

Statement: CS21.01

Cabinet – 24th January 2023

Re: Agenda item 21 - : Budget report & Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24

Statement submitted by: Councillor Christine Townsend

A paper came to Cabinet on September 3rd 2019 which said:

“Bristol Harbour’s physical infrastructure is declining: what should be a premium commercial asset is currently operating at a loss. Significant improvement to this asset is now required, not only to bring it in line with the sort of facilities that boaters can readily find in other locations, but also to create sustainable income growth.”

There is a clear understanding that fees for the Harbour cannot be increased in line with that of similar Harbours when the facilities do not also match. Funding was allocated in the 2019 paper to address this. However there has been no significant increase in the quality or quantity of Bristol’s Harbour offering, in fact many users feel there has been a decrease in facilities.

The 2019 paper also clearly commits to a review that includes consultation with all stakeholders and interested parties:

“Finally, a full and comprehensive Harbour Estate Review will be conducted, starting with a dedicated event for elected members on 7 August 2019. This Review will involve internal and external stakeholders, including residents, boat owners, and commercial businesses, both on and off the water. The Terms of Reference for the Harbour Review will be developed to include implementing comparable market rate fees and charges, once the planned provision of high quality facilities has been put in place.”

There is no evidence that a full meaningful consultation has taken place with those whose lives depend on the harbour, despite many requests by the community and ward councillor to be included in the consultation. The extremely steep and sudden rises to fees within the Harbour have come as a shock to the community, who had received no engagement on the matter nor notification of the potentially imminent rises to their costs.

Since the late publishing of these documents, I have spoken to hundreds and hundreds of concerned residents and businesses. I know that Cabinet will have received significant contact and statements from concerned residents of Bristol and surrounding areas. This is in the less than 7 days since the documents were published. Many others will not have found out in time to make their own representations. The data and review upon which these changes are based have not been published.

The ferries are an important element of our transport infrastructure as a Harbour City, but like much of our infrastructure they are under pressure. These changes will very likely make our vital ferries unviable.

Bristol City Council has failed to carry out an Equalities Impact Assessment, the published report skips from step 1 to step 5, inferring that this report has no equalities impact and any equalities impact that might exist can be addressed later. The Harbour is home to some of the city’s most vulnerable people. There are many people who live on boats, who have no other options. It would be unacceptable for a landlord to raise the rents of their tenants in such a steep and sudden manner. BCC would not raise the rents for our housing tenants in this way, and BCC is landlord to those who

dwelling on boats with the same responsibilities and duty of care. These rises create a real risk of homelessness for those unable to pay the increase, especially during our current cost of living crisis.

I call on the Mayor and Cabinet to:

- Publish the Harbour Review and Fisher Report
- Engage with the community in a meaningful and real consultation process
- Carry out a full Equalities Impact Assessment