

BACKGROUND

In September members of the Brexit, Infrastructure and Legislation Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a full report on Port Health Impacts in the event of a no deal Brexit on 31st October 2019. This report provides an update on the issues it identified and the progress we have made in tackling these and other related issues.

MITIGATING ACTIONS IN PLACE

- We have identified a suitable location and resources to establish a Port Office at the Millbay Ferry Terminal. This will ensure that we are able to issue Export Health and Catch certificates.
- We have identified a suitable site for a heavy goods waiting area, the Old Parade Ground at the Seaton Barracks Site. The site has more than adequate capacity to hold the full ferry load of HGVs recommended by our Ports group.
- There is sufficient additional capacity that we are unlikely to need any additional provision for lorries diverting from other channel ports in the hope of crossing to Roscoff. The decision not to use Plymouth as part of the additional freight capacity contract announced last week considerably reduces the risk of overflow as there will be a longer gap between sailings.
- To reduce the risk even further we are doing everything we can to ensure hauliers are aware of the need for appropriate documentation. This has included overhead digital signage on the major route into the city, pop up advice in the port and a video to be played on ferry crossings.
- We continue to negotiate with ABP ports about the future provision of a Border Inspection Post (BIP) without which the port will be unable to handle animal products and high risk foods. Drawings for the new shed for Border Inspection Staff include provision of space for a BIP.

AREAS OF CONCERN

Since our bid to the Food Standards Agency (FSA) was cut down from £150k to £25k we have not been able to recruit additional staff for the Port Office. Instead we have diverted staff from other responsibilities such as statutory food safety inspections. Whilst this is unsustainable in the medium to long term we would not be able to recruit qualified staff before 1st November now even if we were appropriately resourced. We estimate that staffing the office creates a revenue pressure of £125k pa and we will resubmit our case when bidding reopens in November. In the meantime we have delayed a request from the FSA to carry out an audit of our food safety arrangements in October. We nevertheless anticipate we will receive a critical report in due course.

The government have for some time been buying up freight capacity on roll on roll off ferries for strategic goods, including medicines, under an arrangement known as the freight capacity framework. In September the Government announced that Brittany Ferries have been confirmed as participants in the Government's additional freight capacity framework. Our working assumption has been that Plymouth would therefore see additional sailings as we did in March 2019. Last week it was announced additional Brittany Ferries sailings will be scheduled from its terminals at Poole and Portsmouth only. We have since confirmed with Brittany Ferries strategic goods and medicines will not be coming through Plymouth.

A BIP will cost potentially upward of £1m however this would in principle come from the port operator. We aim to assist to access grant funding by writing a business case and to support this we are hoping to establish a fisheries export hub at Millbay. This follows a model that has been established around the main Scottish Ports. Given the importance of the three main South West peninsula fisheries to the English catch we hope that this will ensure the future commercial viability of a BIP. Our aim remains to have world class facilities at the port.