

**Berneray Community Council**  
**Minutes of Meeting 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2026**  
**Berneray Community Hall, 7.30pm**

**Present:** Margaret MacAskill (Chair), Donald MacLean (Vice Chair), Sharon MacPherson (Treasurer), Eilidh Carr and joined by Teams video link - Councillor Uisdean Robertson & Councillor Mustapha Hocine.

**Members of Public:** Andrew Rodger, Keith McIntyre, Colin Blane & David Henty.

**Apologies:** Lorna MacKillop (Clerk) & Billy Fraser.

Margaret MacAskill (Chair) opened the meeting and welcomed everyone.

**Minutes of meeting – 12<sup>th</sup> January 2026 read and adopted.**

Proposed by Keith McIntyre and seconded by Donald MacLean.

**1. Matters Arising**

**a) Uist Dental Hub Petition –**

Berneray Community Council formed a petition to circulate around Berneray community. This was completed as an original paper copy with hand written signatures / details with nearly 80 signatures collected. Letter and petition forwarded by email to NHS Chief Executive, Integrated Joint Board, Dental Services, MP, MSP and local Councillors on Uist & Barra. Shona MacDonald (BBC Alba) filmed on Berneray with Donald MacLean (vice chair) and Barbara Hunter (local resident) on the negative issues facing dental services / petition impact – to be aired on both radio and news. Councillor Mustapha Hocine thanked BCC for their efforts and work in compiling the petition and suggested the same for North Uist CC. First full day of appointments scheduled for new locum dentist were all cancelled as bad weather disrupted her travel arrangements to Uist. A further letter may be sent higher to Neil Gray, The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care from all Community Councils.

**b) Branch closure of Bank of Scotland, Balivanich –**

Scheduled to permanently close on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2026. Concerns raised for no public consultations or forward planning – new staff currently being trained, options of early retirement or transfer to mainland branch – all lead to important jobs lost and depopulation. Post Office services can be used for banking but questions asked about business use, large cash deposits & every day transactions. Not all communities have access to a Post Office. Loss of vital 24 hour access to cash from ATM located outside bank. Encouraged to move to online banking but not everyone has access to internet or able to use digital technology. Portree & Stornoway to be closest available branch to visit in person – many road miles & ferry journey – not suitable or sustainable 30 days to appeal the Link Assessment – website link / form available online.

**c) Seagrass Restoration Project –**

Public meeting held in Berneray Hall by Andrew Rodger on 18.02.2026, where the Seagrass project as a whole was shared with the local community – covering the importance of seagrass through improved habitats, environment impacts, current seabed locations, seagrass types, creating local employment and more. Most recent bid for funding successful - next stage to apply for Marine License and permission from Crown Estate owners to lease seabed. Questions / interest raised at public meeting. Andrew has contacted Leverburgh fishermen after queries of loss of fishing areas – to

be consulted in license application (as stands, no loss of existing rights / no change in fishing). Berneray Community Council received advice on moving forward with the 'Memorandum of Agreement (MoA)' provided by Andrew between his company, *Namara Projects Ltd* and *BCC*. This was altered to a 'Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)' with further details changed to match with conditions of being a Community Council. Next step to finalise if Community Council will or will not sign agreement.

**d) Bays of Harris Buyout –**

Scottish Land Fund has confirmed the Bays of Harris Community Estate Ltd.'s application to the fund has now been accepted and the purchase is fully fundable moving forward. This will be funded in the new round of the funding available during the summer of 2026.

**e) Comann Dualchas Innse Gall –**

Mairi MacLean, Development Officer at CDIG travelled from Barra to hold public consultations in both Berneray Hall and Berneray Ferry Terminal (February 2026). Each small ferry terminal located on Barra, Eriskay, Berneray and Leverburgh will receive £5000 each of funding towards adding in local heritage boards, information and more. This work will be completed by CDIG working alongside Berneray Historical Society.

## **2. Councillors' Reports**

### **Councillor Uisdean Robertson**

- a) Hebridean Air Services** – new 9 seater plane has arrived in Stornoway ready to enter service between Stornoway and Benbecula. Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) currently understaffed with long delays to issue appropriate certificates etc. Service to move to 5 days per week with the view of Hospital Consultants to travel down to Uist.
- b) Calmac, MV Isle of Islay** – Calmac's newest built ferry has arrived from Turkey, berthing trials across west coast network ahead of entering service on the Islay route.
- c) Calmac, MV Loch Portain** – further delays to MV Loch Portain returning to service. Next scheduled date - 17<sup>th</sup> April 2026. From March 2026, less capacity as direct sailings between Lochmaddy and Tarbert will stop as timetables move to summer schedule.

### **Councillor Mustapha Hocine**

- a) Smartphone Free Childhood, Uist** – Uist parents have created their own branch of the group aiming to delay children owning / having access to mobile phones until 16 years old. Teachers and parents in support.
- b) Budget, Stornoway** – Councillors have travelled to Stornoway ahead of budget meetings. Rise in Council tax proposed, cuts in other areas expected.

## **3. CORRESPONDENCE**

- a) Bays of Harris Buyout, John Maher** – January Press Release update
- b) Calmac** – delay to Loch Portain in dry dock
- c) Uist Dental Hub** – Berneray petition
- d) Comhairle Leader responds to Budget Settlement**
- e) BBC Charter Review (BBC ALBA)**

## **4. Treasurer's Report**

Copies of treasurer's report shared for viewing for period 1<sup>st</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2026.

Income of £50, Loch Duart & expenditure of £250, K.MacDonald.

February 2026 (month not yet complete) expected expenditure – £240 to Berneray

Community Hall - annual hall hire, £4170 to Kilworth Machinery Ltd – Dragone flail mower

HYD side shift & £100 donation to Berneray Christmas Club – contribution towards Community

Winter Dinner & Ceilidh. Councillor Uisdean Robertson & Councillor Mustapha Hocine to donate £400 of their ward funding (£200 each) as a contribution towards the Community Winter Dinner & Ceilidh. Councillors thanked for their generous donation.

#### **5. A.O.C.B.**

- a) **Sound of Harris Fixed Link** – questions were asked regarding the route of the proposed fixed link, would it follow old route proposed many years ago or a new route. Rushgarry residents concerned what this could mean. Views of consultations and News articles have worried residents that plans are moving forward without thoughts of the public. Planned consultations are to only consult; no agreement has been made on any plans / design. Community views needed – fixed link, partial causeway / bridge or ferry.
- b) **Seachdain na Gàidhlig** – various events taking place throughout the Hebrides. Singing evenings / coffee morning scheduled to take place on Berneray. Other non Gaelic events – every second Wednesday, Caraidean Uibhist 1-3pm Churchroad Clinic, everyone welcome & Berneray Community Winter Dinner & Ceilidh, 27<sup>th</sup> February.
- c) **Continued funding for Creative Industries** – recent CNES budget survey showed high support at 45% for arts & culture to continue. In 2024, Decision was made to withdraw funding for the arts; CNES provided a total of £300,000 (£100,000 each year) for the following 3 years, ending this year. New alternative funding will replace this – a bidding process with any group / organisation in art, culture, Heritage etc. available to apply.

#### **7. Date of next meeting:**

**Monday 13<sup>th</sup> April 2026, Berneray Community Hall, 7.30pm.**