



Formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council Finance Committee

16:30 on Thursday 19 February 2026 at the Court House

MINUTES

Present: Catherine Jones, Acting Director of Resources

Councillor Thomas Barnes
Councillor Laura Shearer
Councillor Alan Nicholls

In attendance: Rowan Laxton, HH the Administrator
Kitty George, Shipping and Operations Officer
Georgina Wilson, Clerk of Council

Apologies:

1. Welcome

The Ag Director of Resources (DoR) Catherine Jones welcomed all parties and thanked them for their attendance at the formal finance committee meeting, including Administrator HH Rowan Laxton and invited guest Kitty George.

2. Review of Proposed Capital Funding Bids for 2026-2027

The Ag DoR explained that the first item on the agenda relates to six proposed Ascension Island Government (AIG) capital funded business cases, which have been considered and discussed in detail at a previous informal meeting. The total value of the capital bids being put forward to Councillors totalled £73,020, but one bid had been withdrawn since the informal meeting.

2.1 Installation of Two Playground Shelters at Two Boats School

The Ag DoR explained that the first Business Case to be considered is the installation of two playground shelters at Two Boats School, one in the Middle School and one in the Upper School grounds. Kitty George (KG) provided further information to the Councillors to support the need for the bid. KG advised that currently, the school lacks adequate outside protection against high UV intensity and heavy rainfall, limiting the students using the outside areas during break times, noting that there was a high number of students off sick in recent weeks due to suspected heat related illnesses. KG further explained that the Ascension UV index of level 11 is classed as Extreme, and noted that the tarmac at the school was recorded at 48°C with surrounding air temperature of 28°C. The installation of the shelters would allow for a drastic drop in temperature and provide a safer outside environment for the students.

Councillors agreed the need for the shelters and were supportive, but raised questions on the costing of the bids, noting that the quote provided only covered one shelter, and not the two that were required. Councillors requested further information on the costings of the materials and freight of the shelters, to ensure value for money before a decision could be made. KG agreed to provide further costings, and the bid will be reviewed at a formal meeting to be held on Tuesday 03 March 2026.

2.2 Replacement Marquee

KG explained that the marquee in current use for a range of community events including the King's Birthday Party, Ascension Day Fair, and Remembrance Service was suffering from structure failure causing a health and safety risk. Councillors agreed with the need to replace the marquee but questions were raised over the lack of information provided to allow for a comprehensive comparison on the quotes. It was agreed that KG would provide further information to support the bid, and this would be reviewed along with bid 1, on Tuesday 03 March. The Ag DoR thanked KG for her time.

2.3 Two x 20' Shipping Containers

The Ag DoR explained that the bid for shipping containers had been reduced from four to two, at a cost of £2760 each. The replacement of the containers was for AIG MV Karoline operations, and it was noted that these containers would be used to ship AIG materials therefore no delivery cost would be added. The bid was for the amount of £6,000.

The Ag DoR asked each Committee Member in turn if they are happy to take the proposal, for an appropriation of £6,000 for capital expenditure to the Development Fund for the replacement of two shipping containers for the 2026/27 financial year, forward as a recommendation to the Island Council?

	Proposal	Cllr Thomas Barnes	Cllr Alan Nicholls	Cllr Laura Shearer
1	Replacement of two shipping containers up to the value of £6,000	Yes	Yes	Yes

2.4 Replacement of Two Carpenter Shop Woodworking Machines

The Ag DoR explained that the bid to replace two woodworking machines due to increased health and safety issues surrounding the old machines. The bid totalled £10,000. Councillors raised no objections.

The Ag DoR asked each Committee Member in turn if they are happy to take the proposal, for an appropriation of £10,000 for capital expenditure to the Development Fund for the replacement of two carpentry machines for the 2026/27 financial year, forward as a recommendation to the Island Council?

	Proposal	Cllr Thomas Barnes	Cllr Alan Nicholls	Cllr Laura Shearer
2	Replacement of two carpentry machines up to the value of £10,000	Yes	Yes	Yes

2.5 Post Officer Printer Replacement

The Ag DoR explained that the licence printer at the Post Office was over 10 years old, and is beginning to fail. It was noted that the replacement would be the same brand but an upgraded model. The bid amount was £3,520. Councillors raised no objections.

The Ag DoR asked each Committee Member in turn if they are happy to take the proposal, for an appropriation of £3,520 for capital expenditure to the Development Fund for the replacement of the Post

	Proposal	Cllr Thomas Barnes	Cllr Alan Nicholls	Cllr Laura Shearer
3	Replacement of the Post Office printer up to the value of £3,520	Yes	Yes	Yes

Office Printer for the 2026/27 financial year, forward as a recommendation to the Island Council?

2.7 Replacement of ICT equipment

The Ag DoR explained that the final capital bid to be approved was for the replacement of AIG Information and Communication Technology (ICT) equipment. The bid amount was more than previous years due to the continued need to upgrade AIG IT equipment to allow Windows 11 software, and transitioning to a cloud-based system. It is expected that older machines will fail as new software upgrades are rolled out. The bid was for the amount of £19,000.

The Ag DoR asked each Committee Member in turn if they are happy to take the proposal, for an appropriation of £19,000 for capital expenditure to the Development Fund for the replacement IT equipment for the 2026/27 financial year, forward as a recommendation to the Island Council?

	Proposal	Cllr Thomas Barnes	Cllr Alan Nicholls	Cllr Laura Shearer
4	Replacement IT Equipment up to the value of £19,000	Yes	Yes	Yes

4. 2026/27 Operational and Capital Budget Appropriation

The Ag DoR explained that the £1.179m budget deficit for 2026/27 was significant but had reduced in the previous forecasted amount from 2025/26, incorporating an increase of £50,000 business levy in line with inflation for 2026/27. Councillor Nicholls noted that further changes to the Business Levy would require legislative changes and consultation with the businesses impacted. The Administrator explained that he had been in talks with the relevant organisations, and made them aware of future plans for increases, confirming that the ordinance would be updated as appropriate. The Administrator explained discussions to raise revenue from other projects including from port operations and other services. The Administrator also noted that a Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO) economist would be working closely with the AIG Finance department and the new Director of Resources to find solutions to reduce the budget deficit.

The Ag DoR stated that there had been increased costs in overseas medical referrals over the last few years. It was discussed if medical insurance would help reduce costs but previous experience showed that the cost of insurance was more than the actual expenditure. The Ag DoR agreed to review insurance options to see if this was still true. For 2026/27, the overseas medical budget was increased by £150,000.

The Ag DoR explained that AIG had been fortunate to receive external funding to replace heavy plant machinery but current equipment still required regular maintenance leading to an increase in that element of the budget. The Ag DoR explained that regular maintenance and inspection of AIG assets ensured the safe function and operation of this equipment.

Councillor Shearer questioned if the FCDO could offer to further offset the high costs of running the Residency. The Ag DoR explained that the FCDO do offset costs for events and functions, such as the KBP and the Christmas Carols, but were unable to contribute to staffing and utilities. The Administrator advised that he would look at ways to reduce costs where possible.

Councillor Nicholls queried the £216,000 budget for the Police Service, noting that the Royal Saint Helena Police have been unable to fill the five positions for police staff as agreed in the Memorandum of Understanding. The Administrator confirmed that the AIG will undertake a review of the service to ensure value for money for tax payers. It was discussed if the Royal Air Force (RAF) could provide further support to ease the policing shortfall. Councillor Shearer noted that with a high turnover of police officers, it was hard for trust to be built between the community and the community police.

It was recognised that the AIG have a maximum of three financial years to reduce the budget deficit before reserves will be depleted. The Administrator confirmed that AIG departments are working hard to make

savings but highlighted that everyone, including the wider public, need to be aware of AIG's financial position and must work towards reducing unnecessary spending.

The Ag DoR asked each Committee Member in turn if they are happy to take the proposal, of approving an operational deficit of £1.179m, for the 2026/27 financial year, forward as a recommendation to the Island Council?

	Proposal	Cllr Thomas Barnes	Cllr Alan Nicholls	Cllr Laura Shearer
5	Approve an operational deficit of £1.179m for the 2026/27 financial year	Yes	Yes	Yes

5. Update on Medium Term Financial Planning

The Ag DoR gave an update on the progress of the medium-term financial planning to make savings and raise additional revenue for AIG. The Ag DoR advised that the Corporation tax for 2026/27 would be raised to provide an additional £35,000. Increased duties on alcohol and tobacco were put on hold at the request of the council in 2025, with additional tax structures considered. The duties agreed for vape products is awaiting ordinance drafting updates and will be in place for the beginning of the 2026/27 financial year. The Ag DoR confirmed that tax returns would face stricter scrutiny to ensure sub-contractors were paying the correct tax on all types of income and allowances.

In response to the budget deficit, the AIG have reduced capital expenditure, while also cutting back on some planned projects and finding alternative funding sources where possible. It was also noted that increased collaboration with Island Partners in line with the 'One Island Vision' had helped to reduce overall costs for some projects. Charges for E-visas were increased on the 1st January 2026 after councillors voted to increase fees, along with a rise in the AIG marine freight handling charges. The Ag DoR explained that the introduction of late fees for outstanding payments had ensured outstanding payments were received promptly, and pledged that the AIG will continue to work at reducing the operating budget deficit.

6. AOB

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 18:08.

Georgina Wilson
Clerk of Council

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



Catherine Jones
Director of Resources – Chair of the Finance Committee