

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE- MINUTES RELATING TO COWES FLOATING BRIDGE

9 JANUARY 2018

Review of Cowes Floating Bridge

The Leader outlined the background to the review and advised there were issues that, due to legal advice, could not be commented upon. Independent legal advice was being sought and there were further trials to be undertaken with the new vessel. This would help inform any further actions that were required. The review highlighted that there was a significant issue around project governance which needed to be addressed. It also covered certain deficiencies in staff training, engagement and communication and how these would be addressed.

Members indicated they would like more time to enable them to read through the 300 documents that had been taken into consideration during the review. In addition there were still a number of questions being raised by town and parish councils together with other interested parties which would require a response. The committee believed the report should be deferred and brought back to a special meeting.

RESOLVED :

- (a) THAT the report was deferred so to :
 - (i) obtain answers to all the questions raised by the Scrutiny Committee, local members, town and parish councils and stakeholders and wherever that was not possible the reasons/rationale why;
 - (ii) give committee members the ability to read all the documents forming part of the review;
 - (iii) discuss key issues at an informal meeting when members have had the opportunity of viewing the documents.
- (b) THAT a special meeting of the Committee be held once all the above steps had taken place.

13 FEBRUARY 2018

Cowes Floating Bridge

The Committee was informed that the confidential papers had been made available to them to be viewed on a laptop at County Hall. It was believed that it would take approximately 30 hours to view all the documents. Members asked if the documents could be made available via a secure link to enable them to read them at home.

The Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer advised that due to independent legal advice being sought the publication of some documents could prejudice any Council case or other parties involved.

The Leader provided an update on the progress of some of the issues at the floating bridge. Noise levels had been reduced, the prow chains had been replaced and was waiting for MCA sign off. The vessel had not yet been legally signed off by the Isle of

Wight Council and the warranty had been extended for another year. He indicated that he would be happy for any member to have the ability to view the relevant documents in accordance with any guidance provided by officers.

Questions were raised by both local members regarding the possible investment in the town due to the vessels history and how the confidence of local people would be in the service provided. It was understood that people would not use it. They were advised that by providing a reliable service would encourage people to use it.

The chairman outlined a way forward to enable the committee to make progress on this matter.

RESOLVED:

- (i) THAT in order to respond to questions raised in connection with the review the cabinet member should initiate a meeting between stakeholders, local councillors and key officers.
- (ii) THAT the cabinet member should give consideration to the formation of a stakeholders users group, comprising local councillors, local town and parish councils, business associations and Cowes Harbour Commission to work alongside the Council in monitoring service outcomes and provide a regular update to the committee.
- (iii) THAT the committee receive the results of the recent tests and mitigation to address the depth of chains in the water and the noise problems.
- (iv) THAT the restricted documents should be reviewed by officers to see if these could be made publicly available together with the options for enabling all members to view all the documents without the need to visit County Hall.
- (v) THAT an informal meeting of the committee be held the week commencing 20 February 2018 to review progress.

6 MARCH 2018

Cowes Floating Bridge

A list of restricted document titles had been circulated to all members of the Committee asking if they wanted to select which documents they may wish to read regarding the floating bridge.

The Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Transport gave an update on the issues. The floating bridge would be taken out of service for maintenance to fit new wheels in the coming days. Engineering issues regarding noise and the chain heights were still being investigated.

A question by the local member regarding privatisation was put to the leader who confirmed that at this point in time he was not aware of any privatisation of the floating bridge.

RESOLVED

THAT a special meeting of the Committee would be held by the end of March 2018 to consider the views of members who had looked at all the documentation relating to Cowes Floating Bridge 6, the results of latest trials and the original review report.

12 APRIL 2018

Cowes Floating Bridge 6

The Leader explained that a review of the Cowes Floating bridge had been undertaken and a report was published for a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee in January 2018. He advised that progress was being made to enable the floating bridge to operate effectively and recognised the importance of the vessel to the local communities.

The Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Transport advised the Committee that he had figures of the number of passengers that had used the floating bridge. A 10 minute adjournment was called to enable copies to be distributed to the Committee and allow time to read the information provided.

Floating Bridge 5 had undertaken 5/6 journeys an hour before the implementation of dividing the foot passengers from the vehicles. Once this had been introduced 4/5 journeys were carried out in an hour. Floating Bridge 6 was currently undertaking 4/5 journeys an hour. Noise issues had been addressed and the upgrades would be completed within the next few weeks.

The Cabinet Member advised that a user group would be beneficial for people who use the floating bridge. It was suggested that an officer of the council should chair the meeting.

Members clarified who had responsibility for the bridge and if it had been signed off and ownership transferred to the Isle of Wight Council. They were assured that the bridge had not been accepted by the Council and legal issues were still being resolved.

The committee were informed that the process for acceptance of the vessel was outlined in the contract. The decision to accept would be an officer one in consultation with the Cabinet Member.

Concern was raised regarding the cost of the improvements to date and if this would be made available to members at the end of the acceptance process..

The local member raised concerns that included within the conditions of the Solent Local Enterprise Partnership, who had provided funding to provide the vessel, it would be better than the one it replaced. It was understood that the vessel needed to operate more frequently to apply with the condition. With regard to an economic impact assessment the Leader indicated that this was wider topic than just the floating bridge and included Kingston, the Red Funnel improvements and other related regeneration within the whole area.

Traffic and pedestrian access on the East Cowes side was still an issue as foot passengers were restricted to exiting the vessel on the same side as the road which caused issues when crossing the road while vehicles exit the vessel.

The Committee discussed the arrangements for the user group and were concerned that the list provided by the Chairman had not included users. It was suggested that the representative from the stakeholders group be changed to representatives of users of the bridge.

Concerns were raised regarding the procurement process for the vessel, and if the procurement policy should be reviewed in the light of experience.

RESOLVED:

- I. That the recommendations contained in the Floating Bridge Review report by the Leader of the Council dated 9 January 2018 be supported.
- II. That the Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Transport be recommended to establish a User's Group for Cowes Floating Bridge within 6 weeks with the following purpose :-
 - (i) Feedback and share information to nominated interest groups and organisations.
 - (ii) To work in partnership with the Isle of Wight Council to raise confidence in the Cowes Floating Bridge and associated crossings.
 - (iii) Investigate in partnership opportunities for:
 - Sponsorship.
 - Timetabling.
 - Enhancing access and mobility across the Medina.
 - Promoting the bridges use and activities.

The Isle of Wight Council will provide regular quarterly updates on:

- Reliability of the Service.
- Frequency of the service.
- Functionality of the service.
- Traffic Access to and from the Cowes Floating Bridge.

And the membership should comprise the following :-

2 x Isle of Wight Councillors (1 from Cowes and 1 from East Cowes). (+ 1 deputy)

1 x Member from East Cowes Town Council (+ 1 deputy)

1 x Member from Cowes Town Council (+ 1 deputy)

1 x Representative from the East Cowes Business Community (+ deputy)

1 x Representative from Cowes Business Community (+ deputy)

2 x Representative from users (+ 1 deputy)

1 x Representative from Cowes Harbour Commissioners.

1 x Officer Representative from Isle of Wight Council. (+ deputy)

1 x Cabinet Representative from Isle of Wight Council. (+ deputy)

- a) The Cabinet Member for Procurement, Waste Management, Special Projects and Forward Planning should review the procurement policy in the light of experiences with the Cowes Floating Bridge.
- b) A report should be produced by the Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Transport at the end of the process of accepting Cowes Floating Bridge 6 on the costs of undertaking the necessary modifications.

8 SEPTEMBER 2020

Cowes Floating Bridge

The Committee considered the performance issues connected with the Floating Bridge and the associated financial implications.

Affected ward members Cllr Love (East Cowes) and Cllr Peacey-Wilcox (Cowes Medina) were invited to provide verbal accounts of their experiences. Alongside the local ward member for Newport Central, Cllr Jones-Evans, they had been approached by leading international procurement experts who were willing to assist in the development of solutions to the issues. The Leader was urged to attend a meeting with those experts. It was strongly recommended that discussions on future options for the service involve the affected ward members, Cllrs Love, Peacey-Wilcox and Jones-Evans, in conjunction with the Leader, Cabinet Member for Transport and Infrastructure, and the Chief Executive.

The Leader provided an update on the current position, including an overview of the historic issues which included the chain depth, noise, and electrical issues. The overall reliability of the Floating Bridge was highlighted, nevertheless it was confirmed that the legal process detailed in the contract was now being progressed. The Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Transport provided further information around the hydraulics and confirmed that officers were monitoring progress and briefing him on this twice weekly.

Discussion took place regarding a proposed task and finish group to look into the issues with the vessel. Members were advised that this may require officer capacity that was not available at this time and to the degree that would be needed in order to be effective. Members were reassured that significant officer commitment was in place to support the legal action.

Members requested a clear action plan, together with timeframes, at its next meeting detailing the actions being taken. It was agreed that a risk register document detailing the mitigating actions be circulated to all members of the Committee for information.

RESOLVED:

- i) THAT the Committee receive a report at its next meeting detailing the actions being taken to ensure that the vessel is operational, and to enable discussions to take place on future options for the service involving Cllrs Love, Peacey-Wilcox and Jones-Evans, the Leader, Cabinet Member for Transport and Infrastructure and the Chief Executive.
- ii) THAT the risk register documents be circulated to all members of the Committee for information.

6 OCTOBER 2020

Cowes Floating Bridge

Members noted that at the meeting on 8 September 2020, the Committee agreed to receive a report detailing the actions being taken to ensure that the vessel was

operational, and to enable discussions to take place on future options for the service involving Cllrs Love, Peacey-Wilcox and Jones-Evans, the Leader, Cabinet Member for Transport and Infrastructure and the Chief Executive. The Leader confirmed that discussions had taken place.

The Assistant Director of Neighbourhoods delivered a presentation (Appendix) which detailed the plan in place to resolve the immediate issues with the hydraulics system (identified after routine maintenance), and the significant operational issues experienced since the vessel commenced service in May 2017; including the insufficient clearance over the chains, deviation from the vessel's track across the river, noise issues, and the failures of the loading ramps' lifting systems.

Questions were raised regarding the installation of side thrusters and its impact on the marine life, the vessel design, and the nature of the legal proceedings. Members noted the planned return of the vessel to full service on 17 October 2020 and requested a position update at the meeting on 10 November 2020. Members suggested a confidential briefing to discuss the legal and financial issues and requested that the Leader provide a full detailed report when the legal and financial aspects have been resolved. It was requested that the report from Longitude regarding options for the fitment of side thrusters to the vessel be shared with interested parties when received at the end of October 2020.

RESOLVED:

- i) THAT the presentation be noted, and a position update be provided to the Committee at its meeting on 10 November 2020.
- ii) THAT the report regarding options for the fitment of side thrusters to the vessel be shared with interested parties when available.
- iii) THAT, when appropriate, a confidential briefing for the Committee be arranged to discuss the legal and financial issues related to Floating Bridge 6.
- iv) THAT when the legal and financial aspects have been resolved, the Leader be requested to provide a report to the Committee detailing all the issues related to Floating Bridge 6.

10 NOVEMBER 2020

Floating Bridge

The Leader provided a verbal update regarding the unforeseen issues with the hydraulics system which resulted in the current service suspension following the recommencement of service in October 2020. It was confirmed that legal discussions were ongoing between the council and the companies contracted to design and build the Floating Bridge with a view to recover the cost of the financial losses sustained and the cost of implementing any solutions.

Clarity was sought regarding the membership of the Cowes Floating Bridge Project Board, and concerns were raised regarding the hydraulics, breakwater, and fatigue crack. The Leader invited the committee to provide a list of questions which could be

included within any legal discussions being considered, including whether the tidal effects of the new breakwater had been considered, together with modelling as part of the design phase.

Members also requested details of the other Project Boards that have been established to oversee projects.

RESOLVED:

THAT the update regarding the Floating Bridge be noted.

12 JANUARY 2020

Floating Bridge

The Leader advised that the design, build, and performance of Floating Bridge 6 was subject to legal action through mediation. It was confirmed that the Council had submitted a substantial claim and details around this could not be discussed pending the conclusion of legal actions. The Leader anticipated that the matter would be resolved shortly, and a written report would be provided to the next meeting of the Committee in February 2021.

The local ward member for Cowes Medina raised questions around the recent repairs to the hydraulics and pressure gauges and requested an update on the proposed installation of side thrusters. The Leader confirmed that details around the pressure gauges, in addition to the minutes from previous meetings of the Floating Bridge Project Board, would be circulated to Committee and local ward members.

RESOLVED:

i) THAT the update be noted.

ii) THAT the Leader report to the Committee at its meeting in February 2021 on the outcome of the legal process and mediation, including an update on the proposed next steps regarding the future of the Floating Bridge.

9 FEBRUARY 2021

Leaders Update

The Leader advised the Committee that the legal action regarding the floating bridge had been deferred for up to three weeks due to health issues and a new date was expected to be set in February 2021.

RESOLVED:

i. The legal actions being taken in respect of Cowes Floating Bridge had been delayed but a full report would be presented to the Committee on 9 March 2021. The Leader indicated that he would include in his report any questions submitted to him in advance by members of the Committee.