

## ASCENSION ISLAND GOVERNMENT

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## Informal meeting of the Ascension Island Council

1630 on Thursday 9 Jul 2020 at the Court House

### MEETING SUMMARY

Present: Sean Burns, Administrator  
Gareth Morris, Director of Resources  
Rob Cheeseman, Crown Counsel  
Councillor Andrew Ellick  
Councillor Kitty George  
Councillor Alan Nicholls

In attendance: Xander Halliwell, Head of Administrator's Office  
Jane Disley, Clerk of Council

Apologies:

The Administrator thanked all those involved in the recent Employment Reform Working Group: the Assistant Head of HR, Crown Counsel and Policy Officer for their work on the draft document and councillors for their time and dedication to providing and discussing contributions. Although there was much still to do, he said that a major milestone had been achieved and the Governor was pleased with progress on this important issue.

The matters arising were addressed via the actions tracker and current topics discussed were as follows:

- **Steroid drug for coronavirus symptoms** The SMO confirmed that the hospital had 4 courses at present [only one course can be given per person], but he planned to order more.
- **Flag protocol** The tatty flags had been replaced. The flag protocol would be updated to reflect current priorities. Resource restrictions prevented the flags being raised and lowered daily so options for solar lighting were being investigated to ensure the flags were illuminated while flying at night.
- **IDL waste** Waste at Travellers Hill was not separated into different recyclables so could not be put into the incinerator. This would require a process shift that would take time, but the Dir Ops & Fac would maintain communication with the head of IDL. On waste management generally, the Administrator stressed the need for correct separation of items because inappropriate items damaged the incinerator, which had a cost. In particular, people needed to take more care with what went into the black bins eg large metal items and organic material should be left next to the bins not inside. A notice would be issued shortly to clarify requirements and reiterate advice to the public. It was not the job of the waste management team to check bin bags for items that should not be in there.
- **Bill for Bradley's Camp stay** The Administrator confirmed that he had written to St Helena Government asking for the charging policy but was yet to receive a reply. In the absence of a published policy that he had been made aware of for Ascension travellers, it was difficult to see how any charges could be imposed. .
- **Quarantine in St Helena homes** The Administrator confirmed that SHG had requested AIG to consider ways that the two islands could establish a safe 'movement bubble' between the two islands both of which remained COVID – 19 free. This carried risks (e.g. exposure to crew and other passengers on board) that needed to be explored but in the meantime the request for Ascension travellers to isolate in their own homes had been reiterated.
- **Post-16 education** The Dir Res confirmed that the head teacher had been communicating with parents of year 10 & 11 students and planned to update the website over the summer break to provide more information. She had offered to attend the next informal meeting to provide a briefing and councillors agreed this would be a good idea.

Minutes from the recent **Public Works Committee** had been circulated ahead of the meeting. The Administrator confirmed he was happy for the Dir of Ops & Fac to adapt the monthly works update to be shared with the Committee. Dir Ops & Fac was also in liaison with Encompass about a possible memorandum of understanding with regard to use of their Manitou [cherry-picker]. His comparative study of solar versus LED for street lighting was ongoing.

There was an update from HoAO about **coronavirus** (COVID-19) on Ascension. The UK Govt was still supplying Ascension with testing kits and other medical supplies. The sanitizing fogger machine had arrived and this would make a significant difference to sanitization times for the minibus, hospital, accommodation rooms etc. The oxygen compressor was due this month and would now likely arrive on the next ATI toward the end of July. An additional humanitarian charter flight was being arranged by SHG which would come to Ascension. EOs had been asked to register potential passengers, but numbers would depend largely on the response from SHG about people spending the

quarantine period in their own homes.

HoAO provided an **update on the runway project**. He confirmed that biosecurity aspects of the contractors plan had been submitted to Dir Cons & Fisheries who had responded. The shortage of housing had been resolved via an AIG-MOD land occupancy-style agreement for 30 bed spaces in Georgetown over a 2-year period for contract management staff. Financial approval had been given but the agreement had not yet been signed. Residents would quarantine on the RAF base and only then move to Georgetown. The MOD would upgrade the accommodation, pay rent and utilities and maintain the properties. In response to Cllr Ellick's question about why the private sector had not been included, the HoAO explained that the requirements of the contractors meant that that accommodation was unsuitable. However, the AIG had forwarded accommodation requests to the private sector, where appropriate. He also explained that the contractor's advance party would arrive toward the end of July then quarantine before staying for the duration of the contract. The remainder would start to arrive in September with an initial party of around 40. Contract staff would remain until around July 2022 and their staged departure would continue to around August. A chartered ship containing equipment from Turkey would potentially arrive in September, as would the next USAF ship. No dates were yet available for delivery of the aggregate. It was confirmed that the pier head works were still on course to be completed in August, but Dir Ops & Fac was monitoring.

Information was provided about the forthcoming Council **by-election** to fill the seat vacated by Cllr Chadwick. The proposed date for the election was 3 Sep and the formal Council meeting due on that date would be postponed slightly. As with the general election in Sep 19, there would be a campaign of public notices to engage and inform the public and to ensure that critical deadlines were highlighted eg for nomination of candidates or proxy voters. Cllr George noted the challenge in inspiring the public not only to vote but to stand for election, which prompted some discussion on voter turnout. It was proposed that there be more publicity, although it was suggested that some of this ought to be generated by candidates themselves. It was agreed that the previous public forum for candidates had been a success and it would be worthwhile to repeat this. It was also confirmed that replacement of councillors at a by-election was on a one-for-one basis and so did not require dissolution of the Council.

There were several items of **other business**:

- (i) **Fire Service:** Cllr Nicholls asked for an update on the AIG's plans for its fire service. The Administrator confirmed that the plan was to formalise an agreement with MOD beyond the current MoU which currently provided cover. The Administrator said that it would take time to work out the details; negotiation would be needed based on the level of cover AIG required and the amount it was able to pay. IDL had confirmed that the AIG's fire trucks were unserviceable except perhaps for the small one that could access the mountain road. Cllr Nicholls also asked about testing of extinguishers and fire alarms etc. Dir Res explained that online training had been identified which could allow AIG to undertake its own tests; plus AIG still employed two ex-fire service staff who might be able to complete such tests. If not, it might also be necessary to ask IDL to fulfil that function in the interim.
- (ii) **Unsecured stores:** Cllr Nicholls reported that some supplies of cement had been left out behind the Stores building. Not only did this mean anybody could help themselves, but also they would deteriorate in the rain. The Administrator said he would follow this up but emphasized the need to report such issues immediately. There was no need to wait for a council meeting.
- (iii) **AIG answerphone message:** Cllr Nicholls asked if the AIG's answerphone message on the switchboard could be updated as it contained out of date information. The Administrator agreed that this would be done.
- (iv) **Policy on committees:** Cllr Ellick asked the policy for creating committees, such as the Child Safeguarding Board. The Administrator explained that there were the three Council committees and the Ascension Island Safeguarding Children Board which was largely filled by post holders as part of their job, plus the Community Volunteer member. Cllr Ellick questioned how committees were formed and how somebody might volunteer. He also sought clarification about voluntary positions attracting a stipend and free internet access (beyond that received by elected Council members who make up the Council committees). Cllr Ellick felt that opportunities to join committees should receive greater public notice and that such positions should be rotated to allow new people to volunteer.
- (v) **Global Human Rights Sanction Regime:** Crown Counsel informed the Council that the UK Government had in recent days introduced a Global Human Rights Sanctions regime, intended to use sanctions to combat human rights abuses. Crown Counsel explained that the UK Government intended that the regime would be extended to all OTs, and that the necessary Order was to go to the Privy Council on 21 July, and to come into force the next day. The regime imposes asset freezes and travel bans on named individuals who are considered by the UK Government to have been involved in gross human rights violations.

The meeting closed at 1800.

**J Disley**  
J Disley  
Clerk of Council