



## Formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council

16:30 on Thursday 29 January 2026 at the Courthouse

### MINUTES

Present:	HE Nigel Phillips CBE, Governor [remotely] HH Rowan Laxton, Administrator Andrew Duncan, Attorney General [remotely] Catherine Jones, Deputy Director of Resources	Councillor Thomas Barnes Councillor Ethan Bally Councillor Eugene Bennett Councillor Michael Ellick Councillor Laura Shearer Councillor Alan Nicholls
In attendance:	James Twigg, Crown Counsel [remotely] Martin Hogg, Head of Administrator's Office Stephanie Sherrin, Policy and Comms Officer Nathan Millington, Director of Operations and Facilities Chrystelee Todd, FCDO Desk Officer [remotely] Kevin Werry, Telecoms Technical Consultant Georgina Wilson, Clerk of Council	
Apologies:	Councillor Thomas Hickling	

#### 1. Welcome

HH the Administrator Rowan Laxton welcomed all parties present and introduced those attending remotely.

#### 2. Approval of Minutes

**Decision:** The minutes of the informal Council meeting held on 15 January 2026 and published 26 January 2026 were accepted, and in accordance with the Council Rules were agreed by Council members.

#### 3. Matters Arising

- **Pet Cemetery:** The Director of Operations and Facilities (DoOF) Nathan Millington provided an update on the expansion plans of the pet cemetery. The DoOF recognised the delay to the expansion of the cemetery and explained this was due to resources being utilised for the telecoms network installation but reassured that the pet cemetery work will be completed as soon as possible.
- **Road Markings:** The DoOF advised that the outer line markings had been started on the Two Boats Road, and the remaining markings, including the central lines, will be completed over the coming weeks. The DoOF acknowledged that there had been significant delays in completing this project and will improve work load prioritisation in the future.

#### 4. Entry Control Ordinance

The Administrator apologised on behalf of Ascension Island Government (AIG) for the delayed delivery of the documents associated with the Entry Control Ordinance agenda item to councillors. Crown Counsel James Twigg explained that after a review of the Entry Control Ordinance, it was identified that currently AIG employees are exempt from these requirements under the Ordinance and related entry control policy. This exemption means they are not required to obtain an e-visa or undergo the associated background checks before arrival. This creates inconsistency in vetting standards between AIG employees and other individuals seeking entry to Ascension. The change to the Entry Control Ordinance and policy would ensure that newly appointed AIG employees obtain an e-visa and meet all associated background check requirements before travel.

Councillor Nicholls questioned why the exemption for persons employed by the AIG “in connection to their official duties does not exceed one month” was a necessary change. Crown Counsel advised that the time frame of one month would allow short-term official visitors to the island to enter without the requirement for them to go through the same full entry control screening as permanent employees.

**Each councillor was asked in turn if they were happy to recommend to the Governor that the proposed changes to the Entry Control Ordinance be approved.**

	Proposal	Cllr Barnes	Cllr Bally	Cllr Bennett	Cllr Ellick	Cllr Shearer	Cllr Nicholls
1	<b>Recommend that the proposed changes to the Entry Control Ordinance be approved?</b>	<b>Yes</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.**

### **5. Employment Ordinance Update**

Stephanie Sherrin, Policy and Comms Officer (PCO) explained that following concerns raised at the previous council meetings regarding employment practices of on-island organisations, five action points were identified. The PCO advised that the five actions discussed at the last informal meeting continue to be progressed, as well as a sixth action point, which was later raised by Councillor Shearer. It was noted that public notices regarding the availability and services of the Lay Advocates had been circulated. The Lay Advocates have also met with the Attorney General during his visit to the island to discuss the legality surrounding the issues raised. AIG has also facilitated a visit by the Public Solicitor’s Office in March 2026 to provide support to constituents with concerns. The PCO also advised that a document had been compiled of key grievances which has been given to the Crown Counsel to review and identify where the issues raised may fall short of the Employment Ordinance.

Councillor Nicholls questioned the next steps if the activities are established to fall short of the Employment Ordinance. Crown Counsel advised that, if breaches are identified, the Ordinance allows financial penalties to be imposed which AIG will seek to enforce if required.

### **6. Telecoms Update**

Kevin Werry (KW), Telecoms Technical Consultant, advised the Council that significant progress had taken place since November 2025. He confirmed that equipment was in the process of being delivered to Ascension, via the South Atlantic Airbridge, with all equipment and engineers due to be on island in early February. KW thanked the USSF for their continued support to host telecoms equipment on Cross Hill, Encompass for agreeing to host equipment to provide wider coverage at English Bay, and to the DoOF and his team for their work on Green Mountain in installing telecoms infrastructure. KW advised that the radio network equipment, which is owned by AIG, but currently operated by SURE will be returned to AIG before the end of February. This will be supported by visiting technical specialists to ensure the radio network is fit for purpose, as well providing specialist onsite training to AIG staff to ensure continued operation and maintenance of the network. The AIG was pleased to announce that over 250 individuals had already registered their interest for the new mobile network and that packages and further information would be announced shortly. KW noted that the new broadband offering from the new mobile provider would be competitively priced against Starlink to provide more choice for users.

Councillor Bennett expressed his thanks to the AIG and associated teams for their hard work on this project to ensure that it is successful. He explained that there is excitement within the community and that constituents look forward to the launch of the new network. The Administrator thanked Councillor Bennett for his support and appreciated the community support. Councillor Nicholls asked about the plan for landlines. KW advised there was no plan to replicate landline services currently provided by SURE, however modern technology will allow for handsets to be adapted to be used over the mobile network. Councillor Nicholls asked about the removal of SURE infrastructure such as cables and wires. The Administrator advised that SURE have been reminded about their legal obligations. Councillor Shearer asked for clarity on AIG’s internal IT network. KW advised that AIG is currently updating the AIG network to a cloud-based system which will run through Starlink, providing a faster service within the AIG system.

The Governor echoed thanks from councillors to the AIG team for their extraordinary work over such a short period. The Governor also expressed his thanks to the councillors for their support during the project despite the uncertainties this transition brings for the island. He noted concerns from the St Helena community on Ascension to be able to communicate with family and friends on St Helena, and explained that the PCO will coordinate with the Head of Comms on St Helena to coordinate messaging. Despite the technical and commercial challenges, the Governor explained that Ascension Island should be in a better position than before.

**7. AOB:** There were one item of AOB raised.

- i. **Withdrawal of the Chandlery from Ascension Island:** Councillor Bennett raised questions regarding the Chandlery withdrawal and asked if it was possible, could there be discussions to encourage the new provider to keep on current staff, or if not possible, provide as much notice as possible to the existing staff, so they can seek other employment opportunities. After the Administrator met with staff from the Chandlery, he explained that the Chandlery is hoping for a seamless transition to a new provider to minimise disruption.

**8. Proposed dates of next meetings:**

Informal Council meeting – 15:00 Thursday 26 February 2026

Formal Finance Council meeting – 16:30 Tuesday 04 March 2026

Formal Council meeting – 16:30 Thursday 12 March 2026

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 17:20.

Georgina Wilson  
Clerk of Council

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



*Rowan Laxton*

*On behalf of HE the Governor, Nigel Phillips CBE*