



Formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council Finance Committee

16:30 on Wednesday 19 February 2025 at the Court House

MINUTES

Present: Peter Thomas Director of Resources

Councillor Kerry Benjamin
Councillor Laura Shearer
Councillor Alan Nicholls

In attendance: Catherine Jones, Deputy Director of Resources
Kitty George, Shipping and Operations Officer
Mark Thomas, Motor Transport Team Leader
Fiona Benjamin, Acting Clerk of Council

Apologies:

1. Welcome

The Director of Resources (DoR) welcomed all parties to the Formal Meeting of the Ascension Island Council Finance Committee.

2. Review of Capital Business Cases

The DoR explained that he will run through each of the 13 capital business cases submitted throughout all directorates of Government, which have previously been considered by the Senior Management Team (SMT) and that each capital bid being presented to the Finance Committee is for scrutiny and seeks Councillors approval for recommendation for inclusion in the 2025/26 financial year's budget on a case by case basis.

The DoR invited any Councillor who believe they may have a potential conflict of interest to any of the bids being put forward, to declare this now or at the commencement of the capital business case.

Councillor Laura Shearer declared a potential conflict of Interest with regards to the Procurement of the Truck for the Conservation Directorate; Councillor Shearer said she works for Conservation but that she did not believe that this potential conflict of interest would prevent her in voting objectively on this business case.

2.1 Replacement of interactive smart boards and computer monitors

The DoR reported on a business case put forward from the Headteacher of Two Boats School for the purchase of 3 replacement interactive smart boards and computer monitors up to the value of £9,000.

The DoR said the importance of purchasing the replacement interactive smart boards and monitors played a vital role in supporting the education of students in Two Boats School. The interactive boards currently used at the school are near their end of life have lines down the screen. A number of monitors also need replacing as they are no longer operational. The DoR also mentioned that the interactive boards which are looking to be replaced might be moved within Government where there is a lower need; for example, it could be used in Operations in case of an emergency or throughout the Government.

Councillor Kerry Benjamin asked if the new interactive boards would be compatible with the systems already

in place; the DoR confirmed yes, they will be. Councillor Laura Shearer asked how old are the current interactive boards, as she felt some had been purchased within the last few years and said her concerns would be that potentially if they wouldn't work or didn't have a long quality of life, would it be better if a projector could be used instead. The DoR said he did not know the answer to this and said he would seek confirmation from the Head Teacher.

Due to further information needed on the interactive boards; the age, and if they were compatible with the system already in place, it was requested by the Committee Members that the DoR speak to the Head Teacher and to re-bid once all questions of concern had been addressed.

2.2 Iveco Daily 20-seater passenger mini bus

The DoR thanked Mark Thomas for the business case and explained that the current Bus A954 which is 10 years old and being used for home to duty transport as well as the Public Transport on the weekends, has excessive roof corrosion, and 4 windows which needed replacing. It was noted that in its current state as time goes on it will fail the MOT and to place money into such a vehicle that is unreliable and unsafe was not deemed best value for money. It was therefore proposed to purchase an Iveco daily 20-seater passenger mini bus.

Councillor Nicholls asked who is responsible for the MOT's, it was confirmed that MT (Mark Thomas) is responsible for the MOT's within AIG, however, it was noted that MT did not have a personal conflict of interest in this bid. Councillor Nicholls also asked if the current bus was too expensive to repair. Mark Thomas said 4 windows that needed to be replaced cost about £4,000. The badly corroded roof will cost time and labour and it will probably need a new engine as time goes on. Councillor Laura Shearer said she takes the opinion of the chief mechanic with regards to this decision and just needed clarification if the £61,438.50 included shipping, which it did.

The DoR asked if the new vehicle will be cheaper to run; will it be more fuel efficient and if the emissions are likely to be lower on a modern vehicle than that of an older vehicle. Mark Thomas said the engine will be bigger, so fuel consumption may be higher and the emissions are a Euro 3 which is better from a mechanical side for repairing. Mark Thomas stated the current bus is a Euro 6, so it has a higher emission but has more faults especially with the DPF systems.

It was also noted that the cost of £61,439.50 was exclusive of VAT and because the Iveco Brand of vehicles are already part of the AIG Fleet, parts or spares for these vehicles were standard and held here on stock.

The DoR asked each Committee Member in turn if they are happy to take the proposal forward for an appropriation of £61,439 for capital expenditure to the Development Fund for the purchase of an Iveco Daily 20-seater passenger mini bus?

	Proposal	Councillor Laura Shearer	Councillor Kerry Benjamin	Councillor Alan Nicholls
2	Iveco Daily 20-seater passenger mini bus up to the value of £61,439.50	Yes	Yes	Yes

2.3 Iveco Daily Tippers x 2

The DoR introduced the next business case and said that originally the request was to purchase 3 tipper vehicles, but it was suggested by the SMT that only 2 tipper vehicles should be procured at this time.

A1325 which was previously used by the AIG Carpenters, and is currently being used by the Gardeners, needs extensive body repairs. Whilst some corrosion repairs have been completed to keep the vehicle in a state whereby it could pass the MOT, it will soon fail due to the vehicle being badly corroded in other areas on the cab and tray. Once the Facilities team is back to full staff, it will become a problem as the vehicle will be needed by both the Gardner's and the Carpenters.

The DoR said that vans of an age of 10 and 12 years old would generally be considered by commercial organisations as past the point of needing replacement.

Councillor Kerry Benjamin queried the cost difference of freight between UK and SA. The DoR said freight cost from SA was considerably higher than the cost of freight from UK.

The DoR asked each Committee Member in turn if they are happy to take forward the proposal for an appropriation of £76,948 for capital expenditure to the Development Fund for the purchase of 2 x Iveco Daily Tippers?

	Proposal	Councillor Laura Shearer	Councillor Kerry Benjamin	Councillor Alan Nicholls
3	Iveco Daily Tippers x 2 up to the value of £76,948	Yes	Yes	Yes

2.4 Procurement of Toyota Hilux or Ford Ranger Dual Cab Truck

The DoR introduced the next business case and explained this proposal is for the procurement of a Toyota Hilux or Ford Ranger Dual Cab truck as an additional vehicle for the Conservation Directorate. It was considered that the best choice of vehicle for the terrain and activities required for Conservation work would be the Landrover Defender, but these vehicles are no longer in production and only second-hand models are available.

Discussion with the MT Team Leader Mark Thomas had identified the Toyato Hilux or the Ford Ranger with Euro 4 specifications and rugged tires was the most suitable option for use in the Conservation Directorate, which will allow for access to most of the remote areas on the island and will be easier to maintain within the capacity of the MT department.

Quotes were sourced from Richard James International, Team Leyland and Zedcore. It was decided that whilst Team Leyland were not able to assist with the procurement of a second-hand Landover Defender, they were able to supply a quote for a Toyota Hilux with Euro 4 specification. Team Leyland also offers and provides help, advice and technical support when needed.

It was questioned whether or not the vehicle could be funded by external partners. It was confirmed the UK Government's Darwin Initiative have agreed to procure a vehicle to allow Conservation to conduct community engagement. It was explained that Conservation has 9 vehicles all over 10 years of age and most of them are regularly in MT for repairs leaving the team with having to share or shuffle different teams around which makes the work load less effective and will continue to have an impact over the years to come.

Councillor Kerry Benjamin asked if the purchase of second-hand vehicles had been looked into? It was mentioned some companies were unable to provide quotes for second hand vehicles and for one potential supplier Mark Thomas advised when they asked to be shown pictures of the engine for a second-hand Landover, the supplier would not send any. The DoR asked Councillors if they needed further clarification or questions regarding the proposed Ford Ranger Truck that he could take forward. Councillor Nicholls asked why the Ford Ranger must be purchased instead of the Toyota Hilux; Mark Thomas said that the Ford Ranger Truck is easier to work with and parts are here on island.

The DoR asked each Committee Member in turn if they are happy to take forward the proposal for an appropriation of £34,500 for capital expenditure to the Development Fund for the purchase of a Toyota Hilux or Ford Ranger Dual Cab Truck?

	Proposal	Councillor Laura Shearer	Councillor Kerry Benjamin	Councillor Alan Nicholls
4	Ford Ranger Dual Cab Truck up to the value of £34,500	Yes	Yes	Yes

2.5 Lowering Device from Crane

The DoR explained that a business case has been submitted to provide a safety harness and device for the crane operator to improve the safety and wellbeing of the operators. If purchased the harness/device will be kept in the crane cabin.

Kitty George (KG) said the safety device with harness was something that should have already been in place, and was picked up by the various ongoing Port Training received over the last year and by the British Engineering Services Inspectors.

Various discussion took place with regards to the Safety Device and KG said the safety device will be purchased through Liebherr which is specially designed for the Liebherr Crane and instructors from Liebherr will come to deliver training regarding this safety device. If purchased, and once in place this device will be added to the list of equipment that must be inspected on a 6-monthly basis.

The DoR asked each Committee Member in turn if they are happy to take forward the proposal for an appropriation of £3,033 for capital expenditure to the Development Fund for the purchase of a Lowering device for the Crane?

	Proposal	Councillor Laura Shearer	Councillor Kerry Benjamin	Councillor Alan Nicholls
5	Lowering Device for Crane up to the value of £3,033	Yes	Yes	Yes

2.6 Ride on Lawn Mower

The DoR explained that a business case was submitted for the purchase of a ride on lawn mower.

KG explained that the request for a purchase of a new lawn mower came about due to the previous lawn mower having to constantly go to MT for repairs due to the increase in sturdy stick weeds on the lawns at Red Lion and Garden Cottage. It was said the poor-quality grass and weeds often burn out the motor and causes the belts to break on the previous lawn mower to a point whereby the MT Team Leader would not allow it to be used.

Councillor Kerry Benjamin queried if the purchase of a new ride on lawn mower could be procured through the AIMPACT Fund. The DoR confirmed he would be happy if members wanted to approve the ride on lawn mower on the basis that AIMPACT funding is secured as a first option and if unsuccessful members would be happy to take this forward to the Development Fund for purchasing.

Councillor Alan Nicholls referred to the quote for the Lawn mower and queried if 3 quotes were obtained for purchasing over a certain price. KG said various lawn mowers were looked at and Team Leyland was decided the best one for the job. It was noted that in future all 3 quotes would be sent with the applications submitted for approval.

It was confirmed that all relevant training will be given to staff on how to use the new ride on lawn mower and that the sum of £17,585 included shipping.

The DoR asked each Committee Member in turn if they are happy to take forward the proposal for an appropriation of £17,585 for capital expenditure to the Development Fund for the purchase of a Ride on Lawn Mower subject to AIMPACT Funding not being successful?

	Proposal	Councillor Laura Shearer	Councillor Kerry Benjamin	Councillor Alan Nicholls
6	Ride on Lawn Mower up to the value of £17,585	Yes	Yes	Yes

2.7 Marine Sea Modular Flood Light (WHITE) *5

The DoR explained that the proposal requested for the purchase of the Marine Sea Modular Flood lights up the value of £12,639, no longer needed approval from the Council Members as KG had secured funding from Maritime Coastguard Agency.

2.8 Man Basket, Pierhead Forklift

The DoR explained that a request has been submitted for a Man Basket for the pierhead forklift.

KG said the man basket required for the pierhead forklift is reaching the end of its life. The basket has become corroded and badly worn and has been confirmed by MT it would cost more to have it repaired than purchasing a replacement. It was noted that this man basket would be speciality made to suit the pierhead forklift.

The DoR asked each Committee Member in turn if they are happy to take forward the proposal for an appropriation of £2,350 for capital expenditure to the Development Fund for a replacement Man Basket for the Pierhead Forklift?

	Proposal	Councillor Laura Shearer	Councillor Kerry Benjamin	Councillor Alan Nicholls
7	Replacement Man Basket, for Pierhead Forklift up to the value of £2,350	Yes	Yes	Yes

2.9 Procure additional road signs and barriers

The DoR explained that a request was submitted for the purchase of additional road signage and barriers.

KG said due to the change in water patterns on Ascension, the AIG Plant team are carrying out road repairs more frequently than before. The severity of the rainstorms can cause extensive damage to some of the roads and infrastructure and this can result in certain roads and areas being closed off in the interest of public safety. KG said our cache of road signs and equipment are no longer sufficient nor adequate during or following these rainstorms.

Discussion took place regarding the various signs and equipment that was proposed for purchasing. It was queried on what occasions would the VMS Trailer be used as it was such a high cost compared to the cost of the other safety signs and equipment. KG said it would be use to enhanced the safety of the workers and could be used in the day or night. Councillor Nicholls noted that an additional annual charge of £300.00 was quoted for the ongoing software support for the VMS Trailer if purchased after the 1st year. The DoR said that any additional ongoing operational budget request would need to be processed via the correct procedure if the bid was approved.

It was discussed if the proposed bid should be spilt into 2 singular capital bids or to remain as just 1 single bid. The DDoR said in the audit process it might be a bit difficult trying to show all of the assets due to the nature of the environment they would be used in. It was suggested that perhaps this request should be absorbed into the normal budget and not a capital bid.

The DoR asked each Committee Member in turn if they are happy to take forward the proposal for an appropriation of £22,013 for capital expenditure to the Development Fund for additional road signs and barriers?

Councillors agreed that the additional road signs and equipment should be absorbed into the normal budget, not capital funding and therefore, Councillors unanimously voted to not approve this business case. It was suggested that going forward a bid could be made through IP Funding.

	Proposal	Councillor Laura Shearer	Councillor Kerry Benjamin	Councillor Alan Nicholls
8	Additional road signs & Barriers up to the value of £22,013	No	No	No

2.10 Purchase of 1 x 10,000 litre and 1 x 2,400 litre fuel tanks

The DoR referred to the business case for the purchase of an additional 1 x 10 litre and 1 x 2,400 litre fuel tank for use at the Incinerator Waste Site.

KG said the current 10,000 litre fuel tank that feeds the incinerator with diesel is leaking and it is not possible to repair. Additionally, 45 litre drums used for waste oil for the incinerator also need replaced.

Councillor Kerry Benjamin asked if an Intermediate Bulk Container (IBC) could be used for the storing of waste oil. It was confirmed that this was not possible because of operating constraints and that the IBC would not meet the required operating specifications. In addition, the IBC was expensive to run and did not operate for the required period it may be needed. Councillor Benjamin also asked if the tanks came with a warranty, and KG confirmed that they did.

The DoR asked each Committee Member in turn if they are happy to take forward the proposal for an appropriation of £14,500 for capital expenditure to the Development Fund for the purchase of 1 x 10,000 litre tank and 1 x 2,400 litre fuel tank?

	Proposal	Councillor Laura Shearer	Councillor Kerry Benjamin	Councillor Alan Nicholls
9	Purchase of 1 x 10,000 & 2,400 litre fuel tanks up to the value of £14,500	Yes	Yes	Yes

2.11 Ford Truck Canopy

The DoR explained that a proposed bid was submitted for a Ford Truck Canopy for Sea & Land Rescue.

Councillors agreed that more information was needed to support this capital bid. The DoR said he would discuss this with the Lead and Trainer - Sea and Land Rescue Services, and may give him the chance to support his case at a further meeting.

2.12 Replacement of AIG Laundry Equipment

The DoR referred to the business case for a proposed second industrial washing machine, dryer and press.

The DDoR gave a summary of the proposed bid and said no specific quotes were submitted with this bid, as they were not confident the full bid was going to be accepted. Bids would be sought once it was known what the Finance Committee was willing to approve.

The SPA (Stores, Procurement & Accommodation) Team Leader had requested a bid of £30K to include the purchase of an additional washing machine, dryer and press. It was stated that the priority item would be the industrial tumble dryer.

The DDoR said that the cost of the industrial washing machine that was purchased from the previous budget was £13K and based on that costing, believed the costing of the proposed industrial tumble dryer would be up to the value of £15K.

Councillors agreed that the DDoR should obtain quotes for the industrial tumble dryer and re-address the bid once quotations were received.

2.13 Canopy Georgetown Play Area

The DoR referred to the request for the replacement canopy at the Georgetown Play Park.

No information was submitted via a business case but the DDoR remarked that the canopy is torn and needs replacing. The DDoR stated that four quotes were received between the values of £5k and £900. It was noted that the canopy that needed replacing was 10 years of age and that the replacement canopy should be of the same or similar quality which can last another 10 years.

Councillor Kerry Benjamin asked if the quality could be reviewed to ensure it was UV resistant and hard wearing. Councillor Benjamin also asked if this was something that could be funded out of the AIMPACT Fund?

The DoR said he would take forward to the Head of Administrators Office (HOAO) whether an AIMPACT bid could be submitted in the current round, but made a note that the AIMPACT Bids were technically closed last Friday. Councillor Shearer remarked that whilst the closing date has passed, a request could still be put forward as no bids had been sent to the committee as yet for approval, due to the handover of the HOAO.

3. Review of AIG's Medium-Term Financial Plan

The DoR explained that the purpose of this item is to report to the Finance Committee progress made to-date in developing the Ascension Island Government's (AIG) Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for the next five years.

The DoR said members of the Finance Committee are aware that AIG set a budgeted operating cash deficit of £1.012M for the 2024/2025 Financial Year. This operating cash deficit, together with capital expenditure not funded externally, is being funded by reserves held by AIG.

To ensure that AIG's reserves are not depleted below a satisfactory level, AIG are developing a MTFP for 2025-2030.

A Financial Review Mission (FRM) was carried out by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) alongside the AIG SMT, generating 40 potential ideas. Each idea has been considered carefully to reduce the budget deficit. SMT has considered not only the financial saving and the feasibility of implementing the idea, but also the impacts the idea would have on island stakeholders and communities should the option be implemented.

The DoR stated that each idea has been categorized into one of three categories: Category A) Options to Implement, Category B) Ideas to be developed for potential implementation and Category C) ideas requiring further impact, and feasibility assessment.

The DoR referred to appendix 2 outlining the summary of outputs of considerations made by the SMT and said at the moment this is just for consideration by the Finance Committee, but going forward the Finance Committee will consider the initiatives to be taken forward to the financial year 2025/2026 annual budgets.

Councillor Alan Nicholls queried the comment made by the DoR that "AIG's reserves are not depleted below a satisfactory level" and queried what these levels are? The DoR said at the moment that this is not definitive. In the past it has been over 50% to a 100% and said in his opinion that they should not go below 60% of the annual expenditure.

Councillor Nicholls asked if councillors have the outcomes of the development session and queried what they were? The DoR said that the MTFP was discussed at the last informal meeting and agreed that the DoR would hold a development session with Councillors on the MTFP. A query was raised by Councillor Kerry Benjamin to the difference of 40 ideas generated by SMT and the 38 listed initiatives on the MTFP. The DoR committed to identify the reason for the difference and to advise Councillors of this at a future time.

Councillor Nicholls gave thanks to the DoR for his hard work in putting the MTFP together in such a short

time.

The DoR emphasized that the main cause of AIG's current budget deficit position is due to a loss of revenue when the runway project was completed, and not through over expenditure and gave his thanks to everybody for understanding and working towards the MTFP.

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 18:10

Fiona

Fiona Benjamin
Acting 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 'P Thomas'.

Peter Thomas
Director of Resources – Chair of the Finance Committee