

MINUTES OF THE ASCENSION ISLAND COUNCIL (AIC)

MEETING HELD IN THE COURT HOUSE,

Thursday, 05th April 2018 at 13:30hrs

Present: (by telephone) HE the Governor Lisa Honan
(by telephone) Andrew Sigley, Foreign Office
HH Administrator Justine Allan
Mark Neale, Crown Counsel
Jamie Manson, Director of Resources (DoR)
Councillor Nicholas John
Councillor Jacqui Ellick
Councillor Terence Young

In attendance: Emma Corrigan, Clerk of Council

Apologies: Councillor Kitty George
Councillor Samantha Arms-Lawrence

1. Welcome

The Administrator welcomed all to the meeting. The Governor, Lisa Honan was pleased to be able to attend via telephone as was Andrew Sigley of FCO. Councillors welcomed Justine Allan to her first Council meeting.

2. Approval of the Budget for 2018 – 2019

Jamie Manson confirmed the Finance Committee had met and had reviewed the proposed budget in detail and stated that setting the budget for the year had been particularly challenging for this year due to the unusual circumstances the island was currently experiencing with the limited accessibility that had impacted on the number of visitors and therefore had reduced revenue; this situation was unlikely to alter until the Air-bridge re-opened in 2020, however the regular military flights were allowing for the passage of contractors which produced a stable tax revenue.

AIG was looking to spend £7.65M on operating services over the next year with no anticipated cut back on staff or current services. The impact on operating costs were a result from the loss of direct access to the UK, which had greatly affected the travel costs, expected increased freight costs from the replacement cargo service following the loss of the RMS, an expected increase of 2-3% for utilities by Babcock and an increase of 7.5% on Telecommunication services by Sure. AIG estimated to raise £6.5M which would produce a deficit of £1.15M so reserves would be used to offset this predicted deficit. Mr Manson concluded that the budget for 2019 – 2020 was expected to be similar to that of 2018, with a predicted deficit, but from 2020 onwards when the Air-bridge had re-opened, AIG expected the deficit to decrease and by 2021 the budget was to be stable once again.

AIG was looking to appropriate £3.2M capital, the largest appropriation ever proposed, due to the additional CSSF funds. 80% of the fund was earmarked for the prioritised infrastructure projects; sewage works, fire hydrants, fuel station and waste management, and the costs for the temporary skilled project managers, consultants and contract staff associated with those projects.

Cllr John asked if AIG had any intention to re-introduce tourist accommodation in the future, particularly for the fishing charter businesses, as this was a further possible source of future income. Justine Allan stated this was a valid point and explained that a request had recently been received by a group from the British Geological Society to return to the island. A response had been sent explaining they could use Two Boats Lodge as before, that was previously offered at very little charge. However, as the proposed visit was to be for a longer period the charge for the Lodge was to be at a similar rate to that of the Bed & Breakfast business on the island but added that as the local business offered extras for the same rates it represented better value for money. Cllr John stated in the past the fishing charter businesses would expect about 20 visitors per

month and the current B&B could not accommodate these numbers. The Administrator replied that the local business should have the first opportunity to accommodate visitors. Mr Manson added that during the runway works AIG might accommodate some contract staff in the Guest House but once the runway had reopened then AIG were not looking to operate an accommodation business and would perhaps seek another operator to run a hotel on the island. Justine Allan added that a longer-term strategy was required for the island; only that morning the Commander of the British Forces had stressed that Ascension was essential for the Military operations for the Falkland Islands and would be required for, at least, the next 35 years. AIG had been awarded £50,000 by the Global Britain Fund for a new ambulance which, together with the CSSF money for infrastructure improvements and the investment made in the runway, showed the UK was supporting the future of Ascension.

Decision: The Councillors all agreed unanimously (absent Councillors had sent their vote via email) to advise the Governor to approve the budget.

Action: The Governor approved the budget for 2018-2019.

3. Update on the new Fuel Station

Nathan Millington, Director of Operations, joined the meeting and the Councillors introduced themselves. Mr Millington explained the new fuel station project, which would supply both petrol and clean diesel, was funded through the CSSF money and was expected to be completed by December this year. The project was two-phased, the current temporary fuel storage and supply was to be moved to the new site in Georgetown with the introduction of clean diesel in July, and the completion of the new purpose-built fuel station with the re-introduction of the supply of petrol by the end of the year. The storage facility would hold 80,000L, enough diesel to supply the island for at least 6 months with a further 20,000L in reserve. Adjacent to that would be a storage unit for petrol, holding 40,000L. The site was chosen as it was already level, was considered a safe area and was in close proximity to the Pier Head but was not ideal and the problems of storm-surge flooding and a blind corner for the traffic had to be addressed. The fuel container would be off-loaded from the FIRS, emptied into the storage unit and re-loaded on the FIRS.

A shipment of clean diesel was expected on the FIRS at the end of June 2018, enough fuel to last until the new fuel station was commissioned. The current storage unit at One Boat was to be moved to the new site, reconditioned to remove the poor diesel, and refilled with the clean diesel shipment.

Cllr John asked if consideration had been given to the heavy machinery traffic that would have to pass through Georgetown to build the new runway and Mr Millington said he was to look into this.

Regarding the supply of petrol, negotiations were going well with the MOD and AIG was waiting for the costings. Mr Millington added that he had attempted to design a reserve of fuel into the project so if the supply of petrol ceased from the MOD post 2020, there was enough reserve to last until an alternative wholesaler and supplier could be secured. The project used modular units that would be easy to maintain and repair. Cllr George had asked for her thanks to be passed on to Mr Millington for driving forward the resolution to this issue.

4. Any Other Business

4.1. Update on Spearfishing, Diving and Swimming

The Administrator stated the need to continue to manage the risks associated with entering the waters around the island. Prof Burgess had stated the main two activities that attracted sharks were chumming and spearfishing and both had reduced considerably over the passing months. Miss Allan added that the ultimate aim was to lift the restriction from entering the water following the circulation of a series of newsletters that clearly explained what the risks were and to have in place proposals stating that chumming was permitted from a certain distance offshore and the separation of spearfishing and swimming activities. The Crown Counsel was drafting an ordinance and the Miss Allan was ensuring the major Employing Organisations were aware that the costs of a medevac were their responsibility and the associated insurances were in place.

Action: Council to discuss further at next meeting

4.2. Two Boats Village – excessive dust

Cllr John explained village residents had reported excessive dust in the area on the road between the School and the CSO building. Mr Manson will report this for clinker to be laid.

Actions: Cllr John to inform Mr Manson which houses were most affected.

Mr Manson would report the requirement for clinker to be laid to the Director of Operations.

4.3. Modern Foreign Languages

The Administrator had been approached by parents who had raised concerns over the lack of French being taught in school after the end of this school year. It was stressed this was not a financial constraint but the school had lost their full time language teacher, a part-time teacher had taken the group up to their GCSE and there were no pupils taking French GCSE for the next school year. However pupils lower down the school might have wanted to take French as an option in the future so the first step was to research the demand for French.

Actions: Council to poll parents on the requirement for French as a GCSE

Mr Manson to meet with School Governors

4.4. Future Council Meeting Schedule

A discussion was held and a three weekly pattern was decided with an informal Council meeting followed by a Formal Council meeting.

Action: Emma Corrigan to set up schedule of meetings to end of 2018.

4.5. Vet / Sheep

Cllr George had emailed that the previous issue with the sheep in Two Boats village had resulted in a community project, the fences had been repaired, the sheep rounded-up and relocated. However, the sheep had returned so Justine Allan was to ask Director of Operations to arrange for the damaged fences to be repaired.

The administrator had spoken with Cllr George regarding the transfer of pets on the FIRS and the tremendous work done by Caz Yon who arranged for vets to come to Ascension was commented on. The last attempted visit did not happen due to timing issues so Justine Allan wanted to ask the Director of Conservation to support Caz in the arrangements for the next visit. Justine also wanted the Conservation Directorate to have a more active role in animal management on the island, covering both imported pets and the indigenous livestock, to better support Caz and her excellent work done on animal welfare.

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 1455hrs.

Emma Corrigan
Clerk of Council

