

AGENDA ITEM 8vii

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Stromeferry Working Group** held in Committee Room 1, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Friday 13 December 2019 at 10.30 am.

Present:-

Mr H Morrison (by tele conferencing) Mr A MacInnes
Mrs I Campbell

In attendance:-

Mr C Howell, Head of Infrastructure, Development and Infrastructure Service
Mr G Smith, Principal Engineer, Development and Infrastructure Service
Ms C Smith, Senior Technician, Development and Infrastructure Service
Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator, Chief Executive's Service

Business

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Dr I Cockburn, Mr A Henderson, Mr A Mackinnon, Mr D MacLeod, Mr M Reiss and Mrs T Robertson.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes

The Working Group **NOTED** the Minutes of the Meeting of the Stromeferry Working Group held on 20 March 2019, which were approved by the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee on 16 May 2019.

Arising from the Minute, were the following:-

- the temporary closure of Uig Ferry Terminal was likely to put additional pressure on the Stromeferry route because traffic would use the Ullapool ferry as an alternative; and
- in May the Leader had once again written to the Transport Minister emphasising the need for a review of the Strategic Road Network so that the Stromeferry route was recognised as a Trunk road. However, to date, no reply had been received.

4. Review of Remaining Options – Summary Document

There had been circulated Report No SWG2/19 by the Executive Chief Officer Environment and Infrastructure.

A presentation was provided during which it was highlighted that the Route Options Summary had identified two long term options, namely a Strome Narrows Bridge and a new road from Glen Udalain to Attadale. The Glen Udalain

to Attadale route involved the construction of a 14km road and the construction of four fairly major structures while the Strome Narrows Bridge was a shorter 5.5km route but necessitated the construction of a 850m bridge. In relation to the latter, if that was the option chosen, the Locharron community would be seeking to have their village bypassed. However, this was outwith the current exercise which was solely confined to determining the optimum solution to address the historic road closures of the Stromeferry Bypass.

Photographs were provided to illustrate the landscape both the bridge and alternative road would sit in. Both options had been appraised against the Transport Planning Objectives and the STAG criteria with a summary of their performance being explained to Members. It was hoped this approach would provide a mechanism to evaluate each and to finally enable a decision to be reached. Members were taken through both of the options and how they compared to each of the factors, particularly in relation to environment, safety and economy. Neither option scored particularly well in terms of the cost to benefit ratio but it had to be borne in mind that finding a solution was important to the economy of the west coast.

Following detailed further analysis the Working Group **NOTED** the summary document and **AGREED** that the overall assessment was to take these two options forward to the next stage.

5. Value for Money Workshop

The Head of Infrastructure explained the various options available in relation to the proposed format of how a Value for Money Workshop could be structured. The process involved in other major road projects was referred to, the Transport Scotland A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton being cited as a specific example.

The Working Group **AGREED** to hold a Value for Money Workshop in the near future consisting of Members of the Working Group and Council officers.

6. Draft Scoring Matrix and Main Criteria Weightings

The Head of Infrastructure explained the proposed format of the matrix, a sample being provided, pointing out that, once weightings were included, the process provided a rationale which could be used to make a comparison and to base a decision upon. It was open to amend the criteria weightings but this then raised difficulties in how one could be considered of more importance than another. Both options fulfilled the transport objectives but the scoring matrix and criteria weightings also took into account cost and affordability in a clear and transparent manner.

The Working Group **AGREED**:-

- i. the Scoring Mechanism and that equal weightings be allocated to the main criteria;
- ii. a briefing of the scoring matrix using the criteria weightings be provided to other Members of the Working Group unable to attend this meeting, prior to the Value for Money workshop; and
- iii. to ensure consistency, the membership of the Working Group continue unchanged as the Council moved forward with its new Committee structure.

7. Draft Communication and Consultation Plan

There had been circulated Report No SWG3/19 by the Executive Chief Officer Environment and Infrastructure setting out a draft Communication and Consultation Plan.

Included in the Plan were the two routes identified from the STAG appraisal. Members did not consider it was necessary to include a third “do minimum” option as this approach was something the Council would be required to do regardless and more constructive long term view was needed. Meantime, stakeholders would be kept informed as to the membership and mandate of the Working Group, the process to be followed for the scoring of the options and the recommendation which would be generated from that. This would then be the subject of public consultation for a period of 4-6 weeks. A public meeting would also be held in Achmore and Lochcarron to allow local interested parties to take part with a report then to the appropriate Committee to make the final decision.

The Working Group **APPROVED** the Draft Communication and Consultation Plan.

8. Website Update

Members were informed of the current status of the Stromeferry Options Appraisal public page on the Highland Council website.

The Working Group **NOTED** the position and **AGREED** it be updated as and when required.

9. Committee Reports/Ward Member Briefings

The Head of Infrastructure informed Members that progress was regularly being conveyed to Committee through the Capital Report but, once the Working Group had completed the Value for Money Workshop, had made a recommendation and the consultation process had been completed, a full report would be submitted to the appropriate Committee for final determination.

The Working Group **NOTED** the position.

The meeting ended at 12.20 pm