



Leader: Steven Coutts

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Mr Kevin Stewart MSP
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Our Ref: SC/JM

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Your Ref:

Dear Mr Stewart

Shetland Islands Council considered the consultation on a National Care Service at a special meeting of the Council on 28 October 2021. The response was approved unanimously and, as will be seen, the Council, and indeed its staff, have serious concerns about the proposals.

The main thrust of our concerns is the potential for the proposed governance model to undermine the local democratic process, remove the ability to make local decisions based on local assessment of need, and most crucially in doing so impact on the outcomes for individuals in our community.

Added to that there is serious concern about the inclusion of other service areas such as Children's Services in a National Care Service without any evidence being presented as to why or how this will lead to better outcomes for children and young people.

There are recommendations in the Independent Review of Social Care report we would wish to embrace but we would contend these can be achieved without the need for a National Care Service, and in fact would have a much better chance of success if local government and its partners were adequately resourced to deliver on these shared desired outcomes.

Structural change and centralising decision making with a one size fits all approach seldom works and probably even more acutely impacts the further away one is from the centre.

This being said and further to our earlier engagement, we write to reiterate the desire to work collectively to ensure that the requirements of the Islands (Scotland) Act are followed and that an Island Community Impact Assessment is started as soon as possible. The assessment needs to be robust, honest and detailed and cannot be seen merely as a tick box exercise.

The limitations of the consultation document have not allowed us to outline the unique level of service provision in Shetland and we have attempted to do this through supplementary documents in our formal response.

These documents do give a flavour of how we achieve the outcomes that we do in Shetland. It is through our long term investment, early intervention work, governance structures and very strong partnership working, that we achieve what we do.

We are rightly proud of our investment in care and we really do need positive and constructive engagement with those that are less familiar with Shetland, so they can understand our situation. The range of services covered in the National Care Service proposals obviously stretch beyond the initial Independent Review of Social Care, but it is worth highlighting that the Independent Review did not engage with Shetland. This is despite Shetland continually seeing some of the best outcomes in Scotland.

We would like to draw attention to another provision in the Islands (Scotland) Act, namely the Additional Powers Request. If a Local Authority were to request additional powers there are significant requirements to evidence the reasons for the request, detail the implications, undertake consultation and ultimately demonstrate how this will improve outcomes.

This National Care Service proposal can be seen as central government requesting additional powers from local authorities and therefore surely it is incumbent on the Scottish Government to meet the same criteria that a local authority would need to meet if positions were reversed.

As a Council, we considered and approved our Consultation response, but it was clear having compiled our response that there are still many more questions than answers. The case has yet to be made that outcomes will be improved in Shetland by these proposed changes.

We are alarmed at the prospect that the consultation analysis will only be produced in April, a time when local authority elections will be underway. We seek early engagement on the Impact Assessment and that there is a meaningful commitment from the Government to engage in this detailed work in the spirit in which it is set out in the Islands (Scotland) Act.

The National Care Service feels like a one size fits all at present. The National Care Service is perhaps the biggest policy intervention this Government has ever undertaken. How the Government engage going forward will also provide the biggest test of the Islands (Scotland) Act.

We are very committed to playing our full part in the Island Community Impact Assessment and we look forward to you outlining your timeline for undertaking this crucial work.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Steven Coutts
Political Leader