

# MINUTES OF THE ASCENSION ISLAND COUNCIL (AIC)

## MEETING HELD IN THE COURT HOUSE,

Friday, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2016 at 13:00hrs

Present: (by telephone) HE Governor Lisa Phillips  
HH Administrator Marc Holland  
Walter Scott, Solicitor General  
Jamie Manson, Director of Resources  
Councillor Samantha Arms-Lawrence  
Councillor Marie-Anne Dennis  
Councillor Jacqui Ellick  
Councillor Kitty George

In attendance: Nicola Dillon, Clerk of Council

Overseas: Councillor Nicholas John

### 1. Swearing-in of the new Island Council

Following the General Election on Thursday, 1 September, four elected members were present for the inaugural meeting of the Ascension Island Council.

The meeting began with the administration of oaths to the following members:

1. Councillor Samantha Arms-Lawrence
2. Councillor Marie-Anne Dennis
3. Councillor Jacqui Ellick
4. Councillor Kitty George

Councillor Nicholas John was on leave and would be sworn in when he returned to the island.<sup>1</sup>

### 2. Address by Governor Lisa Phillips

The Governor offered her congratulations to the newly elected Council. She noted that most of the Councillors had been re-elected and there was a new councillor, Cllr Dennis; she looked forward to working with the new Council. The Governor recently visited Ascension (25-29 August) and she referred to her comments made during her visit when she talked about working on the whole relationship and putting effort into the relationship between the Government and the people of Ascension. The Councillors were the Governor's eyes and ears and she relied upon them to keep her in touch with the electorate on Ascension.

The Administrator picked up on the Governor's comments about improving the relationship between the Government and the Council (the people of Ascension) and said that linked to this was the drop in turnout at the General Election. Councillors noted that there was a sense of apathy during the election and offered their views on why this might be.

Cllr George said that she felt that the public was disappointed about developments over the last

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<sup>1</sup> Cllr John was sworn in as a member of the Island Council on Tuesday, 20 September 2016.

year, e.g. the delay of the airport and access to St Helena, especially in compassionate cases. People feel that the airport was not developing as quickly as it should be and the lines of communication were not open. She said that during the election campaign candidates went out to speak to the electorate, but most people seemed disinterested.

Cllr Ellick said that she had spoken to employees on the US Base and their view was they did not see any benefits from the Government spending, i.e., the school, playgrounds etc. There were other issues which exacerbated the apathy shown by these employees, including a recent pension dispute involving one of their colleagues, which added to their worry. Cllr Ellick talked about scheduling council meetings after work, which would enable members of the public to attend. Both the Governor and the Administrator were flexible as were other members and this suggestion would be explored.

Cllr Dennis reiterated the sentiments which were raised; one of the comments which were made during the elections by the electorate was that Council did not do anything for them.

Cllr Arms-Lawrence also agreed with the views raised.

Councillors felt that more public meetings with the constituents might help to dispel these myths. In closing, the Governor told Councillors to 'prove their worth'.

### **3. Presentation of the Council Agenda, 2016-19, by the Administrator, Marc Holland**

The Administrator talked through the issues which Council would be focussing on over the next three years.

#### Airlink

This was still a priority and a lot of work had taken place to develop an airlink between St Helena and Ascension and win the support of the employers to fund it. The delay in the opening of the airport meant that further development was on hold until the issues surrounding the airport were resolved. In the meantime the RMS would continue to service both islands.

#### Employment law

This was something that the Council would be starting on immediately and involved a revision of the 1926 Workman's Protection Ordinance. It was hoped to get this completed within the next year and would include consultation both within the Council and the wider public.

#### Infrastructure Review

The FCO had provided funding to do a study of the Pier including the ship to shore operations; as well as the condition of the island's infrastructure, housing, roads etc. This might also include the buildings at Babcock, power house etc. The study was linked to the 'Future of Ascension' discussions and would be a long term project.

#### Protection of the Island's terrestrial and marine biodiversity

Council would be involved in regulating the inshore fishery and the evolving offshore fishery, including looking at the licencing regime. The question of whether Ascension moves to a full MPA (Marine Protected Area) would be addressed in these discussions. The Administrator said that it was intended to consult extensively on the inshore fishery regulations and this might lead to a review of the Harbours Ordinance.

#### Development of a Biosecurity Policy

The Conservation & Fisheries Directorate had a new person who was employed to look at a

biosecurity policy for the island (50% Conservation Officer, 50% Biosecurity). Council will be consulted as the policy is developed.

#### Waste Management Strategy

The Waste Management Strategy would look at implementing policies for managing the One Boat site, including waste handling and recycling. It could result in possible charges for users.

#### Tax Changes

In light of the PricewaterhouseCoopers taxation review, the Director of Resources would be consulting Council on looking at a successor to the Business Levy. The current Business Levy arrangements raise £1.4million from the UK-based employers, and this runs out in 2018. Discussions on this would start early next year.

#### Child Safeguarding standards

Raising child safeguarding standards was still a priority and was primarily the responsibility of the Safeguarding Board, who occasionally needed to consult Council. One of the issues that the Board would be looking at was how to deal with children who might need fostering and to put a policy in place to care for them.

#### Entry Control Procedures

AIG was currently reviewing the efficiency of the entry control procedures, to move away from a manual paper-based operation by modernising it and having better security checks. The Administrator emphasised that the review was not looking at the policy, but was looking at the procedure to make applying for an entry permit easier and more efficient.

#### Crisis Management System

Implementing a crisis management system as based on the report produced by Alistair Smith in 2015.

#### Law and Legal Services Review

SHG was currently running a law and legal services review which might lead to some changes in Ascension legislation which would come back to Council.

#### Fuel

There had been concerns in recent weeks regarding the fuel which was sold on island not being suitable for modern vehicles and giving car owners problems with their vehicles. This was something that AIG was looking at, although the retailer for this commodity was Solomons who purchased it from Babcock, and this issue was not directly within the Government's control.

#### Hydroponics

Council would be kept informed of the progress of the hydroponics project to ensure that the project delivered as expected.

#### Dogs and Cats Ordinance

This ordinance would be looked at to see if it was still fit for purpose and still worked for Ascension.

The Administrator said that it was hoped that many of the items would be started soon. He referred to Councillors manifestos and picked up on a few points, scheduling of Council meetings, equality and raising public morale. The Employment Law, which would be brought to Council for consultation soon, would help address some of these issues.

In her response, Cllr George said that the electorate would welcome the work being done on the Employment Law. With regards to Biosecurity she hoped that a balance could be struck between preventing threats from introduced species and allowing people to bring in fruit and vegetables from the UK because of the lack of availability on the island. Cllr George agreed that fuel should be looked at as this was a complaint that many residents had; the poor fuel was problematic for vehicles.

In his conclusion, the Administrator said that the issues on the agenda affected people's day to day lives and it would improve things for island residents if they were addressed. He invited Councillors to come back to him with other issues that they would like to address over the coming months.

The Governor agreed that the agenda was a good starting point. She also felt that the Council should communicate more with the people; if they were more visible, the public would be more likely to engage with them. The Administrator thought that this was a good point and was interested to hear Councillors' views on how to get their work seen and understood. He suggested putting public engagement on the agenda for the next meeting.

#### **4. Any Other Business**

##### 4.1. General Elections (Cllr George)

Cllr George raised the issue of the lack of anonymity of voting during the General Election. Voters noted that the ballot paper could be linked to the names on the electoral roll and asked whether this could be looked at. The SG said that the Returning Officer had also raised this and was looking at ways to streamline the elections process. The process would be reviewed and the necessary changes made.

##### 4.2. Fish Exports (Cllr George)

Cllr George raised a question which had been asked regarding arrangements for fish exports for visiting dignitaries, referencing a recent diplomatic visit. The DoR responded as Custodian of Customs and reassured Council that there was no special treatment applied to visiting dignitaries. The group in question purchased the required export permits to cover the export of any fish they took.

##### 4.3. Scholarships (Cllr George)

At a recent public meeting with the Governor a parent raised the issue of scholarships for St Helenian children living on Ascension. The Administrator said that he had written to the Governor to follow this up. The Governor said that she would investigate and report back to Council.

##### 4.4. Feeding of Donkeys in Georgetown (Cllr George)

Donkeys were becoming a nuisance in Georgetown, especially at the school bus stop. Residents asked whether a notice could be put up to ask visitors to refrain from feeding them as this was encouraging donkeys to approach people and to come into residential areas. DoR said that a notice would be published in the Islander. The SG agreed that while the practice of feeding donkeys was seen as quaint by visitors, there were social consequences. All residents should work together with visitors etc. to ask them to stop feeding the donkeys.

##### 4.5. Sharks at the Pier Head (Cllr George)

Cllr George had been approached by a fisherman about the practice of dumping fish carcasses. It was felt that the recent shark sightings at the Pier Head were being encouraged

by the dumping of fish carcasses in the sea at the pierhead. If the carcasses were dumped further out to sea, this would remove the attraction of food for the sharks. The Fisheries Scientific team were looking at what the underlying reasons were for sharks coming into the pier head. In the meantime bins would be placed at the Pier Head for disposal of the carcasses, which would later be taken out to sea away from the Pier.

#### 4.6. Boat Yard (Cllr George)

China Town residents had complained about the state of the Boat Yard, which had become an eyesore. Concern had also been raised about the storage of boats, fuel and other discarded items (including vehicles) in the surroundings of homes occupied by the Ascension Island Fishing Charters (AIFC) company and outside the Tasty Tucker building.

The Administrator said that the Director of Operations was looking at cleaning this area up. The other issues that would be looked at were housing and the obligations of the housing licence holder, and also the erecting of non-permanent structures. The issue of abandoned vehicles was a wider issue on Ascension and would be addressed in the near future.

#### 4.7. Policing (Cllr George)

Residents had raised the issue of ‘over-zealous’ policing by the local force and the military police during and following local functions. The approach by police was causing tensions within the community. The Administrator advised taking the concerns to the police in the first instance; he also suggested that the Police Inspector meet with Councillors at their next informal meeting.

#### 4.8. Council Committees (Director of Resources)

DoR alerted Councillors to the requirement for members to think about representation on Council Committees, including the Finance Committee and the Biodiversity and Fisheries Protection Committee.

#### 4.9. Island Council Background Note (Solicitor General)

The SG said that he had a document which the new Council would find useful, which set out policy and regulatory framework and how the Council feed into Government roles. He suggested scheduling this for an informal meeting to enable the newer Councillors to go through the briefing document.

#### 4.10. JMC 2016

The Administrator also reminded Council that nominations for this year’s JMC (Joint Ministerial Council) were urgently needed to enable preparations to begin.

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 13.55hrs.

Nicola Dillon  
Clerk of Council