

Airport Consultative Meeting

21 January 2026 3-4pm

Attendees:-

Alex Hamilton, Connel Flying Club
Alex Howard, Colonsay Community Council
Axel Miller, Scottish Association for Marine Science
Kirsty MacFarlane, Coll Community Council
David Hobhouse, Colonsay Community Council
John MacCaskill, Tiree Community Council
Linda Beavis, Hebridean Air Services
Ranald Robertson, HITRANs
Cllor Willie Hume
Moya Ingram, Argyll and Bute Council
Cllor John Armour
Jon Ireland, Argyll and Bute Council
Cllor Andrew Kain
Iain MacInnes, Argyll and Bute Council
Fergus Murray, Argyll and Bute Council
Cllor Peter Wallace

AGENDA

1.0 Welcome Introductions and any Apologies

Apologies were received from:-

Kirsty Flanagan, Argyll and Bute Council
Susan Robinson, Argyll and Bute Council
Rachel Ford, Hebridean Air Services

2.0 Minutes from Last Meeting

MI shared the minutes of the last meeting on screen.

An update had been provided on the air services and details of external funding that had been secured externally through the Regulator Pioneers Fund, which is UK Govt funding. This had been used to undertake UAV trials, both for logistical transport and visual.

UAV trials had involved Argyll and Bute Council working in partnership with external agencies like Royal Mail, NHS, SSEN and Network Rail to demonstrate proof of concept. Kirsty Flanagan had also confirmed and increase of an additional

£40k in the revenue maintenance budget for the airports. More kind of JI had shared the PowerPoint he had presented at the meeting, describing staff training on first aid and local supervisor training undertaken by staff at all three airports.

At the last meeting it was also confirmed that additional fire appliances had been purchased by the Council for each of the island airports, and the Council were investigating purchasing a rotational vehicle as well to support the islands in the event of a breakdown or for routine maintenance when the vehicles required to go back to the mainland.

2 emergency exercises had also previously been undertaken and were now due to be undertaken again. The emergency exercise that was outstanding was at Colonsay Airport due to emergency responders on the islands being responsible for a number of competing roles on the island. JI was looking to rectify and get a commitment for a date.

An update had been provided on the business park being developed at Oban Airport, as well as Bristow's search and rescue base at Oban Airport. It was noted TSL we're looking to set up their headquarters at the airport as well.

There was no comments on the previous minutes.

3.0 Update on Oban and the Isles Air Services

An update paper on Oban and the Isles Air Services had been circulated in advance of the meeting. MI gave a brief overview of each of the three licensed airports the Council operates and that they were licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority. A Flight Information Service is also provided from the tower at Oban Airport. The air services were used to transport scholars from the islands to Oban High School on the mainland and are also used by NHS, ACHA etc.

MI gave an update to the current contract which runs to Sept 2027, and cost to the Council for the subsidy for the air services and airports.

Statistical information was circulated in advance of the meeting on the air services performance, and it was noted Dec 25 stats were still to be added.

It was noted that the Council had secured further funding via the UK Govt Regulator Pioneer Fund round 4 to undertake further UAV trials and potential so staff to be trained on their use to deliver Council services.

Council investment includes the purchase of a third fire appliance to allow rotation with island vehicles for routine maintenance and in the event of a breakdown. The third vehicle purchased is the exact same as the appliance operating on each of the islands so airport staff will be familiar with its operation. A brief update was given regarding Bristow's Search and Rescue base at Oban Airport due to commence mid March for a period of 10 years. The base will be

operational 6 months of the year.

Further investment being undertaken by the Council includes connection to the SSEN grid at Colonsay airport with works underway.

The tender for aviation fuel supply at Oban Airport has also been undertaken and being assessed.

The fire training rigs the Council invested in for each of the islands have now been delivered.

Airport inspections have been undertaken for Colonsay and Oban airport with an inspection at Coll airport due to take place early February.

Staff at Oban Airport held a charity event 'Run the Runway' for the local Hospice with children and members of the public participating.

An update on Council investment for digital hubs on the islands was provided. This will offer more resilience on the islands by putting in state-of-the-art equipment in relation to communication for the hubs, so that's video conferencing systems, touch screens, laser projects, laptops, iPads. It allows added resilience in relation to communications in the event of an incident. There is a conference call facility as part of the digital hubs allowing improved connection to the mainland and will assist if there's any training that needs undertaken with staff. It allows desk top exercise to be undertaken with emergency responders. Also if the weather's inclement and stops travel, interviews etc can still be undertaken.

IMc gave an update on the mobile mapping exercise being undertaken across Argyll by mounting equipment to bin lorries to allow for the mapping of mobile coverage. The data will allow you to ascertain, via a mobile coverage checker app, which mobile operator is best for your area. Once all the data is collected a full report will be provided to Council. Findings will be shared with Ofcom and Scottish Govt to lobby for better coverage in the Argyll area. This will also identify where additional resilience is required in event of a power cut.

K Mac raised a query as to why the cost of Oban airport had increased from £500k to £650k.

***Post meeting note:** Finance were contacted regarding the above query. Finance confirmed as per K Mac Freedom of Information Request dated 27 March 2025 Reference Argyllbuteir 19068, the Finance had advised Oban Airport has a revenue budget of £586,989.

As advised at the meeting, a further £40k was added to the above budget for infrastructure maintenance costs, with the rest of the costs associated with inflation costs.

KMac requested a footnote at the bottom of the passengers statistics table to state that in September 2019, Coll and Colonsay lost one of the weekly flights and that that accounts for the drop in passenger numbers.

Action MI

KMac requested performance of the flights statistics are shared with community councils on a regular basis. MI confirmed ABC monitor statistics on a monthly basis based on KPIs that are included within the contract. MI confirmed happy to work with LB offline, to see how best HAS/ABC can do that on a monthly basis to meet the requirements of the Community councils.

MI confirmed statistics are discussed annually at the Airport Consultative to give balanced view of how the air services are performing rather than looking in isolation of each month. It allows the air service performance to be reviewed compared to previous years performance.

KMac raised scholars, at the hostel in Oban, are told if the flight is likely to be cancelled. They then all tend to take the ferry home. KMac enquired if this is treated as a weather cancellation or a no passengers cancellation? KMac said Coll Community Council think it should be a weather cancellation.

LB confirmed HAS normally inform the hostel if there is the likelihood of a flight being cancelled the next day due to weather. But it's very much an onus on the hostel and the parents to make arrangements for transporting their children home. It's very much an onus on the hostel and the parents, to take ownership, if they're going to take the scholars off the flight and put them on the ferry, so HAS will then put that down as no passengers because we do obviously operate the flight and offer seats open to the public if there's availability. But if there's nobody else booked, then we would cancel. HAS will only make a decision to cancel due to weather on the day. So again it's obviously a decision made by the parents and the hostel to put the children onto the ferry the day before. To make a decision on the Saturday morning, regarding no flights due to weather if often too late quite often, to revert to catching the ferry.

MI confirmed as previously stated that all three local airports operate under "Visual Flight Rules" only. Because there isn't any instrument infrastructure to guide planes in through thick mist or low clouds, the pilot has to make the final safety call on the day. This means an official cancellation for weather usually doesn't happen until Saturday morning.

LB confirmed a meeting had been held six months ago with the hostel and MI and JI. It was to try and get around the issue of if HAS cancel on the morning, the scholars are then stuck on the mainland because the ferries have already departed. The outcome of this meeting was the hostel will email or call by 3pm on the Friday to receive an opinion from HAS the operating pilot if the flight is likely to operate or not. However, because the official decision isn't made until Saturday, the responsibility falls on the hostel and parents to decide whether to move the children to the ferry on Friday afternoon.

If there's a strong weather warning or wind warning or a storm warning, HAS will advise that's in place. Again, HAS will make that decision on a Saturday morning whether HAS will fly or not. The information will be given to the hostel from the pilot, and the hostel will then make their final decision of what they want to arrange for transporting the scholars. LB also confirmed that pilots operating the air services use their experience of weather conditions local to the area.

KMac thanked LB for the above explanation and confirmed they had two parents with them on the conference call. KMac confirmed they were keen passenger statistics reflected the above as they do not want the air service to be conveyed as nobody interested in using it.

FM confirmed councillors for this ward were attending the meeting and this issue had been raised last year. The problem is that the hostel is now very reluctant to keep pupils overnight, say a Friday night in summer or a Saturday night, the pupils are more or less being ushered out, and almost being forced to go home earlier than they should, this is something that didn't ever happen in the past. Children were never left stranded and open without supervision in the hostel. So this is like a double problem and it would be good if Counsellors could maybe take the above point away.

FM confirmed its not within the gift of the officers present, but it's certainly an important issue. FM suggested an action from the meeting to have a further discussion on the hostel. FM suggested a meeting with Councillors that would be a helpful approach. Cllor Hume confirmed he would be happy to attend meeting.

Action Meeting with CCs/Cllors/Glencruitten Hostel

4.0 Operational and Development Update

Jl gave a presentation on operations and developments. Jl explained about recruitment and training staff, and costs invested in staff, by the Council. Jl explained about the need for relief fire fighters to ensure fire and rescue cover at the airports otherwise the schedule service cannot fly as shown in the statistics provided. This is CAA law/regulations – no fire cover on the islands then the scheduled service cannot operate.

Jl confirmed delivery of fire training rigs to each island which should help staff training without the need for staff to leave the island. Jl explained regarding using synthetic smoke materials to prevent harm to participants.

Jl explained the need to carry out emergency exercises at the airports and the need for these to be carried out at each of the island airports.

Jl gave a brief update on Oban Airport Business Development Park and the works on going in regards to Bristows Search and Rescue site and TSL contractors head quarters relocation of their base to Oban airport.

Jl gave an update on Colonsay airport and works invested by Council to secure a connection to SSEN grid. Jl also mentioned regarding wind turbines and planning

permissions and Oban airport undertaking safeguarding in regard to any new developments in the vicinity.

Jl explained the airports owned and subsidised by the Council, all operate on Visual Flight Rules. There are no instrument infrastructure at the three Council airports, pilots require vision, line of sight, in order to fly – totally dependent on weather conditions and visibility.

FM thanked Jl and confirmed ABC investment to date in the airports and aspirations to develop.

LB confirmed that pilots operating the air services use their experience of weather conditions local to the area.

5.0 Open Stakeholder Discussion

AH raised matter of VFR and confirmed he was a private pilot. AH confirmed Jl presentation was entirely correct regarding VFRs and the operator has proved to be far more resilient than expected especially in comparison to the ferry services to the islands.

Cllor Hume raised the matter that it was difficult for ABC to recruit staff on the islands due to limited population and enquired what training was necessary.

Jl explained for the relief firefighter post to support fire cover on the islands, recruits are provided 2 weeks training at Oban airport followed by further training every 8 weeks thereafter.

Jl confirmed it starts with basic training rolling out hoses etc to full Breathing Apparatus training. Jl explained they progress to live fire training and also Breathing Apparatus training.

J Mac raised with HAS operator was there any potential to make amendments to timetable to assist Tiree community.

LB confirmed HAS are fully committed to working within the budget and understand how important it is to have value for money and to operate as effectively as possible.

LB confirmed Rachel Ford and herself were planning to visit the islands. LB raised obviously any teaks to timetable requires close consultation with staff on the islands covering the airport duties because obviously it hinges around their availability because of secondary duties, roles that they might have.

DH raised the status of the PSO covering the air services and why Tiree was also included and also potential to amend the timetable.

MI advised the Public Service Obligation was previously a process the Council had to go through, to apply to the European Commission, to allow a public body to put subsidy into a service that otherwise could not be run commercially.

The above (PSO) is a process and the Council is under no 'obligation' to run the air services which are also non statutory services.

MI reemphasised any changes to the air services timetable would need coordinated consultation with Council staff at island airports, staff on the islands have other commitments. Without staff at the island airports the air services cannot operate – as per Civil Aviation Authority regulations, requiring the necessary fire and rescue provision at each airport for every aircraft landing and take off. MI confirmed the budget is also fixed by ABC with no option to increase.

MI confirmed there is a PSO from Tiree to Oban and also a PSO from Tiree to Glasgow (subsidised by Transport Scotland) and this has historically been the case.

MI confirmed the funding from Scottish Government for the air services is included in the single outcome agreement (one off payment) that SG provide in funding to ABC.

K Mac raised the reliability of the air services and FM confirmed there is regular dialogue with the operator regarding their performance. MI confirmed there are a number of reasons for cancellations weather, no passengers, technical issues, pilot issues, no fire cover provision on islands.

LB confirmed HAS now have an additional Islander. This will be used for long term maintenance issues and that HAS have a maintenance planner to ensure only one aircraft at a time is under maintenance. With regards to the any technical issues, HAS will have a third spare aircraft to come over and cover any last minute technical issues if possible. Obviously this might take a day or so for logistics, but HA will do their best where they can.

FM confirmed that further details will be added regarding services performance and action taken to address. FM confirmed ABC are trying to get the value for money for the public investment that's going into the Air Services because there's substantial public investment.

DH asked whither there is a financial penalty raised against the operator. MI confirmed there is a fuel reconciliation carried out annually for flights not undertaken.

DH raised whither flights could be banked. MI confirmed difficult issue, due to Pilot fatigue etc as regulated by CAA. LB confirmed this would be a potential issue as under current contract they provide one pilot.

DH raised that he understood the Stornoway aircraft was being upgraded and LB confirmed this was the case. LB confirmed that a Tecnam P2012 aircraft has been leased for operations in Stornoway. The BN2 remains a 'backup aircraft' for all PSO currently operated by HAS.

DH raised whether maintenance of aircraft is undertaken at Milton Keynes and LB confirmed some undertaken at Inverness airport but the majority at Cumbernauld airport.

AH enquired whether HAS now had three aircraft and LB confirmed that was correct. AH raised concerns regarding HAS running scenic flights where real priority was services to the islands. LB confirmed that she understood AH point however they have hardly run any scenic flights due to weather over the last year.

K Mac raised that there are no longer any scholars using flights from Colonsay, however parent representatives were in attendance from Coll.

Alison Jones joined the meeting and raised the need for an education officer/hostel officer to be in attendance at the meeting.

FM confirmed the restrictive budget, the Council's lobby position and need for CC's to work with Council in lobbying Transport Scotland.

MI confirmed that Susan Robinson is the Officer in Charge in Education and was invited to the meeting, but unfortunately Susan couldn't make it to the meeting, however Susan attended the last one.

AH suggested the Council run the air services as charters and remove the need for CAA licensing fire cover provision at the airports and hence reduce ABC costs for delivering the air services.

FM confirmed the top priority for ABC is public safety and operation of the airports in a safe manner and will therefore be following CAA legislation.

AH confirmed his understanding that the above charter operation is being provided in the Orkney islands.

KMac requested the minutes as soon as possible following the meeting and LB confirmed HAS would have a meeting with CC's as soon as practicably possible in relation to summer timetable.

Action HAS

J Mac raised that the flights banked by Tiree had been a very difficult process and should not be underestimated. J Mac also raised the need, to ensure the understanding of the air services used for access to healthcare.

FM confirmed ABC understand the importance of the NHS usage of the of the service, both for staff and for patients and ABC have tried to reach out to NHS regarding usage but it has been difficult due to their main focus being delivery of healthcare.

AH raised the point that both ferry services and air services should be governed by Transport Scotland.

6.0 AOCB

FM concluded that it had been a very good discussion. FM confirmed on a positive note that there's a lot of investment by ABC going into Argyll airports, during a time of very difficult budget decisions which are still ongoing, with the Council and other areas of government.