

PE1472/D

Orkney Islands Council Letter of 31 May 2013

How are the air PSO's in your authority area managed and what considerations arise?

Orkney Inter Islands Air Service PSO

Background

Orkney Islands Council (OIC) operates a scheduled air service between Kirkwall on the Orkney mainland to the six outer islands of Orkney under a Public Service Obligation (PSO) contract which establishes the minimum frequency, capacity and fares on the routes.

The scheduled air service between the Orkney Mainland (Kirkwall) and the islands of Papa Westray, North Ronaldsay, Westray, Sanday, Stronsay, and Eday is essential to the archipelago of islands in order to promote and encourage economic growth and to meet the Government's transport objectives for accessibility and social inclusion. Transport which connects the outer islands to the mainland of Orkney is therefore fundamental to the islands' survival.

Public Service Obligation (PSO)

In December 1997 the first PSO contract was awarded for scheduled services to North Ronaldsay and Papa Westray due to a limited service by ferry, and in December 2001 Eday, Sanday, Stronsay and Westray scheduled services were added to the PSO.

A tendering exercise was undertaken by OIC in 2012 for the current contract which commenced on 1 April 2013 and will run until 31 March 2016 with an option to extend for a further year. The subsidy represents 64% of the overall cost of running the service with the balance coming from the fares and cargo charges.

The operator is required to provide an advertised weekly minimum:

- a) two return trips Monday to Friday and one return trip on Saturday between the Orkney Mainland (Kirkwall) and Westray, Sanday and Stronsay (combined with other island(s));
- b) one "request stop" return trip on Sunday between the Orkney mainland (Kirkwall) and Westray (combined with another island);
- c) two return trips every Wednesday between the Orkney Mainland (Kirkwall) and Eday (combined with another island);
- d) three return trips during the summer timetable and two return trips during the winter timetable on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday; two return trips on Monday and Saturday, and one return trip on Sunday all year round between the Orkney Mainland (Kirkwall) and Papa Westray;

- e) three return trips all year round on Monday and Wednesday; three return trips during the summer timetable and two return trips during the winter timetable on Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, and two return trips on Sunday all year round between the Orkney Mainland (Kirkwall) and North Ronaldsay;
- f) A drop to Eday all year round on a Monday morning (combined with another island) to specifically pick up S1/2 school pupils during term time only;
- g) One “request stop” return trip on a Sunday between the Orkney Mainland (Kirkwall) and Sanday (combined with another island);
- h) In addition to the minimum frequencies specified above, the Operator shall provide 23 ad hoc flights per annum for special island events to North Ronaldsay and Papa Westray, to be arranged by the island community representatives at least one month in advance of the events.

In addition to the minimum frequencies specified above, the Operator shall provide an estimated 35 supplementary scheduled flights per annum.

Airport Infrastructure

Orkney Islands Council operates and maintains the airports on Eday, North Ronaldsay, Papa Westray, Sanday, Stronsay and Westray with Highland and Island Airports Ltd operating the Kirkwall Airport. The Council own a Hangar at Kirkwall Airport which is leased to Loganair for the duration of the contract.

The Council has also invested in infrastructure in order to improve landing facilities on the isles which deem the air service as their ‘life-line’. Night landing equipment was installed on the island of North Ronaldsay during 2012 to allow for a longer flying day in winter.

Communication and Consultation

Loganair have operated the inter-island air service in Orkney over the past forty-five years. The service provided by the well-established operator is fast, reliable and efficient. Good lines of communication between the operator and the Council are key to ensuring scheduled services meet the needs of the communities served. Meetings between the operator and the Council are therefore arranged through the year as and when required.

As part of the communication process with the communities, the air services consultative committee meet twice a year to discuss the summer and winter air services timetables. The meeting is led by the chair of Orkney Islands Council’s Development and Infrastructure Committee and attended by local Councillors and officials, Loganair Ltd, transport representatives from each of the six outer isles’ community councils, a representative from Education and Leisure Services, Transportation Service, NHS Orkney and Visit Scotland.

A draft air services timetable is presented to all stakeholders prior to the consultative meeting and following discussions, a final draft is then taken to the Development and Infrastructure Committee for approval before being ratified by Full Council.

Operational Issues

Daylight hours restrict the timetable structure in Orkney during the winter months. In order to maximise the use of limited daylight hours, two Britten Norman Islander Aircraft (capacity 8/9) are used during the winter and this is reduced to one aircraft in the summer to allow for maintenance.

As well as frequency of service, capacity is also a major factor for consideration given the aircraft can only accommodate up to 9 persons. Education and Leisure Service use around 50% of the flight availability during term-time to fly itinerant teachers and pupils to and from the local schools. Over the last few years the number of teachers travelling to the isles has increased dramatically. The increased demand, and the need to get the teachers out to the islands as close to the start of the school day as possible, means there are real pressures on the timetable at the beginning and the end of the day. NHS Orkney also relies on the air service to get doctors and nurses to and from the islands and patients to and from the local hospital in Kirkwall and onwards to Aberdeen. Availability of flights can therefore be limited for residents or visitors.

Accessibility and Social Inclusion

Access to key services for work, education or social purposes is key to the social and economic survival of the island communities and remains a priority for Orkney as a whole.

In order to achieve this, transport remains to be one of the most important issues in Orkney and its fragile scattered archipelago of islands.