

## Ferry Troubles

I'm utterly disappointed with the announcement that yet again the Wightcat services to the Island are suspended. These are critical transport links that allow people and materials to flow across the Solent and it is a real failure of Westminster that they simply don't care enough. Local Government does not currently have the money or powers to save this Island connection and I would dearly like the Conservative Council to persuade their party colleagues in Government how vital these links are.

The main reasons for this continuing problem are the lack of regulation of services and no control over the financial structures of the company. Which means the ferry companies have been repeatedly bought by organisations seeing them as a low risk high reward way of making money. The result is that Red Funnel and Wightlink have repeatedly been sold on with previous owners walking away with windfall profits. All while using Islanders and visitors as hostages forced to pay higher fares to cover the money used to buy the ferry companies.

Its about time that the Government actually took some notice of the fact that the ferries are a critical infrastructure link for the people and economy of the Isle of Wight. We see for example the NHS downgrading our Hospital to supposedly provide better services for Islanders on the mainland but failing partly due to the unregulated cost and services provided by ferry companies.

The Government must look to provide monetary support for cross Solent travel. Alongside a long overdue focus on cost and service regulation and continuing support similar to the approach of the Scottish Government and other Countries.

I recognise that all three of the cross solent companies have made extensive efforts to maintain their services in the face of the Covid crisis, which is not going away soon. They certainly have had their issues but in the main they area reasonably run and try hard to support the Island and its businesses, but their focus will always be on their investors.

The isolation and neglect of the Island has to stop. We need Government to stop patting us on the head as a pretty little Island to visit and support the Isle of Wight as part of the United Kingdom. We aren't just a source of graduates and garlic!