

Association of Shetland Community Councils (ASCC)

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Paper 2

Minute of the ASCC meeting held on Tuesday 08 September 2020, 6.00 pm, online WebEx

Present

Alistair Christie-Henry	Bressay Community Council
Sherri Malcolmson	Dunrossness Community Council
Colin Clark	Gulberwick, Quarff and Cunningsburgh Community Council
Maureen Davis	Gulberwick, Quarff and Cunningsburgh Community Council
Jim Anderson	Lerwick Community Council (Chair)
Gary Robinson	Lerwick Community Council
Willie Simpson	Nesting and Lunnasting Community Council
David Brown	Northmavine Community Council
Ian Walterson	Sandness and Walls Community Council (Vice Chair)
James Garrick	Sandsting and Aithsting
Debra Nicolson	Sandsting and Aithsting
Kieran Malcolmson	Sandwick Community Council
John Hunter	Scalloway Community Council
Andrew Archer	Tingwall, Whiteness and Weisdale Community Council
Patrick Fordyce	Unst Community Council
Laurence Odie	Yell Community Council
Annette Jamieson	Yell Community Council

Elected Members

Steven Coutts - SIC Leader, Shetland West
Ryan Thomson – SIC, North Isles

Officers in Attendance

Michael Duncan	Community Council Liaison Officer – Community Planning and Development, SIC
Vaila Simpson	Executive Manager – Community Planning and Development, SIC
Pat Christie	CIDO - Community Planning and Development, SIC (Minutes)
Anne Cogle	Team Leader – Administration – Governance and Law
Marvin Smith	Commercial Development Officer – Shetland Telecom
Mhari McLeman	Head of Strengthening Communities – Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Neil Grant	Director, Development Services, SIC

Officers Observing

Ana Arnett	CIDO - Community Planning and Development, SIC
Roselyn Fraser	CIDO - Community Planning and Development, SIC
Frances Browne	CIDO - Community Planning and Development, SIC

1. Introductions

Mr Jim Anderson, Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. It was agreed that Pat Christie would record the meeting for minute purposes and would destroy the recording thereafter. All attendees introduced themselves before proceeding to the agenda items.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from: Fetlar Community Council; Whalsay Community Council; Skerries Community Council; Delting Community Council and Iris Sandison, Sandness and Walls Community Council.

[6.15 pm – Ms Nicolson joined the meeting]

3. Declarations of Interest

None

4. Note of the previous meeting held on 10 March 2020

Proposed by Andrew Archer Seconded by Alistair Christie-Henry

5. Matters arising from previous minute not on the agenda

Mr Anderson asked if there was an update on the Boundary Commission. Mr Duncan replied that there was none yet.

Mr Duncan gave an update on Actions from 10 March 2020 Minute:

Action 1: As there was poor attendance at the Active Travel workshop in Brae then Ms Barton hopes to reschedule this. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, Ms Barton was unable to reschedule this meeting. An online event happened instead. 420 people responded to the online questionnaire with a good geographic spread. A report is being prepared and Ms Barton will be in touch with community councils in due course to update on progress.

Action 2: Mr Duncan said that a training course on the Complaints Procedure will be designed over the next few months and rolled out to Community Councillors. Postponed due to covid-19 restrictions. To be actioned over the winter months.

Action 3: Mr Duncan to email Community Council Clerks, once Budget information is available. Action completed.

Action 4: Mr Duncan to email Community Council Clerks, once the CDF dates available. Action completed.

Action 5: Mr Duncan to email Community Council Clerks new pay scale information. Action completed.

Action 6: Mr Duncan to email Community Council Clerks, once by-election dates are available. None available as yet. Community Councils to be informed by email when dates have been set.

Action 7: Mr Duncan to email Community Council Clerks, once the new Community Council application forms are ready. Mr Anderson asked what the application form would be for. Mr Duncan explained that the form was an action arising from the community council clerks training last year. The action was to develop a standardised funding application form that would mean all community councils are working to the same format. The process is on hold, but will be actioned over the winter months. Mr Duncan hopes it will be ready for the next ASCC meeting.

Action 8: Mr Duncan will put out a call for items for the June meeting. Action completed.

Action 9: Mr Christie-Henry asked that any link to the CDF application form be sent directly to him rather than the clerk as the clerk is currently on annual leave. Action completed.

Action 10: Mr Duncan said he would put out a call for items for future meetings. Action completed.

Action 11: Mr Christie-Henry asked that community resilience be put on a future meeting. This was in light of the current covid-19 virus. Action completed. Mr Fordyce pointed out a correction in the March minutes at Action 11 second paragraph. He asked that his name be removed with reference to: "It was suggested that population decline and sustainability in rural areas could be a discussion point." Mr Fordyce pointed out that he thought this was a good action but that it was not his idea.

Actions carried over to next meeting:

Action 1- Ms Barton to update ASCC on Active Travel Plan

Action 2 - Mr Duncan to update progress on the proposed training course for the Community Council's Complaints Procedure.

Action 3 - Mr Duncan to email Community Council Clerks, once by-election dates are available.

Action 4 - Mr Duncan to email Community Council Clerks, once the new Community Council application forms are ready.

[6.30 pm – Ms Davis joined the meeting]

6. Community Resilience

Mhari McLeman introduced herself and explained that she works for Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE). HIE act as a conduit for Scottish Government funding. Earlier this year the Scottish Government responded quickly to the Covid-18 pandemic and rolled out a number of emergency funding streams. One of those funds was the 'Supporting Communities Fund'. A good geographical spread was needed throughout the country and HIE administered the fund across the Highlands & Islands. In Shetland, a mix of Community Councils and Community Development groups acted as Anchor organisations. This helped get the funding to where it was most in need. There was 21 approvals from the Supporting Communities Fund totalling approximately £260,000. The funds were for a wide range of activities from food delivery through to connectivity. In islands with small populations, the response was very much about building community resilience such as an ensuring the supply of diesel to support the electricity scheme in Foula for example. Funds need to be spent by the end of September 2020.

Funds in Phase 2 of the Government scheme will go towards recovery. However, we are still very much in the middle of this Covid-19 pandemic and we are not sure what the future holds. An announcement about future funding is to happen over the coming weeks and HIE will cascade that down to communities. These funds may go towards helping community buildings and facilities to reopen safely.

Mr Walterson thanked Mrs McLeman on behalf of the ASCC for all her help over the past few months. Ms McLeman accepted the thanks and added that it had been very much a partnership approach with colleagues at the SIC and Voluntary Action Shetland.

Cllr Coutts explained that he is chair of the Community Resilience Forum. He commended the efforts of Community Anchor organisations over the fast moving early stages of the pandemic. Cllr Coutts stated that a lot of hard work had gone into making sure all of Shetland was covered. This is very much appreciated by everyone. He was concerned how we sustain this over what would appear to be a very long period of uncertainty. However, credit must to be given to community councils and other anchor groups for showing leadership when it mattered. Mrs McLeman agreed with Cllr Coutts that Anchor organisations across Shetland had risen to the challenge and turned a negative situation into a positive outcome.

Mr Anderson added his thanks to Mrs McLeman and HIE for all their help.

Mr Clark asked what would happen when the furlough scheme ends in October. Mrs McLeman replied that the Scottish Government responded quickly to the pandemic initially with generous funding packages. Redundancies did not come as quickly as expected in the first part of lockdown and the furlough scheme was further extended. It is expected that this will change and more redundancies and changes in family's circumstances will happen from now on. HIE have been reminding the Scottish Government of this and are waiting to hear a reply.

Mr Grant informed the meeting that he is chair of a new short-term working group. This group has been set up to support individuals and businesses over the coming months and put measures in place to help them. Members of this group include SIC Economic Development, HIE, Skills Development Scotland, Colleges, Department of Work and Pensions. The Scottish Government have made approximately £200 million pounds available for schemes. This includes training, retraining and youth guarantee schemes. This is probably worth about £1 million pounds to Shetland and details of this are to follow. The working group are developing an action plan, which Mr Grant would be willing discuss at the next ASCC meeting. Some 3,000 people in Shetland were furloughed through the Scottish Government scheme. That figure is now reducing significantly but, there is still a significant number of people who may find themselves out of work at the end of October.

Action 5 – Mr Grant to update ASCC on Scottish Government Scheme

Mr Anderson asked Mrs McLeman if dates for another round of funding have been identified. Mrs McLeman replied that word on this will be over the next few weeks. The total amount of funding is not known at this point either. HIE will work with colleagues in the SIC to look at resilience around community facilities. Community organisations have also accessed other Covid-19 related funds such as the Business Support grants. It would be useful to map any gaps in support, for instance are there any community organisations that have not accessed any help, or who may be struggling to reopen facilities again.

Mr Anderson asked Mr Grant if any one service had total oversight on all the monies that came into Shetland. Mr Grant replied that this was part of what the working group were trying to do. Other things that will be mapped are where jobs are at risk, new job opportunities and economic stimulus projects. These include the Shetland Decommissioning base, the Viking Energy project and Shetland's significant house building programme. It is important that we match the need for jobs to the new jobs that are being created. Once we have these opportunities mapped then we can use that data to get people into the work.

Mr Anderson thanked Mrs McLeman for her presentation and invited her to stay for the rest of the meeting.

7. Community Broadband

Marvin Smith introduced himself and explained that he works for SIC Economic Development Department specifically on the Shetland Telecom side of things. Mr Smith then referred to the briefing note on Community Broadband options sent out earlier today and asked for area specific questions about this from the floor.

Action 6 – Attach Community Broadband Options Briefing Note to this minute

Mr Archer asked if it was a case of doing nothing [with regard to the R100 voucher scheme] until the spring when the contracts are awarded. Mr Smith agreed and explained that because the vouchers are available and of high value then this probably means that this will be the last round of government funding for a number of years. If people cash in the vouchers just now, then it can only be for stopgap solutions. An example being, if people take up satellite broadband options now using the vouchers and a few years later then a fibre to the premise solution comes along, then they will find themselves no longer eligible for support with this more permanent solution. Mr Archer asked if this meant that you get a subsidy for fibre and if you used these vouchers now then you would lose that subsidy. Mr Smith explained that fibre to the premise is the long-term solution and at some point everyone will need this. The R100 Main Procurement list comes out in the spring of next year. If you are not on that list then the £5,000 voucher will be on offer. It would be good if at that point communities could work together, and go to one supplier and say that they are looking for a fibre to the premise solution. This would mean that your £5,000 voucher could go towards the optimum solution of fibre to the premise for everyone rather than a short-term satellite fix for individuals. Once an individual £5,000 voucher is used then it is unlikely this will be on offer again and it makes it much more financially difficult to justify a fibre to the premise solution for everybody.

Mr Odie asked if people should apply for the vouchers now. Mr Smith said that R100 are working on a plan that covers every premise in Scotland. BT has been given a list of premises. Any premise not on that list will be offered some type of solution. Vouchers will be available for a number of years so there is no hurry to get them right away. Since R100 announced the voucher scheme Mr Smith has heard from many people with poor broadband demonstrating the need for a permanent solution. If by the spring of next year, you find that your name is on the list but the scheme is not to be deployed until 2025, then there is a smaller voucher scheme for £400, which would cover some of the stopgap solutions. For example, this would easily cover a 4G solution. Mr Smith recommended waiting to purchase vouchers until February/March next year and review the situation then.

Mr Grant stated that a report is going to Council on 9th September regarding commissioning external provision to work on network planning. This is to map what still needs to be done regarding broadband provision, and look at a set of options on how best this can be done. Once the plan is in place it should help answer some of the questions from tonight.

Mrs Jamieson asked if it was possible to have a communication in the press to let people in the community know what to do. Individuals would be applying now for the vouchers without knowing the facts. Mr Smith said that both the Shetland News and Shetland Times had run with the story. Mr Smith said that per capita Shetland was ahead in taking up the R100 scheme. R100 had been quite surprised to get so many applications from Shetland. He said that possibly some form of public communication might come out from the SIC on the back of the meeting 9th September.

Mr Walterson asked how the £5,000 figure was calculated and was it good value? Mr Smith said the calculation varied between urban and remote, rural areas. Urban areas like Glasgow would get between £700 and £1,500 per premise to connect where very rural areas such as West Burrafirth are assessed as needing £5,000 per premise to connect. The commercial provider's loss is factored into this and is enough to get the industry interested. Mr Smith said it was worth noting that in some circumstances the DCMS or UK government grant scheme would mean that you could combine vouchers. In extreme circumstances you could be looking at more than £5,000 per premise. Again, this means that should the R100 Procurement scheme not come to your area then you should be able to work together to look at a community solution.

Mr Walterson highlighted that the Covid-19 lockdown has shown that good broadband connectivity must be a top priority. Home Schooling being a case in point. Mr Smith agreed that as time goes by changes to work and education patterns will mean it becomes more critical. There is built up frustration in communities when they have been told for 15 years now that things will improve but nothing happens.

Mr Anderson asked if the EE masts that are being erected around Shetland are to be switched on for public use? Mr Smith said that his understanding is that they are not just for emergency services but would be available for anybody to use. The service you get from these masts varies depending on where you are. In parts of mainland Shetland then they are connected by fibre so have good connectivity whereas the further away you get then they are point to point microwave so they become less of use for 4G and home broadband. Mr Smith said he understands that there has been delays to the emergency services contract. He also believes that so far none of the masts built so far is being used, so all are available just now.

Mr Anderson asked if it was just EE who had masts or if cover was shared with Vodafone for example? Mr Smith said that it was a bit of a mix but that most areas can get 4G. Mr Anderson said this was not ideal but better than nothing. Mr Smith replied that 4G certainly is a solution for domestic premises struggling with Broadband coverage.

Mr Smith said that anyone requiring advice regarding this subject could email him on marvin.smith@shetland.gov.uk.

Mr Anderson thanked Mr Smith for the presentation.

[6.51 pm – Mr Smith left the meeting]

8. Shetland Community Benefit Fund

Mr Duncan said that Chris Bunyan, Chair of the Shetland Community Benefit Fund (SCBF) had declined an invitation to join the meeting tonight. He is preparing for a meeting of the SCBF group tomorrow evening.

Mr Anderson said that community council clerks had expressed concerns that this would mean additional work for them.

Mr Clark said that SCBF are currently exploring options and that nothing has been decided yet. Some of the proposals to be discussed at the meeting tomorrow evening are having a project manager and admin support. SCBF are trying to get as much of the fund into the community as possible while taking on board the concerns of the clerks. By employing staff that means less money into the community but this has to be taken into consideration. There will be two phases of money going into the fund, the first being £400,000 leading onto larger sums in the following years when the windmills start turning. It would be good to know what all the clerks concerns are.

Mr Garrick replied that there would be a lot of additional work for clerks dealing with small grants forms. Ms Nicholson agreed with this saying that the Sandsting & Aithsting Community Council clerk had also brought this up with her.

Mr Archer put forward a question for tomorrow's meeting. As Tingwall, Whiteness & Weisdale Community Council is one of the four closest community councils to the wind farm then they [TW&W cc] anticipate there will be considerable extra grants generated. If this is the case then is there any money to pay additional wages to the clerks to deal with the applications? Mr Christie-Henry replied that possible funds targeted for clerk's wages will be discussed at the meeting.

Mr Odie said that in the past clerks had more work with distributing small grants. He felt that if the scheme is kept simple then it should not generate too much extra work. Mr Clark said that it doesn't just have to be the clerks that do the work, there are other members of the community council's as well, but the more community councils can do the more money will be available to the community. Mr Anderson agreed that as much money should come into the community as possible, but he pointed out that this depended on the willingness of clerks to take on the work. He suggested that possibly some monies could be ring fenced for admin purposes.

Mr Duncan gave feedback from recent community council meetings that there are anxieties about the capacity of clerks to take on extra workload. Community councils also had concerns that if they could not take on that extra workload then how would the Community Benefit Fund view that. Would community councils still have a voice in future decision making, or would that be removed from them and be centralised? A second point is about the proposed advance grant scheme. What would the scale of grants be? Would they be small grants? There is a danger, as community councils already award these from their core budgets or CDF budgets, that any new monies could create high volumes of small grants rather than be targeting bigger projects.

Mr Christie-Henry said that he, Mr Garrick and Mr Clark would take the issues discussed to the meeting tomorrow. He emphasised that no decisions had been made from an operational point and that all suggestions were welcome and helpful.

Action 7 – Mrs Christie to collate the points made before tomorrow evening. Mr Duncan to send those onto Chris Bunyan prior to tomorrow's meeting.

9. Inter-island Transport

Mr Anderson explained that Cllr Thomson and Cllr Coutts had come to the meeting to hear concerns about Inter-island transport concerns.

Mr Odie explained that existing ferry provision is not coping with the needs of the community. This needs to be addressed. Mr Odie is pleased that more thought is being put into fixed link options as this is the future he feels. The needs of ferry users must be treated with respect.

Mr Brown commented regarding the company he works for Cooke Aquaculture and the amount of traffic that goes into Yell and Unst. The ferries are very important for the business community as well as residents.

A great many workers are going into the isles through the day and coming out again at night. Approximately 10% of all the salmon farming produce in Scotland passes through the Yell ferry so it provides a vital link and it is important that this is robust. During the Covid-19 then positive talks were held with the SIC and the ferry service did fit in with what the company needed. This may have enhanced the service to the community as well. Fixed links for all the Shetland Islands is the long-term solution for residents and workers. Young people are moving out of the isles and a fixed link would buck that trend meaning more young people would move back in.

Cllr Thomson acknowledged the concerns raised by Yell Community Council and from other constituents. The Yell ferry service is reaching a point where it is no longer fit for purpose. The only solution is a fixed link. The SIC and ZetTrans continue to engage with the process to develop the Scottish Government 20 year Strategic Transport Project Review 2 (STPR2). This was due to be reported on at the end of this year but unfortunately Covid-19 has impacted on the overall timetable. The SIC have two voices at the table and are pushing for fixed links. We very much recognise that the cost implications of a fixed link solution will be difficult to achieve without government assistance. It is imperative that Shetland's voice is heard through the STPR2 process. Cllr Thomson said he would feedback what he has heard tonight, and almost on a daily basis, that fixed links are needed and required. The SIC and ZetTrans will continue to make sure the government hears Shetland's concerns.

Cllr Coutts said that this is not a priority for the Scottish Government. The amount of aquaculture going across Yell Sound is of national significance. The SIC do keep making that case to the government. Shetland is short-changed by approximately £5 million on ferry delivery alone not to mention the shortfall in capital funding. Until the government change, we are on an uphill battle.

Mr Walterson highlighted the economic significance of Yell Sound and Bluemull Sound and that the Shetland salmon industry is a major contributor to the national economy. He added that the white fish industry in Yell is also significant. It was reassuring to know that Cllr Thomson and Cllr Coutts were highlighting this to government ministers. Mr Walterson agreed that young people would move out of the isles if the ferry service was not meeting their expectations. The Yell ferries are starting to age and the council can no longer afford to replace them on a regular basis so alternatives must be considered, while appreciating it is difficult to find the funding needed for this.

Cllr Coutts said depopulation is an increasing trend. He is confident that there is no shortage of economic opportunities on the North Isles. In reality, the younger population likes to move around more freely and ferries don't fit into that lifestyle. Fixed links are the way forward but the local authority cannot afford to implement this without financial help from the government. It has never been more crucial that we speak with one voice from Shetland putting pressure on the politicians. That means Community Councils, councillors and parliamentary representation as well.

Mr Anderson agreed that most people he had spoken to were in favour of fixed links.

Mr Odie said with regard to the Yell ferry timetable, that there are 4 days of good service and 3 days not so good. What is needed is more runs on Monday's and a better service on Saturday's. The poor service is affecting agriculture and shipping animals. Yell is losing people all the time, not only the young but other ages as well. It is very important that until such times as we get a fixed link there is an improved timetable and service. Cllr Thomson replied that the SIC have a working group looking at how ferry timetables can be improved within the existing budget. It is vital that we get government assistance to at least make up the current £4.6 million shortfall annually. The Scottish Government say they do not want to see any island struggling with ferry services. They need to honour this and at least help to cover even basic services. Unfortunately, negotiations with Transport Scotland have broken down despite their acceptance that there needs to be Fair Ferry Funding, but they refuse to deliver on that principle. The Scottish Government need to make up the shortfall within the next 6 months at least or budgets will be under further strain.

Mr Brown said he was willing to help with information for negotiations with the government. 5 or 6 artic loads of salmon go in and out Yell every day. Shelf life is critical and this means massive pressure to get the product out of the isle as quickly as possible. Monday is particularly difficult for movement, and days that Northlink leaves early to go through Orkney can pose a problem. When dealing with a perishable product like salmon it is imperative that the ferry timetable fits in with the north boats. Further to this is the replacement of link spans, and days when the ferry will be out of service. Advanced planning for this essential work and early engagement with the community and industry is essential to keep businesses going over that time. Cllr Thomson extended an invitation to Mr Brown to the next meeting regarding feedback to the government about ferry provision and in terms of the link spans then the salmon industry and community councils will be kept up to date and informed. Mr Brown thanked Cllr Thomson for that and pointed out that this was a case in point where fixed links are the way to go.

Mr Clark commented that he left Unst 25 years ago and fixed links were on the agenda then. It was depressing to think that 25 years later we are no farther on.

Mr Anderson asked what the position was with Skerries link span as this seemed to be taking some time to conclude. Cllr Thomson said there had been delays due to weather but he believed it was progressing now.

10. Items for decision at future meetings

Mr Odie felt that the regular items on the Agenda were good and that members could think about other items before the next meeting. Mr Anderson added that he liked to have interactive items added and asked that members to put these to Mr Duncan before the next meeting. Mr Duncan added that he would send out a reminder 8 to 10 weeks before the next meeting.

11. Any Other Business

Mr Odie hoped that the next meeting would be face-to-face. Mr Anderson said that time would tell but that he felt the lockdown had brought this type of technology into people's homes. It opens up the meetings to people in places like Skerries who have to travel long distances and allows a more flexible way for everybody to participate. Mr Duncan added that the Town Hall is booked for the next meeting so hopefully that might happen. Mr Walterson said that there are advantages and disadvantages to virtual meetings. He missed the face to face discussions and the cup of tea but welcomed finishing up early and not having to drive home.

12. Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 9 March 2021, 6.00pm – Town Hall chamber or Web-ex

Mr Anderson thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

[The meeting closed at 8.30 pm]



Chairperson

Date *27th March 2021*