

Association of Shetland Community Councils (ASCC)

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Paper 1

**Minute of the ASCC meeting held on
Tuesday 13 June 2023, 6.00 pm,
Town Hall Chamber, Lerwick and online using Microsoft Teams**

Present

Ian Walterson	Association of Shetland Community Councils (Chair)
Shayne McLeod	Association of Shetland Community Councils (Vice Chair)
Lindsay Tulloch	Bressay Community Council
Agnes Tallack	Dunrossness Community Council
Irvine Burgess	Dunrossness Community Council
Ewen McPherson	Gulberwick, Quarff & Cunningsburgh Community Council
Willie Simpson	Nesting & Lunnasting Community Council
Finlay MacBeath	Sandness & Walls Community Council
John Priest	Sandsting & Aithsting Community Council
Marie Williamson	Scalloway Community Council
Mark Burgess	Scalloway Community Council
Violet McQuade (clerk)	Skerries Community Council
Andrew Archer	Tingwall, Whiteness & Weisdale Community Council
Claire Priest	Unst Community Council
Annette Jamieson	Yell Community Council
Laurence Odie	Yell Community Council

Officers in Attendance

Steve Mathieson	Manager - VisitScotland
Juliette Scott	Senior Manager – Openreach
Vaila Simpson	Executive Manager – Community Planning & Development, SIC
Anne Cogle	Team Leader – Administration Services, SIC
Michael Duncan	Community Council Liaison Officer – Community Planning & Development, SIC

Officers Observing

Lynsey Hall (note taker)	Community Involvement & Development Officer - Community Planning & Development, SIC
Joanne Fraser	Community Involvement & Development Officer - Community Planning & Development, SIC
Frances Browne	Community Involvement & Development Officer - Community Planning & Development, SIC

Local press

Chris Cope	Shetland News
Kevin Craighen	Shetland Times

1. Introductions

Chair welcomed all present and acknowledged that a few community councils were absent.

2. Apologies

Burra & Trondra Community Council; Niall O'Rourke
Sandwick Community Council; Bryan Peterson
Shetland Islands Council; Jan Riise, Ana Arnett, Frances Browne, Roselyn Fraser

3. Declarations of Interest

None

4. Openreach – Analogue to Digital Switch Over

Juliette Scott, Senior Manager, Openreach, delivered a presentation on the analogue to digital switchover. Juliette explained the background to the project and the different options in place and plans going forward. Provision is moving away from copper lines to using fibre. Fibre has three options:

- Fibre to the Premises (FTTP)
- Fibre to the Cabinet (FTTC) and therefore copper from the cabinet to the premises
- Single Order Generic Ethernet Access (SOGEA) which is very similar to FTTC, however where FTTC will also have a copper line going from the exchange to the cabinet for dial tone and power, the SOGEA line only has the Fibre, therefore no dial or power

It was agreed that the presentation slides could be shared after the meeting. After delivery of the presentation, discussion followed and a number of questions were raised;

Marie Williamson asked about Telecare and wi-fi service during power cuts which highlights difficulties with new system and asked if there is an emergency switch back to analogue?

Juliette replied to say that this is one of Openreach's biggest issues. She went on to explain it is up to the communication providers to provide a solution or provide a battery back-up for vulnerable customers. If there is a loss of power in the exchange there are generators that can be used during a power outage. Openreach is working closely with the power companies. Juliette said that it is possible to buy larger domestic batteries for your home as a back-up provision.

Juliette reinforced that there is a need to keep pushing for power companies to do everything they can to ensure power supply is resilient. When the switchover happens there will be no option to switch back to copper lines as the infrastructure will not be in place. It will be fibre network only. Work will need to continue with the power industry to make sure resilience is better during periods of bad weather/power cuts.

Irvine Burgess asked a question regarding communication with power companies. SSEN have priority services where you can call or text to let them know if there is a power outage in your area but if there's no power you can't contact them. If there is no power, what discussions with power companies have taken place with a view to changing their policies and procedures to accommodate the changes being made?

Juliette replied to say that Openreach are passing feedback on to power companies and to Government. There is an expectation that everyone will have mobile phones but it was acknowledged that not everyone will have a mobile phone or good mobile signal. Juliette said that she will make sure that this feedback and concerns are captured in discussions with the power industry.

Mark Burgess commented that this situation has already arisen as a significant crisis in Shetland and there has been nothing forthcoming from providers; to provide either uninterrupted power supplies or another solution. Mark stated that during the bad weather last year, mobile providers went out of service and Shetland became a complete blackspot. During this time the only way to access emergency services was to walk or drive to your local GP.

Mark highlighted four principles set out by Ofcom and stated that there should be a cascade from Openreach to communication providers disseminating relevant info to customers to tell them that they need to buy additional hardware as their service will be switched off in the event that there is a power cut. This is very significant for the end customer. Mark proceeded on to ask who is taking an overarching view in regard to providing power to communication masts? Even if there is signal available what sort of assurance is there that mobile signals are going to have a viable fibre connection back to an exchange that can enable someone to make a call?

Juliette responded to say that a group has been created consisting of a number of communications providers to make a standard unit (same wattage/same unit) available for over 5 hours. Juliette added that she will speak to her contacts at the various mobile phone providers to find out more info. Juliette agrees that there should be special dispensation to vulnerable customers in order to ensure they have access to a battery back-up unit. It was noted that communication providers have to reach out to all customers. In the industry there is no database of priority list – this doesn't exist but there are discussions as to whether Ofcom could set this up.

Mark acknowledged that FTTP is the end goal but is concerned that it is an unlikely end goal in Shetland due to the geography of Shetland. The majority of households in Shetland are on FTTC, and therefore copper from cabinet to premises. Mark asked how will this service be managed? And if the street cabinets will be powered by Openreach to enable calls to continue from cabinet to exchange?

Juliette responded to say that there are plenty of cabinets which will have batteries and generators in case of emergency and that Openreach have teams that are able to service cabinets quickly. There is quite a bit of FTTP availability in Shetland. Juliette said she would check coverage for Shetland and get back in touch with details for Shetland.

Action: Juliette to confirm FTTP coverage in Shetland to Michael to share onwards

Andrew Archer commented that this was a step backwards and asked who is setting rules about how much power the communications providers have to provide?

Juliette replied to say that this is an Ofcom mandated activity.

Andrew then asked if the current commitment from Ofcom is to supply one hour of power during an outage.

Juliette responded to say that she believed that one hour supply was the agreement. Juliette went on to say that what Openreach have now will not last as the equipment is failing and spare parts don't exist anymore. Openreach are moving to the new technology and it doesn't encompass having copper. Juliette added that she understood the concerns but in the next year communication providers will be talking more to customers about options.

Ewen McPherson asked if there was a timescale for the rollout of FTTP to individual properties in Shetland. And how to you go about getting on the list requiring that? There are many communities waiting to join up but they are just unsure how to join. When British Telecom (BT) has been asked, communities have had little to no information and are feeling forgotten about. Is it not possible for a remote area such as Shetland to come up with an alternative upgrade still using the existing copper that's in good working order? The copper infrastructure shouldn't be taken away until everyone has the opportunity to get FTTP.

Juliette responded to say that there is a third product called Single Order Transitional Access Project (SOTAP) which will give a voice service to everyone via a copper line which won't have power to it. Openreach will only turn off copper network when people have another solution. BT Group have a commitment of universal service offering. Every premises must have a viable connection. Juliette went on to say that there is a webpage and email address can be accessed. Openreach's commitment is by the end of 2026 they will have 25million premises covered. They are currently at 10million. Openreach have committed to a balance rollout which means a lot of rural properties will be part of this.

Marie Williamson urged Juliette and Openreach to take note what happened in Shetland (this previous winter). Shetland needed specialists to deal with power outages who had to come up from the mainland but they couldn't land at Sumburgh airport due to the weather. There was no-one in the islands to deal with the issues. Marie stated that this is just an example of difficulties experienced in Shetland. Marie said that she just wanted to make sure that this info goes back to the people in power/industry who need to hear it.

Finlay MacBeath queried the length of fibre lines going from the cabinet to households and the speed of broadband. Is there an awareness that there is a degradation of service once you come out of more populated areas?

Juliette said that if you are experiencing slow speeds please speak to your communication providers.

Lindsay Tulloch asked from slides to be circulated. Lindsay highlighted that there had been no discussion about multi-agency contingency plans; co-ordination between the communication providers and the understanding that everybody knows what they will do in the event of a longer term power outage. Lindsay feels that there is a need for a plan to be developed and tested before going live.

Juliette said that Openreach host meetings every couple of months with updates and anyone is welcome to join or be added to the Openreach newsletter. She will pass these details to Michael. Juliette thanked everyone for inviting her to the meeting.

Agnes Tallack asks if there is a role for Community Councils to ask providers who we have in Shetland what their plans are. Ewen Macpherson commented that 2025 is when Shetland are transferring power over to new power solution with Viking network – there is real possibility of power outages, unplanned for a year or two until it settles down. Irvine Burgess concluded that there is no co-ordination of the different communication providers, power companies and Openreach. There is no plan or no systems in place for power outages. This is something that will have to be addressed. Shetland will not get back the previous copper system but as a community it needs to put pressure on Government and industry to get co-ordination with the different providers.

Michael will circulate any information received from Juliette.

Ian Walterson thanked Juliette for her attendance. Juliette left the meeting.

5. Note of the previous meeting held on 14 March 2023 for approval.

Proposed by Andrew Archer
Seconded by Finlay MacBeath

6. Matters arising from previous minute not on the agenda

Action tracker from previous meeting was confirmed as completed:

- Ask all Community Councils for feedback on review - revised to end of April
- Circulate template plans re; SSEN Community Resilience Fund – sent early May
- Inviting someone from Openreach to attend – Juliette has attended meeting this evening

7. Shetland Way Hiking Path

Proposal for a walking route across the length of Shetland from one end of the isle to the other (including the North Isles)

Ewen McPherson introduced the topic by sharing excerpts of an article written in the Shetland Times by Alistair Christie-Johnston; *“The route could be used by up to 600,000 visitors over a 10 years period, generating up to £41 million for the local community and creating 52 new jobs within the tourism sector”*

The main concern raised by Gulberwick, Quarff & Cunningsburgh Community Council was for wildlife and ground nesting birds, especially since right to roam legislation has been in place. Ewen raised that the proposed form of *“industrial scale tourism”* would be devastating to nature. Further concerns such as biosecurity and spread of disease; avian flu, foot and mouth existed. Also it was noted there could be issues with access routes, waste and littering – as this seems to be the case all over Scotland.

Similar problems can be seen on West Highland Way and the West Coast 500. Are the SIC intending to provide toilet/camping facilities before these plans come to fruition? What consultations have been done? Given the number of visitors expected (600,000 over a 10 year period) how will visitors get to Shetland? Ewen questioned what the effects would be on already stretched lifeline ferry and air services.

Steve acknowledged that VisitScotland wanted to improve their tourism product and grow the industry but that this did not equate to *“industrial tourism”* and stated that the tourism industry could not stop marketing Shetland as a tourism destination because there are transport issues. Shetland has to look at solving its transport issues”. So far the route/project has been out to public consultation and there has been a feasibility study looking at costings and potential visitor numbers. Regarding the number of 600,000 visitors; this includes visitors to Shetland that would normally visit anyway. Most people would do a walk during their stay. New visitors expected over the time period is 12,000.

Steve spoke about VisitScotland looking at different ways of extending the season and how people can visit different parts of Shetland. Steve said he wouldn't be too concerned about huge numbers ruining the scenery.

There were queries from a few present about provisions such as accommodation, bins and capacity of ferry. VisitScotland are aware of capacity issues on Northlink. Steve said that the goal is to encourage people to come up without their cars; by freeing up car deck space the capacity of the boat would be improved. VisitScotland are encouraging walking and cycling and parts of the Shetland Way route may also be suitable for equestrian groups. The path will also be good for heading to Net Zero targets.

Steve acknowledged that there is also an economic element to the project; people can travel between communities they can start at and end somewhere with accommodation and shops, cafes etc. Hopefully this will encourage visitors to stay for longer.

Ewen asked about data on bird numbers and Steve said that Nature Scot (formerly Scottish Natural Heritage) had been consulted about which areas to avoid and that visitors to Shetland don't have anything to do with decline in bird numbers. Steve used the example of Hermaness where a new boardwalk has been installed alongside an interpretative centre which means there have been less nesting birds disturbed. Steve went on to say that the next stage is to establish which route it will take and to speak to land owners, which will be a long process. There is no specific route yet but there has been a route suggested.

Feasibility study should be publically available to view online.

8. Community Council Scheme Review - update

Michael advised that a report going to Shetland Islands Council meeting on 14th June to seek formal approval for the scope of the review. This report has been circulated to Community Councils. After the Council meeting Michael will be able to share the decision with all Community Councils.

Assuming that the decision is to move forward with the review there will then be three main consultation periods which have an indicative timetable as follows:

Phase 1	Minimum 8 weeks	Now – Start of Aug 2023
Phase 2	Minimum 8 weeks	Nov – End of Jan 2024
Phase 3	Minimum 4 weeks	March – April 2024

Michael suggested that Community Councils keep the Scheme Review as a standing item on their agendas for the duration of the report and advised that the next ASCC meeting should be held shortly after the close of Phase 1 period (end of Sept/early Oct) so could be an opportunity for Community Councils to hear feedback.

By Sept 2024 there should be updated Community Council Scheme of Establishment to put to Shetland Islands Council for consideration. Between now and this date, Michael and his colleagues will be in close contact with Community Councils with more information and updates. Michael encouraged anyone who has questions on the review to get in touch with him.

John Priest commented that he has found the feedback from other Community Councils on the draft scope of the review very helpful and that it may be an idea to have a conference specifically about this, to see how it develops. Michael answered that he was willing to explore doing something like this as part of the consultation process.

9. Items for future discussion

Explore if someone from Ofcom, Alistair Carmichael, Beatrice Wishart, Openreach or any of the appropriate communication providers are available to discuss issues following on from tonight's meeting to find out how the digital switchover will be regulated.

Michael will send out email to ask for agenda requests for future meetings.

10. Date of Next Meeting

To be confirmed

Meeting closed at 8.05pm

Chairperson

Date