

DUNOON GOUROCK FERRY – UPDATE PAPER

1. SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the current operation of the Dunoon Gourock passenger only ferry service.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That members note the contents of this report.

3. DETAIL

3.1 Preparation

The Council had agreed with Transport Scotland to provide a Harbour Users Access Agreement which would be included in the tender documents for the new operator. Argyll Ferries Ltd, a subsidiary company of David MacBrayne Ltd was appointed following tender submissions and the new service commenced on 30 June 2011.

In anticipation of the new service the Council had procured waiting room and toilet facilities which were suitable for the physically impaired. The water connection for these was not fully operational until midday on the 30th June. The linkspan has been subject to routine inspections and general maintenance was undertaken in the week leading up to the 30th. Further work on the seals, which are now stored in Dunoon, has to be undertaken in October. Argyll Ferries has been advised of this work with the implication that the ferry will have to operate from the timber pier whilst this is completed. The work is anticipated to take five days to complete.

Discussions were held with all bus operators and arrangements put in place for the new marshalling area to be used by service buses with effect from the inception of the new ferry service. Risk assessments for the transfer of passengers from both the waiting room and the service buses were carried out and arrangements put in place to guard their safety. The marshalling area was signed for free parking in alternate lanes

The facilities required to successfully transfer the operation of the ferry from the timber pier to the new breakwater including the installation of pad eyes for the ropes, were all in place for the commencement of service on 30th June and notices had been published in the local press to advertise the new arrangements.

3.2 In service

Staffing prior to the new service was for 10 people operating a rota system. Due to the new operating hours, Legal Services advised that the Council must offer staff a new contract and rota or face redundancy. Six out of ten staff chose to accept redundancy and as a consequence an advertisement has been published seeking interest in four temporary pier operative posts at Dunoon.

The use of the toilet facilities has proved popular not just for ferry passengers and as a result the costs incurred in emptying the tanks are projected to be considerably greater than originally anticipated. A solution to this would be to make a permanent connection to the foul sewer. The decision on whether to progress with this is, to some extent, dependent upon the programme for the construction of the new harbour master's office.

The bus shelters currently in use are due to be replaced and the Council are in discussion with suppliers to provide a more weather resilient shelter in due course.

The vessels proposed for the route had been procured by Argyll Ferries Ltd but in the week leading up to the start of service it was evident that one of the vessels, to be named the Argyll Flyer, would not be ready. The operator chartered the Clyde Clipper and had emergency works carried out to enable her to berth stern to. This vessel went out of service on the first day due to exhaust problems which were subsequently fixed. It should also be noted that despite the operator being quite clear that rope handling facilities were not required from the Council they were requested at 1700hrs on the 29 June and subsequently provided for the first three weeks of operation. The Argyll Flier is now in operation but there remain concerns that the gangway from the vessel to the linkspan is not suitable for all passengers, particularly those travelling with prams or buggies. In terms of running to timetable this now appears to be satisfactory.

The Council has received one letter of complaint via Alan Reid MP from a resident at Hunters Quay. The elements pertinent to our operation concerned the suitability of the linkspan for passengers in terms of trip hazards, the lack of disabled bays in the marshalling area and the lack of a cycle rack. The Council's health and safety officers will inspect and report back on the hazards for passengers although it should be highlighted that the structure was originally designed to accommodate foot passengers. Disabled bays are presently available

in the car park adjacent to the Rock cafe, with suitable access from there to the ferry. Arrangements are in place for the bicycle racks currently on the old pier to be uplifted and re-sited on the block paving to the south of the marshalling area.

There are discussions with the taxi operators regarding their use of part of the marshalling area which would leave the current taxi rank available for use as a drop off point. These arrangements have yet to be agreed with Members.

The single most significant issue is the total lack of any Argyll Ferries staff in Dunoon to answer public queries on the ferry service. There is also a fundamental lack of communication with Council staff to advise of any cancellations or to advise on the preparations for the forthcoming Cowal Games. There continues to be a perception that the Council will manage despite the operator being advised of limitations on staff availability. The new rota operates with two staff on duty and three shifts per day. There have been numerous phone conversations with the operator and whilst they recognise the problems, resolution is slow in coming.

With regard to the timetable it is understood that there are some services that are not carrying any passengers. This may result in the operator reverting to the Scottish Government to request that the level of service on offer be reviewed.

Integration with other modes of transport appears to work well with no reports that the bus services do not suit the new timetable although it is understood that the time gap at Gourock is tight to catch the train. The question of introducing a vehicular ferry service from the breakwater has been raised but to date there has been no firm proposal given to Western Ferries for their consideration.

4. CONCLUSION

The new ferry service continues to present a number of challenges. Those that relate to the Council are being addressed and those which the operator needs to resolve are being highlighted to them on a regular basis by harbour staff. Whilst it is recognised that the contract is in its infancy the problems that have been encountered are largely due to the timescales imposed being insufficient to permit thorough planning and preparation.

5 IMPLICATIONS

Policy

Potential impact upon Policy to be evaluated

Financial	Further analysis required when confirmation of future operation established
Personnel	Requirement to reduce staff number to reflect future operation
Legal	None
Equal Opportunities	None

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