

**Informal meeting Summary of the Ascension Island Council****16:30 on Thursday 15 January 2026 at the Courthouse****MEETING SUMMARY**

Present: HH Rowan Laxton, Administrator
Acting Director of Resources (DoR), Catherine Jones
Crown Counsel (CC), James Twigg

Councillor Michael Ellick
Councillor Thomas Barnes
Councillor Ethan Bally
Councillor Eugene Bennett
Councillor Laura Shearer
Councillor Alan Nicholls
Councillor Thomas Hickling

In attendance: Head of Administrator's Office, Martin Hogg
Attorney General (AG), Andrew Duncan
Director of Facilities & Operations (DoFO), Nathan Millington
Director of Conservation and Fisheries (DoCF), Tiffany Simpson
Environmental Health Officer, Christiane Anthony
Policy and Comms Officer (PCO), Stephanie Sherrin
Acting Clerk to Council, Denise John
Wildlife Management International Ltd (WMIL), Elizabeth Bell
Wildlife Management International Ltd (WMIL), Dan Burgin
Wildlife Management International Ltd (WMIL), Baylee Connor-McClean

1. Welcome

The Administrator Rowan Laxton welcomed all parties and thanked everyone for attending, including the Attorney General for attending in person.

2. Minutes of last Formal Meeting

The minutes of the Formal Council meeting held on 4 December 2025 were accepted, and in accordance with the Council Rules, were agreed by Council members.

3. Matters Arising

Matters arising through the Action Tracker.

- **Food Security.** Councillor Nicholls commented that Council were only made aware of the Chandlery's imminent departure when the public notice was issued and felt that Council should have been given some advance warning. Acting DoR apologised for the oversight. The Administrator noted that the Ascension Island Government (AIG) was given notice on Friday by Chandlery that they had reached a decision to withdraw and thought it important to reassure and inform the public as soon as possible that it would be business as normal until the withdrawal. A further notice was issued shortly afterwards to invite expressions of interest. The Administrator said there were plans to have a deep dive on food security this quarter which would include the Georgetown mini-mart.

4. Wildlife Management Team Update

The Administrator welcomed the visiting Wildlife Management International (WMIL) team, DoCF and Environmental Health Officer. DoCF introduced Elizabeth (Biz) Bell, Dan Burgin and Baylee Connor-McClean and explained that following a population boom of rats and mice in 2023/24, Darwin Funding was secured to bring WMIL over to

conduct a feasibility study to consider if it was possible to fully eradicate rats and mice and other vertebrate pests from the island. A Report was produced which determined it was not financially viable to fully eradicate rodents, but recommended improvements for management and control. Further Darwin Funding was secured in 2025/26 and the WMIL consultant has returned to help implement the recommendations, provide training to the AIG Environmental Health Team and oversee trials of new methods. Ms Bell explained the use of the novel rat traps and immunocontraceptive products that are being trialled. Ms Bell explained during this visit the team will conduct stakeholder meetings to receive feedback and commitment to the proposed one island rodent control strategy. Councillor Nicholls asked if there was a form of biological control for rodent eradication. Ms Bell confirmed there are no recommended biological controls, cats were eradicated from the island but they actually do not control rats. Councillor Bennett asked whether the devices will be deployed near homes and in the villages. Ms Bell confirmed that a few will be trialled on the perimeter of Georgetown, Ashpit camp ground and Green Mountain. Councillor Bennett queried if the traps could injure cats? Ms Bell explained that the bait smell would not attract cats and that the trap would be set 10cm off the ground so any animal would have to be small enough and crawl significant distance inside the chamber for the trap to go off. Councillor Bennett was concerned about the frequency of checking the traps if they were deployed around homes, due to the smells of dead rats. Ms Bell confirmed traps would not be placed around homes, but on the perimeter of settlements. The WMIL team welcomed any further questions and feedback the Councillors may have about the trials.

Councillor Bennett commented that community members, particularly those in Two Boats Village were concerned about sheep noise and smells, noting that the sheep were recently found to be infected with a virus and expressed concern that they are in close proximity to the playgrounds and homes. Ms Bell advised several options, which included 1) rounding up the sheep and managing them as a stock; finding a suitable site where the stock will be held and maintaining the welfare of the stock are significant considerations. 2) Reducing stock by culling; and 3) repairing the fence recognising that sheep do scale the fences so there will be cost implications to improve or replace fencing. Ms Bell said it was important to have more informed discussions with the community and stakeholders to discuss all options available in more detail.

5. Entry Control

Crown Counsel raised that currently AIG employees have a blanket exemption from obtaining an e-visa for arrival on Ascension within the Entry Control Ordinance. CC proposed to remove the exemption from the Entry Control Ordinance, with the exception for those already employed by the AIG on-island, and those visiting less than one month. This would treat AIG in the same manner as other on-island organisations. Councillor Bally asked if the fee would be waived. CC said the intention is to waive the fee for AIG, so AIG would not in effect be charging themselves. There were no further questions so CC will prepare the amendment to the Ordinance and bring forward for vote at the next formal meeting. The Administrator thanked CC and the PCO for proposing this amendment.

6. Telecoms Update

The DoFO updated Councillors on the telecoms situation and reported that with SURE ceasing operations on 28 February, AIG have now entered into a contract with OMNITOUSH to replace the SURE network. DoFO advised that the equipment is due to arrive and be installed before SURE exits on 28 February 2026 and the AIG is in discussion with SURE regarding an exit plan. The aim is to deliver an improved service over existing products: better value, advanced coverage and better performance overall for customers. OMNITOUSH will not be the network operator, so the AIG will launch a new company: 'Ascension Island Mobile' (AI Mobile or AIM). This is still in development and AIG is still finalising the commercial offer including a dedicated web page for customers to access products. Products will include mobile phone and landline services and also bespoke business products. In parallel, the AIG is looking at contingencies in the event there is a delay or issues during switchover and are developing an emergency management plan to ensure residents and employers can still reach essential services and will keep the public informed if this becomes likely. The DoFO asked Councillors for their support to signpost and engage customers, encouraging constituents to pre-register via the webpage to reduce potential disruption. In answer to Councillor Nicholls, the Administrator confirmed that the AIG had considered carefully the commercial aspects of AI Mobile. Councillor Shearer queried about removal of SURE infrastructure across the island and CC confirmed that SURE have been reminded of their legal obligations.

7. Employment Ordinance

The Policy and Comms Officer thanked Councillor Shearer for raising concerns about current practices from an employment organisation which were discussed at length in a previous informal meeting. The PCO confirmed that as a result, five action points were being taken forward. The Lay Advocates Notice will be re-circulated to remind the public what services on-island Lay Advocates can offer. The Lay Advocates recently met with the Attorney General and spoke on the subject from a legal perspective, and the AIG is arranging a visit from the Public Solicitor's

Office in March 2026 to further support island constituents with employment concerns. Councillor Shearer queried if it would be possible to gather some data on the packages provided by other employers to use as a comparison.

8. AOB

8.1 Pet Cemetery

Councillor Hickling requested an update on the developments of the Deadman's pet cemetery. Councillor Bennett had submitted a Councillor Enquiry Form last year and since then the AIG has given the pet cemetery some maintenance and advised that the AIG planned to extend the pet cemetery area as the current site was full. The DoFO agreed to investigate and provide an update on this matter to Councillors.

8.2 Visit of Public Guardian

The acting DoR confirmed there was a public meeting that evening at the Saints Club from the visiting Public Guardian, Mrs Anna Crowie from St Helena. The meeting was to provide St Helenian residents advice on how to register for Power of Attorneys, St Helena island pensions, income related benefits and expectations for Ascension residents when returning to St Helena.

Next Formal Meeting 29 Jan 2026

The Administrator thanked all for attending and the meeting closed at 18:00

Denise John
Clerk to Council