The Highland Council

Agenda Item	**6**
Report No	**LA/38/26**

Committee: **Lochaber**

Date: **9 November 2026**

Report Title: **Corran Ferry Update**

Report By: **Assistant Chief Executive - Place**

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the Corran Ferry Infrastructure Improvement Scheme, the Corran Ferry New Electric Vessel and the Corran Ferry Service operations.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:-

i. **Note** the Corran Ferry Infrastructure Improvement Scheme (CFIIS) & Corran Ferry New Electric Vessel (CFNEV) updates; and
ii. **Note** the Corran Ferry Service update.

3 Implications

3.1 **Resource** - Resource implications are highlighted where required within the report.

3.2 **Legal** - Legal advice continues to be followed throughout.

3.3 **Risk** - Without the CFIIS and CFNEV, the future reliability, capacity and sustainability of the ferry service is at risk. The new ferry design is standardised with CalMac/CMAL which will offer an enhanced robust process.

3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** - In future the new berth provided as part of the CFIIS eliminates the risks associated with the daily ship-to-ship transfer of crew. Meantime, the new flit boat has improved the safety of current crew-transfer operations.

3.5 **Gaelic** - There are no implications for Gaelic.

4 Impacts

4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

4.3 This is a monitoring/update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5 Corran Ferry Infrastructure Improvement Scheme (CFIIS) and Corran Ferry New Electric Vessel (CFNEV) Updates

5.1 Construction for the 18-month CFIIS commenced in early 2026 and is now well progressed for this transformational £30m landside project, delivering major upgrades on both shores of the Corran Narrows. This includes a new slipway and overnight berthing pier at Ardgour, with a new slipway, breakwater, marshalling area, parking, cycle path and enhanced public facilities at Corran (Nether Lochaber).

These improvements lay the groundwork for the £28m investment in the CFNEV, ensuring a modern, reliable and sustainable service for the route. The latest significant milestone in the purchase of the CFNEV took place on 1 October 2026 when the formal single-vessel tender procurement process was launched.

The Corran Ferry service is a priority within the Highland Council Delivery Plan 2024-27 and the Highland Council Local Transport Strategy. Funded through the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal (IHCRD), this combined £58m transport ferry investment marks a pivotal time for the Highland Council's Corran Ferry service, the busiest single-vessel route in Scotland.

5.2 Please find the most recent CFIIS and CFNEV Updates in **Appendix 1** of this report, with accompanying photographs provided in **Appendix 2**.

Corran Ferry Service Update

6 MV Corran

6.1 Since she re-entered service on 2 April 2026 after her last refit, the MV Corran (26 years old) is operating to the usual timetable, running seven days a week.

6.2 Corran Ferry service information is published on the Corran Ferry Webpage, and latest service updates for passengers continue to be provided via the Corran Ferry Facebook (external link) page and the @CorranFerry (external link) X page. The Corran Ferry X page currently has 5,470 followers.

6.3 As planned, day-to-day Corran Ferry service delivery is unaffected by the CFIIS, whose works are taking place alongside the existing Corran Ferry operation (see photograph A in **Appendix 2**).

From an operational perspective, while the local area is busy with the associated marine traffic (barges, multi-cat vessels, small work boats, etc), there are regular safety meetings between the Corran Ferry team and the construction project managers. The contractor Charles Brand issues any necessary Notices to Mariners, and close communication between the Corran Ferry skippers, barge operators and construction vessels continues.

Such day-to-day cooperation helps to ensure there is no effect on the Corran Ferry service and that business-as-usual continues uninterrupted for ferry passengers.

6.4 On Monday 14 September 2026 Corran Ferry passenger numbers increased when the Isle of Mull ferry was off. The Oban-Craignure Mull service suffered sailing cancellations due to a technical fault, causing traffic to re-route to Mull via the Corran Ferry and Lochaline-Fishnish ferry services.

When these situations arise periodically the Corran Ferry team respond to the operational challenges, increasing sailings (shuttling back and forth across the Corran Narrows) and marshalling traffic until the queues subside for the convenience and safety of passengers and traffic.

The photographs in **Appendix 3** give an illustration of this. While the busy queues in the photograph appear to be at a manageable level, this is due to the continuous shuttling of the ferry and the continued commitment and concentration of the crew over a sustained period throughout the incident.

The Corran Ferry service is integral to the economic and social well-being of Ardgour, Sunart, Ardnamurchan, Morvern, Moidart, Mull and the wider area. As well as during trunk road closures for example, access is severely restricted in these situations if it were not for Corran Ferry. (Alternative Road-based diversions (Corran Ferry Webpage) are around 2 hours and involve navigating single track roads with limited access for large commercial vehicles, including bridge height restrictions.)

6.5 The MV Corran's next annual refit commences 1 November 2026. There are no major overhauls of main equipment scheduled, however the Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) for the propulsion units is scheduled to renew long-lead-time parts for the forward prop unit that were identified at the last refit. This replacement work is planned to be completed by the end of November 2026 aiming to help keep the length of the MV Corran's absence to a minimum to ensure continued resilience for the communities that rely on the Corran Ferry service.

At refit, it is also planned to modify the vessel's crew-access-door arrangements. These are relatively minor alterations to ensure compatibility with the new berth when it comes into use next summer (June 2027).

Stakeholders and passengers will be kept fully informed with regular refit updates.

7 Maid of Glencoul

7.1 The Maid of Glencoul (51 years old) is in good condition following her last refit and continued investment to retain her in-service until the planned CFNEV arrives in approximately thirty months' time (early 2029).

7.2 The Maid of Glencoul's last refit (spring/summer 2026) comprised annual scheduled maintenance works plus hot-steel hull patching, ramp flap improvements and rewiring resulting in an extended refit but ensuring that she can continue to provide reliable and safe relief cover for the MV Corran.

7.3 Dangerous Goods can also be carried by the Maid of Glencoul, helping to ensure continued resilience for the community.

7.4 When the Maid of Glencoul returned home week commencing 17 August 2026 she was berthed at Fort William for five weeks to accommodate the CFIIS works taking place at Ardgour, and she has since returned to her Ardgour mooring.

7.5 Since her return to Loch Linnhe in August the Maid has been available as relief cover for the MV Corran providing vital resilience for the Corran Ferry service, helping ensure continuity of service during the busy summer months by providing immediate cover for the MV Corran if required, reducing disruption and maintaining reliable access for residents, businesses and visitors.

7.6 The Maid of Glencoul's timeous return also helps ferry service delivery, easing important availability for operational trials, crew familiarisation drills, etc.

7.7 The Maid of Glencoul's next annual refit is scheduled spring 2027.

8 Corran Ferry Ticketing Project

8.1 Since the start of June 2026, our existing Corran Ferry ticketing supplier, Professional Data Management Services Ltd (PDMS), are contracted to supplement the existing Corran Ferry Compass ticketing system with online ticket sales. Online sales will fully integrate with existing reporting and back-office support. The project has progressed well and is on timeline to go live in December 2026/January 2027.

8.2 The aim of the Ticketing Project is to modernise the ticketing system, to optimise efficiency and benefit passengers.

The project is delivering an online purchase option for Corran Ferry fares, where a valid m-ticket (with a QR-code) may be purchased online and presented on a smartphone to the Purser on the ferry, where it will be scanned by the Purser and validity confirmed.

8.3 This will include a multi-journey purchase option (e.g. x30 or x40 tickets in a bundle to replace the existing x30 tickets in a paper book).

8.4 The go-live is planned as a soft launch, so existing ticket sales methods will continue concurrently as the new online option is phased in for passengers.

8.5 Passengers (Private/Light Goods Vehicles and Commercial Vehicles over 3,500 Kg GVW) and stakeholders will be involved as we progress the project to completion.

9 Carryings

9.1 Carryings figures for July 2026 were down 5.5% on last year; however, Corran Ferry was busier in August-September this year, with 2026 carryings 10% higher than August-September 2025.

9.2 According to VisitBritain, “the downward dip in July 2026 was triggered by people delaying holiday plans due to the cost-of-living, which caused domestic travel intentions to drop to a multi-month low” (Corran Ferry May-June carryings were also 6% lower than last year). “This reduction was compounded by geopolitical volatility and rising fuel costs that severely suppressed high-spending, long-haul international flight bookings from North America and the Middle East early in the summer.”

9.3 Visit Scotland and Visit Britain’s final verified visitor count reports for August and September 2026 are not available at the time of writing this report, but Corran Ferry’s upturn in passenger numbers corresponds with the VisitBritain Domestic Sentiment Tracker which reports that “intentions to take a UK overnight trip and domestic travel demand rose significantly in August-September 2026. Also, the massive "coolcationing" booking pivot - which eventually drove a late-summer surge of travellers escaping Southern European heatwaves into Scotland and northern regions - did not fully mobilise or register in the data until late August-September.”

“Scotland's autumn and winter 2026 tourism trends are expected to show a surge in niche experiences like dark-sky stargazing and seasonal food tourism, driven by visitors seeking unique off-season travel. However, persistent cost-of-living constraints mean this traffic relies heavily on spontaneous, last-minute bookings and tiered spending that prioritizes free attractions alongside high-comfort stays.”

10 Weather

10.1 Corran Ferry has experienced no service outages due to the weather since the spring storms back in April 2026.

10.2 After a wet June, Corran Ferry crew enjoyed a warm and sunny July.

However, then it became increasingly wet, contrasting with a drier south of the country, and peaked in September with nearly 40% more rain than average (Met Office figures), with correspondingly below average sunshine.

Despite this rain in August-September Lochaber recorded an unusually warm summer culminating in a September average temperature of 13°C (Met Office).

11 Mechanical Breakdowns/Service Outages

11.1 The Corran Ferry service operated trouble-free throughout the summer – the busiest season of the year from July to September – apart from a hydraulic issue with the aft propulsion unit on Thursday 30 July 2026 (MV Corran). Due to the commendable efforts of all involved this was limited to a two-day outage and service resumed on Saturday 1 August 2026.

There were no service outages due to vessel breakdowns for the 5-months prior to that apart from on Friday 20 February 2026 due to an engine warranty repair (Maid of Glencoul). Again, this was expedited quickly due to the commendable efforts of all involved and service resumed on Sunday 22 February 2026.

11.2 Corran Ferry operates 7-days-a-week all year, except for 25-26 December and 1-2 January (Corran Ferry Timetable, Corran Ferry Webpage). Out of a possible 273 Corran Ferry operating days between 1 January 2026 and 30 September 2026 the two 2-day breakdowns represent 1.5%.

11.3 If a Corran Ferry service outage occurs, the Highland Council is committed to implementing the Corran Ferry contingency plan immediately. The contingency plan is published via the Corran Ferry Webpage entitled Service Outage Strategy.

11.4 Additional contingency will be available from next year provided by new slipways which are standardised with the west coast ferry fleet so that RoRo ferries, as opposed to the current Corran Ferry bespoke quarter-loading vessels, may be outsourced to operate on the crossing (should they ever be required) in a time of need. Funded through the CFIIS, construction of the new slipways is now well advanced, due for completion in June 2027 (**Appendix 1**).

12 Corran Ferry Stakeholder Group

12.1 Corran Ferry Stakeholder Group meetings focus on Corran Ferry service operations. They continue to take place quarterly, the day after each Lochaber Area Committee, and minutes and associated reports or information are published on the Corran Ferry Stakeholder Group page on the council's Corran Ferry Webpage.

Designation:	Assistant Chief Executive - Place
Date:	2 October 2026
Author:	Richard Porteous – Operations Manager – Corran Ferry
Background Papers:	Corran Ferry Update report, Lochaber Committee, 10 August 2026 - Item 10 Corran Ferry Update report, Lochaber Committee, 11 May 2026 - Item 8 Corran Ferry Update report, Lochaber Committee, 26 January 2026 - Item 15 Corran Ferry Update report, Lochaber Area Committee, 10 November 2025 - Item 10
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Corran Ferry Infrastructure Improvement Scheme (CFIIS) and Corran Ferry New Electric Vessel (CFNEV) Updates Appendix 2 – Photographs CFIIS (taken late Sep 2026)

Appendix 1

Corran Ferry Infrastructure Improvement Scheme and New Electric Vessel Update

1	**Corran Ferry Infrastructure Improvement Scheme**
1.1	Construction continues to progress well and the works on the Ardgour side include: • Reinforcement, shuttering and concrete pours are continuing for the north and south capping beam to the Ardgour slipway. • Infilling works to the Ardgour slipway following completion of the piling works with rockfill material are approximately 80% complete. Tie rods are also being installed. • The stone cladding works to the retaining wall structure are complete. • Sheet piling installation to the overnight berthing structure are now complete and bulk fill with tie rod installation is progressing. • Dredging works at Ardgour are progressing with the dredged material being reused as infill to the overnight berthing structure. • Demolition works to the existing pier structure are ongoing. • Construction of the Ardgour retaining wall structures are approximately 95% complete. Infilling works behind the retaining wall structures are progressing to provide the widened carriageway and parking area in Ardgour and drainage works are progressing.
1.2	The construction works on the Nether Lochaber side include: • Nether Lochaber slipway works with installation of the precast concrete caisson units for the slipway is ongoing which is being supported by divers for the subsea works. • The Nether Lochaber rock dredging is approximately 80% complete on the main dredge area, and the dredged material is being used as rockfill to the slipway breakwater. • Placement of rock armour to the Nether Lochaber marshalling area which are approximately 60% complete. Backfilling of suitable material in the marshalling area which are approximately 95% complete.
1.3	Seven community liaison group (CLG) meeting have been held in Ardgour over the last seven months with local community representatives, local residents, Council Members and Council officials attending. Discussions which have taken place include the upcoming proposed works, traffic management on the A82 at Nether Lochaber and on the A861 in Ardgour village, working hours and any community and resident concerns.
1.4	The contractor's current construction programme shows the completion date as June 2027.

2	**Corran Ferry New Electric Vessel - Procurement**
2.1	The Highland Council has reached another significant milestone in the delivery of a replacement Corran Ferry, with the procurement process for a new electric vessel now formally underway.
2.2	Working in partnership with Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL), the Council has developed the tender documentation required to progress the project and has launched a single-vessel procurement exercise.
2.3	This collaborative approach enables the Council to retain overall project leadership while benefiting from CMAL's extensive expertise in vessel procurement, technical assurance, contract management and construction supervision. It also provides the opportunity to align the new Corran Ferry with the proven vessel designs being delivered through CMAL's Small Vessels Replacement Programme, helping to achieve greater standardisation and efficiency.
2.4	The procurement follows the strategy approved by the Council's Economy and Infrastructure Committee in May 2025 and represents a key step towards delivering a modern, reliable and sustainable ferry service for the Corran crossing.
2.5	Publication of the Contract Notice on the Public Contracts Scotland portal formally invites expressions of interest from the market and enables suitably qualified suppliers to submit bids in accordance with the procurement requirements.
2.6	The Council remains committed to introducing a new electric vessel for the Corran crossing at the earliest practicable opportunity, aligned with the delivery of the associated shoreside infrastructure. Construction of the new infrastructure is progressing well and is currently programmed for completion in June 2027, with the installation and commissioning of the charging infrastructure scheduled for completion by September 2028.
2.7	Subject to the successful completion of the procurement process, the contract for the new vessel is expected to be awarded in March 2027. Based on current programme assumptions, the replacement ferry is anticipated to enter service in early 2029.
2.8	The new vessel and supporting infrastructure will improve the long-term resilience, reliability and sustainability of this vital transport link, ensuring the Corran crossing continues to serve local communities, businesses and visitors for many years to come.
2.9	The Highland Council will continue to provide updates as the procurement process progresses.

Appendix 2 – Photograph A – Corran Ferry Infrastructure Improvement Scheme (CFIIS) – ongoing construction at Ardgour



Ardgour – New slipway (with construction barge alongside) and new T-shaped ferry berthing structure. (MV Corran ferry in left of picture on the existing Ardgour slipway).

Appendix 2 – Photograph B – Corran Ferry Infrastructure Improvement Scheme (CFIIS) – ongoing construction at Corran



Corran (Nether Lochaber) – New slipway and breakwater, tubular piles for new alignment structure (with construction barge alongside), new queueing area (with construction plant and materials) and rock armour walls. (The existing Corran slipway is out-of-picture to the right.)

Appendix 3 – Corran Ferry Queues – Monday 14 September 2026

Corran



Ardgour

