

SOUTH THAMES GATEWAY BUILDING CONTROL JOINT COMMITTEE

10 MARCH 2022

MONITORING REPORT DECEMBER 2021 TO FEBRUARY 2022

Report from: Janine Weaver, Director, South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership

Summary

The report updates the Joint Committee on the current forecast for the 2020/2021 financial year and gives details against the progress of the objectives of the Business Plan 2020/2021.

1. Budget and policy framework
 - 1.1. The Joint Committee requires the preparation of monitoring reports to be reported to the Officer Steering Group and Joint Committee.
2. Director's comments
 - 2.1. The report gives a further overview of the position of the budget and the progression against objectives shown in the Business Plan 2021/2022.
 - 2.2. Continued development of our IT system is essential to improve and simplify the services to our customers. A cultural change is currently underway to encourage our customers to adopt our online site inspection booking facility as the preferred route to requesting inspections.
 - 2.3. Fee-earning applications are around 4% lower than the same period last year, however, income is around 11% higher. The level of inspections is also around 2% lower for this period.
 - 2.4. Local Authority Building Control (LABC) secured government funding at the end of November 2021, for the licensing training of existing surveyors. LABC are currently working through the registration forms for over 300 authorities' surveyors. Due to the unprecedented demand and with no additional funding from government, they are having to change their approach to the delivery of the programme.

3. Delivery Plan Update

- 3.1. The Business Plan 2022/2025 has now progressed through each Council's Cabinet or Committee and has been approved so that the contributions element can now be included in their financial plan.
- 3.2. Investing in our online services has proved to offer an excellent return on investment, as not only has it reduced processing time on deposited applications but also enabled that area of the service to be carried out remotely. This benefitted both the staff and partnership in adapting working practices in line with government restrictions whilst continuing to offer customers a way to submit applications without having to worry if it is within the business hours or not.
- 3.3. The ability to booking site inspections online went live on our website last quarter, expanding our digital services. Uptake has been slow as we undertake to change our customers' perception from the old style "over-the-phone booking" to online making the process more convenient for them.
- 3.4. The number of fee-earning building regulation applications is around 4% lower than this time last year and may reflect the financial pressures the economy is currently experiencing with rising costs. However, income is around 11% higher for the same period.
- 3.5. Further savings have been made in the staffing budget, we are currently carrying three surveyor vacancies, and in supplies and services. Together with additional income generated through the work for the consultancy we remain predicting a surplus in the budget at the end of year. Details of applications and fee income are shown in Appendix 1.

4. Use of Resources Overview

- 4.1. With the partnership carrying three surveyor vacancies it has been necessary to review and realign resources, requiring surveyors to carry out site inspections within other areas that they would not normally work in.
- 4.2. A fair distribution of workload has always been the ethos of the partnership, using the properly qualified staff to carry out the necessary matched work and this has always been recognised as a necessity. Flexibility in working areas will become essential in ensuring the continued delivery of the service as well as enabling the required training surveyors will need to undertake as part of the new licencing requirements to be introduced.
- 4.3. In January 2022, after three years of training, one of our assistant building control surveyors passed the required levels and assessments to be re-graded to a building control surveyor. Developing our own surveyors has been essential to assisting the partnership to maintain resilience, however, this takes a considerable amount of time and resource in a highly competitive market.

- 4.4. At the end of November 2021, the LABC received government funding to ensure all public service building control surveyors are adequately supported to meet the future needs of the licencing. Up to £18,000 per surveyor has been allocated to our existing surveyors under this funding, this equates to a funding of £270,000. All new surveyors, who are not registered, would need to be funded by the partnership.
- 4.5. The consultancy through January 2022 to March 2022 is currently undertaking condition surveys on 225 of Medway's housing properties. Our working relationship with Medway Housing continues to grow having been appointed to assist the delivery of their fire risk assessment programme from April 2022 to March 2024.

5. Performance

- 5.1. The administration team received a large volume of telephone calls requesting confirmation that an email has been received. In January 2022 an auto reply text on emails received by the partnership's main mailbox went live which will hopefully reduce the numbers of these types of telephone enquiries.
- 5.2. Details of the performance statistics are shown in Appendix 2. Despite the loss of the operations manager at the end of December, the operations team has maintained its high-performance levels. Speed of delivery has always been a major criterion identified by architects and agents as essential in deciding on a building control provider, so achieving and maintaining these levels is key to holding on to customers through reputation and this will need to be maintained next year.
- 5.3. With the additional training requiring to be undertaken by surveyors over the next year, it is anticipated that we can maintain this level of performance, however, our business plan also identifies timescales on other areas of work that may need to be reassessed.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1. There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1. There are no direct legal implications as a result of this report.

8. Risk Management

- 8.1. There is always the possibility that income at the end of the financial year will be below expectation, in which case a call on additional contributions from each of the partner authorities would be required.

9. Recommendation

9.1. Members are asked to note the contents of the report.

10. Suggested reasons for decision(s)

10.1. The Constitution requires the Joint Committee to monitor the progress of the Partnership.

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Exempt Appendices

Appendix 1 – Monitoring Statement

Appendix 2 – Performance Statistics

Background papers

None