

**MINUTE OF THE MEETING OF SHETLAND'S COMMISSION  
ON TACKLING INEQUALITIES  
(SESSION 2: HOUSEHOLD FINANCES)**

**24 AUGUST 2015**

**PRESENT:**

- A Hamilton (Commission Chair)
- I Kinniburgh, Chair, NHS Board (Interim Chair)
- J Anderson, Lerwick Community Council
- K Anderson, MSYP
- A Black, Chief Executive, Shetland Charitable Trust
- C Buxton, Director of Regional Development, HIE (Participated in part, by video link)
- Alastair Cooper, Shetland Islands Council
- Andrew Cooper, Shetland Charitable Trust
- C Ferguson, Director of Corporate Services, SIC
- B Hunter, Chair, Shetland Charitable Trust
- R Hunter, Area Manager, HIE
- A Miller, Chair, Voluntary Action Shetland
- K Mouat, MSYP
- V Nicolson, Head of Anderson High School
- D O'Neill, Chair of CoSLA
- G Robinson, Leader, Shetland Islands Council
- C Smith, Shetland Islands Council
- S Taylor, NHS Board
- C Waddington, NHS Board

**APOLOGIES:**

- A Hamilton (Apologies for lateness)
- S Laing, Housing, Regeneration and Welfare Directorate, Scottish Government
- P Kelly/F McHardy, Poverty Alliance
- M Stewart, Voluntary Action Shetland

**ATTENDING:**

- B Hall, Policy Officer, Community Planning and Development, SIC
- M Hunter, Senior Research and Information Officer, SIC
- A Jamieson, Executive Manager – Housing, SIC
- S Johnson, Opportunities for All Co-ordinator, SIC
- E Perring, Policy Manager, Community Planning and Development, SIC
- E Robinson, Health Improvement Manager, NHS
- V Simpson, Executive Manager – Community Planning and Development, SIC
- L Adamson, Committee Officer

**ALSO ATTENDING:**

- K Eunson, Citizens Advice Bureau
- C Harper, Citizens Advice Bureau
- H Hunter, Job Centre Plus
- A Nunn, Salvation Army
- V Tulloch, Citizens Advice Bureau

<b>1</b>	<b>Welcome</b>
	<p>In the absence of the Chair, Mr Kinniburgh, welcomed all present to the second meeting of Shetland's Commission on Tackling Inequalities.</p> <p>Mr Kinniburgh referred to a previous proposal whereby formal arrangements would be made for Commissioners to visit organisations who provide evidence to the meetings, however he suggested that Commissioners make their own informal arrangements for such visits.</p> <p>To act as a reminder to Commissioners, Mr Kinniburgh outlined the purpose of the Commission, and he clarified the relationship between the Commission and the Shetland Partnership Board. He advised that the recommendations from the Commission would be presented for consideration to the Shetland Partnership Board, whom following acceptance of the recommendations, would put in place an Action Plan to tackle inequalities locally; through actions locally, or lobby for policy change elsewhere.</p>
<b>2</b>	<b>Minutes of the Meeting of the Commission held on 1 July 2015</b>
	<p>(a) The minute was approved as an accurate record of the meeting.</p> <p>(b) There were no matters arising.</p>
<b>3</b>	<b>Terms of Reference</b>
	<p>The Commission approved the updated Terms of Reference.</p>
<b>4</b>	<b>Report of Session 1</b>
	<p>Mr Kinniburgh introduced the Summary Report from Session 1, which he advised will help Commissioners to continue to develop their thinking along the lines established at the first meeting. He added that any additional comments from the first meeting would be welcomed, to add into the process.</p> <p>Commissioners were advised that Mr B Smith, Archivist, has offered to attend the 3<sup>rd</sup> Session to provide information on historic inequalities in Shetland. Mr Kinniburgh advised on other sources of information which may be helpful to Commissioners, including Renfrewshire's Tackling Poverty Commission, and the "Creating A Fairer Scotland" leaflet, which could be</p>

	<p>used as a template for the final report</p> <p>Mr Kinniburgh advised that arrangements have been made for a Media Question/Answer session tomorrow morning to publicise the work of the Commission and the information that will be discussed today. He advised that two of the evidence providers, Ms Eunson and Ms Nunn, have already agreed to participate at the Media Session, and he sought volunteers from possibly two Commissioners to take part. He confirmed that Mr Hamilton, as Chair of the Commission will be attending.</p>
<b>5</b>	<b>Household Income and Expenditure in Shetland</b>
	<p>Ms E Perring, Policy Manager, advised that the focus for Session 2 is on household finances, and in particular the challenges faced by households in Shetland on a low income. She advised that in addition to the presentations, there would be opportunities for question/answers, smaller group discussion and to start to develop initial recommendations.</p> <p>Ms Perring gave a presentation entitled “Household Finances”, which she advised is determined by income to and expenditure by a household. Information was provided on household income and outgoings in Shetland and comparisons with other Scottish regions. Using CACI household data, in 2014, the incomes of 10% of households in Shetland were £9,175.49 or less and the incomes of 20% of households in Shetland were £13,564.13 or less. Using Council Tax Benefit and Housing Tax Benefit 12% of households in Shetland can be considered to be in low income.</p>
<b>6</b>	<b>Challenges Faced in Shetland</b>
	<p>Mr H Hunter, Manager, Job Centre Plus, gave a presentation on the UK Benefit System. He informed on the very complex UK Benefits system and the different types of benefits and the payments received. He reported on the new system of Universal Credit which is being rolled out gradually, where the focus is to move claimants from benefits while increasing earnings income. He informed on the complex process to apply for Universal Credit and the support that is given to claimants in the form of money management.</p> <p>Ms K Eunson, Manager, Citizen’s Advice Bureau, gave a presentation entitled “Challenges to Accessing the Benefit System”. In reporting on budget difficulties when accessing benefits where the presumption is that claimants are to apply online, she highlighted the concern that people are going into arrears while Universal Credit is being introduced, and then going further into a cycle of debt. She advised on the nationwide concerns around the Universal Credit claimant conditions, where more conditions are being added where claimants have to continually evidence to retain their benefit claim. She advised that it was important that claimants access advice and support to challenge decisions, and for their benefits to be reviewed to ascertain whether any sanctions can be appealed.</p> <p>During a presentation entitled “In-Work Poverty”, Commissioners were informed that work is not a guaranteed route out of poverty. Ms Eunson reported on the numerous different reasons which can lead to an individual being assessed as in-work poverty, which included low wages, the high cost of living in Shetland, child care costs and availability, part-time working and gaps around in-work benefits and cuts to tax credits. Ms Eunson concluded by advising on an aspiration from this Commission, for more partnership working to reach the most vulnerable people and households.</p>

*(It was noted that Ms Buxton's link to the meeting had terminated).*

**Question and Answer Session:**

- K Eunson, Citizens Advice Bureau
- C Harper, Citizens Advice Bureau
- H Hunter, Job Centre Plus

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**Q:** (D O'Neil) - During the run up to the Referendum there were all sorts of promises from the Scottish Government and UK Government, where one was that the level of expenditure to the Department of Work and Pensions was actually greater than the level of expenditure by Local Authorities. Have you had any indication spending in Shetland would be spent in ways that would suit Shetland?

**A:** (H Hunter) - I'm not aware of anything like that, and we work to the national guidelines.

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**Q:** (D O'Neil) - It would seem that as one size fits all across the UK, these systems are accepted, but the system needs to be simplified and tailored to suit Shetland.

**A:** (H Hunter) - We try to be as flexible as we can, where in remote communities like Shetland we do utilise phone interviews where possible, and we support customers to make the interview process as streamlined as possible.

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**Q:** (S Taylor) - How do your services work, and what are your own experiences of working with people who live in the outer islands and more remote parts of Shetland, particularly when there are poor IT connections and bus services?

**A:** (H Hunter) - When customers attend for interview we would offer a full refund on the travel costs. We would try to make the experience as best for the claimant as possible.

**A:** (K Eunson) - The CAB is open most weekdays, Thursday evenings, and Saturday mornings. We can also e-mail advice and carry out home visits. We also do surgeries in communities, linking with the health centres.

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**Q:** (S Taylor) - From the data collected, is there any evidence that people who live in the more remote parts of Shetland who would be entitled to claim benefits, are not claiming their benefit?

**A:** (K Eunson) - We have done work on under-claiming of benefits. There is the stigma associated with seeking benefits and there are areas of concern.

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**Q:** (Andrew Cooper) - Is there a link to educational skills (IT) and employability at some point?

**A:** (K Eunson) - There was a Government Funded pilot project last year on access to IT. The project was jointly run by the Council and the Shetland College to up-skill individuals in areas of IT. There are however a number of, often complex, factors for digital exclusion, other than not owning or having access to a computer or being able to access an IT Course. Therefore provision of ICT and skills development are only part of the answer.

**A:** (H Hunter) - An IT course was run at the Job Centre last year. We currently run a weekly course (2 hours/week) in conjunction with Adult Learning, which focuses on people with very low literacy skills.

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**Q:** (A Miller) - In a recent article on the Scottish Welfare Fund, someone was assisted to claim housing payments. Therefore I found it strange that in a separate article, it reported that

	<p>Shetland had only spent half of its welfare budget last year with the remainder returned to the Government.</p> <p><b>A:</b> (C Harper) - Perhaps in Shetland, people have not been challenging the decisions. When people are sanctioned they think they cannot do anything about the decision. There is a need to make people aware of their options. The Scottish Welfare Fund is the Local Authority's responsibility.</p> <p><b>Comment:</b> (D O'Neil) - Shetland is not alone in that respect – a lot of areas do not take up on their allocation.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p><b>Q:</b> (Alastair Cooper) - People in Shetland who run crofts can work lots of hours, and crofting does not pay the minimum wage. To what extent could running a croft impact on the benefits that an individual could receive?</p> <p><b>A:</b> (H Hunter) - We would gather information, including their latest accounts and all details are taken into account to see if they are entitled to benefits. Often crofters have other areas of employment. This isn't an issue I'm aware of.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p><b>Q:</b> (R Hunter) – With childcare being a barrier to access employment, and following the increase in childcare from 16 to 22 hours a week, is there still a lack of childcare spaces in Shetland or any evidence that working parents are not able to access childcare?</p> <p><b>A:</b> (C Harper) - These are not statistics that we collect or report on. Subjectively we could say that childcare is an issue for people in finding work but it is not one which they would tend to approach CAB about. We see parents who are not able to work but we see them, for example, about difficulties they are having with benefits.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p><b>Q:</b> (B Hunter): An area around Universal Credit where I have concerns is the challenges for individuals to access the alternative payment plan, and the length of time for applications to be processed.</p> <p><b>A:</b> (H Hunter) - I would encourage anybody who is experiencing problems or delays to phone, to get the application chased up as quickly as possible.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p>Mr Kinniburgh thanked Mr Hunter, Ms Eunson and Ms Harper for their contributions and participation during the Q/A Session.</p>
<b>7</b>	<b>Impacts: Debt and Money Management Food Poverty</b>
	<p>Ms Eunson advised the Commissioners that debt and money management is the biggest issue for the CAB. During the presentation statistics and information was provided on who is in debt, why people get into debt, and the impacts of debt, where it was noted that in Shetland the high cost of living is a core factor. Ms Eunson explained how the CAB helps people who are in debt and/or have money management issues, where advice and support is provided on an impartial and confidential basis. She added that in some of the more complex cases, with numerous debts, a case can be open for years.</p> <p>Ms Eunson advised on the 50% reduction in debt advisers to provide legal remedy, and that funding for the one remaining debt adviser will cease from the end of March 2016. She stated that it is crucial that Shetland finds a way to continue to fund debt advice.</p>

Ms A Nunn, from the Salvation Army, provided a presentation informing on the situation with "Food Poverty in Shetland". During her presentation, Ms Nunn advised how she is shocked by the extent of food poverty in Shetland. She informed on a number of the reasons why people find themselves in food poverty and needing to access food parcels. She advised that more and more people have no savings, and are spending their income on essentials, and therefore an unexpected event can throw their finances into a precarious situation. Ms Nunn informed that the Salvation Army works closely with other service providers, and focus on the more remote areas where it is known that people are living in food poverty but are reluctant to come forward.

Ms Nunn concluded by stating that anybody can find themselves in need, and therefore it is important that people communicate and work together, where she asked the Commissioners to help to break down the barriers to reduce the stigma for people to use food parcels.

#### **Question and Answer Session:**

- K Eunson, Citizens Advice Bureau
- C Harper, Citizens Advice Bureau
- V Tulloch, Citizens Advice Bureau
- H Hunter, Job Centre Plus

**Q:** (V Nicolson): All the evidence providers have a wealth of knowledge. What would be their top strategic aspiration for the Commission to do which would be tangible to the people of Shetland and what would be a smaller quick fix?

**A:** (K Eunson): From the CAB's point of view, the main concern is how to continue to provide the debt advice from April 2016. Other areas would be for people to act as role models to reduce the stigmas, and for partnership working.

**A:** (H Hunter): Not everybody in Shetland has access to a vehicle. More could be done on transport links and improvements to bus timetables.

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**Q:** (G Robinson): Most of the evidence providers have mentioned the issues of remoteness and access to services. Most arguments for decentralising services are about creating jobs in rural areas, however as these are small organisations and small sections, to take the service from Lerwick to a remote area would mean moving the service further away from other remote areas. In regard to bus services, the community mini buses are currently poorly utilised, and this is an area which could be developed to better meet the needs of communities.

Although there could be more employment in rural areas and people appear to complain most that all the services are centralised, is it easier to travel to Lerwick where if you need to access one service you can access other services too?

**A:** (K Eunson): It can be useful for individual's to be able to access all appointments in one day, but often to get all appointments arranged for the same day can be difficult, so a mixture of solutions is required.

**Q:** (I Kinniburgh): Could there be any merit to establish a one-stop-shop approach?

**A:** (K Eunson): NHS localities planning takes in different professionals, so that is an option to develop further.

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	<p><b>Q:</b> (A Black): How can the Commission work towards preventing debt and the need for food banks into the future, and to what extent can the communities help individuals who are most vulnerable in those communities?</p> <p><b>A:</b> (K Eunson): If looking solely at low income/cost of living the issue is not an easy fix. Individuals often struggle to recognise they have problems, and to access help and support at an earlier stage.</p> <p><b>A:</b> (V Tulloch): Other areas that could be developed are for more financial, income/expenditure information to be provided at schools, and further work with adults/adult learning around financial management.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p><b>Q:</b> (A Black): Is there any early years activity at schools around promoting healthy eating?</p> <p><b>A:</b> (A Nunn): Healthy eating is promoted at schools, but it is the cost of eating healthy. People can lose motivation to be healthy as the focus for survival can be a struggle.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p>Mr Kinniburgh thanked Ms Eunson, Ms Nunn, Mr Hunter, and Ms Tulloch for their contributions and participation during the Q/A Session.</p>
<b>8</b>	<b>Solutions and Challenges</b>
	<p>During a brief presentation, Ms Perring informed on the solutions and challenges faced in attempting to improve household finances. There is the challenge of providing services when the funding available is reducing, and of increasing household income, through, for example the living wage, employment opportunities and provision of childcare.</p> <p><i>(Mr C Smith left the meeting)</i></p>
<b>9</b>	<b>Group Work</b>
	<p>The three Groups focused on the following Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the big issues, and key challenges in terms of Shetland's Inequalities?</li> <li>• What is the root cause/or causes of these inequalities?</li> <li>• What needs to be achieved to overcome these issues and challenges? What needs to be achieved to mitigate?</li> <li>• What are the solutions?</li> <li>• What would you like to know more about?</li> </ul> <p><i>(Mr Hamilton attended the meeting, and assumed the Chair).</i></p> <p><i>(Mr Alastair Cooper and Ms R Hunter left the meeting).</i></p> <p>The Chair welcomed feedback from the facilitators of the groups:</p> <p>Some of the main points raised were:</p> <p><b>What are the big issues, and key challenges in terms of Shetland's Inequalities?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mitigation, solutions and issues around the cost of living</li> </ul>

	<p><b>What is the root cause/or causes of these inequalities?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to transport</li> <li>• Poor broadband coverage</li> <li>• Living in small communities and the stigma around poverty</li> <li>• Under-claiming of benefits/effect on household income</li> <li>• People at retirement not claiming for Pension top ups</li> </ul> <p><b>What needs to be achieved to overcome these issues and challenges? What needs to be achieved to mitigate?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A practical idea suggested was 'island proofing'</li> </ul> <p><b>What are the solutions?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Services to be accessed by everybody, and not to be different</li> <li>• Normalising access so people in Shetland communities feel they can access help and not be judged.</li> <li>• Smart/charge cards, and cashless systems</li> <li>• Subsidies/concessions to be targeted and not universal</li> <li>• More work to inform pupils and adults on budgeting/money management</li> </ul> <p><b>What would you like to know more about?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The link with the Shetland Partnership Board as there are a lot of inter dependencies and not to take decisions in isolation</li> <li>• The Scottish Welfare Fund</li> </ul> <p><b>(For detail from the Group session, refer to the separate Report from Session 2).</b></p> <p>During a brief discussion, it was questioned whether Shetland, being remote from the UK, has inbuilt inequalities, and a further inbuilt geographical inequality for those people living in the more remote parts/islands communities of Shetland. The Chair advised that this would be discussed at the 4<sup>th</sup> Session where the focus will be on Geographical Inequalities.</p>
<b>10</b>	<b>Next Steps</b>
	<p>The Chair informed that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Session would be held on 21 September, where the focus will be on EU, UK and Regional Policy and cover fuel poverty and transport issues. There will also be the contribution from the Archivist on the historical perspective of inequalities in Shetland.</p> <p>He advised on the proposal that the 4<sup>th</sup> Session "Geography and Communities" could be held in either Yell or Unst, to give the opportunity for local engagement. Following a brief discussion, it was agreed that the Policy Manager explore further with the communities and provide an update to the next meeting.</p> <p>The Chair thanked the Commissioners for attending and for their contributions to the Session.</p>
<b>11</b>	<b>Date of Next Meeting</b>
	<p>It was noted that the next meeting would be held on Monday 21 September 2015, in Room 16, Islesburgh Community Centre, at 1.45pm. Lunch will be available from 1pm.</p>

