

Bristol City Council
Minutes of the Harbour Committee

26 November 2024 at 3.30 pm



Members Present:-

Councillors: Andrew Brown (Chair), Patrick McAllister (Vice-Chair), Al-Maghrabi, Ani Stafford-Townsend, Kye Dudd

Co-optees: Andy Brigden and Will Stanley

Officers in Attendance:-

Patsy Mellor, Eric Dougall, Tony Nichols, Tony Moore, Pete Seed and Jeremy Livitt

28 Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Chair welcomed all parties to the meeting and explained the emergency evacuation procedure.

29 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Kathryn Davis and Kevin Mowatt.

The Committee also noted that Councillor Al Al-Maghrabi had replaced Councillor Ellie King on the Committee.

Declarations of Interest

30

Councillor Patrick McAllister declared an interest following a recent trustee appointment in “We the Curious” (a science centre and educational charity on Bristol’s Harbourside).

31 Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 3rd September 2024

RESOLVED – that the minutes be approved as a correct record with the following amendment: the words “endeavour to preserve” to replace the reference to “would need to be maintained” in the third bullet point relating to Councillors’ questions for Minute Number 24.”

ACTION: Jeremy Livitt to add to the signed minutes – **ACTION TAKEN**



The Committee noted the request from John Sharman for some changes to the wording of the minute for PQ36 which he had referred to in his late statement (accepted by the Chair). It was noted that this statement would be included retrospectively and republished with the agenda papers – **ACTION TAKEN**

32 Public Forum

The Chair indicated that he had accepted a late statement from John Sharman which would be included in the Public Forum paperwork and published on the website (also referred to in the Agenda Item relating to the minutes).

The Committee noted the published answers to the written questions and also noted the statements received (all published on the website).

The Committee then received the following supplementary questions and answers were provided as follows:

David Redgewell – Supplementary Questions for Questions 4, 5 and 6

Supplementary Question 1: Since there is a duty under the Equalities Act 2010 to ensure protection for people with disability and protected characteristics, how will Bristol City Council ensure it takes its responsibility seriously and provide access in all these situations?

A: Patsy Mellor (Director Management of Place) stated that she had raised this issue with Adam Crowther (Strategic Transport).

Supplementary Question 2: Long Term Ticketing – how can this be arranged so that rail and ferry services are interlinked?

A: The equalities act would be adhered to as required. The provision of strategic transport is a long-term aspiration. It was noted that the service would be shaped as needed to make it more effective in addressing these changes.

The Committee noted that this was a long-term aim of Strategic Transport to achieve.

Jake Beaton – Supplementary Questions for Question 7

Supplementary Question 1: Since last meeting, there had been at least two major incidents which were not included within the accident report. Why were these not included in the latest accident statistics?

Note: The incidents in question were not recorded as major incidents – one was categorised as a near miss

A: All such incidents are fully investigated. The report had been produced and published before the statistics for these incidents had been received.



Supplementary Question 2: When a member of the public phones the Harbour Master Office, they get an answerphone message and this was not operational during emergency hours. Please can this be addressed.

A: Officers noted the concerns raised about this service.

John Sharman – Questions 11, 12 and 13

Q: Supplementary Question 1 (for Answer to Question 11): There is no breakdown Q: provided of the costs for harbour fees. What services do these relate to – for example, leisure mooring, pontoon or liveaboard?

A: The fees were split into relevant sections – the licence was for mooring rights. It was acknowledged that the differences between the different services needed to be more clearly identified. Discussions would be taking place with various representatives to clarify this in future.

Q: Supplementary Question 2: Please can the cabinet decision upon which the benchmarking information was made be released in view of the large increase in fees?

A: There was no objection to this information being released. However, it should be noted that benchmarking is only one element upon which the decision on fees and charges were made.

Trevor Gray – Questions 15,16 and 17

Supplementary Question 1: Why can the draft of the mooring policy not be made available now?

A: The initial engagement with the stakeholder groups would commence at the meeting with them on 8th January 2025. The complete document would be provided to them and there would be many opportunities to work with them and obtain their feedback on this.

Supplementary Question 2 for Question 16: The following written answer (below) does not fully answer the question – please confirm whether the houseboat Ferro is permanent:

Written Answer: Planning Legislation does not override Primary Statutory Legislation for a Statutory Harbour. Therefore, although planning permission may have been granted, this does not dictate that any vessel is a permanent feature. The licence given to Ferro is the same as any other new and current live aboard, and this was pointed out initially when an application for a residential mooring was made that if any new live aboard moorings were to be offered in the future, they may not be agreeable to the owner at the time of being offered.

A: Patsy Mellor indicated that she would provide the legal advice requested at the time

ACTION: Tony Nichols to clarify if it is legally privileged and send to Patsy Mellor for review)



Linda Thomas – Qs 18, 19 and 20

Supplementary Question 1: A lot of the questions had not been answered – they had merely stated existing policy. It feels very difficult and confrontational to deal with the Harbour Office. Why are you treating us as if we have done something wrong?

A: There had been a change of governance with Bristol City Council in the harbour and new arrangements put in place to deal with this ie the Stakeholder Group. Difficult decisions were required. However, meetings were regularly taking place with various parties including boat owners and stakeholders and there was no intention to ever be confrontational in dealing with these issues. It was hoped that the future relationship would be much more harmonious notwithstanding the difficult relationships that were required.

Supplementary Question 2: In view of the feedback that you have received, please can you ensure that there is full consultation with Stakeholder Groups before any changes are made to existing mooring licences.

A: A full engagement process would be carried out.

Ben Ewing – Questions 21, 22 and 23 (on behalf of Phoebe Arrowsmith-Ewing) and Questions 24, 25 and 26

Supplementary Question 1: Since the full moorings income appears to only be approximately £325,000, where does the remaining amount come from?

A: There would not be a full sign off of the relevant document until March 2025 Harbour Committee- this information would be submitted to the Stakeholders Group in advance of this in January 2025 and would confirm what income would be received and how this would be spent on port facilities. This would also include details of the plan for improvements in the harbour and how this related to the Business Plan.

Supplementary Question 2(Q24) : Why won't Bristol City Council uphold the signed agreement requiring a 10% discount for clubs?

A: Patsy Mellor advised that the Ben Arrowsmith-Ewing should provide any documentation on this issue since the Bristol Harbour Master had indicated that the agreement had lapsed since 2022 **ACTION: Ben Ewing to provide proof of the ongoing arrangement - Patsy Mellor to take any action as required following this**

The Chair noted that 30 minutes had now occurred since the start of the Public Forum time period and that therefore it was now concluded.



33 Work Programme 2024/25

The Committee noted the Work Programme for the next meeting in March 2025 as follows:

“Mooring Policy

Feedback on Stakeholder Groups

Water Quality Update

New Cuts Works/Walls Update – Shaun Taylor/Chris Dooley to be invited to March 2025 Committee

Business Plan 2025/26”

ACTION: Patsy Mellor/Jonathan James/Eric Dougall/Tony Nichols – to amend Work Programme accordingly

34 Action Update Report

Patsy Mellor introduced this report and confirmed that most actions had been completed with significant work required in particular areas such as the New Harbour Revision Order and the Harbour Business Plan.

35 Harbour Business Plan

The Committee noted the Harbour Business Plan which would be made more robust for the January 2025 meeting with Stakeholders.

Committee members made the following comments and officers responded as required:

- This was a good Business Plan and should be supported
- Officers needed to identify the financial trade off with commercial concessions and ensure this worked. It was noted that there would always be a mix of leases and concessions in the harbour with a prospectus of opportunities to be considered by the committee for 2025/26
- There was a need to improve the level of vacant premises by repairing and investing as appropriate. A full options appraisal was needed to substantially improve income and ensure a better return was achieved
- The final document would be signed off in March 2025 and would then be approved by Economy and Skills Policy Committee and would include those planned improvements to be delivered
- This was a much more transparent process and would enable the plan to be measured against delivery
- Officers would assess whether information on events could be brought forward in view of the potentially commercially sensitive nature of some of them
- There were millions of pounds being spent on infrastructure costs – details of how this was being spent and what could be afforded was important
- It was important to note the tradeoffs in KPI indicators between financial income and other issues like mooring occupancy and commercial premises as part of the KPI indicators



- Health and Safety would be a priority – electrical upgrades were planned for these
- A detailed list of works could be listed and to ensure where these were updated to provide expectation management and transparency
- An adequate maintenance budget was required which had not been provided in the past
- There was a need to encourage the full reporting of all accidents
- The Harbour Master report would be kept as up to date as possible

ACTION: The comments to be noted and the item referred to the Stakeholder Group prior to resubmission at 30th March 2025 Harbour Committee with a final decision scheduled to be made at the Economy and Skills Policy Committee on 31st March 2025 – Patsy Mellor/Jonathan James

36 Harbour Revenue Budget

In response to Committee Members' questions, officers confirmed:

- that the repairs and maintenance budget was earmarked for this area of work
- the need to meet recruitment challenges including by measures such as apprenticeships – for example the vacant electrical engineer post and mechanical engineer post

The committee noted that there was a significant increase in expenditure for marine support services and requested further information. Eric Dougall provided this information to the Committee.

37 Fees and Charges 2025/26

Patsy Mellor (Director – Management of Place) introduced this report and explained that these had been produced following an engagement process including stakeholders.

The Chair noted that this item had provoked a large response including the Bristol Boaters Community Association. He emphasised the need for this process to ensure that Bristol City Council had a clear policy which reflected the facilities that can be provided and the different areas involved in a more stable and predictable way - including consideration of other options such as premium areas. He highlighted the need to restructure the service and ensure a move away from General Fund subsidy for it.

Committee members made the following comments:

- It was good to see that the process was becoming more published and transparent. However, the costs involved were high and could cause hardships which could lead to boat spaces becoming emptier as they become less attractive. This could cause long-term damage to the harbour and needed to be considered.
- The decision to add 5% to on top of the CPI was discussed. Since the harbour was revenue neutral and was ring-fenced,



- Members were fully aware of the very difficult financial situation with which Bristol City Council was faced and that extensive conversations had taken place outside the committee with key user groups to re-build trust and ensure that communication remained non-confrontational. However, all areas needed to be explored to ensure the situation was made easier, including the legal wording used in licences.
- Leasing of moorings for and long-term residential licences could help provide cheaper options than renting – one member raised this acknowledging best practice advice was annual licences.

The Committee thanked officers for the work that was being done and stressed the importance of rebuilding trust which had been eroded in the past following previous large increases in fees and charges.

Patsy Mellor made the following points in response:

- The harbour had to be sustainable including key aspects such as moorings which, if leased rather than maintained as annual licences, held the value of the price of a house. The cost accommodating boats in the harbour was not yet met by income of mooring fees.
- The Harbour is not yet revenue neutral and is heavily subsidized by the general fund.
- The Harbour Committee had received expert professional advice from co-opted members that annual licences were the best practice option.
- The Harbour is currently heavily subsidised by the general fund and the Harbour is required to work towards this ending.
- Harbour income, from all areas was being addressed from Events, Leases, Commercial opportunities.
- The Harbour Committee and officer had met and held a workshop where officers demonstrated all income raising efforts and business plan development. The Harbour Committee thanked the officers for all the work underway.
- A Business Plan was being produced to ensure that the financial situation was dealt with but that does mean managing the Harbour on a commercial footing. This is a requirement of the DFT that the Harbour has a balanced budget.
- There had been massive improvements over the last two years and extensive discussions with stakeholders to address their concerns.
- Stakeholders were urged to address individual concerns for their personal situation directly with the Harbour Office
- If moorings were leased this would enable boat holders with low value boats to sell the rights to the moorings for hundreds of thousands of pounds and would severely limit who could afford to use them.
- In the past, people were not officially allowed to live in the harbour but this had now been permitted and is regularised long term residential living in the harbour is now possible.
- Significant amounts of money are being invested in Harbour Infrastructure and harbour improvements.

RESOLVED – that the comments are noted and the item referred to the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee



ACTION:

Patsy Mellor/Tony Nichols – comments to be noted

Jeremy Livitt – Draft Minute Referred to Policy Committee Team for Reference to Strategy and Resources Policy Committee

38 Harbour Operational and Mooring Facilities Policy

Tony Nichols (Harbour Master) introduced this report and noted the comments and questions that had been received as part of the Public Forum. The Committee noted that this was the first draft of the document which would be discussed for engagement purposes with the Stakeholder Group.

It was noted that Council Tax would not impact on the harbour and so did not affect this.

Andy Brigden commented that the specification for Swing Moorings in Paragraph 31 of Appendix A was not required as this was a standard policy. The Committee noted that the Harbour Master had clarified that Portishead does have swing mooring. They also noted that legal advice had already been provided on this issue.

ACTION:

(1) Andy Brigden to provide detailed feedback on the mooring policy

(2) the comments to be noted and the item referred to the Stakeholder Group prior to resubmission at 30th March 2025 Harbour Committee meeting with a final decision scheduled to be made at the Economy and Skills Policy Committee on 31st March 2025 – Patsy Mellor/Tony Nichols

39 Harbour Key Performance Indicators

Eric Dougall (Harbour Estates Manager) introduced this report and explained that it provided a review of what had been decided at the last meeting concerning financial targets, accommodating events at the harbour, providing an acknowledgement around mooring occupancy and water quality policy.

In response to Councillor's questions, officers confirmed that an ecological officer was assessing water quality. It was noted that Bristol City Council had a small role to play, whilst Wessex water was the principal organisation who could improve this. In addition, work was being carried out to look at measures to reduce plastic in conjunction with the combined authority.

Councillor Andrew Brown moved, seconded by Councillor Patrick McAllister and upon being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED (unanimously) – that the metrics set out in the report be approved. ACTION: Jonathan James/Eric Dougall



40 Harbour Master Quarterly Report

Tony Nichols (Harbour Master) introduced this report and commented that:

- pontoons were being constructed in Ireland to be shipped over for the works at the Capricorn Quay
- Trevor Alder (Bristol City Council's Designated Person for the Harbour) had carried out two audits which would be signed off by the Chair, Councillor Andrew Brown
- Stakeholder Minutes for the meeting on 17th September 2024 were included – the Terms of Reference had been updated. The Chair of the Group was Tim Trew and the Vice-Chair was Ian Wilkinson

The Committee noted the work that had been carried out by Tony Nichols on safety, KPIS, the development of new policies (including mooring) and water safety which fit together.

Patsy Mellor referred to the importance of stakeholder meetings in developing key relationships and building trust between parties.

Committee Members thanked all those involved in the production of the audit and for the clean bill of health received.

The Committee also thanked Tony Nichols for his service as Harbour Master – the Chair thanked him for providing regular monthly catch ups to him.

ACTION: Patsy Mellor/Tony Nichols to discuss with Tim Trew (Chair of Stakeholder Group) the Stakeholder Group Terms of Reference – Patsy Mellor and Tim Trew to discuss – now agreed for 8th January 2025

41 Bristol Water Safety Partnership

Eric Dougall (Harbour Estates Manager) introduced this report and pointed out that this partnership had been put in place since 2018 following an increased number of fatalities during the winter of 2018.

The Committee noted that this was a multi-agency body with groups such as the Fire Service and Avon and Somerset Police which met three times a year to ensure a constant focus was maintained on the issues required to ensure safety.

Members noted the ongoing concern about the recent situation involving a man who had gone missing in the harbour.

The Chair welcomed the work that had been done on producing this policy.



It was noted that an item on water quality would be discussed again at the next Harbour Committee meeting.

ACTION: Eric Dougall/Patsy Mellor to add to the Work Programme

42 Date of Next Meeting

The Committee noted that the next meeting was scheduled for 3.30pm on Tuesday 30th March 2025 in the Council Chamber, City Hall, College Green, Bristol.

The meeting ended at 5.30 pm

CHAIR _____

