

Sunart Community Council Minutes 6.30 – 7.30pm Strontian

Public Meeting hosted on behalf of the peninsula communities with representatives from Highland Council regarding the failure of the Corran Ferry service, interim measures and longer term considerations.

Chair - Denise Anderson - Welcome & Introductions

Guest Speakers - Kate Lackie Interim Chief Executive, Highland Council & **Tracey Urry (Steering Group)**

Over 70 people attended from the peninsula including CCs from West Ardnamurchan, Ardgour, Morvern and Mull, residents, local businesses and ward Cllr Sarah Fanet.

1. Section A – Interim Measures

a. **Update from Highland Council on Emergency Measures**

Kate Lackie (HC) expressed her concerns, frustrations and upset and the immediate need to mitigate the situation. Tracey Urry apologised that there was NO plan in place, NO compensation scheme measures in place and that the HC are NOT obligated to run this crucial life line service. With no Medical / Emergency contingency plans in place from a health perspective Tracey Urry acknowledged the scale of the impact on the peninsula and the need to identify options and solutions in the interim of the ferry breakdown.

Kate Lackie confirmed the HC have an obligation to address the situation and guarantee they will be transparent about what opportunities are available, interim actions discussed include:

- a. Passenger Vessel to run shuttle service from Ardgour to Fort William twice daily (with possible increase to suit working hours)
- b. Additional Passenger RIB to run from Ardgour to Corran from Monday 17th April, easier to access (not ideal for elderly or people living with a disability)
- c. Set up a group to improve communications with HC
- d. Review bus timetables, provide additional bus services
- e. Supply / erect additional signage, update HC website to inform tourists of the situation, emergency improvements on the A861 and passing places
- f. Address key access service, work closely with Police, NHS and increase flexibility
- g. Need to promote the area is still open for business
- h. Identify possible opportunities for Compensation Scheme (hospitality, industry, local businesses)
- i. Improve communications with National Services (Medical Emergencies)
- j. Engage with CalMac for part for MV Corran to improve return time of MV Corran
- k. Possibility option of locating a temporary vessel via a local business which would inevitably be subject to checks such as conditions, safety, environmental and contractual
- l. Free roadside recovery in place

b. **Questions/Comments from the floor on interim measures** (CC members and 'public')

Local residents and businesses expressed their concerns relating loss of income from the hospitality sector, construction industry, education and health and the general lack of planning from the HC knowing both vessels were coming to an end of service:

- Why has no planning strategy been put in place for today and in the long term?
- Interim boat service, who is this aimed at supporting, concern for locals, elderly, work commitments and special educational needs?
- What about connecting bus services for a forward on route, revised and increased timetable, a boat service is fine but not much good without a bus at the Corran side to take you to Fort William?
- Need repeated signage, improve the condition of passing places, convoys are too long, waiting times too long, damage to road side is already visible.
- Where is the local business compensation recovery plan (similar to the covid support plan)?
- If the roads are improved, will this interfere with the current / new ferry plans?
- Where is 'Transport Scotland' and HiTrans, why are they not involved yet as this is part of the main infrastructure?
- Why pursue the electric ferry options, why have you not listened to residents for a direct diesel replacement ferry?
- What can the HC deliver now, and what can they deliver in the future?
- The shuttle service is expected to run 7am/7pm can this be increased from 7am/9pm?
- With the high increase in the cost of living and loss of income to businesses, what are you going to do about it? Do you even have any idea of the scale of impact on this peninsula?
- Why has the part from CalMac taken so long to arrive, is it even on order?
- What is in place for emergency health issues?
- Scottish Six Day Trials, will this be cancelled?
- What about a fixed link, when can this be delivered?
- Who is marshalling the ferry queues for tourists who are still waiting without realising there is no ferry at present?
- This process has been in place for six years, we need a ferry today, why are the HC not taking accountability ?
- The money that was going to be used to pay the marshalls for 6 months is no longer needed as we have no need for marshalls. Where did that money come from? How will it be used now?
- The telephone handlers for 111 need to have their script changed, as the A861 is not as suitable as other 'A' roads in the UK, and an ambulance may be required to take a patient to hospital rather than attempting the journey in their own transport.
- What was the date of the CalMac ferry breakdown, from which we are apparently getting the part needed to fix the MV Corran? Will a second-hand part mean we can expect another breakdown soon?

- It's not just one part that is required to fix the MV Corran?
- There is a moral obligation here to recompense these businesses.
- One electric ferry from 2027 will still have to go for its annual service.

2. Section B - Timescales and issues relating to the Return of the MV Corran and Maid of Glencoul

. a. Update from Highland Council on return of MV Corran and Maid of Glencoul

Kate Lackie HC has stated that she is fiercely committed to finding a solution to the Corran narrows ferry failure. It is likely the MV Glencoul may not return, a lead time for the return of the MV Corran can take between 6-8 weeks providing parts can be sourced, fitted, safety checks have been actioned and sea trials have been completed.

HC will put measures in place to improve communications with national services and will put our case forward to convince other members of the importance of the current problem. They have been unable to source the part required for the MV Corran as it's in the hands of a third party. HC have been engaging with CalMac with the possibility of procuring a part from another ferry that is currently out of service.

HC will make adjustments where possible and will provide an additional vessel to assist with commuters, leisure and tourism in two weeks time. Emergency improvements overnight (less traffic on the road) will be made to the A861.

As there is no compensation scheme in place, and although they are not obligated, will seek possible opportunities and must promote the area is still open for business. Katie Lackie will deal with special educational needs directly.

b. Questions / Responses from the floor:

- Local hospitality has been running at a loss of £1k per day through cancellations, where is the support from a financial perspective, construction is running at a loss, what support is available?
- Where is the guidance in place to inform tourists, where will the funds come from for additional signage, marshalling and emergency health issues?
- How will you cater for the elderly, where is the transport for their needs, who will be paying medical expenses ?
- Why has this happened on the first bank holiday of the year when the season commences for most businesses?
- Can we have additional passing places to lessen the queuing?

3. Section C - Long Term Planning and Engagement

a Update from Highland Council Speaker Kate Lackie on Long Term Plans

A replacement diesel ferry had not been proposed nor considered as a replacement, HC were unaware of this option. There are other Highland Islands that have a poor if not current service running so why should we have our new ferries, why is our need greater than theirs.

Proposal of a three stage process plan:

A = speedier more efficient way of communication

B = plans for a replacement ferry as soon as possible

C = plans for a back up ferry

A fixed link is not possible at present and can only be delivered by Transport Scotland who are NOT interested in a fixed link. Money is the issue. There is NO money in the budget for new ferries even with the electrical ferries being the best environmental solution which can take between 5-7 years from concept though to delivery. The plan is to have one electric ferry, which will be larger than the MV Corran, and will be available by 2027.

Stage 1. Procurement**2. Tender****3. Construction**

A focused group consisting of local residents and businesses together with representatives from the HC will be created to drive this ongoing problem forward presenting full transparency of what is going on with HC, Transport Scotland and HiTrans, and the ongoing need for a Long Term Replacement Ferry.