1) Do you think the current and proposed level of investment in new ferries and port infrastructure is enough to ensure the resilience of the Clyde and Hebrides ferries network in future years?

No. The Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service has proved a tremendous success in recent years with record numbers of passengers and vehicles making use of these vital lifeline services boosted through the Government's RET investment and the growing popularity of many of our islands as places to live and also visit.

This success has brought with it a number of inherent problems in terms of the capacity of the service to cope with peak demand combined with the poor reliability of an aging ferry fleet together with port infrastructure in need of substantial investment. The loss of a key vessel for repairs this summer clearly demonstrated this issue.

There is an urgent need for additional ferries to serve the network and accommodate increasing demand. Whilst it is noted that the Government has invested in procuring a number of new ferries the latest vessels have experienced significant delay in being built and deployed exacerbating the situation as previously described.

The size and length of the vessels being constructed will also require significant investment in terms of port infrastructure which has yet to be fully recognised by the Government. Without this investment the new ferries will not be able to access a significant number of existing ports reducing their potential impact on network capacity and ability to respond to challenges as they arise such as ferry breakdowns or spikes in demand. There is also a concern that using larger vessels will create greater impacts on communities with fragile transport infrastructure including the local road network and marshalling areas which are not designed to accommodate larger numbers of vehicles wanting to use the ferry. For example, Oban has limited space to accommodate larger amounts of cars generated by a larger ferry which will result in additional capital expenditure to provide an acceptable solution for the operators, customers and the local community.

It should also be noted that procuring fewer, larger ferries may not be able to meet future demand based on likely projections in terms of visitor numbers and will also have significant implications for council budgets in terms of having to improve our own Pier assets to enable larger vessels to dock and berth in a safe manner. For example, Craignure on Mull owned and operated by Argyll and Bute Council.

In addition, there is also a need to invest in the skills of the future ferry workforce as the demographic of current staff are aging and will need to be replaced with new recruits, hopefully trained in Scotland, close to the ferry network as possible to allow local people to access employment opportunity.
2) Has sufficient investment been made in vessels and port/harbour facilities to handle increased passenger numbers, particularly since the introduction of the Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) fares?

RET is a distance based fares structure, which ties ferry fares to the cost of travelling the equivalent distance by road. The formula for calculating RET fares involves a fixed element and a rate per-mile, based on independent research into the cost of motoring.

No. Please also see answer to the above question. There is a need to procure additional ferries shorter in length than the latest procured vessels to meet projected demand without the need for major investment in port and Pier infrastructure. If the Government is set on larger/longer vessels there will be a need for significant further investment in Pier and Port infrastructure. This includes C Mal and Council owned and operated assets. As it stands Argyll and Bute Council has a 10 year investment plan for its marine related works that will have to be paid for by fees and charges primarily generated by Cal Mac Vessels. The council considers it would be more cost efficient for all parties that any new major works are minimised through collaboration of all parties with the future procurement of ferries ensuring that can make use of existing facilities provided of course they are in good condition. There is also a compelling need to deliver a holistic approach to transport investment for our island and other communities served by ferries as investment has to be balanced with potential impacts on the local road network, parking, active and public transport. Again, the example of Oban that serves a number of islands demonstrates the need for a system options appraisal. Another example, is Islay and the success of the tourist and whisky industry that is creating capacity issues for the ferries for long periods and concerns over the ability of the island infrastructure to cope with spikes in demand particularly when tourist numbers and whisky production is expected to increase year on year.

3) What impact could changes to the application of EU state aid and procurement rules have on ferries investment - whether as a result of British exit from the EU or through some other change?

This could mean a change in how ferry services are tendered that needs to be considered by the Scottish Ministers.

4) How might island life be affected, particularly access to essential services, if Clyde and Hebrides ferry services are not appropriately funded?

'Appropriately funded' in this question means that island communities are provided with the level of ferry service that they require to access day-to-day services and emergency services. These are lifeline services that provide our island communities with the very means to survive and prosper. An inadequately funded service would give rise to additional reliability and capacity issues for the ferry network given recent successes. This in turn would have a major detrimental impact on key island industries (whisky, tourism, aquaculture, service provision etc.) with significant consequences for the future of these communities.
For Argyll and Bute there would also be a negative impact on our island and remote peninsula population levels. Transport connectivity is a key priority for local residents and local businesses that require routes to market. The availability of affordable and reliable ferry services is also a key element in attracting new people to live in these communities and also importantly allowing people to return following higher education or development of their careers.

5) **Do you have any concerns about the accessibility of ferries and port/harbour facilities, and, if so, what investment might be needed to address these concerns?**

'Accessibility' in this question means that anyone with a disability or mobility issue is able to access Clyde and Hebrides ferries, ports and harbours without difficulties.

Yes, a number of port facilities and older ferries have limited facilities to accommodate passengers with disability or mobility issues. While efforts have been made to address this there is an ongoing need for further investment here and procurement of new vessels will need to ensure their accessibility is compliant with the port facilities they will serve.

6) **What level of priority should the Scottish Government give to funding Clyde and Hebrides ferry services within the overall transport budget, which also covers spending on other transport modes, including trunk roads, rail, aviation, buses, walking and cycling and low carbon vehicles?**

**High priority**

For all of the reasons above, this public service must be a high priority for the Scottish Government given the increasing emphasis on inclusion and the need for island proofing established through the Island Bill.

There is no alternative to the ferry service for the majority of island transportation needs and this has to be recognised at the highest level in Government. A Key priority therefore must be the delivery of fit for purpose ferry and port infrastructure that improves reliability of the service and built in capacity to cope with peak demand to realise economic opportunity.

That said, this priority cannot however be made at the expense of other transport elements that convey people to and from the ferries or ports as this would be counterproductive. A holistic approach to transport planning therefore needs to be taken looking at all aspects of transport connectivity to ensure all public investment is complementary and also cost efficient in terms of its delivery and outcomes for all transport users.