

**ASCENSION ISLAND  
GOVERNMENT**

Clerk of Council's Office  
Ascension Island  
South Atlantic Ocean  
ASCN 1ZZ



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**Informal meeting of the Ascension Island Council**

**10:00 on Thursday 19 December 2024 at the Court House**

**MEETING SUMMARY**

Present: HH Simon Minshull, Administrator  
Director of Resources, Peter Thomas  
Acting Attorney General, Matthew James  
Councillor Kyla Benjamin  
Councillor Alan Nicholls  
Councillor Laura Shearer  
Councillor Gordon Worthington

In attendance: Head of the Administrator's Office, Carl Mackerras  
Siobhan Stewart, Clerk to Council

Apologies: Councillor Kerry Benjamin

**1. Welcome**

The Administrator welcomed all parties and thanked everyone for attending.

**2. Matters arising**

Matters arising were addressed via the actions tracker as follows:

**Pets on the FIRS:** The Head of the Administrator's Office explained that AIG has now received confirmation 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 Head of the Administrator's Office explained that he has sought confirmation on this policy from the RAF Commander of the Ascension Island Base [CAIB], who is now waiting on confirmation 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 Head of the Administrator's Office 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 by 31 March 2025. The Administrator noted that the Falkland Islands Senior Veterinary Officer continues to provide valuable remote support to pet owners as necessary.

**3. Domestic Abuse Ordinance**

The Acting Attorney General [AAG] explained that Ascension currently lacks specific legal mechanisms to protect people suffering from domestic abuse and therefore now seeks to introduce a Domestic Abuse Ordinance, 2025. The Ordinance aims to provide the necessary legal powers to protect vulnerable adults and children from various forms of domestic abuse, which can extend beyond physical violence to include emotional, psychological, and economic abuse, as well as coercive and controlling behaviour. The AAG provided an overview of Domestic Violence Protection Notices [DVPN's] and Domestic Abuse Protection Orders [DAPO's] which will provide both the Police and Court further powers for immediate and long-term protections for victims of domestic abuse, which are transferrable in their application between Ascension and St Helena. The AAG noted that DVPN's do not require the

victim's consent to be issued. The AAG explained that whilst the draft Ordinance draws significantly from St Helena's Domestic Abuse Ordinance, 2017, it also mirrors key provisions from the UK's Domestic Abuse Act, 2021, ultimately ensuring that Ascension's domestic abuse protections align with modern day standards.

The AAG thanked Councillor Shearer for her comments and feedback provided prior to the meeting. Discussion was had regarding the interpretation of sexual abuse and whether this would capture intimate image abuse. The AAG noted that the AIG are currently reviewing cyber security legislation and awareness more generally, adding that legislative changes can be made at a future date should interpretations be found to be needing to be more descriptive. Conversation was had with regards to DAPO's and who an application can be made by. The AAG explained that Hospital Staff are not included in the list of persons who may make an application due to confidentiality issues however, either the persons to whom the application relates, or a Police Officer or Social Worker may make an application.

The AAG explained that when an undertaking is made by a respondent, it would remain in force for the period stated in the undertaking however, it may not exceed a period of three years. Discussion was had regarding the length of time an undertaking can remain in force for and whether it was sufficient, with the AAG noting the high sentencing threshold for contempt of Court should an order be breached.

Discussion was had regarding the level of fine applied to a person who without reasonable excuse does anything that he or she is prohibited from doing by an Order under this Ordinance, Councillor Shearer conveyed her concern that a fine of up to £1000.00 was set too low. The AAG explained that punishment levels have been mirrored as to what is currently applied in St Helena and are felt to be proportionate to levels of income in Ascension. The AAG highlighted that any fine was on a per incident basis and may also be accompanied by imprisonment for five years, as well as sum of compensation, if awarded by the Court. Further discussion was had regarding the correlation between the Entry Control to Ascension Policy trigger points and the level of offences in the draft Domestic Abuse Ordinance, 2025. Conversation was had regarding custodial sentences and the mechanisms in place to manage them effectively on Ascension.

The AAG explained that the Child Welfare Ordinance, 2011, lists both ages 16 and 18 years old when referring to children, depending on the circumstances referred to. Discussion was had regarding controlling or coercive behaviour between persons who are both under the age of 16, following a recent case in the UK. The AAG suggested that prior to taking any immediate action, it would be best to await any findings following the enquiry as to why prosecution could not take place in the example case referred to. It was confirmed that DAPO's awarded in Ascension will not transfer to the UK, however the AAG could envisage a complainant citing a DAPO if applying to UK Courts for protection.

The AAG encouraged Councillors to meet collectively outside Council to discuss their concerns and submit a collective response in writing ahead of the formal meeting of Council in January 2025.

#### **4. National Protected Areas Legislation**

The AAG explained that on 06 July 2023 the Ascension Island Council formally recommended that the policy on the expansion of the national protected areas networks be recommended for adoption. Councillors also formally recommended that the management plans for the existing protected areas be approved for adoption. The Governor accepted the Councillors' recommendation in principle at the 06 July meeting, pending final confirmation from a key stakeholder. The AAG acknowledged that whilst it is likely that Councillor Shearer will be managing these Nature Reserves in her primary employment role with the AIG, this declaration of interest was not considered one which materially affects the ability of Councillor Shearer to participate objectively in the determination of the item of business. Elected members of Council agreed.

The AAG explained that whilst work is ongoing with a key stakeholder who has an interest in one area being proposed to become a Nature Reserve, this should not hold up the progress on forming and approving the legislative changes.

The AAG highlighted the key areas within the National Protected Areas Ordinance, Order and Regulations, noting the amendments made and the repeal of the Green Mountain National Park Regulations, removing unnecessary duplication of powers. The AAG highlighted the following changes to the Wildlife Protection (Amendment) Ordinance; the addition of three species of bill fish already protected under the international Commission for the

Conservation of Atlantic Tunas [ICCAT], as well as the addition of several invertebrate species. Discussion was had regarding the definition of harass, both in wilfully and reckless manners.

The AAG explained that proposed changes made to the the Harbours (Ascension) (Amendment) Regulations was initially discussed during the runway resurfacing project where there were significant construction projects happening in the Harbour. The changes proposed will provide additional safeguards to the environment in protected areas.

## **5. Sick Leave Provision & subsequent Ordinance**

The AAG explained that a period of consultation is currently underway in relation the draft Policy on the Legal Requirement for Sick Leave Provision, and will end on 22 December 2024. The AAG thanked Councillors for raising issues experienced by their constituents and thanked them for their insights and review. The AAG explained that the draft policy sets out essential guidelines to standardise sick leave provisions across all employing organisations in Ascension, ensuring fair treatment and effective management of health-related absences. The AAG noted that to allow a person to adequately recover from sickness, it is considered appropriate that a person may not have their contract terminated for the reason of absence from work while they are overseas on a medical referral by the SMO, unless the person has failed to follow reasonable instructions from the SMO with regard to receiving treatment or to returning to Ascension.

Councillors Nicholls conveyed his thanks on behalf of constituents to the AAG for drafting the policy, adding that he felt it adequately addressed constituents' concerns. Discussion was had regarding employing organisation specific issues such as child sick leave that at this stage was not recommended as requiring formal regulation. Councillor Nicholls requested that the legislation be prepared as soon as possible following the end of the public consultation period.

## **6. Single Use Vapes (prohibition of Sale) Ordinance**

The AAG explained that Single-use vapes are currently the subject of discussion in the UK, and their sale is likely to be prohibited as early as July 2025. Due to the limited capability for waste disposal in Ascension, with the majority of waste being incinerated or put in a landfill, as well as the potential risk of environmental harm, it is proposed that Ascension follow suit with the UK. The AAG explained that the policy does not make possession of a single use vape unlawful, but simply the sale of a single use vapes in Ascension. The AAG provided the following definition; a vape will be considered to be single-use if it cannot have its battery recharged, or have its vaping substance refilled. The AAG explained that the policy will go out for public consultation soon and an update will be provided to Council in due course. Councillor Shearer conveyed her support of a ban on the sale of single-use vapes. Councillor Nicholls requested an update on the banning of single use plastics more generally. The AAG requested that Councillor Nicholls submit a Councillor Enquiry Form to allow for a full and considered response regarding the wider issue.

## **7. Medium Term Financial Planning**

The DoR provided an update to Council following a meeting of the AIG Senior Management Team to the discuss medium term financial planning of AIG. The DoR explained that 40 potential options were discussed with the impact of island partners as well as the wider community considered under each option. The DoR confirmed that the AIG is currently running a significant operational deficit, in addition to potential capital spend creating a need to identify solutions to close the fiscal gap. Discussion was had in relation to areas where more money could possibly be generated and where money could be saved, all of which would be considered as part of the budget setting process at the end of January 2025 with the Ascension Island Council Finance Committee. Councillor Nicholls thanked the DoR for the update and acknowledged the difficult exercise being conducted, noting the rising cost of living for the community generally in Ascension, encouraging consideration of external funding sources, such as UKHMG.

## **8. Oxford University Research**

Councillor Shearer explained that concerns were raised at a prior informal meeting of the Ascension Island Council on 06 November 2024 regarding the recent research visit by the rare earth metals team from Oxford University and requested further information with regards to what initiated this research and what the findings were. The Administrator referred to the two public presentations that were held in October 2024 where it was explained that the research being conducted was into the presence of rare earth metals in Ascension, in conjunction with sub

surface mapping and sample analysis of rock specimens removed from Ascension between 1980 and 1990. The Administrator explained that the research team are currently drafting an article for the Islander Newspaper on the research they conducted on Ascension. The Administrator also made mention of a report received by the research team that he is currently reviewing, which he will request permission to share with Councillors. The Administrator emphasised that only research has been permitted at this stage, with no commitment by AIG or HE the Governor, Nigel Phillips CBE, to conduct any further research. The Administrator explained that British Geological Survey also visited recently to explore options to improve collation of seismic activity data on and around Ascension.

## 9. Post 16 Education

Councillor Shearer referred to a Councillor Enquiry Form that was originally raised by Councillor Kerry Benjamin and reported that young people on Ascension have raised concerns regarding only having the option of sitting two A level subjects, despite the standard requirements to attend university being three A levels. Councillor Nicholls recalled that pupils from Two Boats School were previously able to attend Chichester College for further education but was unaware of the reasons why this was no longer available. The DoR provided an overview of how A level education is offered to students via distance learning on Ascension, noting that specific requests to sit three A levels will and have been considered previously. The DoR described the challenges faced by young people when bridging the gap from face to face teaching to distance learning and highlighted the benefits of the AIG Youth Trainee Programme for young people who do not wish to pursue further education in a school environment. Councillor Laura Shearer asked whether consideration could be given to linking up with Westgate School in Winchester in the UK as has been done in previous years with Chichester College. Councillor Laura Shearer also suggested sharing A level resources with St Helena or other UK Overseas Territories, however students are likely to face similar challenges as this would also be through distance learning. The Administrator explained that further consideration will be given the matter following the return of the Head Teacher at Two Boats School. Discussion was had regarding future school leavers. Councillors Shearer requested that improved methods of identification of Youth Trainee positions in AIG be conducted in 2025 to allow Youth Trainees to be better prepared for interviews. The DoR acknowledged the issues raised and confirmed that this would be addressed.

## 10. Road Safety Concern

Councillor Shearer explained that Councillors had been approached by a constituent with concerns around vehicle speed limits on the airfield perimeter road in the vicinity of the Bulk Fuel Installation [BFI] and the Ascension Island Base headquarters [AIB HQ], with recent near misses reported in this specific area. To provide additional safety to pedestrians crossing the road, fuel bowsers, and other large vehicles it was requested that the speed limit be reduced from 30mph to 20mph. It was agreed that Councillor Worthington would progress this request with a formal legislative change application, along with maps and further information on the near misses mentioned to justify the change. Councillor Shearer suggested that consideration also be given to additional road markings to assist visitors who are unfamiliar with driving on the left-hand side of the road. The Administrator highlighted that it would be normal practice for a period of public consultation to take place on a proposed legislative change like this.

## 11. Any other business

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

- i. **Visit by the Acting Director of the Overseas Territories and Polar Directorate:** The Administrator notified Councillors that Sarah Hulton OBE, Acting Director of the Overseas Territories and Polar Directorate, Foreign and Commonwealth and Development Office plans to visit Ascension from 09-10 January 2025 to conduct a familiarisation visit. The Administrator explained that the Head of the Administrator's Office was currently preparing a visit programme and would reach out to Councillors to arrange a meeting during the visit.
- ii. **Airbridge seat allocation:** The Administrator explained that following a review of seating allocations on the South Atlantic Airbridge the following amendments to allocations has been made for the period from 01 January 2025 to 31 March 2025; The Falkland Islands Government (FIG) will be able to bid for up to 40 seats per flight; up from 31 seats, and the Ascension Island Government (AIG) will be able to bid for up to 10 seats per flight; down from 15 seats. Whilst this is expected to have little to no impact in Ascension it will be reviewed following this three-month period.
- iii. **Visiting band to Ascension:** Councillor Gordon Worthington explained that about eight members of The Band of the Princess of Wales Royal Regiment will be visiting Ascension Island in January 2025. In addition

to performing at an RAF event, the band are keen to offer a public performance in the Georgetown Square. Councillor Worthington relayed the CAIB's request for AIG to provide logistical support with the event in Georgetown, the Administrator confirmed that in principle the AIG would be happy to support logistically and requested that dates be confirmed as soon as possible to allow planning of resources.

The next formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council will be held on Thursday 16 January 2025.

The meeting closed at 11:45.

Siobhan Stewart  
Clerk to Council