



# Committee report

Committee **CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
 Date **8 SEPTEMBER 2020**  
 Title **COWES FLOATING BRIDGE UPDATE**  
 Report of **DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOODS  
 CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report outlines how the floating bridge has performed in the current year, the current issues and an update on the legal action being taken.

## BACKGROUND

### **Performance**

2. The tables below show the key performance data for the periods January to July 2019 and 2020: -

	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Total
Foot passengers	23,814	23,554	26,737	33,295	44,356	40,163	47,332	239,251
Vehicle numbers	15,172	15,183	16,992	19,340	18,142	19,200	18,241	122,270
Hours operated	595	534	562	579	553	548	527	3,898
Hours operated as a % of scheduled hours	99.75	98.89	94.13	100.00	92.40	94.30	88.00	95.35

	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Total
Foot passengers	25,292	28,772	20,597	5,298	9,271	15,420	25,769	130,419
Vehicle numbers	18,667	18,348	15,031	2,188	5,126	9,437	6,434	75,231
Hours operated	279	554	590	579	597	579	251	3,428
Hours operated as a % of scheduled hours	96.90	99.10	98.80	100.00	100.00	100.00	41.80	90.94

3. It is clear from the table that the reliability of the vessel between January and June 2020 represented a considerable improvement on that in the same period in 2019.
4. It is also apparent that January and February 2020 saw increases in the number of foot passengers and vehicles using the service with foot passengers increasing from 47,368 to 54,064 (14.13%) and vehicles increasing from 30,355 to 37,015 (21.94%). However, this increase has been curtailed as a direct result of the Coronavirus lockdown and subsequent mitigations that have been implemented.

## Operational Issues

5. The Floating Bridge was taken out of service in July for scheduled maintenance, which had been delayed in order to provide an essential link to mainland ferry services and to cover reductions in other forms of public transport during the height of the COVID Pandemic This work was scheduled to take place between 14 and 24 July and included the planned replacement of the segments on the two drive wheels segments and the chain wheels as well as the introduction of measures to mitigate noise emanating from the chains. A media statement was issued prior to the commencement of the work to advise users of the suspension of the service and the alternative arrangements in place.
6. These works were successfully completed within the advertised timescale. However, whilst undergoing tests prior to returning the vessel to service, a major fault with the hydraulic system was identified. The shipbuilders and their approved contractors investigated this and advised the council that the vessel should not return to service as originally planned as this risked further damage. A further media statement was issued once it was known that the vessel would not be returning to service as scheduled after the planned works.
7. A programme was developed by the shipbuilders to carry out the investigation and remedial works required to enable the vessel to return to service. It is planned that by the end of August the cause of the issue will have been fully established, together with the extent of the issue known and a date for completion of the works and return to service. This information was proactively relayed to users in an updated media statement and, in response to feedback received, signage relating to the provision and location of the replacement foot passenger launch was provided on site.
8. In accordance with the agreed programme arrangements were made with the shipbuilders and their specialist contractor to remove some of the main components of the hydraulic system including the main drive and auxiliary pumps and motors, so they can be fully examined and inspected, cleaned and repaired in the pump manufacturers workshops. This work commenced on Monday 10 August.
9. Progress on the repairs, and the expected return to service is being closely monitored with the shipbuilder providing regular detailed updates. As soon as a definitive date is known for returning to service this will be communicated to the media and key stakeholders and posted on social media.
10. As with all occasions when it is necessary to suspend the service the replacement launch service for foot passengers is operating from 0500 - 2300hrs (0630-2300hrs Sundays).

## LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

11. The council, having received legal advice, consider that a number of the performance issues that the FB has suffered are as a result of the failure of the two companies contracted to design and build the floating bridge to comply with the council's requirements as set out in its contracts with the companies.
12. The council must now follow the prescribed pre action procedures set out in the contracts and by the courts in order to seek to appropriate redress in respect of the that arise as result of contractual failings. Therefore, the council have engaged with

the builder and designer of the floating bridge as is required by the pre action protocol that governs how parties should approach potential litigation.

13. If the required pre action discussions do not conclude with a satisfactory remedy for the losses suffered by the council, then it will be open to the council to issue court proceedings to seek remedy including financial loss. It would be inappropriate to comment further at this stage whilst we seek to find a resolution.
14. The advice was provided by Justin Thorne, Strategic Manager - Legal Services.

#### RECOMMENDATION

15. The committee is invited to note the report and receive updates on progress with the current hydraulic issue and performance statistics.

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