

Notes of the Meeting held between **ONCHAN DISTRICT COMMISSIONERS** and the **POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVES FOR ONCHAN** held in the Boardroom, Hawthorn Villa, 79 Main Road, Onchan on Monday 21st July 2025 at 6:00 pm.

Present:	Mr A Allen	(Chairman)
	Mr A Gibson	
	Mr O Lockwood	(Lead Member for Finance and General Purposes)
	Mr D Quirk	
	Mr R Turton	
	Mr R Callister	(Member for the House of Keys for Onchan)
	Ms J Edge	(Member for the House of Keys for Onchan)
	Mrs D Caine	(Member for the House of Keys for Garff)
	Mr A Smith	(Member for the House of Keys for Garff)
Apologies:	Mr S Wilson	(Vice Chairman and Lead Member for Housing)
	Miss G Corkish	
In Attendance:	Mr R Phillips	(Chief Executive/Clerk)

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending.

1. **MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION**

1.1 **Consideration of publishing the Joint Political Meeting agendas and notes on the Authority's website**

Following the request of the Vice Chairman, the Chairman asked the Members of the House of Keys (MHKs) and the Board of Onchan District Commissioners if they are in agreement to publish the agenda and approved notes of tonight's meeting, as well as future meetings.

The Chief Executive/Clerk advised that he had liaised with some of the other local authorities to inquire how similar meetings are administered. The following was noted:

- These authorities did not host regular meetings of this sort; and
- If a Minister or MHK meets with a local authority Board or Council that the notes of any such meeting have not been published.

The Chief Executive/Clerk further advised that any notes from meetings held by the Board are not exempt from Freedom of Information requests; therefore, it would be advisable that any agenda and notes relating to a meeting of the Board with the MHKs be publicly available.

The MHKs and the Members of the Board of Onchan District Commissioners agreed upon the following:

- That the Joint Political Meeting agendas and notes are to be made publicly available once agreed.

It was requested that the Chief Executive/Clerk circulate the notes of tonight's meeting for consideration by those in attendance prior to making them publicly available on the Authority's website.

1.2 **Suggested changes to the Elections (Keys and Local Authorities) (Amendment) Bill 2024**

Ms Edge and Mr Callister raised the situation which the Authority had recently experienced regarding a newly elected Commissioner standing down from office after the uncontested local authority general election in April 2025.

Mr Callister congratulated the Chairman on how he had handled the situation with the former Commissioner on behalf of the Board.

Ms Edge and Mr Callister proposed recommendations to avoid a similar situation occurring, including:

- Promoting changes to the Elections (Keys and Local Authorities) (Amendment) Bill 2024;
- Inclusion of more safeguards to limit potential candidates from standing who are not fit to stand for public office; and
- Inclusion of procedures to improve uncontested elections, and to allow constituents the opportunity to comment upon uncontested candidates.

The Members of the Board of Onchan District Commissioners noted the following:

- The Authority had submitted a response to the Elections (Keys and Local Authorities) (Amendment) Bill 2024 consultation in January 2025, but the response made no inclusion regarding the above matters;
- The practicality and limitations of a Returning Officer or Deputy Returning Officer undertaking due diligence checks; and
- Will any of the proposed changes also apply to the House of Keys, the Legislative Council, and the boards formed within Government departments. An example of due diligence checks was given in relation to the Chairman of Visit Isle of Man standing down recently.

Mrs Caine proposed that any offences limiting a person from standing for public office could also include civil matters, and not just bankruptcy and court rulings.

The Chairman concluded the matter and stated that this matter is now for the Members of the House of Keys to progress within Tynwald as it falls outside the vires of the local authorities.

1.3 **Local Government (Amendment) Bill 2023**

The Chief Executive/Clerk highlighted that this matter had been due for consideration at an earlier meeting with the MHKs to allow the Members of the Board of Onchan District Commissioners to share views before submitting a consultation response. It was noted that due to everyone's limited availability, the earlier meeting had been postponed and that the Authority had already submitted a consultation response in relation to the Amendment Bill.

The Chief Executive/Clerk provided an overview in relation to the current progress of the matter, including:

- Correspondence had been received from a Member of the Legislative Council inviting representatives from all local authorities to attend an

Evidence Stage prior to progressing the Bill through the Legislative Council;

- The Evidence Stage was due to be held on Tuesday 24th June 2025, and it was requested that each local authority have no more than one representative in attendance, and that opening statements were to be limited to only four people acting on behalf of all the local authorities;
- Noted that many of the local authorities agreed that the time limit to prepare evidence and the limitation of speakers was an unfair process;
- Legal advice was obtained regarding the matter; and
- Following the submission of a letter on behalf of all the local authorities, the Legislative Council has agreed that the evidence stage will now be held on the 28th October 2025 to allow more time to prepare evidence and to agree which local authorities will provide opening statements on behalf of all the authorities.

Mr Callister raised concerns regarding the inclusion of the new clause that will allow the Department of Infrastructure to impose functions on local authorities, and stated that this clause is not required.

The Members of the Board of Onchan District Commissioners confirmed that this was also the view of Onchan District Commissioners.

Mrs Caine provided reassurances that the Legislative Council will bring the local authorities' evidence to the Members of the House of Keys for consideration before progressing the amendment bill. Mrs Caine provided an overview of some of the background to the current inclusion of the new clause and the issues experienced at the Northern Civic Amenity Site.

The Members of the Board of Onchan Commissioners highlighted concerns regarding the new clause having the potential to be misused to force local government reforms. Examples were provided based on changes to refuse collection services, social housing provision, and library services that could negatively affect the ratepayers of Onchan.

Mrs Caine suggested the Authority share its legislative council evidence submission with the MHKs for Onchan. The Chairman confirmed that this will be done to support the Authority's views being heard.

1.4 Implementation of 20 MPH Speed Limits Consultation

The Chief Executive/Clerk highlighted that this matter had been due for consideration at an earlier meeting with the MHKs to allow the Members of the Board of Onchan District Commissioners to share views before submitting a consultation response. It was noted that due to everyone's limited availability, the earlier meeting had been postponed and that the Authority had already submitted a consultation response.

Mrs Caine commented that the proposed changes and the consultation have been divisive, but highlighted that all comments received will be considered by the Department of Infrastructure.

The Members of the Board of Onchan District Commissioners and Mr Callister commented:

- That the consultation appears to have been meaningless; and

- That the Department of Infrastructure has not handled the matter in a professional manner, which has upset many members of the public. An example was given of installing new speed limit sign poles on Hillberry Road prior to the consultation conclusion.

Ms Edge provided an overview of previous road safety measures that were investigated and recommended by a traffic specialist on behalf of the Department of Infrastructure, including details of how these other measures would have benefitted the District, but the Department has not taken these recommendations forward due to cost.

The Members of the Board of Onchan District Commissioners raised concerns regarding:

- The potential for speed cameras to be introduced in the future on the newly installed poles around the Island; and
- Lack of response to the Authority's consultation response, which proposed temporary speed limit changes to trial high-traffic areas rather than permanent changes.

The Chairman concluded the discussion and stated that the overall process administered by the Department of Infrastructure had been poor.

Delegated DOI Functions to Local Authorities

The Chief Executive/Clerk highlighted that this matter had been due for consideration at an earlier meeting with the MHKs to allow the Members of the Board of Onchan District Commissioners to share views before meeting with the Minister for the Department of Infrastructure. It was noted that due to everyone's limited availability, the earlier meeting had been postponed and that the Authority had already met with the Minister.

The Board of Onchan District Commissioners and the Chief Executive/Clerk provided an overview of the following:

- The Department of Infrastructure's delegation of functions to the local authorities in 2015, including weed spraying, road sweeping, road gully emptying, and verge cutting;
- That the agreement has not been reviewed by the Department since it was signed, but it is highlighted that there is a clause that allows for it to be reviewed annually;
- Correspondence received from the Department regarding implementing formally set standards to be achieved when undertaking the delegated functions; and
- The level of objection received from local authorities regarding the implementation of standards, as many local authorities do not currently have adequate resources, and the cost to ratepayers to obtain greater resources; and
- Concerns that the Department does not meet the same expected standards when undertaking its responsibilities to publicly adopted highways.

The Chief Executive/Clerk confirmed that no update in relation to the matter has been received from the Department of Infrastructure since August 2023.

The MHKs agreed to try to obtain an update from the Department of Infrastructure in relation to the matter.

The Chairman concluded the discussion by stating that any additional services delegated from the Isle of Man Government to local authorities, or the implementation of increased service standards, will impact future rate-setting considerations for the Board and future Boards. Furthermore, the ratepayer may be seen as being charged via the rates for services without any reduction in taxes.

Waste Strategy Principles Consultation

The Board of Onchan District Commissioners and the Chief Executive/Clerk provided an overview of the following:

- A public consultation regarding this matter was carried out in September and October 2024, to which the Authority provided a response;
- That a feedback statement following the consultation was publicised that included the number of respondents, and those in favour and those opposed to the proposed changes; and
- That no update regarding the consultation and any potential changes to waste management has been provided since 2024.

The MHKs agreed to try to obtain an update in relation to the matter.

1.5 Planning Development Procedure Order – Loss of Automatic Interested Party Status for Local Authorities

The Chief Executive/Clerk highlighted the following:

- That local authorities no longer had automatic interested party status under the Town and Country Planning (Development Procedure) (Amendment) Order 2024; and
- The shortfall of this loss of automatic interested party status due to some local authorities only meet once a month, and that a Board or Council may miss the opportunity to comment upon an application in time.

Mr Callister noted that there is not much that can be done now that the automatic interest status has been repealed. It was advised that the Authority and members of the public can still submit comments to the Planning Department even if it is after the deadline for planning application comment submissions, as these may still be considered by the relevant planning officer.

Mrs Caine provided a recent example of where Garff Commissioners had experienced this issue, but still submitted comments after the deadline, which were considered.

1.6 Onchan District Commissioners – Social Housing

It was noted that copies of the Authority's response to Mr Hooper MHK's letter, dated 22nd January 2025, outlining the Isle of Man Government's ambitions to expand affordable housing on the Island, had already been circulated.

The Chief Executive/Clerk provided an overview of the following:

- The sites identified within the District that could be utilised for the provision of future social housing;
- Highlighted that the Authority currently does not own any vacant sites that could be developed for social housing;
- Highlighted that the Board is due to consider a draft social housing strategy, which will be made available to the public;
- Difficulties obtaining land to purchase, including currently vacant land owned by the Isle of Man Government; and
- Difficulties experienced by local authorities when trying to petition for borrowings to refurbish existing properties or when trying to develop new properties. It was highlighted that the petition procedure is now laden with delays due to the administration of the Department of Infrastructure and Treasury. Examples were given of the currently delayed refurbishment projects at Springfield Court sheltered housing complex and the Barrule Drive general housing scheme.

Ms Edge suggested proposals in order to reduce social housing waiting lists, including the provision of more affordable private homes for purchase and rent-to-buy schemes.

The Members of the Board and Mrs Edge discussed their concerns regarding housing opportunities for those requiring social housing, private rental, and first-time buyers.

Mr Callister raised concerns regarding social housing income thresholds and highlighted that these are due to be reconsidered by the Department of Infrastructure soon.

Mr Smith requested that the Chief Executive/Clerk provide him with the details regarding the sites currently in the ownership of the Isle of Man Government that he is trying to negotiate a sale of to the Authority for the provision of social housing. Mr Smith confirmed that he may be able to assist with providing an update or progressing the matter. The Chief Executive/Clerk agreed to share the information after the meeting.

The Chairman concluded the discussion by requesting that the MHKs support the Authority's attempts to provide more social housing properties, as well as trying to obtain borrowings to refurbish current social housing properties.

1.7 Vacant and Zero Rated Properties

The Board of Onchan District Commissioners and the Chief Executive/Clerk provided an overview of the following:

- A public consultation regarding this matter was carried out in May 2024, to which the Authority provided a response;
- Noted that an update paper was provided to Tynwald in July 2024, but no further updates have been provided to the public;
- Highlighted the difficulty for local authorities when trying to engage with some property owners, including the shortcomings of the current legislation and regulations that are to be used; and
- Highlighted Douglas City Council's attempt to try to combat some issues by objecting to zero-rating and allowances given by the Isle of Man Government under Section 24 of the Rating and Valuation Act 1953. It was noted that the Council is still trying to progress this matter, but there has been resistance from the Isle of Man Government, including a tribunal in relation to the matter.

Mr Callister requested that information regarding the Douglas City Council matter be shared so that he can consider the information before approaching the relevant Isle of Man Government Department for an update. The Chief Executive/Clerk agreed to share the information after the meeting.

Mr Smith advised that Treasury has recently reinstated rates on previously zero-rated properties and those with allowances, and made these property owners reapply for new rate allowances or allowances to try to reduce the number of property owners who may not be truthful regarding the condition of a property. Mr Smith suggested that the Authority speak with Treasury regarding the matter.

1.8 Consideration of a Joint Political Surgery – July or September 2025 in Onchan

Mrs Caine stated that she will share her upcoming public surgery dates with the Members of the Board of Onchan District Commissioners, and that if they wish, a Member can jointly host the surgeries as previously offered. Mrs Caine noted that some of the Members of the Board of Garff Commissioners jointly host surgeries held in Laxey.

Mr Callister also offered for the Members of the Board of Onchan District Commissioners to accompany him to his public surgeries, as previously offered.

The Chairman requested that the surgery dates be circulated to the Members of the Board of Onchan District Commissioners, and if they wished to attend any of the surgeries, then the Member is to make their own arrangements for attendance.

1.9 Onchan Secret Gardens Competition 2026

Mr Callister provided an overview of the event as follows:

- That publicity for the 2026 event is due to take place shortly;
- The dates for the event will be provided in due course;
- Approximately £4,000 had been raised for charities the previous year, following the first year of the event;
- The chosen 2026 charities are Sight Matters and Housing Matters; and
- Highlighted that the Chief Executive/Clerk has already agreed for the Jubilee Garden in Onchan Pleasure Park to be included.

Mr Callister requested that the Authority support the event by publicising it. The Chairman concluded the meeting by confirming that the Authority will assist as requested and thanked all those in attendance at the meeting for coming this evening.

There being no further business the meeting ended at 8.40 pm.