

**THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
CAITHNESS AREA COMMITTEE 26th February, 2007**

Agenda Item	11
Report No	CC/48/07

**REOPENING OF NORTH ATLANTIC LINK THROUGH NEW FAROESE SMYRIL LINE
SERVICE TO SCRABSTER FROM JUNE 18, 2007**

Report by Area Development Manager

SUMMARY

The emergence of a major new North European passenger and freight service by way of the Faroese vessel Norrona calling at Scrabster, links Caithness to Faroe, Norway and Iceland, Shetland and Denmark in the summer season, and re-establishes old connections between the North Atlantic communities. This is of both cultural and economic significance.

Support is sought from the Caithness Committee to

1] Establish / co-operate with the establishment of a small working group to ensure the smooth co-ordination of the community effort required to support this new socio-economic development opportunity

1] Provide a maximum of £5000 from the Area Development Discretionary funds to match fund an information package for Scrabster Harbour Trust to distribute for the new visitors

2] Explore the possibility of sponsorship for a group of young people and escorts to go from Caithness on the first sailing from Scrabster on June 18th and visit the Faroe Islands for a week, and

3] Provide a civic reception at an estimated cost of £500, for others from Faroe who arrive in Caithness on the Norrona on June 18th

1. Introduction

Scrabster Harbour lost its passenger and car ferry service to Faroe, Norway and Iceland some years ago, resulting in the loss of easy cultural, social and economic links between Caithness and these the North Atlantic communities. These links are set to be restored this summer when the 40,000 tonne Smyril Line ship Norrona begins a new service from Scrabster on June 18th.

1.1 Norrona has been estimated to carry between 500 and 1000 passengers, and 300 vehicles each week through Scrabster Harbour in the peak summer season.

2. Not only will this facility help re-establish old links with the Faroe Islands for the community, including the link between Wick and its twin town Klaksvik, it will also bring in people to Caithness from other areas such as France and Belgium, who may, for example, wish to visit Iceland by car.

2.1 An important requirement to provide for these people is to produce good information about both our local facilities here in Caithness and our role as a gateway to other parts of the Highlands and Islands which they may wish to tour. Caithness will most likely have a pivotal role to play in accommodation provision before and after each sailing of Norrona from Scrabster. Late opening of other facilities such as shops and restaurants will probably be required. All this information needs to be distributed, both on the ship and to the countries that Norrona will visit. For this reason, it is proposed that a special brochure be produced.

- 2.2 It is also proposed that a special welcoming reception be given to the first arrival of the Norrona in Scrabster on June 18th, and that the pipe band greets the ship, and there is a welcome committee for the ship's Master and Smyril Line representatives from Caithness, with press and television cameras invited to record this major event. Scrabster Harbourmasters have indicated they would appreciate co-operation from The Highland Council and local community on this matter.
- 2.3 Apart from the work already done at Scrabster Harbour and involving the Thurso Community, at the Wick Project Meeting on February 13th, Wick Community Council representatives expressed interest in the opportunity to reinforce old bonds with their twin town of Klaksvik, and would be interested in the exchange of groups of young people between Wick and Klaksvik, and associated events.
3. It can thus be seen that the advent of Norrona will create a number of important new linkages for Caithness involving the wider community and further partnership working both within the community and with others outside of the community,

RECOMMENDATION

1] It is recommended that a small working group be established between the various services of The Highland Council likely to be involved in provision of support to the many visitors who will arrive here through this new international link. This group should include the Scrabster Harbour Trust, Thurso and Wick Community Councils, the Chamber of Commerce, the North Highland Tourism Operators Group, the Caithness Partnership and others.

2] It is recommended that a maximum of £5000 be agreed from the discretionary Area Development funds as a contribution from The Caithness Committee to match fund an information package for the new visitors which will be published in advance and be distributed under the auspices of Scrabster Harbour Trust

3] It is recommended that funding, estimated at £500 be agreed to provide a civic welcome for the Faroese visitors

4] It is recommended the Caithness Committee explore the possibility of sponsorship for a group of 12 young people and escorts to go to Faroe for one week for the first sailing on June 18th.

Signature:

ELIZABETH MARSHALL
Area Development Manager, Caithness

Date:

Ref:

Background Papers