



Formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council

1630 on Thursday 16th May 2019 at the Court House

MINUTES

Present: HE Dr Philip Rushbrook, Governor
HH Steven Chandler, Administrator
Gareth Morris, Director of Resources
Allen Cansick, Acting Attorney General
Councillor Samantha Arms-Lawrence
Councillor Keturah George
Councillor Nicholas John
Councillor Alan Nicholls

In attendance: Sarah Roberts-Favell, Head of Administrator's Office
Jane Disley, Clerk of Council
Apologies:
Councillor Terence Young [essential duty]

1. Welcome

The Administrator welcomed all parties, and especially the Governor to his first AI Council meeting. In his brief response the Governor said he looked forward to today's discussions and to working with Island Councillors.

2. Approval of minutes

Minutes from the formal meetings on 28 Feb and 25 Mar 2019 were approved.

Action: Clerk to place the minutes on the AIG website and on the noticeboards.

3. Matters arising

The following matters arising from the minutes of the previous formal meeting on 25 Mar 19 were discussed.

3.4 Marine Protected Area (MPA): A Marine Management Plan (MMP) would need to be drafted, along with appropriate legislation, both of which would be brought before the Council in due course.

Action: Dir Cons to draft an MMP. Appropriate legislation to be prepared with inputs from Dir Cons and Crown Counsel.

Update: The Administrator summarised a recent letter from Lord Ahmad (Foreign & Commonwealth Office Minister) which indicated that ongoing UK government funding support for the MPA would be delivered at the forthcoming UK government Spending Review, probably in the late autumn. The Governor added that the strong supportive language was encouraging and indicated a firm intention that HM Treasury intended to support the MPA.

3.5.a) Joint Ministerial Council (JMC) – policy on safeguarding vulnerable adults: The Administrator raised the topic of safeguarding vulnerable adults at the AISCB meeting on 4 Apr. The Board agreed to look at updating its policies to include vulnerable adults.

3.5.b) JMC – availability of CSSF funded training for safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults: The Administrator raised the topic of funded training at the AISCB meeting on 4 Apr. The Board

took note that both the St Helena Government's Director of Safeguarding and the FCO had agreed to highlight to Ascension any funded training opportunities that arose in future.

3. 6.c) Employment legislation: The Administrator advised that the correct version of the Workman's Ordinance was now on the website. He also confirmed that Employment Law had been discussed at the informal Council meeting on 2 May and this was reflected in the meeting summary.

3. 6.e) Minutes on AIG website: The Administrator confirmed that a summary of information previously provided by the Operations Directorate had been attached to the minutes of the formal 25 March meeting.

3. 6.f) Summary of responses to concerns: The Administrator confirmed that summaries of the 11 April and 2 May informal meetings had been completed and had been published. A summary of informal meetings would now be produced after each meeting for publication.

3. 5.a) Hydroponics Committee: Councillors agreed the Committee should consist of Dir Ops plus two councillors, and a fact-finding visit to Hydroponics would be a useful first action for the Committee to undertake (with the Ops Manager (in Dir Ops' absence)). It was also suggested that a visit to the US Hydroponics site would also be useful to see their operation and whether lessons could be learned. Dir Res reported that the AIG Hydroponics Manager had ongoing liaison with the US team and had visited.

Action: The Hydroponics Committee to arrange visits to both the AIG and the US Hydroponics sites, along with the AIG Ops Mgr, and report back in due course.

3. 5.b) Two Boats pool – use by divers: It was confirmed that the divers were now using the pool outside of normal opening hours.

3. 5.c) Two Boats playground: Dir Res reported that AIG estates staff now have the playground included in their visit schedule for checks and maintenance. Cllr John noted that there was also a need for greater inspection of the facility as a whole as some of the wood features were starting to splinter.

3. 5.d) EFFI update: The EFFI update had been provided by Dir Ops and published.

4. Road Safety (Amendment) Ordinance

The A/Attorney General summarised the background to the amendment, reminding Council members that the aim was to minimise disruption to Senior Medical Officer (SMO) availability. The amendment would permit nurses who had been authorised in writing by the SMO to take blood in suspected drink/drive cases. There were no questions and all councillors recommended approval of the amendment to the Governor. The Governor was happy to approve the amendment.

Action: The A/Attorney General to take the necessary steps to formalise the amendment.

5. Appropriation (Amendment) Ordinance

Dir Res explained that there had been a textual error on the original Ordinance that required correction: the Consolidated Fund provision should read £7,106,000 and not £7,107,000. There were no questions and all councillors recommended approval of the amendment to the Governor. The Governor was happy to approve the amendment, having confirmed the accuracy of the revised figure.

Action: Dir Res and A/Attorney General to take the necessary steps to formalise the amendment.

6. Income Tax Rates and Allowance Ordinance

This item was removed from the agenda by the Administrator who noted he expected to place it on the agenda of the next informal meeting.

7. Waste Management Strategy

The Administrator reminded the Council that at its informal meeting on 2 May this item been suggested for discussion. Dir Ops was on annual leave but had provided a briefing note before he left which had been circulated ahead of the meeting. The Administrator reminded the Council that the Waste Management Strategy Project 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle – developing a waste management strategy for Ascension' had been finalised at the end of 2018 and had been launched just this year. There had been close liaison with the other employing organisations on Ascension as it was developed. The project had been majority funded by the UK government's Darwin Initiative with some funding and support from the Blue Marine Foundation. The Strategy espoused three key principles: protection of the environment from harm; aspiration to work to a UK standard; and achievement of sustainable funding. Various topics were raised and discussed:

a. Participation of other employing organisations. Waste is acknowledged as a major issue on the Island and so the other organisations had been involved at an early stage of creating the Strategy and had signed up to its principles. There was some interest in future usage, for example the US Base Cdr had expressed an interest in using the AIG incinerator facilities for waste oil, which the US incinerator was not able to handle. However, no agreement on funding had been made thus far because it was impossible to predict running costs accurately in advance. Part of the cost would depend on the throughput of waste because, for example, an incinerator is not necessarily economical for small volumes. Furthermore, there was more work to be done to determine the level of de-pollution required for cars prior to final disposal. Therefore, a charging strategy could not be set without further data on the quantity/cost balance. AIG needed to engage energetically to encourage greater involvement by other organisations. In order to meet the sustainable funding principle it would be essential for users to pay for waste management services provided by AIG. It would also be important to engage further with the community who had, to date, embraced AIG's recycling effort enthusiastically. In determining a charging strategy that included individuals/households from different organisations rather than just the organisations as a whole, one tricky issue was separation of waste in order to associate charges according to the source/user.

b. Legacy waste. The need to consider legacy waste was discussed and the Administrator confirmed that although there was no legal requirement there was an aspiration to deal with legacy waste via the new infrastructure in due course.

c. Pest control. A concern was raised about rats at the rubbish dump at One Boat. The Administrator confirmed that the Strategy demonstrated AIG's commitment to sorting out the waste problem, but that greater engagement with the other organisations was needed – ideally based on data collected by AIG – in order to show the value of using the facilities rather than dropping waste at the dump. AIG (and the US Base) has pest control processes, which include checking and refilling rodent boxes every 2-4 weeks and extra patrols of the dump. It was not clear how successful these practices were, i.e. how they could be measured, but the Environmental team could be asked for feedback to provide an indication. Liaison between the AIG and US teams to share best practice would be beneficial.

Action: Administrator to ask the Environmental Health team to provide feedback on pest

control and to advise on their working relationship with their US counterparts.

d. Dumping at sea. Dumping of waste food into the sea – US practice – was raised as a potential concern. The Administrator noted that Dir Cons had been reassured the practice was having no detrimental impact at sea. However, looking ahead to MPA establishment we would be looking more closely at the respective practices of disposing waste on land versus at sea.

e. Strategy funding/costs. As already noted there would be ongoing operating costs to run the incinerator and car crusher, including additional human resources. It was suggested that any spare capacity within AIG ought to be considered to flex across, as required, to support waste management operations, e.g. the stand-by Fire & Rescue Service personnel. The Administrator noted the Fire & Rescue team had an important job to do but agreed to consider the potential flexibility of AIG human resources.

The Administrator was pleased to note that the Council agreed the Waste Management Strategy was a positive initiative. He summarised that an effective and efficient waste management strategy would be good for the whole island and it was therefore in everybody's interests to maximise participation because the greater the throughput the more efficient the system and the lower the cost. He thanked everybody for their input and emphasised that this was the beginning of the process, not the end and suggested that Dir Ops provide an update at a future meeting.

Action: Dir Ops to update on progress at a future meeting.

8. Any Other Business

Several AOB points were raised as follows:

a) Georgetown swimming pool: Dir Res (on behalf of Dir Ops) provided an update which included a suggestion to take water from the turtle ponds rather than the open sea. This would considerably simplify the issue with replacing the water pipe as it would be protected from strong currents. However, a minor concern had been expressed about people allowing dogs to use the turtle ponds and the resulting impact on water quality. The Council agreed that with suitable signs and warnings this would be an acceptable and cost effective solution to speed up progress toward reopening the pool.

Action: Ops Manager to pursue this option.

b) AIG website: Dir Res provided an update on the AIG website. Three suppliers had expressed an interest. Two were considered suitable for further engagement, including St Mary's pastor, Gavin Tyte, who had given a presentation on what services he could offer. There was significant enthusiasm to make progress and the two proposals/quotes received would be discussed and actioned shortly.

Action: Dir Res would report back at the next informal meeting.

c) Teaching of Design Technology (DT): Concerns were raised about the priority afforded to DT teaching at Two Boats School. Cllr George had compiled a number of comments she had received from some parents, teachers, and School Governors, the key elements of which were:

- i) *The published advert was for a teacher of History and Geography (Humanities) with an ability to teach DT, PE or modern languages as an option;*
- ii) *School staff and Governors had not been consulted before the advert had been published;*
- iii) *A subsequent School letter circulated to parents was perceived by some as a PR and crisis management exercise in response to complaints;*

- iv) There was some concern the Head Teacher might gravitate towards Humanities above DT and this could result in DT being lost from the curriculum. It should not be an either/or choice between these two subjects;*
- v) Some parents and teachers feel that the loss of DT, a very popular subject and well suited to the less academically inclined, would be detrimental to children's education on Ascension;*
- vi) The Head Teacher role should be reviewed to consider whether it is best done as a split role (school management and teaching);*
- vii) The Head Teacher should seek to include School Governors and fellow teachers in discussions that lead to such decision making. This would bring reassurance to all concerned;*
- viii) A request for clarification about the role of School Governors.*

Councillors noted some of the same concerns had been raised with them. Cllr John thought that the Council should have a link with the Board of Governors and that if there was a change in the priority of certain subjects that the Council ought to be engaged. He also felt that DT benefitted AIG especially when there were problems recruiting people from off-island. Cllr Nicholls also associated himself with the views reported by Cllr George and confirmed that he too had been contacted. He explained that he had grave anxiety about replacement of the DT teacher and the perception resulting from how the advert had been worded. He felt that DT offered hands on, technical experience rather than purely academic development and so offered a valuable route for many young Ascension students. Hence it would be a disservice to lower the priority of DT. He also expressed concern about the lack of communication at the School such that Governors and parents did not know what was going on. Communication of correct information helped to dissipate rumour and gossip and this should be given priority. Cllr Arms-Lawrence aligned herself with the views expressed.

Dir Res responded to the points raised to reassure the Council that DT was valued and the School's current recruitment strategy was focused on delivering a broad and appropriate curriculum with awareness to the balance of teaching resources. The School would benefit from both a DT and a Humanities teacher, and while filling the vacant post with an applicant who could teach both would be ideal, it was acknowledged that this might not prove possible. Dir Res explained that, though not ideal, the teaching of Humanities could still be covered at the School by current teaching resource, but, as everyone was aware, the teaching of DT could not. Therefore, it was expected that the recruitment of a teacher with DT teaching capability would always take priority, which was why a second advert with more of a DT focus had been released to sit alongside the first.

The Administrator, while noting his belief that this was not properly Council business, nevertheless acknowledged the strength of feeling about this subject. He welcomed the Head Teacher's 15 May communication as a useful contribution to help better inform parents about the School's plans. He noted that the School had been clear that it does value DT and was making efforts to continue its teaching, but that it could also not ignore the teaching of Humanities. He proposed that the current recruitment process be allowed to run its course to see if it yielded a positive result. As a contingency, the Head Teacher should be asked now to start to explore other options, consulting with teaching staff and Governors, in case the current recruitment proved to be unsuccessful. He acknowledged this was a difficult balancing act and expressed his thanks to teachers, parents and Governors, and to the Head Teacher and Dir Res for their efforts to find the right balance.

Cllr Nichols proposed that in future the School considers a teaching head as offering greater value for money. The Administrator noted that when the time came there would be a review of current needs in order to inform recruiting requirements. Cllr Nicholls also asked if Governors were aware of their responsibilities and powers. The Administrator explained that these were set out in a

document, but it might be useful to circulate this among relevant parties.

Action: Dir Res to circulate details of Board of Governor powers and responsibilities to relevant parties.

Cllr John suggested that the education system might come under St Helena in order to provide some external oversight. Cllr Nicholls confirmed that St Helena used to have some involvement with the School. Dir Res explained that there was a desire for greater cooperation with St Helena and greater alignment of the curriculum and work was underway to move toward this.

d) General election: The Administrator reminded the Council that there would need to be a general election later in the year and advised that he would likely propose a latest date for dissolution of the Council of 1 Sep (3 years since the previous election). Since it was now just over 3 months to that date it was his intention to submit a Memorandum at the next formal meeting to seek Council's advice for the Governor on an election date and dissolution date.

9. Date of next meetings

It was proposed that the next informal meetings and formal meeting would be held on the following dates:

- Informal – Thursday 30 May at 1630
- Informal – Thursday 13 Jun at 1630
- Formal – Thursday 27 Jun at 1630

10. Photograph of AI Council

Given the absence of Cllr Young, it was decided that the photograph would be taken on another day.

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 1805hrs.

Jane Disley
Clerk of Council