

Skerries Community Council (SCC)

Minute of meeting held at 2.00 pm on Friday, 28th February 2025

In Skerries Community Hall

Present:

Paul James (Chair)
Bertha Anderson
Marina Anderson
Janice Hughson

In attendance:

Michael Duncan – External Funding Officer / Community Council Liaison Officer
Julie Graham – Engagement Officer, UHI Shetland
Lynsey Hall – Community Support Worker for Skerries
Mellany Arthur
Violet McQuade - Clerk (notes)

1) Apologies

Frances Anderson, Jilly Ash, Kia James, Marina Tait and Robert Thomson.

Paul welcomed everyone to the meeting; after a round of introductions the meeting commenced.

2) Declaration of Interest to any agenda Item

Chairperson asked for declaration of interests.

Paul declared an interest for any discussions under Items 5 and 6.

3) Minutes of last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on the 17th January 2025, were approved.

Proposed by Bertha Anderson, seconded by Janice Hughson.

4) Matters Arising/Actions from last meeting

4.1 Speak to a representative from NHS, regarding emergency medication

Paul has been in touch with the NHS regarding emergency medication issues, communication issues and getting better support for the Healthcare Support Worker (HSCW). Recently there has been an issue with the HSCW not being able to return to Skerries on the set date after her annual leave. The situation was outwith her control; it was due to one of the Northlink ferries being out of action. There have also been some communication issues; recent information has not been coming through the proper channels.

Skerries shouldn't be left in the position where information is not coming through, or that the community is having to go cap in hand to ask for service provision. It was agreed that the HCSW should be better supported. Paul will be monitoring the situation.

4.2 Write to Environmental Health, re pest infestation

Paul was in touch with Environmental Health (EH) Officer regarding the pest infestation. Four EH people are in Skerries today to help deal with the problem. Householders were to be charged £150 per property; public areas are to be treated at no cost to the community. An invoice will be issued for treating Grunay. It has been agreed that the same will happen as the last time that Grunay was treated; the Skerries Development Group (SDG) will be invoiced for the Grunay visit. It was agreed that it is important to get Grunay treated at the same time as Bruray and the West Isle.

4.3 Ask Education Services about retaining any useful equipment

Paul was in touch with Education Services before Christmas – it was agreed to have a meeting in early 2025. Paul sent an email asking for a date to hold the meeting, but has so far received no correspondence to suggest a date. It was agreed for Paul to get in touch with Education Services Quality Improvement Officer (QIO).

Action: Paul to get in touch with QIO at Education Services

4.4 Send a request to Burial Services re gates, hinges, wall

Violet was in touch with Burial Services, who have agreed that existing hinges on the gate of the old kirkyard may not be adequate for its weight. They will look at replacing the gate with a more suitable option, similar to the galvanised gate at the newer burial ground. Also the East dyke will be reviewed. They have suggested reaching out to landowners to help cut down on the rabbit population in surrounding areas.

Since Violet got in touch with Burial Services workmen have been in Skerries looking at the gates. They had found no evidence of rabbits, but asked that if anyone found any evidence they are to get in touch; they would then come out again to deal with the problem. It was noted that less rabbits have been seen around the area recently.

4.5 Skip

After the last meeting Violet ordered a skip, which was full by the time it was uplifted. It was agreed if there is still sufficient funding that another skip could be ordered as soon as possible.

Action: Violet check funding/order skip if funding available

5 Nomination of Director for Shetland Community Benefit Fund (SCBF)

Paul has decided to stand down from his role representing Skerries as a Director of SCBF. Paul gave a brief overview of what was involved in the role. After discussion it was agreed for Violet to send round an email to everyone in the community asking for people to consider taking on the role of representing Skerries as a Director of the SCBF.

Action: Violet – circulate email re SCBF Director

6 Impact of Visitor Levy

There was a discussion on the impact that the Visitor Levy will have on tourists coming to places like Skerries. So far, the Shetland Islands Council has taken no position on the matter, it is still being explored. It is not clear yet what the levy would entail. It was felt that with the high cost of coming to Shetland it is a shame that these extra charges may be added. It is not clear yet what timescales may be involved. Michael agreed to send over what information he can from the Economic Development Department.

7 Finance/Funding

7.1 Annual accounts

Violet informed members that, following the usual procedure, she has arranged an external accountant to audit this year's SCC accounts – after the end of March.

Two funding applications have been received for money from the Distribution Fund.

7.2 (SDG) Funding application for EH issues

The SDG has applied for £400 to cover costs of dealing with pests, and to ensure that Grunay is dealt with timeously along with the Bruray and the West Isle. It was agreed to grant the £400 funding to help keep down on the pests.

7.3 (SDG) Funding for Heritage Event

The SDG applied for £600 to go towards funding another event similar to the Heritage Event that was held in Skerries in July 2024. The 2024 event was paid for with funding from the National Lottery, but that funding will not be available this year. It was agreed to grant the £600 funding so that another Heritage Event, or similar, can be held again.

8 Scrap Cars (SDG)

A query has been received about the possibility of getting a community run organised, so that the Filla can uplift scrap cars from Skerries.

It was agreed to follow this up. Violet asked for Lynsey's help with this, as Shetland Amenity Trust are no longer available to uplift the cars when the ferry drops them off, therefore some other arrangements will need to be set in place. Lynsey to liaise with Violet on the matter.

9 Risks

The petrol pumps have been added to the Risks Log.

10 Issues

There have been no changes to the Issues Log since the last meeting.

11) Shops Consultation

The survey forms that have been drafted to get feedback from the community on the situation with the shop/s are ready to go. Once they are agreed on they will be sent out to everyone in the community, as well as anyone else who may use the shop/s.

Once the consultation is finished, and found what the community want, a meeting will be held to decide on the best way forward.

12) Correspondence Received

All correspondence has been circulated electronically.

13) AOCB

13.1 Proposed visit from MSP and MP

The Shetland MSP and MP are proposing to visit Skerries on the 22nd August, and have asked if that would fit in with a Community Council meeting. As the August meeting was already set for the 15th August, Violet asked if the date could be changed to the 22nd to fit in with the visit. All members present agreed to change the date of the August meeting to the 22nd.

Action: Violet arrange change of meeting date

13.2 Proposed meeting with Chief Nurse/NHS staff

As there has so far been no date set to reschedule the meeting that was due to be held with the Chief Nurse/NHS staff in November 2024, Violet has been asked to try again to get a meeting date set. Paul agreed to get in touch with the Chief Nurse to request a meeting, and if she cannot manage to attend in person if another representative would be able to attend a meeting in Skerries.

Action: Paul to contact Chief Nurse

13.3 Radio Teleswitch Service (RTS)/BT Landlines – Switch-off

13.3.1 Radio Teleswitch Service (RTS)

A discussion was held about the RTS switch off – the service is scheduled to be switched off on the 30th June 2025. It has been found that there are problems with smart meters not working in remote areas, including Skerries, and that a large majority of Shetlanders do not have access to an appropriate network. Concerns were expressed about what would happen in June when the switch off occurs. It was suggested that people need to be writing to their energy companies, voicing their concerns – and keep a record of all communication.

13.3.2 BT Landlines

There will be no landlines in Skerries after the BT switch-off; the latest update was that the switch-off has been postponed until January 2027. People rely on landlines; when there is a power cut the only means of communication for most residents are landlines. It was suggested having some kind of community phone for emergency situations. Unless people are registered with EE they have no access to telephones during a power cut. It is not clear what system the Skerries exchange runs on. Paul agreed to contact BT to get more information. It was suggested that people could write to BT, voicing their concerns, and keeping a record of all communication.

Action: Paul to contact BT

13.4 Community Emergency Plan

Lynsey spoke about the Community Emergency Plan, and had brought along templates; these have already been circulated to members. The purpose is to set up a plan so that everyone

knows what to do in emergency situations, who to speak to, and how to filter down any relevant information. A list of names and numbers is to be set up to deal with emergency situations.

The Community Work team have been asked by Emergency Planning to take this along to Community Councils to ask them to lead on plans for each community council area. The plans need to be completed by people living in the community. It is proposed that the plan would be used should there be an emergency Shetland-wide, such as the mass power cut experienced a couple of years ago.

The final draft needs to be submitted to the Emergency Planning & Resilience Advisor by June 2025. This may require members to have a think about who would be most appropriate to have their names on the telephone tree, etc. It was proposed to circulate the template to the Skerries community, asking for them to return what they can complete, then the results can be collated, and taken for discussion, to the SCC meeting on the 11th April.

Paul asked Violet to hang fire on circulating the template. He would like to read it, and add some explanatory wording before circulation. Once forms are circulated they can be filled in by residents, then returned to Violet to collate the results.

Action: Paul set out wording to accompany forms for circulation

13.5 Local Place Plan

A representative, who is leading on the Local Place Plan will be visiting Shetland in April, and will be doing a workshop/meeting in Lerwick. This is scheduled to take place between 10.00 am and 4.00 pm on Friday, 4th April. The venue is still to be confirmed. Anyone interested can attend.

13.6 Transport Meeting – in Whalsay

Paul and Lynsey will be attending the transport meeting, due to be held in Whalsay, between 3.30 pm and 7.30 pm on Thursday, 6th March. This will be a drop-in session. Consultants will be setting aside an hour to speak to anyone from Skerries who needs more information.

A discussion was held regarding the online transport survey form. Some people couldn't manage to finish the form, this was because part of it was much too complicated. It was agreed that it had not been designed with places such as Skerries in mind. The part where it asked for information on specific journeys was the problem, because trips to and from Skerries can involve going to Whalsay, Lerwick, Laxo or Vidlin – this meant that there were numerous scenarios; it was extremely tedious and time consuming when attempting to include all relevant information. This led to some people who attempted to complete the form abandoning it before it was finished. It was felt that as a result of the poor construction of this part of the form that there would be very few, if any, completed forms coming through from Skerries.

13.7 Visit from representative from Home Energy Scotland

A visit is planned for a representative from Home Energy Scotland is due to take place on Friday, 14th March. Individual appointments/visits are currently being arranged.

It was noted that there is another scheme (Warm Works) that may be suitable for some householders.

2.55 pm – Michael Duncan left the meeting

13.8 Visit from University Professor

A Professor from a Japanese university will be visiting Skerries on Friday, 14th March. He is doing research and hoping to meet members of the community to find out about how remote islands deal with things like health care and education. He is intending to be in Skerries for a couple of days.

13.9 School - Playing area

The wire netting surrounding the court at the side of the school is coming apart. It was agreed that Paul would contact the Team Leader in charge of this area. It was suggested that the

whole area would need to be checked. The last time that work was done the council got locals to do the work, for which they were paid.

Action: Paul to contact the Team Leader - Leisure Facilities

13.10 UHI Engagement Officer

Julie Grahame, UHI Engagement Officer gave an overview of her role with UHI. She deals with training/learning, and would welcome any feedback on what the community would need from UHI. She asked if there were any issues regarding getting access to courses, and how any training and courses could be easier for people to join.

A discussion was held – it was suggested that discretionary remote learning courses could be held. Julie said it has been suggested that recorded classes could be run for courses such as Minute Taking, SAGE or admin courses; they could be available on YouTube. A group of people could gather in the hall for a class; it was felt that with Skerries having such a small population, this was highly unlikely.

Some courses could be held in a classroom, providing students could travel to attend classes. If it were the case that travel was not possible, a class could then be held remotely. It was noted that some students benefit from being present in a classroom with other students – the social / integration side of classes is important as well as the learning.

Another suggestion was that it would help if there could be a special price at Islesburgh, for example, for students from the outer isles. During discussion Julie told the SCC that the Scalloway College has accommodation at Port Arthur for 10 students.

Also, the dial-a-ride service with the reduced fare to catch the ferry would help. It was suggested that taking some practical based courses to the outer isles would be welcome. Mellany suggested that any courses that could be available for places like Skerries could be noted on the Adult Learning Classes leaflet that is circulated annually. This would help to inform islanders on what courses it would be possible to do in the more remote areas.

Julie will put some information together, which she will send it to Violet to circulate to the community.

14) Date of the next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled to be held at 2.00 pm on Friday, 11th April 2025.

The meeting concluded at 3.15 pm

Actions:

Paul

- Get in touch with QIO at Education Services re school equipment
- Contact Chief Nurse regarding a meeting
- Contact BT regarding switch-off
- Contact the Team Leader - Leisure Facilities regarding multi-court netting
- Set out wording to accompany forms for circulation

Violet

- Check finance, and if possible, order a skip
- Liaise with Lynsey regarding scrap cars
- Change meeting date from 15th to 22nd August
- Circulate email regarding Director of SCBF

Chair Signature

Signed.....