

**ASCENSION ISLAND
GOVERNMENT**

Clerk of Council's Office
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Informal meeting of the Ascension Island Council

10:00 on Thursday 04th July 2024 at the Courthouse

MEETING SUMMARY

Present: HH Simon Minshull, Administrator
Director of Resources, Peter Thomas
Councillor Kyla Benjamin
Councillor Kerry Benjamin
Councillor Alan Nicholls
Councillor Laura Shearer

In attendance: Carl Mackerras, Head of Administrator's Office
David Mills, Director of Operations and Facilities
Siobhan Stewart, Clerk to Council

Apologies: Councillor Gordon Worthington [overseas]
Matthew James, Crown Counsel [overseas]

The Administrator welcomed all parties and thanked everyone for attending.

Matters arising were addressed via the actions tracker. There were two topics on the tracker which was discussed as follows:

Pets on the FIRS: The Administrator explained that whilst BFSAI have confirmed pets only belonging to MOD Military Personnel and MOD Civil Servants will be carried on the FIRS, written confirmation from the MOD in the UK has not yet been received. The Administrator noted that existing commitments are still being fulfilled for north bound journeys to the UK only. Councillor Shearer reported of pets being booked on the MOD FIRS from the UK that are due to arrive in Ascension in August, which contradicts the line from BFSAI that only to allow pets belonging to MOD Military Personnel and MOD Civil Servants to be carried on the FIRS. Councillor Shearer emphasised the importance that pet owners are fully informed of the new restrictions and that they are applied consistently. Councillor Shearer requested that an update be provided prior to the departure of the August FIRS from the UK. The Administrator agreed to provide an update to Councillors by write around.

Future Vet Visit Plans: The Head of the Administrator's Office (HoAO) informed councillors that community members may wish to submit a bid to the AIMPACT fund (see further details below) to support the costs associated with bringing a Vet to Ascension. Invitations to bid will be publicised by the end of July 2024.

The Director of Resources reported to council of an overspend of £30k in relation to additional work that took place during the recent **refurbishment works of the Residency** and confirmed that the matter be discussed further at a future meeting of the Finance Committee, with input from the Director of Operations and Facilities (DoOF), to consider whether a Supplementary Ordinance is required, or whether alternative funding streams such as underspends in other areas be considered.

The Director of Operations and Facilities (DoOF) reported that he will make recommendations on measures to reduce the chance of such issues reoccurring in future. A report will be submitted to the Finance Committee explaining the complexities surrounding the overspend and any mitigation measures applied. Councillor Shearer requested clarity on whether part of the additional charge was because the Residency remained occupied during part of the renovations. The DoOF assured councillors that a comprehensive report will cover the breadth of the project. Councillor Nicholls asked whether a contingency amount was agreed when the contract was entered into. The DoR explained that best practice is to not apply a contingency sum into contracts, ensuring contractors and AIG Officers scrutinise budgets set and apply minimum costs to projects. However, the process to address addition to scope would be reviewed. Discussion was had regarding the windows installed at the Residency, the DoOF confirmed

that this would also be covered in the report. Councillor Shearer requested the final amount that the Residency refurbishment has cost to AIG noting £30k was a significant addition. The DoR acknowledged the need to improve risk identification in future projects. Noting concern at the overspend and its potential impact on AIG's budget, Councillor Shearer commented that constituents had raised with her the condition of the road network in Ascension. The DoR acknowledged the need for demonstration of good spending of AIG resources.

The HoAO provided background on the **AIMPACT fund (Ascension Island Marine Protected Area Community Trust fund)** that was set up in 2021 in recognition of Ascension establishing one of the biggest marine protected areas in the world. The sum of £2m was donated by Peter Lürssen in recognition of the major conservation commitment made by the community of Ascension. The HoAO reported that the AIG and Blue Marine Foundation have agreed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Terms of Reference for use of the fund. The formation of a project advisory board is now underway and will be primarily made up of members of the community, along with some AIG Officers and a representative of the Island Council. It is anticipated that invitations to bid for monies from the fund will be publicised by the end of July. Councillor Nicholls requested confirmation of how much money is currently in the fund. The HoAO explained that the fund will provide at least £80,000 per year for a variety of projects on Ascension under the following four categories: Community, Education, Environment and Heritage. The current balance is understood to be in the region of £240K. Discussion was had regarding the monitoring of the fund as well as the scoring mechanism of applications. The Administrator requested that Councillors consider who they wish to represent the Island Council on the AIMPACT board and let the Clerk know in due course. Councillor Shearer expressed her interest to represent Council as the Chair of the Ascension Island Council Health and Social Care Committee.

There was one item of **other business**:

- i. **Wildlife Management International feasibility study findings:** Councillor Nicholls noted that in January 2024 Councillors attending a meeting with Wildlife Management International regarding a feasibility study towards the potential eradication of primarily rats and mice, and possibly other pests as well. Councillor Nicholls requested an update on what came of the visit and recommendations thereafter, highlighting that the rodent situation in Ascension appears to be worsening again. Councillor Kerry Benjamin asked whether the report has been concluded. The Administrator agreed to provide an update to councillors at a future date.

The next Formal AI Council Meeting will be held on 17 July 2024.

The meeting closed at 10:35

Siobhan Stewart
Clerk to Council