

Peer Challenge

Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee

4-6 December 2018

Feedback Report

1. Executive Summary

There is a clear recognition of the significance of the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry to the communities of both Cornwall and Plymouth. The stated mission for Tamar Crossings is that the need for safe, reliable and cost-effective crossing of the Tamar is met. It is clearly understood by all with whom the peer team met.

Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee (TBTF) has two of the most iconic physical and strategic assets in the region and has the benefit of its engaged and committed staff across the organisation as well as strongly engaged sub-contractors.

There is great confidence in the operational stewardship of the bridge and how the bridge is operated in achieving the Joint Committee's mission to provide safe, reliable and efficient crossings. Going forward there is a need for the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Joint Committee to be reviewed and the full flexibilities derived from the Act embraced.

There appears to be some divergence of view in the role of the Joint Committee amongst some stakeholders. Some of those the Review team met believe it has a scrutiny function to the activities of TBTF. It was also not fully clear as to how the responsibilities of the Joint Committee are scrutinised within its parent Authorities. There could be greater clarity about the strategic importance of the bridge and ferry crossings in contributing to strategic transport and economic growth agendas of the councils. Overall, it appears as if the Joint Committee is punching below its weight in strategic discussion and development of the transport, economic and social well-being infrastructure of Cornwall and Plymouth.

The time is right for Tamar Crossings to have a more strategic voice and take its place more fully in the development of the economic growth agenda of both Cornwall and Plymouth. With the growth agendas of both Authorities, the £100m bid to Cities for the Future and a Sub-Regional Transport Board becoming stronger, now is the time for Tamar Crossings to take its place in these strategic developments at both an officer and political level. In a wider sense, the profile of Tamar Crossings within TBTF's parent Authorities needs to be raised.

The team was unable to see a clear picture in terms of internal and external engagement which indicates the need to consider the development of a structured internal and external communications strategy with plans as to how this will be delivered.

The standard, clarity and presentation of TBTF financial information and reporting is high. Going forward, longer-term capital financial planning is needed to inform future toll revisions and financial planning. The facility to increase tolls with an inflation index would simplify and support this approach. The financial reporting is very thorough and the forecasting and accounting up to the standards expected in a local public body. However, given the nature of the undertaking, it is likely that TBTF would find a long-term financial planning period beneficial and perhaps a forecasting period of 25-30 years would be worth consideration by the Joint Committee.

There may be a risk to the Councils in the employment status of the employees of Tamar Crossings which the Review Team would encourage TBTF to review. The Peer Review team are aware that Counsel's opinion has been obtained on behalf of Tamar Crossings in relation to the joint employment situation of staff as being employed by both Cornwall and Plymouth Councils. However, this still seems to be a risk that could be more clearly articulated to, and fully understood by, the parent Councils, with whom any risk ultimately sits and there is a need to consider addressing this.

At both the bridge and the ferry, the operational teams feel very much a 'family' with strong support to one another and, in the case of the bridge, strong support of senior management. At the ferry, however, the 'family', whilst strong in their support of one another, felt less supported by senior managers. Whilst front-line operatives' commitment and pride is evident in the ferry operations, there are personnel matters that need to be addressed as is evidenced in the increasing levels of sickness and poor morale.

2. Key recommendations

There are a range of suggestions and observations within the main section of the report that will inform some 'quick wins' and practical actions, in addition to the conversations onsite, many of which provided ideas and examples of practice from other organisations.

The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the Councils:

- 1) Focus on both the strategic role of and opportunities for Tamar Crossings at senior officer and at Joint Committee level in its significance to the regional economic and social infrastructure;
- 2) Bring the ferry and bridge operations into a feeling of being one team - develop the management cadre at the ferry alongside restorative practice/team development across the whole team and include bridge personnel with external facilitation;
- 3) Develop a structured internal and external communications strategy;
- 4) Review the Terms of Reference of the Joint Committee to provide as much flexibility within the Act as possible giving consideration to some fundamental issues arising from the Act itself; and
- 5) The Councils and TBTF jointly instruct specialist employment Counsel to clarify the employment position of Tamar Crossings staff and determine any associated risks for the three organisations.

3. Summary of the Peer Challenge approach

3.1 The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced Elected Member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected your requirements and the focus of the peer challenge. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and agreed with you.

The Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee is a local government committee formed by five councillors from each of the two Joint Authorities, Plymouth City Council and Cornwall Council.

A special coalition between these two authorities began in 1950, when together they began lobbying national government to fund and construct a bridge across the lower reaches of the Tamar to secure the prosperity of the region. In 1955, in the face of increasingly compelling justification for a bridge and continuing government inaction, the Joint Authorities took the initiative to go forward with the scheme as a local joint enterprise. The following year they jointly promoted a parliamentary bill which would allow compulsory purchase of land to build a bridge and subsequently charge tolls to repay construction costs and fund future operation.

As part of the legislation, the Joint Authorities also acquired joint possession of the Torpoint Ferry, at the time owned solely by Cornwall County Council, putting the control of these two vital crossings of the Tamar together under the control of one governing body operating as a single business unit.

The Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee was subsequently established by the passing of the first Tamar Bridge Act, which received Royal Assent on 27th July 1957.

The peers who delivered this bespoke peer challenge of the TBTF were:

1. **Lead Peer:** Trish Dalby (Corporate Director and Deputy Chief Executive, Hull City Council)
2. **Member Peer:** Martin Veal (Portfolio Holder for Community Services, Bath and North East Somerset Council)
3. **Senior Officer Peer :** Peter Dearing (Assistant Head of Services for Legal Services, Hull City Council)
4. **Senior Officer Peer 2:** Alan Finch (LGA Principal Adviser, Finance) – *(Provided support for the review remotely).*
5. **Review Manager:** Ernest Opuni, Improvement Manager, Local Government Association

3.2 Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following four questions extracted from the five core components the LGA's Corporate Peer Challenges template:

1. Understanding of the local place and priority setting;
2. Organisational leadership and governance;
3. Financial planning and viability; and
4. Capacity to deliver.

Additionally TBTF also asked for the team's reflections on:

- Perspective on elements of the financial case for toll revision;
- The fundamental framework of the Committee's governance arrangements;
- Staff and organisational leadership; and
- Whether the Committee has appropriate structures to engage users and stakeholders.

The first of these items was the primary catalyst for the review.

The team's views on these core and supplementary areas of focus are covered within the feedback provided under the four core headings.

3.3 The peer challenge process

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer challenges are improvement focussed and tailored to meet individual organisation's needs. They are designed to complement and add value to an organisation's own performance and improvement. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared for the peer challenge by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the organisation and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent 3 days onsite at TBTF during which they:

- Spoke to more than 40 people including a range of TBTF staff together with Councillors and external partners and stakeholders;
- Gathered information and views from more than 15 meetings, visits to key sites in the area and additional research and reading; and

- Collectively spent more than 100 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending nearly a month with TBTF.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. It builds on the feedback presentation provided by the peer team at the end of their on-site visit (4-6 December 2018). In presenting this feedback, the team have done this as fellow local government officers and members not professional consultants or inspectors. By its nature, the peer challenge is a snapshot in time. We appreciate that some of the feedback may be about matters that TBTF is already addressing and progressing.

4. Feedback

4.1 Understanding of the local place and priority setting

There is a clear recognition of the significance of the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry to the communities of both Cornwall and Plymouth. The requirements of the 1957 Act and subsequent Acts that bind together the Bridge and the Ferry are clearly understood and TBTF are committed to the needs of the different communities that both assets serve, both economically and socially. The crossings are key to the movement of people between the two areas which is important for movement of workforces between the two areas. Also because most staff are local to one of the areas, there is a pride and ownership of the history of both.

The stated mission for Tamar Crossing is that the need for safe, reliable and cost effective crossing of the Tamar is met. It is clearly understood by all with whom the Review Team met and was articulated to the team on numerous occasions during the review.

The bridge and the ferry have a critical role in the growth plans of both Cornwall and Plymouth Councils and there is a good understanding within both councils as well as among external stakeholders and partners of the socio-economic impact of the crossings for both. However, strategic engagement in the transport and growth agendas of both Councils and the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) appears limited at the present time and in the view of the team this represents an opportunity for the future. There is a clear contribution to wider economic development and regeneration aspirations for both Councils that the Bridge and Ferry could make. The team believes that TBTF becoming more proactive in these arenas would be beneficial. For example there is scope for the crossings to contribute positively to the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly LEP '10 Opportunities' vision. Similarly, the Heart of the South West LEP seeks to lead and influence economic growth, job creation and prosperity across a geographic area; the ability of people to move across the Tamar contributes significantly to this.

The staff at both the Bridge and the Ferry are held in high regard by emergency services who regularly use both crossings. The strong view communicated to the

team is that bridge and ferry staff could not be more accommodating for ambulance services and emergency services in general. Emergency Services consider themselves to have very good relations with both bridge and ferry staff citing the willingness of the latter to adapt timetables to enable, for example, ambulance patient transport. Multi agency exercises are undertaken at the bridge on a regular basis and again the bridge staff are very accommodating and supportive of this activity.

Highways England has a good relationship with the bridge whilst the communications and relationships with strategic partners such as Tonkins and Securitas are also working well meaning these partners feel able to deliver their particular areas of expertise more effectively. Tonkins supply recovery operations at the bridge and within the Saltash Tunnel. The contract is for operational support and staff at Tonkins also carry out duties such as gritting of footpaths, maintenance of convenience facilities and management of car parks. Tonkins have monthly meetings with bridge staff and find the situation to work well. Securitas, as the toll operator resource, has an effective and engaged relationship with the management team at the Bridge.

Overall, customer engagement is reactive and there is more to do in order to clearly define a strategy for proactive customer engagement either through a user group or stakeholder representation. This could improve the level of understanding among communities about the deployment of resources to cover overall costs including key elements such as maintenance, operational arrangements and improvement projects. Currently contact appears to be managed at an individual level through response to demand or complaints; for example through the front-facing offices at the bridge or complaints and social media response to the unavailability of the ferry.

Whilst recognising that at the time of the peer review, considerable disruption to the ferry service was being experienced, the staff were mainly local people, committed and hardworking, who believe in their jobs, their community and in the continuation of what they perceive as a poorly supported 'Cinderella Service' to the bridge. It is important that TBTF is proactive in ensuring that all staff feel equally valued. This will be important in realising the longer term benefit TBTF will gain from a fully engaged workforce united in delivering a common and shared vision for the organisation.

The team is aware of an imminent significant upgrade to the toll system at both crossings and would encourage TBTF to continuously review available technologies which improve the customer experience. The team was informed that the system for tags is deemed to be generally working well and that the toll fee reductions available to tag users is welcomed by users. However, exploring the possibility of other technologies, such as a means of topping up the tag, might help address some of the capacity challenges which exist through the current payment systems and infrastructure.

The Learning Centre, which has benefitted from a successful bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund, provides an excellent opportunity to launch a proactive media and communications strategy. Included in this is an opportunity to give some thought to the

unique and rich engineering history of chain ferry as a future heritage or tourist asset. In social and economic terms there would be value in TBTF making more of its rich maritime history as part of the wider place making narrative of both Cornwall and Plymouth.

4.2 Organisational leadership and governance

TBTF has well resourced, competent and committed operational teams with appropriate sub-contracting in place. The leadership of TBTF's experienced officers mean it is recognised as being well managed.

The Joint Committee and Officers have a clear focus on task and the mission of the organisation. The Joint Committee made clear to the team that see their role as being responsible for an important asset in the region for both of their adjoining authorities. Their focus is on ensuring that the bridge and ferry are well maintained, safe and capable of delivering service to the communities on both sides of the river.

In terms of its governance, TBTF produces an annual Business Plan for approval by the Joint Committee and in addition has a four year overall Strategic Plan. The financial elements of the Business Plan are consistent with reports to the respective Cabinets and Councils of Cornwall and Plymouth.

Going forward, the team would encourage TBTF to increase its focus on some potential current and future opportunities that could be of benefit. This relates to the Committee's potential wider role in the economic development of both Cornwall and Plymouth. The team's view is that as well as providing valuable physical links between the two authorities both the bridge and ferry could play a greater role as catalysts for future economic development.

There is an opportunity for TBTF to proactively create a wider-reaching vision and adopt a strategic responsibility which accentuates the place-making leadership role of the Joint Committee. A contributor to this would be for TBTF to engage more strategically and effectively with the two Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) serving the areas of Cornwall and Plymouth. There is more that could be made of the role of the bridge and ferry as an integral part of delivering on some of the wider priorities of both LEPs.

There may be opportunities for resources from the LEPs to be targeted at the bridge and the ferry crossing which support wider benefits for both Cornwall and Plymouth. The LEPs could be viable sources of funding to help with development of the visitor centre or maintaining the ferries for example.

It was clear to the team that the Joint Committee recognise the need for greater communication between the local authorities, stakeholders and customers. The team's view is that TBTF exploring this further would be a positive move. Now might be the time for TBTF and the General Manager to take a more strategic role in the

transport and 'place' fora critical for Cornwall and Plymouth. This is likely to become increasingly important because decisions made by each Authority will have impact on the bridge and the ferry. For example there is imminent bridge resurfacing that needs to be undertaken during 2020 estimated to cost approximately six million pounds and whilst this has been reported formally to both Councils in the capital programme of TBTF there does not appear to be any further formal consultation on the impact of these works and it would be prudent for this to be progressed swiftly.

Members of the Joint Committee have an opportunity to be advocates in their respective Councils, taking a more active role in the wider conversation on economic impact and growth. This may in turn offer a better understanding of the Bridge and Ferry role and help deflect criticism at time of toll increase.

The Joint Committee is well placed for this enhanced and increased strategic role and the Review Team would encourage using the influence of the portfolio holders and ward councillors more proactively in this regard. In order to progress this further, the Terms of Reference of the Joint Committee may benefit from review in order that the full flexibility from the Act can be embraced and relevant constitutional changes in Cornwall and Plymouth Councils taken forward. This may enable the Councils to concentrate on the strategic importance of the crossings and the debate to be more than only about the toll revisions.

The arrangements around having Joint Chairs and the current reporting arrangements may benefit from review as part of this exercise. It would seem the processes of reporting back into the two Councils through Cabinet and then Full Council could be streamlined. In addition there would be benefit in clarifying the scrutiny functions around TBTF in both Councils. Some members on the Joint Committee believe that they exercise a Scrutiny role whereas others do not. It was not clear how TBTF fell into the Scrutiny provisions of either council.

Currently there are some frustrations in terms of having to take and promote parallel reports to each Authority which creates a duplication of effort and risk. In addition, the different time periods for decisions in Cornwall and in Plymouth can be a hindrance to operational efficiency and agile decision-making. Any possibility of greater synergy or delegation being achieved would be of benefit to both councils. It is noted that the Joint Committee membership currently includes the relevant Portfolio Holders from the two Councils; this has not always been the case. If this were to be a standard nomination of the Portfolio Holder to the Committee it is considered that this would further strengthen the strategic place of TBTF to be recognised in the governance of both Councils and the LEPs

The two authorities were required under the Tamar Bridge Act 1957 to create a Joint Committee. The Joint Committee has all of the powers detailed within the Act except for:

1. Those relating to the acquisition, appropriation, leasing or disposal of land;

2. Those relating to the ceasing to demand, take and recover tolls and those relating to resuming the demanding, taking and recovery of toll; and
3. Those contained in part VI (Finance) of the 1957 Act.

The ten provisions within the Finance Section do not appear to the review team to relate to toll increases. The power of TBTF to proposed toll increases without referring the matter to the two Councils accordingly needs to be clarified. This perhaps could be considered as part of any review of the Terms of Reference. Given that TBTF toll increases have no financial impact on the two Councils' budgets the review team consider that any decision in relation to tolls should be taken by TBTF. It is however a matter for the parties to discuss and potentially refresh the internal arrangements in respect of these matters.

It would appear that in 2009 events changed such as the two authorities required a change in the strategic role of the bridge and issued terms of reference. This appears to have been accepted by the TBTF. As far as can be discerned, whilst both portfolio holders currently sit on the Joint Committee there is no mandated link between the Cabinets of the two Councils and the Joint Committee. This could be addressed by the nomination of the relevant Portfolio Holders to the Joint Committee as a standard role within each Authority as part of any review of the Terms of Reference.

It appears from a Corporate Governance perspective that there is more interest from Cornwall in the bridge and ferry operations than there is from Plymouth. This may be due to the fact that the ferry in particular provides an economic link from South Cornwall to Plymouth.

There may be some value in ensuring that the expertise around economic development and regeneration on the Joint Committee's membership is strengthened to ensure it is better placed to contribute to the wider place-making considerations in both areas. Also some greater clarity on the views from each Council about overall policy on tolls with a clear focus on how all costs will be covered would be appropriate.

Focusing more internally on staffing matters there is more that needs to be done by the Joint Committee and the senior officer leadership to ensure TBTF is truly 'one organisation'. From the various meetings with different staff across TBTF the Review team was left with the strong impression that Tamar Crossings appear as two separate and distinct identities at the bridge and the ferry. All staff at both the bridge and the ferry are hugely proud of what they do and have a commitment to the communities they serve. There does, however, seem to be a significant differential in the perceptions as to how highly their contributions are regarded dependent on whether the views were being expressed by bridge staff or their ferry counterparts.

A key message shared with the team is that communication across TBTF would benefit from some renewed focus. Staff at the Ferry were not as positive about levels of resources committed to their side of the business or the level of support they received from management. It is clear that there is a level of marginalisation ferry staff

felt in comparison to investment and support going towards the bridge part of the TBTF operation. The lower levels of morale and higher levels of sickness among ferry staff indicate that there are significant issues which would benefit from focused intervention and leadership development of the management. Proactive two way communication would be an important start to this process in the view of the Review Team.

There appears to be an opportunity for TBTF to further explore the scope for improvement in relation to the reliability of ferry fleet and equipment, the general quality of the working environment at the ferry, reviewing payment methods including the possibility of contactless collection of tolls, invigorated and supportive appraisal process and capacity of the technical team. The ferry is a vital and integral part of the contribution of TBTF to the wider economy so ensuring that it has adequate capacity to deliver will benefit the whole operation. There is an opportunity for more visible and focused engagement in order that the understanding of issues and problems can be properly addressed; restorative practice has been used by a number of Councils to great effect in addressing similar situations.

There also seems an opportunity for TBTF to utilise Torpoint Town Council (TTC) more proactively as a partner who can help to improve this side of the business. TTC certainly expressed an appetite to work collaboratively with TBTF on this. There may be value in any review of tolls making explicit an understanding of the need to prioritise the continuance and sustainability of the ferry in the short and medium term. The precise shape of this continuance may change but it is undeniable that it remains core to the future of TBTF.

4.3 Financial planning and viability

The aim of this element of the TBTF review was for the team to ascertain if there was a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and if there was evidence that it is being implemented successfully.

The team's view is that in general TBTF's financial reporting is thorough and the forecasting and accounting seem appropriate for the standards expected in a local public body. From the information obtained the team has no concerns regarding the Joint Committee's finances

The use of graphs to explain TBTF's financial position was helpful. The team considered that reliance could be placed on the published figures.

The Committee's finances are established on the basis of a break-even position being achieved over the cycle between toll reviews. The ferry crossing runs at a permanent deficit because of the chosen toll structure, which means that the bridge has to generate an equivalent surplus for the break-even target to be achieved.

Periodic toll increases are intended initially to generate a net surplus which then reduces over time as costs overtake income resulting in a deficit in the years immediately preceding each subsequent toll review. This allows a reserve to be built up in the early years between toll increases which is drawn down in the later years. It is intended that the reserve never falls below two million pounds. This is a reasonable approach given the constraints of the current applicable legislation but requires considerable financial discipline to achieve.

Over the years toll income appears to have been quite buoyant. There was a downturn at the time of the recession, caused by a reduction in the number of crossings being undertaken, from which it has recovered and volumes at the crossings have been relatively stable in recent years. The next proposed toll increase in 2019 is projected to lead to a thirty three percent increased income. The toll increases would initially restore reserves to about £4 million but would subsequently diminish.

Among the targets TBTF sets in the Business Plan there is no target for income (other than the budget) so there may be value in exploring how TBTF and its staff are incentivised to maximise income as an organisation.

Revenue expenditure has been fairly stable in the long run but there have been some major fluctuations in recent years. Expenditure peaked at £12.9 million in 2014/15 and reduced to £10.3 million the year after that, moving up again to £11.4 million in 2017/18. We did not explore the reasons for these in detail, but clearly it is important that the Committee keeps control of its costs on an ongoing basis and seeks to operate as efficiently as possible,

The capital programme totals about £40 million over the next five years which is an average of £8 million a year. There is a need to keep the bridge and ferry infrastructure in good repair. Due to the strategic importance of the crossings, they are also of major importance to the region. It does not appear to be in the Joint Committee's remit to consider the long-term replacement of the bridge, which is now roughly halfway through its 120 year estimated life.

The capital programme is financed from borrowing undertaken by Cornwall Council and the Joint Committee reimburses the Council at pre-arranged rates. This arrangement needs to ensure that there is no cross-subsidy between Cornwall Council and Joint Committee. It is understood that the Joint Committee is satisfied with the current arrangement.

Given the reliance of the crossings on long term investment and the strategy of increasing tolls only periodically and smoothing the impact through use of reserves, the main issue identified so far is that, while the reporting and planning in the medium term seems to be very thorough, there is little evidence of longer term modelling and forecasting. It may be something that TBTF could look at and produce a model for long term financial planning, perhaps twenty five to thirty years.

Local government bodies across the country are increasingly looking to optimise commercial opportunities to generate income. The location of the Tamar Crossings make them tourist and heritage attractions as well as working crossings and it may be that there are further opportunities the Joint Committee can exploit in that regard.

In view of the challenges facing the bridge and ferry in the coming years, it is essential that both Councils recognise the bridge and ferry crossings as important parts of the road network which makes it essential that they become an active participant in long term plans for both Councils.

4.4 Capacity to deliver

The strong technical and engineering skills within TBTF means operational performance is good. Additionally there is a clear understanding of future requirements of the bridge and ferry including estimates for future works which are as accurate as possible based on previous costs plus elements to recognise inflation and increases. However it is acknowledged that once works start there is always the prospect of prices increasing due to the nature of the work and the exposure to the elements. In relation to these areas the senior management team seems well aware of the requirements for the future.

TBTF has a good understanding of its business in maintaining its assets. There is however more to do in fully understanding future requirements of the ferry and some longer term planning for this part of the business may be of benefit. Is there sufficient engagement at officer and political level to exert influence in the LEP to determine potential future funding opportunities and outcomes consistent with the economic and transportation growth agenda?

There appears to be a need for better succession planning as part of a workforce strategy in an environment with shortages in engineering and other fields. There is a recognition of an ageing workforce and, until more recently, a low staff turnover. The next priority (which is a national issue) relates to how to grow the engineers of the future. There may be opportunities with the unique marine engineering context locally to develop collaborative opportunities for apprenticeships that qualify for the apprenticeship levy. There are apprentices in customer services which provides a start for this wider consideration.

TBTF use of sub-contractors is appropriate and well-managed and there may be the potential for further exploration of this as a means of maintaining capacity. The firm Tonkins are engaged to recover vehicles from the bridge and the Saltash Tunnel which TBTF manage on behalf of Highways England. Tonkins feel that they are part of the bridge team and describe their interaction as good. They have been involved in training undertaken at the bridge and enjoy the work.

The contractor Securitas provides toll collection on the bridge and is in the second year of its contract. This contractor indicated they had a very good relationship with the bridge referring to it as one of the best contracts they operate.

Staff at the bridge communicate well with each other and the various contractors and there are regular monthly meetings to look at performance against Service Level Agreements. Securitas are advised as to what events are happening on the bridge which may affect their staff at work. Additionally Securitas staff at the bridge were involved in training with bridge operatives.

Maintenance contracts for bridge and ferry tend to be more complex. Frameworks are used wherever possible but due to the uniqueness of bridge and ferry they are not always suitable. Aecom are the technical consultants to the bridge and undertake monitoring of essential items on the structure ensuring the necessary expertise is in place for this more complicated part of the operation.

The organisation has a procurement specialist seconded part time from Cornwall Council. This relationship is very good and the team works well together in preparing specification and dealing with contracts. Procurement of all contracts follows public contract regulations. The reason for specialist advice on site is due to the uniqueness of the bridge and ferry.

TBTF has the benefit of a motivated and committed staff who, overall, feel part of the organisation. This is particularly true of staff working at the bridge who felt described working for the bridge as a 'family environment' and that they were motivated to be ambassadors for the bridge outside of work. Bridge staff and representatives understood the ethos of the bridge and felt part of the larger team.

The 'family environment' does not however extend as fully as it might to the ferry service. With the exception of some limited interaction on some days in customer services, there appears to be little interface between bridge staff and ferry staff at an engineering/operating level. As mentioned previously, the team would encourage TBTF to prioritise improved engagement and involvement with the ferry operation as a pressing priority.

Some concerns about personal security were expressed to the team. There is value in TBTF Members & Senior Management better understanding the frustrations of a delayed public, then considering the accessibility and potential vulnerability of staff in such circumstances. While this is positive for public facing interface with the public, these facilities do not always provide the same level of perceived security as did the previous facility which had a glass panel between customer service staff and members of the public. For example, there is easy access to the bridge back office and staff felt that the panic alarms did not provide sufficient security. It also appears that response to requests for assistance when there were problems at the counter could be speedier.

Some bridge toll collectors have received abuse from members of the public but are instructed to not engage, close the toll booth and open the barrier to allow the member of the public across. These issues are escalated at certain times and the CCTV footage from within the toll collection point is used. There would seem some further scope for this to be more proactively managed going forward.

There were some concerns about security at the ferry also. A simple immediate win could be the introduction of Electronic Real Time Notice Boards (RTI) at the access/egress of the Ferry as well as on-board to manage expectations. This could also be shown at points where final decisions on which route to take (to attempt or cross the Tamar) are made. On board this would help staff explain any issues and prevent any public disquiet. Management should also be more 'visible' when a restricted service was in operation. An electronic payment method (and/or a smartphone 'App') is a necessity for the service and would prevent any possible embezzlement. The visibility of Tamar Crossings personnel at times of a restricted service should be significantly higher with more urgency employed.

5 Next steps

Immediate next steps

We appreciate that the Joint Committee will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions in order to determine how the organisation wishes to take things forward.

As part of the peer challenge process, there is an offer of further activity to support this. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this. Andy Bates, Principal Adviser, is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association (LGA). His contact details are: andy.bates@local.gov.uk.

In the meantime we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with the TBTF throughout the peer challenge. We will endeavour to provide signposting to examples of practice and further information and guidance about the issues we have raised in this report to help inform ongoing consideration.

Follow up visit

The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge process includes a follow up visit. The purpose of the visit is to help assess the impact of the peer challenge and demonstrate the progress it has made against the areas of improvement and development identified by the peer team. It is a lighter-touch version of the original visit and the team will be happy to support any further work once TBTF has had time for reflection on this report.