

Association of Shetland Community Councils (ASCC)

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Paper 1

**Minute of the ASCC meeting held on
Tuesday 10 June 2025, 6.00 pm,
Town Hall Chamber, Lerwick and online using Microsoft Teams**

Present

Shayne McLeod	Association of Shetland Community Councils (Vice Chair)
Lindsay Tulloch	Bressay Community Council
Irvine Burgess	Dunrossness Community Council
Lucy Cummings	Fetlar Community Council
Maureen Davis	Gulberwick, Quarff & Cunningsburgh Community Council
Jim Anderson	Lerwick Community Council
Willie Simpson	Nesting and Lunnasting Community Council
David Brown	Northmaven Community Council
Findlay MacBeath	Sandness & Walls Community Council
Joanne Jamieson	Sandwick Community Council
Lawson Bisset	Scalloway Community Council
Linda Tulloch	Tingwall, Whiteness & Weisdale Community Council
Caroline Hunter	Unst Community Council
Annette Jamieson	Yell Community Council
Laurence Odie	Yell Community Council

Officers in Attendance

Vaila Simpson	Executive Manager – Community Planning & Development, SIC
Michael Duncan	Community Council Liaison Officer – Community Planning & Development, SIC
Jan Riise	Executive Manager – Governance & Law, SIC
Andrew Inkster	Executive Manager - Ferries, Airports & Ports Engineering, SIC
Michael Craigie	Executive Manager – Transport Planning, SIC
Professor Jim Wilson	University of Edinburgh
Sandra Laurenson	Viking Genes Shetland

Officers Observing

Frances Browne (note taker)	Community Involvement & Development Officer – North Isles, SIC
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1. Introductions

Chair welcomed all present
Group agreed to meeting being recorded.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Ian Walterson, ASCC Chair, Burra & Trondra Community Council and Delting Community Council. Apologies also received from Ana Arnett, Roselyn Fraser and Lynsey Hall from Shetland Islands Council.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest

4. Professor Jim Wilson – Viking Genes Study updates Sandra Laurenson Viking Genes Shetland

Professor Wilson shared a presentation with the meeting. Professor Jim Wilson led the Viking Genes study, which started in Orkney and was extended to Shetland, the Hebrides and further afield. The study identified that (due to Norse component and geographic isolation) the islands have distinct gene pools.

As part of this study a significantly higher incidence of genes related to cancer, heart and other health conditions (called harmful actionable variants) have been identified in the Shetland population. This means that the Shetland population is more at risk of developing these diseases. However with screening, preventative healthcare can be undertaken and save lives. There are around 50 variants, some spread across the Shetland population and others with links to certain areas/islands (the BRCA 2 variant has received some publicity). The study also identifies where there are higher than average populations which have 'carrier variants' genes which do not affect the individual but may affect children of two carriers.

Previous participants in the Viking Genes study have been contacted. The Viking Study is one of only 2 studies to return results to participants. This has taken some time due to being a new process. It has had an iterative effect, as participants who have received results have encouraged their family to get screening. Some of the stories from people who received results and subsequent action were shared with the meeting and are on the website. Roughly half of people tested had no idea they had these genes.

Professor Jim Wilson believes that the higher significance of these genes in the Shetland population demonstrates need for more screening. Viking Genes Shetland are now setting up a new programme to test a further 5000 Shetlanders. They need to seek further funding to achieve this programme. Although NHS Shetland cannot provide funding for screening they are working with Viking Genes Shetland as will provide the healthcare pathways for participants with 'Harmful Actionable Variants'. Previously participants had to have at least 2 Shetland Grandparents but going forward the tests will be open to all that reside in Shetland. Currently there is one other programme for the Jewish population, residing in England, who also have a distinct gene pool and are similarly at risk of having more 'harmful actionable variant' genes which Viking Genes Shetland plan to collaborate with.

Professor Jim Wilson handed over to Sandra Laurenson, who also shared a presentation with the meeting. The Viking Genes Shetland Committee was formed back in September and includes Sandra Laurenson, Valerie Nicolson, Lindsay Tulloch, Elaine Jamieson and Peter Malcolmson. They have undertaken due diligence, formed as a charity and drafted a project plan. Their role is to create awareness and support fundraising.

The group are planning to raise enough funds to take them until 2029. The current focus will be on screening for actionable genetic variants. Initially funds will go towards laboratory costs and the delivery team who will establish a database, work through ethical principles, set up the laboratory and offer the screening. Professor Jim Wilson and researcher Ben Fletcher (who is developing the panel of variants to be screened for) are funded through the Edinburgh University.

The total cost is estimated to be £1.8m. The Edinburgh University will provide £0.8m, with Viking Genes Shetland seeking to raise £1m. They will approach institutional bodies, including pharmaceutical bodies, both within and out with Shetland. As no one body will fully fund the project, they need a partnership approach, of which the Shetland Community is a vital part, in order to reach target and demonstrate community support. Around £72k has been raised through fundraising so far, which is an excellent start.

Viking Genes Shetland are asking Community Councils to provide support by promoting the project within their communities, perhaps acting as champions for the project and helping direct people who would like to help towards the committee. Viking Genes Shetland can be contacted via their website or by emailing Viking@ed.ac.uk.

Participants were invited to ask questions.

Lindsay Tulloch requested Community Councils to help get the message out to folk and to signpost interested people to the committee. He stated that although NHS Shetland can't support with funding, they are very supportive of the project itself.

Professor Jim Wilson agreed that they had several meetings with NHS Shetland who were keen on the project, linking it to the preventative agenda. They are helping with ethics application. Working with the NHS is necessary as they will guide people on to their pathway of care.

David Brown thought the project was fascinating, worthwhile and is very happy to help out. Shane McLeod said he echoed that from all the Community Councils. And that they would all be happy to help in any way they can.

Sandra Laurenson and Professor Jim Wilson stated they were happy for presentations to be shared with the ASCC minutes. Professor Wilson also stated that the presentations will also be on You Tube, which when ready would be happy to share too.

Lawson Bisset asked if it would be possible to share the presentations with their communities. Professor Jim Wilson responded that that would be brilliant.

5. Note of the previous meeting held on 11 March 2025 for approval.

The minutes of the March meeting were Proposed by Lawson Bisset and seconded by Lindsay Tulloch

Item 6 & 7 will be swapped around

6. Community Council Elections 2025 – Awareness Raising Project

After the last ASCC meeting in March, a Community Council awareness raising subgroup was formed. The subgroup met last week and agreed a number of publicity options.

They are planning a two-fold approach:

Shetland wide publicity, led by Michael Duncan and local publicity, led by Community Councils.

For Shetland wide publicity, there will be posters and info, radio advert, as well as online publicity. This time different social media platforms may be used as well as Facebook, to reach a wider demographic. The publicity will also reach out through youth services and families by communicating through schools.

For local awareness raising, Community Councils are encouraged to be as proactive as possible and to start planning what might be done now. This could include Community Councils sharing publicity and getting out and about, such as having a presence at community events. The subgroup will come up with a menu of options and materials to be sent out in advance of the nomination period commencing.

The publicity on social media will take place just before and during nomination period. The subgroup noted that some people are not keen to take part in elections, which might be a barrier, so Michael Duncan will be seeking some advice internally around messaging for that.

Michael Duncan invited Community Councillors to comment on the draft timetable for election.

Notice of Election	Friday 12th September
Close	Thursday 9th October
Notice of poll	Friday 10th October
If seats are contested postal ballot	Friday 24th October
Election Day	Thursday 20th November
Count and verification of votes	Friday 21st November

All existing Councillors in post till Wednesday 19th November.

Uncontested Councillors will be elected 11am on Thursday 20th November.

Or if Councillors are subject to ballot they will be elected on Friday 21st November

Meetings of new Community Councils to be held within 1 month by 21st December.

Comments were invited from those present.

Lawson Bisset stated the election dates seemed logical and asked if the dates could be sent out to Community Councils to check. Michael Duncan said he will confirm the dates with the election team and get dates out as soon as possible.

Laurence Odie queried the length of the period for a contested election as it seemed like a long time. Michael Duncan will feed back Laurence Odie's view but responded that it was a fairly standard length of time allowing for the fact it was a postal ballot, and as people may be away.

Lawson Bisset asked if posters for dissemination could depict local areas to help it be more relatable to local audience. If this could be done centrally it would help Community Councils – help for CC to publicise in own areas. Could SIC consider a poster which has local image on it, rather than a generic poster to help us target our audience? Would be helpful if this could be done before sending out. With space for local contact details. Michael Duncan thought this could be looked at.

Jim Anderson asked if publicity could emphasise that the election is for over 16 year olds. Michael Duncan agreed. Joanne Jamieson asked if nomination forms would be available physically as well as online as previously one of their Community Councillors found it effective to hand nomination forms to potential candidates. Michael Duncan and Jan Riise thought the forms were available in hard copy and online.

Linda Tulloch recalled that during the last election the internet failed so Councillors had to deliver forms personally. Lindsay Tulloch agreed that approaching individuals was effective in gaining nominations and requested Community Councils receive forms with publicity packs. Michael Duncan agreed that could be included. Annette Jamieson recalled that one of the questions on the form asks for a voter roll number, which people weren't sure how to find, so asked if guidance on that could be added to the form.

Group agreed that the proposed election dates were acceptable. Jan Riise raised that being aware of whether current Community Councillors intend to stand again or not is important, although he realised this is delicate, as not knowing can result in a lack of nominees.

Lindsay Tulloch asked if it was appropriate for Chairs to ask each Councillor individually if they planned to stay on. Lawson Bisset suggested it might be best for each Chair to approach their Councillors as appropriate based on their own knowledge.

Linda Tulloch shared that last time their Chair had contacted Anne Cogle towards the end of the nomination period and realised nomination forms hadn't been received, so he had phoned round Community Councillors to remind them to put their nomination forms in.

Jan Riise responded that there is a need for the Election Team to be careful about not influencing whether a ballot takes place or not. Although he recognises it is helpful to know how many people may stand. He will consider what information might be proper to share, to let Community Councils know if there could be an issue looming.

7. Matters arising from previous minute not on the agenda

No matters were brought forward by those present.

It was noted that Michael Craigie and Andrew Inkster were in attendance in response to the request about inter island connectivity and external connectivity and Transport links to Mainland Scotland raised at the previous ASCC meeting.

Lindsay Tulloch asked about transport issues in getting to Mainland Scotland.

Michael Craigie spoke about what is happening at the moment. It has been announced that two freighter flex vessels will have capacity for 200 passengers, with 64-65 cabins as well as freight and are expected will come in to service around 2029. Replacing passenger vessels is beginning to be spoken about with an estimated time frame of 2032-2033 for delivery.

The current contract for these services finishes in 2028. The community needs assessment which informs the next contract for ferry services will be starting soon. Capacity will be a key issue within this. Michael Craigie has asked Transport Scotland who undertake this assessment to clearly set out all constraints within this project. This will enable Shetland organisations and residents to focus on where improvement can be made. For example, one of the fixed points is that new boats will continue to use Aberdeen Harbour.

Finlay MacBeath stated that he had heard that the Aberdeen Harbour couldn't accommodate any vessels larger than the current vessels. He wondered if this was the case why a Linkspan wasn't included in the South Harbour. He wondered if more vessels trying to dock using the current Linkspan would cause issues. He felt that Aberdeen Harbour was becoming complacent.

Irvine Burgess stated that he was aware of some of the issues around this and wondered if explanations around why the fixed points were in place would be helpful.

Lawson Bisset understood that there were fixed points that couldn't be changed, and agreed it seems sensible to concentrate effort on what can change, but wondered where there might be wiggle room, and wondered if Transport Scotland would be responsive to questions around this?

Lindsay Tulloch felt people would need to understand clearly what the issues are. For example, if it is agreed that building new vessels is positive, are we also to assume the new vessels will be able to have greater capacity, but it still may not actually resolve the problems around capacity due to the demand for travel and need for cabins?

Jim Anderson wondered whether there was possibility to utilise more space on the freight deck of ferries. If all cabins could be four berth that might help. Could sailings through Orkney be reduced in summer, as they have other options to reach the UK mainland.

Michael Craigie responded that as he meets with Transport Scotland regularly, he will reiterate his wish that Transport Scotland set out 'hard' limits to what can change. If Community Councils can send Michael Craigie what needs to be adjusted and changed, Michael Craigie can take that to Transport Scotland.

This may include the 'hard limits' above, as Michael Craigie can tell Transport Scotland that these need to be shared, understood and may be challenged. If this can be sent to him soon that would enable him to share this in good time.

Michael Craigie thought Transport Scotland would be responsive to feedback around social wellbeing or economic issues. Transport Scotland are communicating that due to funding pressures there is not extra money available for new infrastructure or vessels, and this is unlikely to change. They say there may be more opportunity to shift revenue budgets.

Joanne Jamieson asked if objective information about passengers needs and wants for the service is available already or is that still to be collated? Michael Craigie responded this is still to be collated. This will be part of the Community Engagement to be undertaken.

Irvine Burgess fed back that the proposed changes will be helpful but won't solve the issues. We need people to put in feedback which support data that this isn't meeting Shetland's needs. Irvine Burgess is happy to support Michael Craigie's work.

Lawson Bisset asked if Community Councils putting this information forward would help Michael Craigie.

Action: Community Councils to share information with Michael Craigie to put to Transport Scotland around what 'hard' limits need explanation and discussion.

Inter-Island Ferries

Lucy Cummings asked about the Inter island Ferry service, as there are issues affecting the North Isles generally including large businesses, like the Saxavord UK Spaceport and Cooke Aquaculture as well as residents feeling the impact. Although Fetlar has a smaller population they are at the end of the line, and it affects residents too. Services are running ok at the moment, but winter has been difficult.

Andrew Inkster responded that The Inter Islands Transport Connectivity Study is looking at connectivity in the medium and long term. The Ferry Resilience Review is bringing forward interim solutions. They have investigated second hand ferries without much success. They have also undertaken work on making jobs more attractive, which is now in place on Whalsay and Skerries. They are making progress on Bressay, and in the near future the service will be able to make early morning runs to connect with flights.

There are particular issues on Bluemull Sound with regards the recruitment and retention of staff. A key objective is making changes to crew patterns for the Geira, which is going well. There are adverts going live soon. Once additional crew is in place the Giera can move to a 6-day week service.

There is a similar process happening for Yell Sound. Unfortunately, between crew issues and older vessels the service is up against it at present and the communities are feeling the brunt of this. The Ferries Service will update the North Isles Community Councils on the measures being undertaken to provide fixes.

They are also working on procuring a new vessel which they expect will take 2-3 years.

Lucy Cummings responded that they understood there were big issues which would take time and money to resolve. Fetlar Community Council will keep raising to ensure that there is a community voice to support the actions taken. The service working well is good for the overall Shetland Economy.

David Brown shared that in his work role for Cooke Aquaculture the ferries are critical for what they do. Approximately 12% of Scotland’s Salmon is produced in Yell and Cooke have farms in Yell and Unst. It is difficult for employees to get to work in Unst on Sundays. It is also difficult to get bookings on Bluemull Sound ferries. Some connections aren’t great – such as the Saturday morning 7:45am ferry from Toft doesn’t connect with the 8:25am ferry to Unst.

Andrew Inkster replied that block bookings are an issue across the service, the current situation is causing more people to book multiple ferries. They are procuring a new booking system which may be able to preclude this and take payment which would also deter it. Changes to timetable are not simple as there are always knock on effects, but Andrew Inkster encouraged David Brown to submit his concerns around timetable.

Caroline Hunter stated that with the resurfacing work at Ulsta, travellers are asked to be at the terminal 10 minutes before departure rather than five, and this can be difficult for those travelling across Bluemull sound due to the connections. Is compensation being made for this?

Andrew Inkster responded that this was a very temporary arrangement and that he thought there would be consideration for Unst and Fetlar residents in that situation.

Caroline Hunter asked if the Ferry Service knew when the new booking system might start. Andrew Inkster replied that they have a formal proposal from the company so will see movement in near future.

Michael Craigie shared that the bus services Business Case was on the agenda for the Shetland Islands Council today. There are 13 options, 7 of which proposed cuts. It will be a similar network with some more evening and Sunday services in areas that haven’t had them previously. There will be more community engagement about this in August and September. Changes will take effect from August 2026.

Michael Craigie went on to advise that the nature of community engagement had not been established in detail yet, but that Unst is seen as a specific community to engage with through the Community Council. Michael Craigie advised that Transport Scotland was soon to launch its consultation on the next Northern Isles Ferry Services and that the views of the ASCC would be important to capture in that. Michael Craigie agreed to meet with Irvine Burgess to get initial views.

8. Items for future meetings

Michael Duncan advised that any future agenda items were to be submitted to himself using the agenda request form. Community Councils would be contacted in due course and invited to submit agenda items.

9. Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 9th September 2025, usual time and place. Meeting closed at 8.00pm

Chairperson

Date