

**MINUTES of MEETING of ARGYLL ISLANDS SOUNDING BOARD held BY MICROSOFT TEAMS
on MONDAY, 4 MARCH 2024**

Present: Councillor Liz McCabe (Chair)

Councillor Robin Currie	Councillor Jim Lynch
Councillor Kieron Green	Councillor Dougie McFadzean
Councillor Amanda Hampsey	Councillor Julie McKenzie
Councillor Andrew Kain	Councillor Peter Wallace

Attending: Pippa Milne, Chief Executive
Kirsty Flanagan, Executive Director
Jim Smith, Head of Roads and Infrastructure Services
Moya Ingram, Strategic Transportation and Infrastructure Manager
Anna Watkiss, Senior Planning Development Officer
Susie Sinclair, Directorate Support Officer
Lynsey Innis, Senior Committee Assistant
Lewis MacAskill, Scottish Government's Islands Team
Francesco Bertoldi, Scottish Government's Islands Team
Megan McWilliams, Scottish Government's Islands Team

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, and in particular to the representatives from the Scottish Government Islands Team, who were in attendance to provide an update at item 4 of this Minute (National Islands Plan Review – Feedback by Communities).

The Chair ruled, and the Sounding Board agreed, that the business dealt with at item 7 of this Minute (Islands Connectivity Plan Consultation), be dealt with as a matter of urgency by reason that the deadline for responses was due before the next meeting of the Argyll Islands Sounding Board.

1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence intimated.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest intimated.

3. MINUTES

The Minute of the previous meeting of the Argyll Islands Sounding Board, held on 19 October 2023, was approved as a correct record.

4. NATIONAL ISLANDS PLAN REVIEW - FEEDBACK BY COMMUNITIES

Having noted that a requirement of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 was to review the National Islands Plan within five years of publication, the Board gave consideration to a short verbal update from the Scottish Government's Islands Team on the feedback received from island communities in relation to the recent National Islands Plan review.

Mr Bertoldi advised that as part of the review process a consultation exercise must be carried out offering everyone with an interest in Scotland's islands an opportunity to provide their views on the impact and content of the current National Islands Plan. He advised that the consultation had been carried out between July and November 2023 both online and through a number of island events. He advised that the consultation had been open to the general public as well as being specifically targeted to island communities, organisations and third party stakeholders.

Mr Bertoldi provided statistical information on the results of the consultation and outlined a number of areas where improvement was required. These included the need to improve communication around the National Islands Plan and to consider reducing the number of strategic objectives and commitments contained within the current Plan to better prioritise matters of importance such as housing, transport, depopulation and fuel poverty. He also advised that while it was clear that there was a need to consider a more localised approach, there was an acknowledgement that barriers such as capacity made this a difficult task. Mr Bertoldi advised that while a decision was still to be taken in relation to the next steps, there was a commitment given to ensure that local authorities would be involved in the process going forward.

Discussion was had around the perceived failures of the current National Islands Plan; the need for greater emphasis to be placed on the blue economy; the missed opportunities for island connectivity through the Strategic Transport Project Review 2 (STPR2) process; the need to consider how commitments match deliverable strategic objectives while managing expectations and the need for robust and honest engagement with island communities.

Decision

The Argyll Islands Sounding Board noted the information provided and thanked the Scottish Government Island's Team for their attendance.

5. CLYDE AND HEBRIDES FERRY SERVICE CONTRACT - CONSULTATION TRANSPORT SCOTLAND

The Board gave consideration to a report which provided an update on the proposals by Scottish Ministers on the award of a third Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service Contract and outlined the live consultation and draft response on this process .

Discussion was had in relation to capacity, with Members expressing concern that unutilised block bookings for commercial vehicles result in empty spaces on car decks; the reference to "in season" referring to the summer months not being a true reflection of islands such as Islay; the misconception that the Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) makes all fares cheaper; the need to have spaces on sailings which are for island residents only and the need to look at viable fixed link options that could be run by the Ferry Service until such time as Transport Scotland have their fixed links up and running.

Further discussion was had around whether there was an opportunity for the Scottish Government to include Council services in the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service Contract.

Decision

The Argyll Islands Sounding Board:-

1. noted Transport Scotland's document on Public Consultation for the next Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service Contract (CHFS3) enclosed within Appendix 1 to the report; and
2. considered and approved the response to the CHFS3 consultation, contained within Appendix 2 to the report, subject to the inclusion of comments, as outlined above.

(Reference: Report by Executive Director with responsibility for Development and Economic Growth, dated 19 February 2024, submitted)

6. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

The Chair advised of discussions at the last meeting of the Board on possible future agenda items and advised that unfortunately SSEN had not been in a position to attend this meeting to provide information on the Whole System energy options for the Inner Hebrides and Orkney Islands. She advised that they had indicated that they would be happy to attend a future meeting to provide this information and outlined a number of possible future meeting dates.

Discussion was had in relation to a number of exciting opportunities being brought to the area by SSEN.

Decision

The Argyll Islands Sounding Board:-

1. requested that a Members Seminar be arranged to inform all Members of the upcoming opportunities from SSEN; and
2. agreed that a date for the next meeting of the Argyll Islands Sounding Board would be notified to Members in due course.

7. ISLANDS CONNECTIVITY PLAN CONSULTATION

The Board gave consideration to a draft response which provided areas for possible discussion in relation to the Scottish Government's Consultation on the Islands Connectivity Plan.

Discussion was had around the provision of air services and the proposals to mirror the free bus travel for persons aged 22 years and under on ferry services. The Head of Roads and Infrastructure Services advised that the intention was to bring the draft response to the Council meeting in April 2024 and asked Members to provide any further feedback directly to himself, the Head of Development and Economic Growth and the Strategic Transportation and Infrastructure Manager for inclusion in this response.

Decision

The Argyll Islands Sounding Board considered the draft response to the Islands Connectivity Plan Consultation.

(Reference: Joint Response by Executive Director with responsibility for Roads and Infrastructure Services and Development and Economic Growth, submitted)