



Formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council
16:30 on Wednesday 04 December 2024 at the Courthouse
MINUTES

Present: HE Governor, Nigel Phillips [remotely]
HH Acting Administrator, Carl Mackerras
Peter Thomas, Director of Resources
Councillor Kerry Benjamin
Councillor Kyla Benjamin
Councillor Alan Nicholls
Councillor Laura Shearer

In attendance: Ailsa Hearne, FCDO Desk Officer
Siobhan Stewart, Clerk of Council

Apologies: Attorney General, David Ballantyne
HH Administrator, Simon Minshull
Councillor Gordon Worthington
Matthew James, Senior Crown Counsel

1. Welcome

The Acting Administrator welcomed all parties present and those attending remotely. The Acting Administrator acknowledged that this meeting was FCDO Desk Officer, Ailsa Hearne's last Council meeting and conveyed his thanks for her hard work and commitment to Ascension and wished her all the best for the future. HE the Governor, Nigel Phillips CBE, also thanked Ailsa for her excellent work during her tenure with the FCDO Overseas Territories Polar Directorate.

2. Approval of Minutes

The summary of the informal Council meeting held on 26 September 2024, and published on 07 October 2024, was accepted and in accordance with the Council Rules were agreed by Council members.

3. Matters arising

Matters arising were addressed via the Action's Tracker:

Pets on the FIRS: The Acting Administrator explained that confirmation has been received from Defence Supply Chain Operations and Movements [DSCOM] that Military Personnel and MOD Civil Staff are entitled to apply for the movement of pets on the Falkland Islands Resupply Ship [FIRS]. Any applications outside of these criteria will be treated as exceptions and considered on their merits and prioritised accordingly. Kuehne & Nagel have also confirmed that they are accepting pets from civilians on the understanding that Military Personnel and entitled MOD Civilian Staff owned pets will take precedence. The Acting Administrator explained that he has sought confirmation on this policy from the RAF Commander of the Ascension Island Base [CAIB], who will now seek advice from British Forces South Atlantic Islands [BFSAI] to ensure the policy is in line with their understanding also. A further update will be provided to Councillors in due course.

Future Vet Visit Plans: The Acting Administrator confirmed that a bid to support costs associated with bringing a veterinarian to Ascension has been approved by the Ascension Island Marine Protected Area Community Trust

(AIMPACT) fund. AIG are working with the Falkland Islands Senior Veterinary Officer to agree a suitable time for a visit, which is currently projected to take place in by 31 March 2025.

4. Joint Ministerial Council

Councillor Nicholls provided an update following his and Councillor Kerry Benjamin's attendance at the Joint Ministerial Council [JMC] that ran from 20 to 21 November 2024 at the Locarno Suite at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) in London. Councillor Nicholls reported that prior to the commencement of the JMC himself and Councillor Kerry Benjamin attended a meeting of the South Atlantic Overseas Territories at Falklands House, to discuss the agenda for both the JMC and the UKOTA Political Council ahead of the UKOTA Political Council meeting at Church House later that day. On the evening of Monday 18 November 2024, a Ministerial dinner was hosted by The Rt Hon Stephen Doughty MP, Minister for the Overseas Territories, at the residence of the Foreign Secretary in Carlton Gardens, enabling overseas territories delegates to meet each other, and Minister Doughty, in an informal setting and to make appropriate introductions during dinner. Councillor Nicholls explained that the JMC provided an excellent opportunity for elected representatives of the Overseas Territories to meet with UK government ministers and officials to discuss issues of common concern and to celebrate the unique relationship overseas territories enjoy with the UK. Councillor Nicholls reported that the following matters were discussed over the course of the JMC; Resetting the relationship, Security and Irregular Migration, Climate and Environment, Illicit Finance and Sanctions, ODA Recipient Territories and Human Development. Councillor Nicholls confirmed that interventions were made on behalf of Ascension Island on the following topics; Resetting the relationship, Climate and Environment, Economic Diversification and resilience, Illicit Finance and Sanctions and finally, Human Development. Unfortunately, there was no more time available to make an intervention on ODA Recipient Territories or Security and Irregular Migration.

Councillor Nicholls reported on several items worthy of note both during and after the JMC discussions. Firstly, that the UK Government has conveyed its commitment to seeking a relationship with its remaining Overseas Territories that is strong, based on a modern, respectful, engaging and evolving partnership. As such, the majority of leaders and elected representatives, supported a new UK White Paper that addresses the advancement of all territory constitutions and recognises their collective responsibilities, as the existing 2012 White Paper has now reached its maturity. Secondly, Councillor Nicholls explained that that the new UK Government has set out five principles towards the Overseas Territories;

1. **Devolution and democratic autonomy** - establishing clear consistency on constitutional principles of partnership and engagement.
2. **Listening** - firmly believe in the principle of "nothing about you without you".
3. **Partnership** - built on mutual respect and inclusion involving all Government Departments, not just the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office.
4. **Rights come with responsibilities** - shared values of the British family include a robust commitment to democracy, the rule of law and liberty, and the protection of human rights.
5. **Advancement of good governance** - ensuring proper democratic accountability and regulation.

Finally, Councillor Nicholls noted the attendance of Minister Doughty for the duration of the JMC, as well as the attendance of UK government ministers and other senior government officials attending throughout, including the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary at the conclusion, indicating the importance the new Labour Government has placed on the JMC. Councillor Nicholls also highlighted that under Minister Doughty's leadership all UK Government Departments have been assigned a Minister with responsibility for the relationship with the Overseas Territories.

Councillor Nicholls reported that himself, Councillor Kerry Benjamin and HE the Governor, Nigel Phillips CBE, attended a bilateral meeting with Minister Doughty at the Foreign Secretary's residence in Carlton Gardens during the morning of Tuesday 19 November 2024, whereby Minister Doughty took particular note of the developments regarding the 'Future of Ascension' and welcomed the 'One Island Vision' statement that had been agreed between the AIG, FCDO and MoD. The Minister also noted organisational collaboration in relation to waste management practices since the publishing of the One Island Vision statement in May 2024. Minister Doughty took a keen interest in Ascension Island's shipping challenges and the impact around food security, with the minister making a note to discuss the matter at a future date with the MoD. The Minister also took a keen interest

in Ascension Island's general infrastructure and finances however, it was agreed that the FCDO economists report needed to be finalised before any further consideration could be given to this matter.

Councillor Nicholls explained that as well as attending each of the sessions, and speaking on the subjects already mentioned, both himself and Councillor Kerry Benjamin were able to offer their support and stand in solidarity with the other overseas territories on matters that do not to unduly affect Ascension Island, such as Security and Irregular Migration and Illicit Finance and Sanctions. This was particularly welcomed by the Caribbean Overseas Territories as, during a meeting with the House of Commons Speaker, Sir Lindsay Hoyle, Councillor Nicholls described how other Overseas Territories applauded when he made a statement of support and solidarity.

Councillors Nicholls was pleased to report that the JMC continues to provide an excellent platform for elected representatives of the Overseas Territories to meet and discuss with UK Government Ministers many of the issues that the OT's face in common. Councillor Nicholls expressed how the Ascension Island Council looks forward to working jointly with the new UK government over the coming year to ensure that the productive discussions had at this year's JMC translate into tangible action that the people of Ascension can see and ultimately benefit from.

Councillor Nicholls explained that following the JMC the Overseas Territories and UK Governments published a [Communique](#).

Councillor Nicholls and Councillor Kerry Benjamin conveyed their thanks to the Head of the Administrator's Office, Carl Mackerras for his support and assistance in collating and providing the briefing documents for the JMC, Clerk to Council Siobhan Stewart for logistical support and FCDO Desk Officer, Ailsa Hearne who provided much support and assistance during their time in London generally and at the JMC itself. Councillor Kerry Benjamin expressed her gratitude at being able to represent Ascension Island at the JMC, noting that it was a very worthwhile experience.

Councillor Nicholls also made note of two additional meetings himself and Councillor Benjamin attended with both Blue Marine and Blue Belt Representatives, as well as Encompass Digital Media. Blue Marine and Blue Belt suggested that following the establishment of the Ascension Island Marine Protected Area Community Trust (AIMPACT) Fund that monies be spent in the community, along with a gentle reminder that Inshore Fisheries Legislation is yet to be finalised. Councillor Nicholls and Councillor Kerry Benjamin also reported meeting with the Chief Executive Officer of Encompass Digital Media where rising utility prices, power outages and battery storage was discussed.

Councillor Shearer thanked Councillor Nicholls and Councillor Kerry Benjamin for attending and providing the update to Council, however highlighted that issues around shipping and food security had been discussed in previous bilateral meetings as a concern and hoped for resolution this time. Councillor Kerry Benjamin suggested that the South Atlantic Overseas Territories meet on a quarterly basis to discuss areas of common interest with a view to supporting each other where possible. Councillor Shearer agreed.

5. Financial Regulations and Contract Regulations

The Director of Resources [DoR] advised Councillors that draft Financial Regulations and Contract Regulations have been produced for the Ascension Island Government and once adopted will be internal AIG Regulations. The DoR explained that whilst these Regulations do not require formal recommendation from Councillors prior to being sent to the Governor for adoption he welcomed any questions or comments Councillors may have. Councillor Nicholls highlighted legislative references specific to St Helena, the DoR agreed to review the documents with AIG's Senior Crown Counsel prior to finalising the Regulations. Councillor Nicholls confirmed that he would review the documents thoroughly and highlight any points via email at a future date.

6. Any other business

There were four items of other business:

- i. Fire Service:** Councillor Nicholls asked whether the agreement between AIG and the MOD [DIO] to provide Emergency Fire Response had been finalised. The Acting Administrator confirmed that temporary

cover remains in place, with formalisation of the temporary agreement to be resolved in due course. Councillor Nicholls requested clarity as to whether the AIG will be required to purchase a Fire Engine to support. The Acting Administrator confirmed that he would seek clarity from the MOD and will provide an update to Council at a later date.

- ii. **Christmas Lights:** Councillor Alan Nicholls noted that the new Christmas Street lights recently purchased looked very nice.
- iii. **JMC:** HE the Governor, Nigel Phillips CBE commented on what was an exceptional JMC and thanked Councillors for their attendance and contributions on behalf of Ascension Island.
- iv. **Farewell from FCDO Officer, Ailsa Hearne:** FCDO Desk Office, Ailsa Hearne, thanked Council members for their kind words and well wishes and expressed her pleasure to have been able to serve Ascension in the role of FCDO Desk Officer, encouraging Councillors to continue their excellent work in representing Ascension.

7. Proposed dates of next meetings:

Informal Council Meeting	–	10:00 19 December 2024
Formal Council Meeting	–	16:30 09 January 2025

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 17:00

Siobhan Stewart
Clerk of Council

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



Carl Mackerras
On behalf of HE the Governor, Nigel Phillips CBE