

MARINE OPERATIONS: MAINLAND FERRY SERVICE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report introduces to Members, the “Argyll & Bute Council Mainland Ferries Study – Comparative Analysis of Options for Council-run ferries” carried out by Caledonian Economics (Mainland Ferries Study) at appendix 1.
- 1.2 The anticipated Islands Connectivity Plan and Community Needs Assessments, being produced by Transport Scotland, excludes local authority run ferries from proposals. The study seeks to address the gap left by this exclusion and looks at options for the future planning for lifeline services to Easdale and Luing.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee are asked to:-

- 2.1 Thank the Easdale and Luing community council representatives and residents for the high level of engagement and return regarding the study.
- 2.2 Discuss the contents and implications of the Mainland Ferries Study (appendix 1).
- 2.3 Approve the continuation of the feasibility study to progress a business case for the provision of infrastructure options to Easdale, including fixed links.
- 2.4 Approve the inclusion of options to Luing in the feasibility study to continue to take advantage of economy of scale.

3.0 DETAIL

- 3.1 On 13 October 2022 Policy and Resources Committee agreed to allocate £100k of Crown Estates Funds to a feasibility study and specification work for pier infrastructure at Ellenabeich and Easdale which would support the ongoing provision of the council ferry service.

- 3.2 A sensible starting position for the feasibility study was a baseline study into the current services being provided. Economies of scale enabled the inclusion of the Luing service at the same time, particularly as the Luing Community Council had separately commenced a 'participation Request' to investigate improvements to the Cuan service.
- 3.3 Caledonian Economics were engaged to carry out this work at a cost of £10k leaving £90k for the remaining detailed study.
- 3.4 The study at appendix 1 therefore concentrates on the current provision of lifeline services covering the islands of Luing and Easdale. Both services use aging vessels and infrastructure, which do not reach modern standards and expectations, to support a variety of users within the communities.
- 3.5 The study seeks to provide some detail around options for long-term future solutions in both locations.
- 3.6 The study was prepared by an independent consultant firm, Caledonian Economics, and ran alongside the 'Participation Request' works being carried out by officers for the Luing Community, which also involved ferry provision. The Consultant considered previous reports carried out on both island crossings from the early 2000's and looked to build a picture of the current service level to ascertain what changes, improvements and future requirements in each location might be.
- 3.7 As part of the study the Consultant ensured that the residents and users of both services were consulted to gather evidence on the current services and what potential improvements should be considered. A questionnaire was developed and issued via representatives of both local community councils.
- 3.8 This information, along with current operational and financial information was used to develop a range of options for the future of each crossing. High-level costings were developed for each option, based on a mixture of publicly available information, current market rates and recent council construction costs with a 40% optimism bias applied.
- 3.9 It describes:
- Previous studies carried out along with other relevant local information,
 - Current situation including details of vessels, infrastructure and finance,
 - Multiple future options and public responses received,
 - Financial estimates of future options and a comparison of costs over the various life expectancies of each option, and
 - Recommendations for preferred options for each location.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The study provides an overview of past and current service levels and makes recommendations for the future infrastructure needs in both locations. It

balances financial estimates with public opinion to suggest options that are available and viable for council purposes.

- 4.2 This report recommends that officers should now further investigate the recommended options including potential fixed links to replace both ferry crossings by preparing a business case for each location.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Policy – None.

5.2 Financial – None.

5.3 Legal – None.

5.4 HR – None.

5.5 Fairer Scotland Duty:

5.5.1 Equalities - protected characteristics - Vessel and Infrastructure accessibility (Equalities Act).

5.5.2 Socio-economic Duty - Lifeline ferries with no other current means to travel to / from islands.

5.5.3 Islands - Education, transport, health, business.

5.6 Climate Change – Effect of increasing water levels and extreme weather events on the infrastructure and provision of service.

5.7 Risk - Vessel age and current infrastructure conditions.

5.8 Customer Service - Complaints about current service levels will increase as vessels age.

5.9 The Rights of the Child (UNCRC) - Education and social access to mainland facilities and services.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Mainland Ferries Survey