

Unst Community Council

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Shetland

Clerk

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Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 21st April 2025 at 6.30 pm in the Baltasound School Music Huts and by MsTeams

Present

Caroline Hunter, Chair
David Cooper, Vice Chair
Adam Doull
Alec Priest
Janice Priest
Ingram Thomson
Robert Thomson, SIC Councillor (ex-officio)
Ryan Thomson, SIC Councillor (ex-officio) MsTeams

Attending

Fiona Farquhar, SIC Marine and Air Operations
Sheena Summers, SIC Marine and Air Operations
Julie Graham, UHI Engagement Officer
Josie McMillan, Clerk

01/04/25 Apologies

Gary Betney
John Peterson
Duncan Anderson, SIC Councillor (ex-officio)
Frances Browne, Community Involvement and Development Officer
Michael Duncan, Community Council Liaison Officer
Gordon Thomson, Unst Partnership Ltd

Caroline welcomed everybody to the meeting. It was decided to take agenda items 6 then 7 first.

06/04/25 UHI Shetland – Julie Graham, Engagement Officer

Julie Graham explained that she is doing research on behalf of UHI Shetland, consulting with all Community Councils and asking what their current training needs are and what expectations they have for potential future delivery. She asked what the community's views were on the single campus; transport issues and available courses. Members explained that closing the local Learning Centre had been a big loss for the local community. The Centre was well attended and many people were accessing learning which they had been unable to early on in their lives, for various different reasons. Accommodation, travel, cost and course timings all make attending courses in Lerwick very difficult. There is normally no accommodation available for young people who opt to go to UHI Shetland instead of the Anderson High School to continue their education. This affects Skills for Work students as well. Bus timetables and ferries do not usually link in to allow people to get to the college in Lerwick. This will be much more of a problem if the single campus is based in Scalloway. Transport and accommodation would need to be provided for young students from the Isles who want to enrol on courses at UHI Shetland. Ms Graham asked if the community was happy with what courses are offered. Members felt Textiles; Arts and Crafts; Hospitality; Rural Skills and Music are all important courses to offer. Ms

Graham was asked if the student accommodation at the Scalloway campus was going to be converted to offices. She said this was being discussed but no decision had been made, accommodation is needed for students travelling up from south as well. Ms Graham asked if there would be any demand for online courses in basic book keeping and administration. She was asked if there are any courses available for people wanting to train as Home Economic and Craft and Designs teachers. There is a shortage of these teachers in Shetland but the nearest courses are delivered through Perth. It is important to look at what Shetland needs and look to fill these skills gaps. Members felt the website was user friendly. Ms Graham will use all the information she gathers from communities throughout Shetland to compile a report for UHI Shetland. If there are any further comments after the meeting, these can be forwarded to Ms Graham.

Caroline thanked Ms Graham for attending the meeting.

07/04/25 Ferries/Fixed Links

Sheena Summers and Fiona Farquhar, SIC Marine and Air Operations, attended the meeting at the request of the Community Council. Caroline said the Community Council is getting a lot of correspondence about the ferry booking system and lack of capacity on Bluemull Sound. Members believe the service is running close to 100% of capacity, which is making it difficult to function. There have been multiple examples from the community saying they had been told that ferries were fully booked and when they got there were only two booked vehicles. Robert said the same had happened to him last Wednesday when the first ferry he could book into Unst was at 2pm. There were only three vehicles on it. He has requested anonymised data from that day, to check usage. Members said that you can't depend on there being spaces if you can't get booked on the ferry and you need to be somewhere at a specific time. Ms Summers said there had been similar problems in Whalsay with the booking system and people being unable to book. SIC Ferries had reminded travellers there to cancel bookings if they no longer needed them. She said there is still a problem there. The Community Council has put it on Facebook reminding people to cancel bookings if they are no longer needed. There were also step by step instructions on how to cancel online bookings put on the Community Council Facebook page.

Members said that the ferries aren't coping with the volume of traffic at the moment, they asked how they will cope with increased tourist traffic in the summer. Once the Space Port is fully operational there will be a higher number of people travelling to Unst. Businesses in Unst were hit really hard last year when there were so many disruptions to the ferry service, with many tourists not coming to Unst because of the uncertainty of travelling back to the mainland. Many tour buses choose not to come, which resulted in cancelled bookings and loss of income for tourism businesses. Businesses are very worried about the effects the reduced services will have on them again this year.

Ms Summers said that with a bit of forward planning they had staggered the SIC tarry trucks coming into Unst last year. This had worked well. Although SIC Roads has said they will be doing no tarring work in Unst until the lashing down of vehicles has been sorted. Ms Summers said she is the point of contact for the Space Port for organising ferry bookings for big loads coming to Unst. She hasn't been contacted once.

The MOD is carrying out a lot of work this year which will involve tarring and lorries from the mainland. The Royal Engineers are also coming up to carry out some work. This will all impact on the ferries.

There was also a discussion about the new booking system which Andrew Inkster spoke about at the Community Council meeting last September. Ms Summers was asked what progress, if any, had been made on getting this new system. She said that representatives from the Company, who worked with Orkney Ferries and NorthLink ferries on their booking systems, will be in Shetland this week. They will speak to booking office staff, management and ICT colleagues and also visit the ferries. She explained that this new system will be a vast improvement on the old one and will be much more user friendly as it will be easier to change and update information. When bookings are made with the new system, the information gained from the number plate, will show the vehicle details and size of space needed. The old system books on deck space, so does not take into account a lorry lashed down over 4 or 6 spaces. Booking Office staff can make some amendments, but the online booking system works on deck space. This has created problems with vehicles arriving for a ferry they have booked on, but are unable to get on because it is already full. The new system will be able to flag up

multiple bookings using the same vehicle number plate. At present the only way this can be done is by manually looking through the bookings. The Orkney online booking system charges when the booking is made. If the run is cancelled for any reason a refund is issued. Robert said that when the booking system is introduced it will be a “soft” start. One suggestion was a non refundable booking fee when the booking is made, with the balance paid on travel. Ms Summers said that there are plans for the Booking Office to be open from 7am to 6pm, 7 days a week.

Members said there is a need to speak to commercial companies as well about cancelling bookings. Robert said that he had spoken to one Yell contractor about ferry bookings and usage. One suggestion was to carry out some of the preparation work on site, e.g. mixing the concrete there, instead of shipping it in by truck. It is important to get the message out about cancelling ferries if travellers no longer need them. Staff checking vehicles onto the ferry should be able to identify vehicles that do not turn up. Could these people be sent an email asking why they didn't travel? Ms Summers said that the onshore staff are subject to a lot of abuse, which isn't acceptable.

Ms Summers said that they were making good progress on the Geira shift pattern change which will increase the Geira service to Unst, without impacting on the Fetlar service. She said that the final version of the proposal has gone to the Geira crew, incorporating the suggestions made by them. She is hoping for a response by the end of the week. Ms Summers said that advertising for a second crew should be done in the next couple of weeks. There should be enough crew available for the second shift, with existing workers and agency staff. Robert said that there were discussions ongoing with other crews about shift patterns changes.

There were concerns raised about the number of times the ferry leaves late from Toft, which makes catching the ferry at Gutcher very difficult. Ms Summers said that there has been a directive from Sellaness instructing ferries to leave on time unless there is an acceptable reason not to.

The new sign at Ulsta is not user friendly. The writing is too small to read when you are driving towards it. Members asked again if diagrams of the terminals could be added to the confirmation email.

The Community Council has decided to write to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) directly. The Community Council needs to be seen to be asking questions about this decision which is having crippling consequences on the Unst Community. Robert suggested asking Alistair Carmichael, MP, to help organise a meeting with MCA.

Robert said that the Community Council is working on a “Local Place Plan,” he emphasised how important it was to put all these concerns into this plan.

Appendix 1 – There is an appendix at the end of the minutes with a list of Community Council questions which have been put to SIC Ferries. The answers received from Andrew Inkster, Executive Manager, Ferry & Airport Operations & Port Infrastructure, are shown in red.

02/04/25 Elect Vice Chair

David agreed to be Vice Chair until the Community Council elections in November. He was proposed by Caroline and seconded by Adam.

03/04/25 Declaration of Interest

Janice and Ingram declared an interest in 18/04/25.1 Space Watch UK – Field visit to Unst 5th to 9th May - Research on Community views relating to SaxaVord Spaceport

04/04/25 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes from the meeting held on Monday 10th March 2025 were proposed by Janice and seconded by Ingram.

05/04/25 Matters Arising from last minutes

There were no matters arising from the last minutes, that aren't on the agenda.

08/04/25 SIC North Isles Councillors Update

Robert said that he has been busy with ferry issues. Ryan said that the Council is currently in recess, so things are extremely quiet. He has attended a few Licensing Committee meetings, again nothing in relation to the North Isles. He also attended the Full Council meeting on Wednesday 26th March, where the council agreed to approve further work and budget provision to explore and develop proposals for the new vessel acquisition, with the additional £10m capital received from the Scottish Government. Ryan said that there isn't a 'back up' vessel, as such, as there is nearly always a ferry in dry dock, and the Fivla covering that. An additional vessel that could be despatched to all ports would be seen as a good short term sticking plaster prior to fixed links. Robert was asked about the Scottish Government's increased funding for Rural Housing. He said that the SIC has not got any of this funding yet and do not know if they will qualify for any of it. All Shetland is classed as rural for Scottish Government housing purposes. Once the Scottish Government makes the money available it has to go through the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA). Robert doesn't know when this money will become available, and if Shetland will get any of the funding.

09/04/25 Unst Partnership Ltd (UP) Update.

Gordon sent his apologies to the meeting. He emailed the UP Report and Community Action Plan. He said that UP hope to start a new Skip scheme in May/June. The UP shop continues to trade well on Thursday and Saturday afternoons. The final version of the Unst Community Action Plan (CAP) still has to be completed but should be finished by the end of this month. The main themes in the recommendations centre around Activity (services and facilities), Connectivity (transport and broadband), Resilience (housing), Environment and Enterprise. Luke Fraser is working on the Housing Needs Assessment over the next few weeks and plans to have it completed by the end of May. Shetland Amenity Trust has now said that they are willing to consider a one year lease of the Viking Longhouse site. They will cover paint/preservative costs, grass-cutting and buildings insurance. In return, a local group would collect the donations, supply labour to look after the site and cover the cost of "third party liability" i.e. any injury on the site. UP is in the process of getting quotes for this, hopefully as part of their own Insurance cover. Better signage to encourage donations, perhaps via a QR code, has been suggested. Once this is clearer, a local meeting will be organised for anyone interested in looking after the site. There will be a fair amount of work involved. The paint suppliers recommend the boat be pressure-washed first to remove salt and dirt from the wood. The decking will need to be lifted to remove debris from inside the boat. Some of the woodwork on the deck needs repaired. The Tourist Map 2025 that UP has produced in previous years is going to go purely online this year as a trial. The Tourist Map should go live by the beginning of May.

10/04/25 Community Involvement Update

Frances sent her apologies. She will update the Community Council at the next meeting. There was a discussion about the Community Resilience Plan. Frances is going to organise a meeting of groups that will be involved with drawing up the plan. There are several issues which need to be considered before producing leaflets.

11/04/25 Shetland Community Benefit Fund (SCBF)

David said there was nothing to report. He said that there had been a press release showing that SCBF have distributed a million pounds to qualifying groups and projects. There were some issues discussed. One was whether there could be money available for people to insulate their homes, if they didn't qualify through a recognised scheme. Members wondered why SCBF were supporting the Brae District Heating Scheme, but were giving no money towards the costs of tunnels. David said that SCBF are following a five year plan. This is now year 3 of that plan. He said that directors are involved with policy decisions and not involved with awarding funding.

12/04/25 Community Council Scheme Review Update

The Community Council Scheme Review has been completed. The Council approved the recommendations at a meeting at the end of March. The changes came into effect immediately. Details can be seen on the website.

13/04/25 Clerk's Job Update

Interviews are taking place next week. The new clerk will be in place for the next meeting.

14/04/25 Applications for Planning

There were no applications for planning.

15/04/25 Application for Donations

There were no applications for donations. This will be advertised locally and on Facebook.

16/04/25 Unadopted Roads

This will be advertised locally and on Facebook.

17/04/25 Community Council – Retention and Destruction Policy

All minutes and annual accounts up to 2023 have had to be archived. These had to be in paper form. The minutes in calendar years and bound. There were minutes in the filing cabinet from 1977 and annual accounts from 1982. The Clerk has archived all the documents and taken them to the Shetland Archive. Financial documents supporting the annual accounts have to be kept for 6 years plus the current year. All earlier financial documents have been destroyed. Archiving will now be done every year.

18/04/25 Correspondence

18/04/25.1 Space Watch UK – Field visit to Unst 5th to 9th May - Research on Community views relating to SaxaVord Spaceport

Peter Burt, Space Watch UK, is coming to Unst on a field visit from the 5th to the 9th May. He wants to speak to members of the community about their views on the Spaceport. Information about Space Watch UK can be found on the internet at <https://spacewatch.uk/>

18/04/25.2 SIC Burial Services Update

Yvonne Scott, SIC Burial Services Officer, emailed to say that the SIC wanted to “inform Community Councils that in certain burial grounds where the remaining capacity is estimated to be less than 10 years, pre-purchasing of Exclusive Right of Burial is no longer permitted. This has been the case for some years in several burial grounds and is a standard practice to ensure space remains available for immediate burial needs.” She said that the SIC “understand that this may be difficult for families who wish to plan ahead. However, there are still options available, and they are available to discuss alternative arrangements that may suit individual circumstances.” This information is on the SIC Website:

<https://www.shetland.gov.uk/births-marriages-deaths/burial-services/2>

18/04/25.3 Community Council Elections – Awareness Raising Campaign

Michael Duncan, Community Council Liaison Officer, emailed to say that a small short life working group will be set up to agree a range of publicity methods to encourage candidates, old and new, to put forward nominations for their local Community Council at the next round of Community Council elections in November. Community Councils will also need to carry out their own awareness raising, and encourage individuals to apply.

19/04/25 Community Council Finances

19/04/25 End of Year Accounts

The Annual Accounts are at Voluntary Action Shetland for auditing.

20/04/25 A.O.C.B.

20/04/25.1 Tax Levy on Accommodation Providers

An email was received from Melanie Mouat, The Peerie Neuk, asking the Community Council to back accommodation and tourism-based businesses in their objection to the introduction of the proposed Visitor Levy in Shetland, particularly in relation to its potential impact on tourism in Unst and the North Isles. Melanie explains that she believes this levy would have unintended consequences for both Unst's fragile tourism

economy and the wider island community. The Scottish Government has now passed legislation allowing local authorities to introduce a percentage-based levy on overnight accommodation and has asked each council to hold a consultation process to determine whether to adopt it. Melanie states that this levy is effectively an accommodation tax as it would not apply to cruise ship passengers, wild campers or those staying in caravans or motorhomes (who have not booked to stay at a campsite). Members said that if this tax is applied it should be applied to cruise ship passengers. It also currently doesn't exclude local visitors who need to travel to the mainland for hospital appointments, events at Mareel or other venues, or to catch early morning flights. The proposed 5% per night levy would be added to the cost of the first five consecutive nights. This will encourage visitors to base themselves on the mainland and take day trips to the outer isles, rather than staying in there. That shift would negatively impact, not only accommodation providers, but also other local businesses who rely on visitor trade. There is too much to see and do in Unst in just one day. It would also put added pressure on an already stretched and fragile ferry service. There are also serious practical concerns. Accommodation providers would be expected to collect this levy on behalf of the Council, in effect, becoming tax collectors. That adds an administrative burden, processing fees and potential accounting complications. The levy would be classed as part of income which could affect taxable revenue and for some it would push their businesses over the VAT threshold, even though the levy itself brings no benefit to the business. Melanie has raised her concerns in writing with: Kate Forbes MSP, Cabinet Secretary for the Economy and Rural Affairs; Beatrice Wishart MSP, Shetland; Douglas Ross MSP, Highlands and Islands; Councillors Robert Thomson and Ryan Thomson, Shetland Islands Council. Members discussed this in detail and agreed to write a letter of support. They agreed with Melanie's suggestion of having a further consultation, a deeper understanding of the realities faced by rural and island tourism businesses and if a levy is to be introduced, a fairer and more inclusive approach that applies equally to all types of visitors, including cruise ship passengers, wild campers and campervanners.

20/04/25.2 Roads

Neil Hutcheson SIC Roads, replied to the Community Council's emails about white line painting. He said that "the contractor's vehicle did not have lashing points for the ferry so they were unable to access Unst during their visit in March. The SIC will discuss this with the contractor to see if this can be rectified or if they have an alternative vehicle. They are due in Shetland again in June or July with another visit planned for after the end of the surface dressing season so August/September. Unst will be a priority for the first visit if the necessary arrangements regarding the lashing points can be made." There has been no reply from Mr Hutcheson about the road issues we wrote about again after the last meeting. There have been complaints about the drainage problems on the road from Brookpoint to the White Brig, and the conditions of the Dale Road; the Troal Road, Norwick; Crossroads at the Camp to the Holsens, Norwick and the junction to Outer Skaw from the grid. The last repairs on the Holsens Road were done with concrete and 4 inch crusher run which was put into the potholes, which didn't last long. The road needs to be a bound surface (tarred). The Community Council has written about these road issues repeatedly in the last few years. It was agreed to write again.

21/04/25 Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting is the 2nd June 2025.

Chair: _____ Date: _____

Clerk: _____

**Appendix 1 - Questions put to SIC Ferries by the Community Council are shown in black
Andrew Inkster's answers are shown in red**

Unst Community Council – Ferry Service Concerns – 15 April 2025

1. Opening Statement

We are still very worried about the upcoming few months and the negative effect this will have on the Island. Our main worry is that very few of the solutions mentioned below will be in place until the summer is likely over. We all appreciate some of the issues but we feel we need some action and at least need to know details of a plan going forward.

I very much hope the detail below will reassure you that we are doing everything within our power to minimise adverse effects, but we can only make the best of the resources we have at hand.

2. Current Issues

- *The main issue at the moment is currently capacity. This is obviously exacerbated by both the high demand for materials at the space centre and the current reduced capacity due to additional securing measures.*
- *We have had multiple complaints and have seen with our own eyes the capacity issues. We have seen multiple days that the first available ferries in or out of Unst are around 3pm. Unfortunately if we are not coping in March / April the system will simply implode come June / July. There will be no tourism trade for the isle if the ferries appear fully booked.*

Understood and agreed.

3. Community Council Meeting

- *The next community council meeting is on Monday 21st 2025, Can Andrew Inkster or someone else attend on behalf of the Shetland Islands Ferries, Ideally in person but if not they could attend via zoom.*

Sheena and Fiona will attend in person. I hope that the information contained in this response will provide detail, and anything which Sheena cannot expand upon will be noted for a further response following the meeting.

4. Bookings

- *The current booking system needs to be looked at. Too often people are complaining that they are turning up early to get on booked ferries that are near empty. This discourages travel and inconveniences people. We have seen instances when due to no available bookings out of the isle we've put a vehicle across the night before only to join the desired ferry the next morning for it to have 2 cars on it.*

The Ferries Resilience Review report which went to Councillors in September last year had several key actions, one of which is the replacement of our booking system. To that end, we are in discussion with a Company who have worked with Orkney Ferries and NorthLink to commission new booking systems. They have just about pulled their proposal together, and will be in Shetland next week, to visit ships, booking office, management and colleagues in ICT. Following this visit, I very much hope that we will have a formal offer to provide services to design, procure, install and commission a new system. This is a significant

project, and will inevitably take some time to complete, but everything is being done at our end to push this along. The ball is very much in the specialist's hands, but they are aware of the need for urgency.

- *Due to the ferry issues people are clearly booking multiple ferries or booking on the off chance they need a ferry, this only adds to the issue.*

Noted and agreed.

- *We will back the SICs request to get encourage people to cancel ferries. We have already done this, many on the Facebook page noted they did not know how to cancel online so we have shown them.*

Your assistance with this matter is appreciated.

- *The bigger issue is likely the larger vehicles. There is a thought that some of the mainland and Yell based contractors are making bookings on the off chance they are needed, if these are not then cancelled it leads to massive problems.*

We will arrange for public messaging to go out, reminding businesses to cancel unused bookings wherever possible. Beyond this, noting some measures outlined below to track no-shows, it is difficult to identify further action that can be taken with the current booking system software.

- *When there were large concrete pours happening at the space centre we were losing 6 spaces per ferry due to concrete trucks. If the concrete was cancelled or the order doesn't materialise these bookings don't appear to be being cancelled.*

The issue of multiple bookings is a problem we have seen elsewhere in the fleet, and our current booking system does not preclude the same person booking multiple vessels. With no requirement to make payment in advance, there is no penalty for doing this, and our current system is not powerful enough to monitor this. I very much hope our new system will offer ways to control this, such as recognising identical car reg numbers on consecutive runs and demanding at least a call to the booking office, rather than allowing multiple online bookings to be made.

Ferry Operations also favour payment in advance, at the time of booking, but we need some legal advice on the implications of cancelled runs before we commit to anything. Orkney Ferries have adopted this approach, and their system automatically refunds anyone booked on a run which is cancelled at the press of a button, so this may not be a significant hurdle to overcome.

- *One member has suggested could a record be kept of vehicles that have booked but failed to show up be kept. Then repeat offenders could face repercussions, i.e. 3 missed bookings and suspension of booking privileges for a few weeks.*

We will adopt this course of action, with marshalling area attendants keeping a log of no-shows on each run. In terms of penalty, we will need to discuss this further, but a letter reminding persons to cancel runs they do not use should be easily introduced in the first instance. Penalties beyond this will need legal advice which will not happen quickly, and in my view are unlikely to be approved.

Arrangements are currently in place to provide IT equipment to support the printing of manifests for each run, so that attendants can identify no-shows and report them to Sella Ness for further action.

- *Could the online system be amended so truck bookings can also be cancelled easier?*

As you will be aware Commercial vehicles cannot be booked online. This is something a new system will be better able to support, but at the moment all commercial vehicle bookings have to be made by calling the Booking Office. Cancellation of these bookings can therefore only be made by calling the booking office. Changes to current software is not possible due to age and obsolescence.

Sheena has met with Booking Office staff, and we will look to increase Booking Office opening hours in the very near future.

Sheena will update at your meeting.

- Others have suggested payment at the time of booking so if you are coming in later you've still paid your fare however it would discourage multiple bookings.

Agreed, and I very much hope that the introduction of a new booking system will allow this to happen.

Missed bookings may result in a further fare being payable, but this level of detail needs careful consideration before the introduction of any new booking arrangements.

- *We've also had a complaint that someone was excluded from booking due to passenger numbers being at the limit but there was still deck space. This was incorrect for 2 reasons:*

1. *A 45-seater bus had been booked on and incorrectly marked as 45 passengers rather than the 25 that were actually on the bus.*

Without investigating the particular issue, my thoughts are that the booking office must mark down total vehicle capacity at the time of booking, unless carrier can confirm a reduced number at that time. We can't book a ferry to capacity in the hope or expectation that the bus won't be full. However, if buses are regularly travelling with much reduced numbers, there may be an option for the Companies to declare a reduced number at the time of booking, but they are then required to manage this, and excess numbers on the bus would result in persons being left at the Terminal, which is not ideal.

2. *Worse they said booking office stated they were still using the 4 crew passenger limit rather than the 5 crew limit.*

I believe that this was a misunderstanding with new staff, and the matter is now resolved. Bear in mind that under current arrangements, Geira is a four man crew, and passenger numbers will decrease when this vessel is covering. However, our plans for Geira which I will expand on below, will see 5 man crew at all times, removing this restriction.

5. MCA – Incident

- *This is still one of the major issues and will cause massive issue during the summer.*

Agreed, the implications are unhelpful at a time when demand already outstrips capacity during peak periods.

- *As a community council we request to see the incident report issued to the MCA.*

Forgive me for being blunt, but I need to absolutely clear on this matter:

No incident report was issued to the MCA, nor have they asked for sight of one.

We are obliged to notify the MCA and Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) when incidents of this nature occur. Once notified, the MCA made their own arrangements to travel to Shetland, where they viewed the vessel and vehicle, and interviewed crew individually. The MAIB decided not to attend Shetland and have also decided that they do not need sight of our internal report.

Meetings between crew and MCA inspectors was arranged by my Management Team.

Sella Ness Management staff were excluded from these interviews, and the changes directed to us by MCA were based on their own investigation, with no input from myself or my management team. Management were neither invited, nor given any opportunity to give any opinion before the MCA made their decision.

Their decision was based solely on their visit and discussions with crew.

I am aware of rumours and suggestions online that these new requirements have come about following an over-zealous and heavy-handed investigation by Sella Ness management.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Our internal investigation is complete, but MCA have not requested sight of its content or findings.

You will understand that the investigation document is in parts confidential, and I will take advice on whether it can be shared with you.

- *We also request to see the compliance notice issued by the MCA*

The MCA consider their audit/investigation results to be confidential, but again, I will seek advice on whether the document or relevant elements are able to be made public.

Background to the Compliance Notice:

- Every vessel in our fleet, except for Good Shepherd 4 (GSIV) on Fair Isle, must have a "Cargo securing Manual". (GSIV certificated under different regulations due to smaller size).
- This manual must comply with marine legislation where applicable.
- The manual must be approved by the MCA and is an integral part of the ships certification.
- The cargo securing manual for our ship contains an element of discretion for Masters operating in "Categorised Waters", where conditions were assessed by the MCA as being "predictable".
- Categorised waters are those deemed to be sheltered to a point where ships are not treated as being "at Sea" by the MCA.
- For our service, this includes the route between Gutcher and Belmont, the route between Toft and Ulsta, and the whole of Lerwick Harbour, which covers our Bressay service.
- For all other routes, any vehicle over 3.5t must be lashed, irrespective of weather conditions
- Having met with the crew and viewed the incident, the MCA have removed the element of discretion which was available to Master's on Belmont#Gutcher route, based on their view that tide and weather conditions are NOT predictable.
- The discretion remains on Yell and Bressay service routes.

- *Robert mentioned that there is consideration in going to speak to the MCA. Is this happening? What is the plan going forward regarding this? We can't be just at a consideration stage after this much time.*

We hope to meet with the MCA, to outline the impact this change has had, and explore any other options which could mitigate these adverse effects.

It is unlikely that anything will assist, other than a reversal of their decision which is in my view out of the question. The chances of a regulatory authority relaxing a direction like this would be very difficult to foresee.

For clarity, we will not be challenging their decision – to do so would not be received well, and would demonstrate, in my view, a lack of understanding or willingness to comply with safety requirements which were deemed necessary following what could very nearly have been a fatal accident.

Current MCA resources mean that securing meetings is difficult, and my staff will continue to try and get a date in the diary.

- *Again how much were the MCA made aware of the suitability of the machine that had the incident. A high, rotating mixer drum rotating a liquid load supported at the front on a narrow point tow hitch?*

As above, the MCA visited the vessel and viewed the vehicle. Ferry Operations management have not been offered the opportunity to give our thoughts or view on the suitability/stability of the vehicle.

- *If this is to be challenged to save our summer that must be happening sooner rather than later.*

As above – their decision will not be challenged.

6. Stock Trailers & Other Securing issues

- *While this is more an issue for the end of summer it is still a very concerning issue. When it is time for the livestock sales all ferries are fully booked on the morning of the sale already. If we are having to tie these down and halving our capacity these farmers simply cannot get their livestock down to the sales on time.*

Unless trailers are in excess of 3.5t fully laden, I do not foresee a need to tie them or the towing vehicle down. We will not consider the combined weight, and my understanding is that even the largest capacity 4x4 vehicles are rated to a maximum of 3.5t tow, so trailers will be considered to be at or below this figure.

So, for normal crofters I do not see an issue. If we are talking about much larger stock trailers towed by tractors etc. the lashing requirements will apply, depending on vehicle size and weight.

- *Has there been any look into the option to amend the securing points on the ferries so that vehicles can be secured directly down meaning there is no loss in capacity.*

As above, the MCA approved Cargo Securing Manual for the vessel must comply with relevant regulations and guidance. In this respect, lashing angles are required to be between 30 and 60 degrees.

Vertical lashing would not provide the same restraint and would require re#design of the vessels lashing points and subsequent approval by MCA.

Even if we thought this was do-able, it would take time to have calculations completed, assessed and approved and then structural alterations to the vessel which would take it out of service.

- *Has there been any look into the option to amend strapping down to use ratchet guns to speed up the process.*

Yes – we have reviewed a change, but chains are heavier and would offer no real benefit in terms of time to lash. In reality, a ratchet strap is as quick to apply by persons familiar with them.

7. Geira – Shift pattern change

- This is something that could help but can you give us info on the potential future timetables as well as a timeframe.

I'm pleased to report that we are making good progress on this matter. A meeting was held with crew recently, where some final tweaks to proposals were requested by them. My staff have assessed these proposals, and we have confirmed to crew that these are acceptable. Final versions have been issued to crew this week, and I expect formal changes to contracts to commence in the very near future.

We then need to think about the second crew, and recruitment will take some time. However, Sheena has some good ideas on using existing pool crew, who are already on 2/2 rotation, augmented by Agency staff if necessary.

Therefore, I hope that we may be able to increase Geira service quicker than we first anticipated.

Regarding timetable, this will take some consultation with Communities in Unst and Fetlar. However, my initial feeling is that Fetlar would continue with the level of service currently provided, and the increased Geira hours would augment the Unst Service, while longer term arrangements are put in place

My priority is to increase traffic capacity for Unst, without detriment to Fetlar.

In terms of actual start/finish times, I will ask Sheena to give you more detail on what has been discussed with crews during your meeting.

- *Unfortunately however with the time for recruitment / training will this realistically be in place before the summer is over.*

As above, this will take time, but we are looking at every opportunity to expedite arrangements.

8. Bulk Cargo / Coasters

Do the council believe that this is a viable option? As a business man I can see the following issues.

- *Money talks, The cost of hiring a coaster, loading and unloading the aggregate will mean £perT delivery will be more using coaster and if that's the case it will likely see companies continue to move materials by road / ferry.*

I agree that it is a commercial decision for Companies, but in the light of capacity demands, we will always advocate the transport of bulk materials by coaster to Baltasound.

We will be clear in response to any enquiry that capacity is limited on our vessels, and as seen in the past, numbers of vehicles on a daily basis will be restricted.

- *The only material this doesn't apply to would be the concrete. This was previously batched in Unst with sand brought in direct via coaster.*

Agreed, and this would be an obvious solution if bulk transport was considered. We continue to push this option in meetings with the Space Port.

- *At the moment we need to see that progress is being made and that there is a plan in place to reduce these back logs as much as possible. it is a very worrying time for anyone in the Unst community.*

I very much hope that the above convinces you that we understand your concerns, and we are doing everything we can to provide additional support. Unfortunately, there is only so much we can do, but we are committed to working with Communities to provide the best service possible. Some of these things will take time, but there is no lack of effort within my team.

- *We look forward to hopefully discussing the matter at the upcoming UCC meeting.*

I would very much like to have attended, but I am sure that Sheena and Fiona will do their best to inform you. It is going to be a very difficult period for all, and I can assure you that we understand the need to provide the best service possible.

I look forward to meeting with you once I'm able and appreciate your detailed list of concerns. Communication at this time is vital, and we are always happy to meet, either in Unst, or at Sella Ness whenever you feel it necessary.