

BRIEFING REPORT

ISLE OF WIGHT COUNCIL PROPOSED BUDGET SAVINGS: COWES FLOATING BRIDGE

Meeting: Extraordinary Meeting, Monday 5 October 2026 at 6.00pm

Purpose: To provide councillors with the information currently available regarding proposed budget savings affecting the Cowes Floating Bridge ahead of the Economy, Regeneration, Transport and Infrastructure Committee meeting on 6 October 2026.

1. Background

The Isle of Wight Council's Economy, Regeneration, Transport and Infrastructure Committee is scheduled to meet at 5.00pm on Tuesday 6 October 2026.

Agenda Item 6(b), Early Budget Savings Proposals, sets out potential savings and income-generation measures relating to the Committee's service areas as part of preparations for the Council's 2027/28 budget.

The recommendation before the Committee is to agree the savings proposals for recommendation to the Policy, Finance and Resources Committee for consideration within the Council's budget-setting process.

The report makes clear that the proposals do not currently represent agreed Isle of Wight Council policy. Where proposals are taken forward, further detailed analysis, consultation where appropriate, Equality Impact Assessments and formal decision-making processes may be required. The financial figures contained within the report are also described as indicative at this stage.

2. Proposed Increase to Floating Bridge Fares

Appendix 1 identifies a proposal to:

Increase Floating Bridge passenger and vehicle fares to align with Dartmouth Lower Ferry.

This is identified as an income-generation proposal.

The estimated additional income is:

2027/28: £820,584

2028/29 and ongoing: £820,584

The report identifies potential risks associated with the proposal, including:

potential reputational damage;

the possibility that public perception of the Floating Bridge could be affected by a significant price increase; and

the possibility that price resistance may deter motorists from using the crossing, potentially increasing congestion on the Cowes/Newport/East Cowes routes.

3. Proposed Charge for Under-19s

A separate proposal is to:

Introduce a flat rate of £1 per crossing for under-19s between 7.00pm and 7.00am on the Floating Bridge.

The estimated additional income from this proposal is:

2027/28: £6,400

2028/29 and ongoing: £6,400

The report identifies reputational damage as a potential risk and acknowledges that concerns may be raised regarding the effect of the proposal upon children and youth activities.

Taken together, the two Floating Bridge proposals indicate potential additional income of approximately £826,984 per year.

4. Other Relevant Proposals

The same schedule contains a number of other savings and income-generation proposals.

One proposal is to increase parking tariffs for both on-street and off-street parking by 25p per hour.

The estimated additional income associated with this proposal is:

2027/28: £315,786

2028/29 and ongoing: £451,123

A separate proposal would remove free parking for electric vehicles in off-street car parks, generating an estimated £91,014 per year, based upon the assumption that the proposed 25p parking increase is approved.

These are separate proposals from those relating to the Floating Bridge but are included within the same schedule of potential budget measures.

5. Reason for the Extraordinary Meeting

An Extraordinary Meeting has been called for Monday 5 October 2026, prior to the Economy, Regeneration, Transport and Infrastructure Committee meeting on Tuesday 6 October 2026.

The purpose of the meeting is to enable councillors to consider the information contained within the published report concerning the proposed changes to Floating Bridge charges and their potential implications for the communities of East Cowes and Cowes.

The meeting will provide an opportunity to:

review the information currently available;

consider the proposed changes to passenger and vehicle fares;

consider the proposed £1 charge for under-19s between 7.00pm and 7.00am;

consider the potential implications identified within the Isle of Wight Council's own report;

identify any further information or clarification required from the Isle of Wight Council; and

determine what representations, if any, each Town Council wishes to make in relation to the proposals.

6. Status of the Proposals

It is important to note that the proposals have not yet been adopted as Isle of Wight Council policy.

They form part of the early budget savings process for 2027/28.

The recommendation being considered by the Economy, Regeneration, Transport and Infrastructure Committee on 6 October is for the savings proposals to be recommended to the Policy, Finance and Resources Committee for consideration as part of the wider budget-setting process.

The report indicates that proposals progressed towards implementation may require further work, including detailed analysis, consultation where appropriate and Equality Impact Assessments.

7. Information Which May Require Further Clarification

Based upon the information currently available, councillors may wish to seek further clarification from the Isle of Wight Council regarding:

- The proposed fare structure, including the actual passenger and vehicle fares being considered.
- The basis for using the Dartmouth Lower Ferry as the comparator.
- How the projected £820,584 additional annual income has been calculated.
- Whether the financial modelling takes account of any potential reduction in Floating Bridge usage following a fare increase.
- Any modelling undertaken regarding potential displacement of vehicle journeys onto the Cowes/Newport/East Cowes road network.
- Whether an economic impact assessment has been, or will be, undertaken specifically in relation to East Cowes and Cowes.
- What consultation will take place with residents, businesses and the Town Councils before any revised fare structure is implemented.
- What Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken in relation to the proposed charge for under-19s.
- How the budget proposal relates to the wider work currently taking place regarding the future operation of the Floating Bridge.

8. Purpose of Discussion

The Extraordinary Meeting provides an opportunity for both Town Councils to consider the published information and determine their respective positions.

Any formal resolution or representation would be a matter for each Town Council to determine independently through its own properly convened meeting.

The purpose of this briefing is therefore to provide factual information to councillors and not to recommend a particular position on the proposals.