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Dear Colleagues,

As you may have heard, I hope to be a candidate for the chair of the Shetland Charitable Trust. I have accepted the invitation to become a trustee, after resigning in December last year because I could not support the decision to allow control of the trust to pass from elected to selected trustees. I wished to speak out publicly against this policy and have done so.

I recognise and applaud the painstaking work on reform of the trust, carried out over the past two years by the governance review group. I agree with all of their recommendations - except for the method of choosing a majority of trustees. It now comes down to a simple choice: election or selection.

The recent council election result suggests there is majority public support for the principle of retaining democratic control of the trust. OSCR has confirmed that there is no insuperable obstacle to electing nominees for trusteeships although, legally, the trust would still have to issue formal invitations to successful candidates (as it does to the *ex officio* councillor trustees under its present constitution).

That being so, I propose that the trust should vote to withdraw the current scheme of reorganisation and simultaneously, at the same meeting, submit a revised scheme to OSCR. This would differ only in a single detail: instead of eight selected trustees there would be eight elected trustees, in addition to the seven councillors to be nominated by Shetland Islands Council.

How we implement this change obviously requires detailed discussion but need not be very complicated. I envisage the mechanism for electing the eight independent members being as follows (although other trustees may have better suggestions):

1. Candidates for trusteeships would require to be nominated by at least five registered electors in the Shetland area;
2. The trust should publish a list of the personal qualities and abilities considered desirable in candidates for trusteeships, and supply the candidates with a clear description of trustees' duties.
3. There would be a postal ballot of all registered Shetland electors;
4. No canvassing or advertising would be permitted;
5. Each candidate would be allocated space in the official election circular, sent out with the ballot paper, for a photograph and 400 words describing the skills, experience and ideas they would bring to the trust;

6. The method of voting would be for the elector to rank the candidates in order of preference from 1 to 8 (or another voting arrangement to be decided by the present trustees, in consultation with OSCR);
7. Upon publication of the results of the ballot, the trust would write to the eight candidates with the largest number of votes and invite them to become trustees;
8. The new system would be phased in and elections then held at two yearly intervals, to allow for a regular turnover of trust membership but also to ensure some continuity of knowledge and experience.
9. In the event of there being insufficient candidates to fill the vacancies, the trust would use its existing powers to co-opt new trustees.

Some critics have objected that elections cannot be relied upon to throw up suitable nominees for the trust and there are not enough appropriately qualified people in Shetland who would be willing to stand. The answer to that is threefold: the success of the voluntary sector here shows the range of talent and experience available; the trust already has sufficient powers to curb or remove any trustee shown to be deficient or delinquent in his or her duties (whether directly elected or not); and if the electoral system is good enough to choose councillors to act in the public interest, why should it be inadequate to choose trustees acting in the same interest?

Our first priority as trustees must be this reform of the trust, to resolve much-publicised difficulties with perceived conflicts of interest. Of almost equal importance is the future of our proposed investment in the Viking windfarm project. We need to decide this as soon as possible. I am in favour of the investment, subject to the following conditions:

1. Trustees will require a considerably more detailed breakdown of the proposed development budget than was provided at the two recent inquorate meetings. To consider such details, we may well need to go into private session because of commercial confidentiality (as we don't necessarily want bidders for contracts to know exactly what sums we have in mind).
2. We will also need assurances that the remaining concerns over the proximity of turbines to inhabited houses can be resolved – either by re-siting or deleting some turbines, or by compensation/purchase agreements with householders, or by some other means. I am sure we all want the Viking project to be a good neighbour, as far as technically possible.

The controversy over the windfarm has tended to obscure the exciting opportunities it can bring to the trust and to the community whose interest we serve: if the returns from the investment are as large as predicted (and we will, of course, need expert evidence and assurance on that point, before proceeding to the next stage) then the trust's annual income could at least double. In the long term, that could allow us to sustain and improve the Shetland system for care of the elderly; to spend more on the environment, sport and the arts, and to consider new ventures, such as educational grants (for example, music tuition, craftwork instruction, bursaries for apprentices and university students).

I have watched the trust grow from modest beginnings in the 1970s to the major force for good it has now become. I hope to be able to lead the trust into the next, even more useful, stage of its career, with a reformed constitution that will allow us to concentrate on doing good without wasting time and energy on incessant rows about largely imaginary conflicts of interest.

I respectfully ask for your support in the election to the chair.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jonathan Wills". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'J' and a long, sweeping underline.

Jonathan Wills

PS In view of the considerable public interest in this matter, and also to ensure transparency in public business, I am taking the liberty of copying this letter to local news organisations.