Rules were agreed by Council members.

The summary of the informal Council meeting held on 14 August 2024, and published on 30 August 2024, was accepted and in accordance with the Council Rules were agreed by Council members.

3. Matters arising

Matters arising were addressed via the Action's Tracker:

Pets on the MOD FIRS: The Administrator explained that no decision has been made as to whether pets only belonging to MOD Military Personnel and MOD Civil Servants will be carried on the FIRS, meaning civilians based in Ascension may no longer have access to this service. Discussions are ongoing with both British Forces South Atlantic Islands [BFSAI] and Defence Supply Chain Operations and Movements [DSCOM]. The Administrator agreed for the item to remain on the actions tracker until a final decision is made.

Future vet visit plans: The Administrator confirmed that a bid has been made to the AIMPACT fund to support a vet visit to Ascension. The AIMPACT Advisory Board will meet in the coming weeks to consider all bids submitted.

4. Supplementary Appropriation

The Director Resources [DoR] explained that following councillors’ scrutiny and detailed discussions on 15 August 2024 regarding the draft Memorandum of Understanding [MOU] between AIG and Sure South Atlantic, Councillors made a recommendation to HE the Governor, Nigel Phillips CBE, that the AIG sign the MOU with Sure South Atlantic [SSA] to secure the provision of essential telecommunications systems and the AIG’s IT Services contract to maintain resilience on the Island. Councillors were advised at the earlier meeting of the financial commitments the MOU would place upon the AIG and Councillors agreed to recommend to the Governor the approval of a Supplementary Appropriation Ordinance for the expenditure, above that already budgeted for, that would be incurred as a result of the MOU during the 2024/2025 Financial Year.

Councillor Nicholls noted that since the last meeting where the MOU was recommended for signing, it is believed there has been a change in the forecast number of SSA employees that will be located in Ascension. Councillor Nicholls asked whether this is likely to affect any service output by SSA, highlighting the importance of continued maintenance to essential telecommunications services in Ascension. The Administrator explained that the level of service that SSA must provide will be defined in the contracts that underpin the MOU, which will also include Key Performance Indicators [KPIs] to ensure an agreed level of service is maintained. Discussion was had regarding potential remote support for Ascension. The Administrator explained that it will be for SSA to decide how it delivers those KPIs and reassured Councillors that mechanisms will be in place should KPI standards not be met.

Councillor Worthington asked whether consideration has been given to applying any savings made by SSA in reducing their physical headcount on island, to offset the level of subsidy being paid by the AIG to SSA. The DoR explained that the contract between the AIG and SSA will be based on an agreed amount for the provision of essential services, not on a specific employee head count.

Councillor Nicholls asked whether the recent overspend identified during the Residency refurbishment project will also be addressed in this Supplementary Appropriation. The DoR explained that is likely that alternative funding streams such as underspends in other areas will be used to offset this overspend, rather than a Supplementary Appropriation.

The DoR invited Councillors to recommend the draft Supplementary Appropriation Ordinance to HE the Acting Governor, Stephen Thwaites, as an addition to the 2024/2025 budget pack. The Administrator explained that all four Councillors eligible to vote have voted in favour of the below. HE the Acting Governor, Stephen Thwaites, thanked Councillors for their advice and accepted their recommendation.

	Proposal	Councillor Kyla Benjamin	Councillor Nicholls	Councillor Shearer	Councillor Worthington
1	£208,500 Subsidy payment for the provision of public telecommunications services	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	£98,500 AIG IT Support Contract	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

5. Public and Government Holidays 2025

The Administrator provided a brief update and background to the declaring of Public Holidays on Ascension Island highlighting the schedule in the Public Holidays Ordinance where the official Public Holidays are listed. Ascension Day in 2025 falls on Thursday 29 May. The Administrator proposed that Councillors may wish to consider directing that the Ascension Day Public Holiday be observed on Friday 30 May 2025 in order to provide a more efficient working week and greater flexibility to island residents.

	Proposal	Councillor Kyla Benjamin	Councillor Nicholls	Councillor Shearer	Councillor Worthington	Councillor Kerry Benjamin
1	Ascension Day to be observed on Friday 30 May 2025 instead of Thursday 29 May 2025.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Councillors were invited to note that approval had been received from the Royal Unit to hold this year's King's Birthday Party on Saturday 26 October 2024 at The Residency, and that following Councillors direction at a previous council meeting, Ascension will overserve Friday 15 November 2024 as a public holiday to mark the occasion of the birthday of His Majesty King Charles III, in line with St Helena. The Administrator confirmed that a notice regarding the Public Holiday in 2025, to mark the occasion of the Birthday of His Majesty King Charles III, will issue at a later date.

6. Any other business

There were three items of other business:

- i. **Starlink:** Councillor Worthington requested an update the availability of the Starlink Regional Roam package in Ascension. The Administrator confirmed that the AIG has been advised by Starlink that problems subscribers reported with the activation of the Mobile-Regional roam service had now been resolved. Councillor Shearer offered her thanks to Crown Counsel and the AIG for their efforts in licencing Starlink on Ascension.
- i. **Legislative Changes:** Crown Counsel advised Councillors that a meeting where a process can be set out to enable Councillors to propose changes in legislation will convene in around a week's time.
- i. **Governor Visit:** The Administrator reported that HE the Governor, Nigel Phillips CBE, will visit Ascension Island from 12 -15 September 2024, during which time elected members will be invited to meet him.

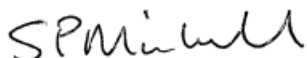
3. Proposed dates of next meetings:

Informal Council Meeting – 10:00 26 September 2024
 Formal Council Meeting – 16:30 09 October 2024

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 Minshull

On behalf of HE the Acting Governor, Mr Stephen Thwaites