

**MINUTES of MEETING of ARGYLL ISLANDS STRATEGIC GROUP held in the COUNCIL
CHAMBERS, KILMORY, LOCHGILPHEAD
on TUESDAY, 9 JANUARY 2018**

Present: Councillor Robin Currie (Chair)

Councillor Anne Horn	Councillor Aileen Morton
Councillor Sir Jamie McGrigor	Councillor Elaine Robertson
Councillor Jean Moffat	Councillor Len Scoullar

Attending: Tricia O'Neill, Central Governance Manager
Cleland Sneddon, Chief Executive
Pippa Milne, Executive Director of Development and Infrastructure Services
Fergus Murray, Head of Economic Development and Strategic Transformation
Stewart Clark, Marine Operations Manager
Councillor Roddy McCuish

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Councillors Devon and McNeilly.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest intimated.

3. MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 31 OCTOBER 2017

The Minute of the meeting of the Argyll Islands Strategic Group held on 31 October 2017, was approved as a true record, subject to the inclusion of Councillor Jim Findlay on the attendee list.

4. SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT ISLAND LIAISON DIRECTORS

The group gave consideration to a report providing an outline of a proposed eighteen month pilot scheme which would see the extension of the Scottish Civil Service's network of Liaison Directors to Argyll and Bute islands. The Chief Executive advised of ongoing discussions with the Scottish Government with suggestions of a cluster arrangement for a Liaison Director to be appointed to each grouping of islands within the Mid Argyll, Kintyre and the Islands; Bute and Cowal and Oban, Lorn and the Isles administrative areas. Mr Sneddon confirmed that the existing and well established local government structures such as community planning would be utilised to take this pilot forward.

The Chair requested that an invite be extended to the Liaison Directors to attend a future meeting of the group.

Decision:

The group agreed:

1. with the principles of the report for a pilot for Scottish Government Island Liaison Directors in Argyll and Bute;
2. to delegate to the Chief Executive permission to approach the Scottish Government's Permanent Secretary to take forward this pilot including the establishment of a steering group; and
3. that the pilot run for eighteen months followed by an evaluation.

(Ref: Report by Chief Executive, dated 9 January 2018, submitted.)

5. FERRY FREIGHT FARES - POLICY REVIEW BY SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

The group gave consideration to a report providing an update on the review of ferry fares, including potential implications on freight fares for several islands/communities should the Scottish Government decide, in the future, to implement a proposed new freight fares structure.

The Argyll Islands Strategic Group expressed concerns about the proposed detrimental impact of the freight fares review on Coll and Tiree and recommended that the review should consider a wider range of options to mitigate against the significant increase for the remoter islands to ensure their future sustainability including:

- different rates for different categories of freight
- freight – only journeys.

Decision:

The group agreed:

1. to note the report; and
2. requested that the Marine Operations Manager feed the concerns outlined above to the Scottish Government in respect of the Policy Review.

(Ref: Report by Executive Director of Development and Infrastructure Services, dated 9 January 2018, submitted.)

Councillor Sir Jamie McGrigor joined the meeting at 10.25am during consideration of Agenda Item 5.

Councillor Anne Horn joined the meeting at 10.28am and left the meeting at 10.50am, during consideration of Agenda Item 5.

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6. RURAL TOURIST INFRASTRUCTURE FUND

The Head of Economic Development and Strategic Transformation provided the group with a verbal update in relation to the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund. Mr Murray advised that the Scottish Government is to establish a fund to provide investment in infrastructure to support sustainable growth in rural tourism across Scotland. He advised that the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, which will see £6 million invested over two years, will help ensure the services and facilities tourists and communities need are provided, such as parking, camping facilities, recycling points and footpath access. Mr

Murray advised that the new fund is expected to launch early in 2018 and will be administered by public sector partners working with local authorities, with input from communities and the industry to identify projects requiring support.

Discussion took place in respect of the criteria and possible deadlines for applications. The Head of Economic Development and Strategic Transformation advised that this information was not yet available and confirmed that as soon as there was further information he would provide an update to the group.

Decision:

The group agreed to note the information provided.

7. ISLAND INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY

The Head of Economic Development and Strategic Transformation provided a verbal update in relation to the proposed Island Infrastructure Levy. Mr Murray advised that the focus of the levy applied to Calmac and was based on current passenger figures. He advised that it was estimated that 2.3 million passengers utilise Calmac services within Argyll and Bute, however not all passengers would be tourists. Using the rationale of implementing a £1.00 levy on each ticket, Mr Murray advised that the fund could have in the region of £2 million. He advised of interim analysis works completed, which he hoped would form the basis of future discussions with the Minister for Transport and the Islands. Mr Murray advised that he was unclear how this would be introduced but that it would form part of discussions in the months ahead.

Discussion took place in respect of ongoing discussions in both Glasgow and Edinburgh with the group noting that these were specific to accommodation rather than transport. The Executive Director of Development and Infrastructure Services reminded the group that Argyll and Bute Council do not have the power to implement the levy, this would be a decision for the Scottish Government. The Head of Economic Development and Strategic Transformation confirmed that he would seek information from the Scottish Government as to the stage of discussions and provide an update to Members.

Decision:

The group agreed to note the information provided.

Councillor Anne Horn re-joined the meeting at 11.23am, during consideration of Agenda Item 7.

8. PROGRESS OF THE ISLANDS BILL

The group gave consideration to a verbal update from the Head of Economic Development and Strategic Infrastructure who outlined the Parliamentary process for passing a Bill, and confirmed that stage 1 of the Islands Bill had been completed and a report was expected to be presented to the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee with a chamber debate on 8 February 2018. Mr Murray advised that Stage 2 of the process was scheduled for March 2018, with amendments lodged the week before. He further advised that there is a meeting of the Strategic Island Group on 18 January 2018 and he suspected that possible amendments would be discussed in this forum.

The Chief Executive advised Members that it was important to note that this is an enabling Bill which would have permissible development in the future.

Decision:

The group agreed to note the information provided.

9. UPDATE ON AGENDA FOR JANUARY MEETING OF THE NATIONAL ISLANDS GROUP

The Chief Executive advised that he had not yet received a copy of the agenda, therefore he was unable to provide an update at this stage. Mr Sneddon confirmed that he would circulate a copy of the agenda to Members as soon as it became available.

Decision:

The group agreed to note the information provided.

The group noted the suggestion that an item on the decision taken by HIAL on the Air Control System could be considered as a future Argyll Islands Strategic Group agenda item.

The Chair thanked all in attendance and advised that the next meeting of the group was scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 27 March 2018 at 11.00am, within the Council Chambers, Kilmory, Lochgilphead. He further advised that the Minister for Transport and the Islands , Humza Yusaf MSP had confirmed his attendance at this meeting.