

Medway Council
Meeting of South Thames Gateway Building Control Joint
Committee

Thursday, 22 March 2012

10.00am to 11.22am

Record of the meeting

Subject to approval as an accurate record at the next meeting of this committee

Present: Councillors: Burden, Chitty (Chairman) and Lewin

In Attendance: Janine Boughton, Head of Administration and Business Development
Paula Charker, Employee Relations Manager
Vikki Finneran, Principal Accountant Financial Services, Gravesham Borough Council
James Freeman, Swale Borough Council
Stephen Gaimster, Assistant Director Development, Economy and Transport
Sarah Kilkie, Gravesham Borough Council
Anthony Law, Democratic Services Officer
Tony Van Veghel, Director, South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership
Kevin Woolmer, Finance Manager, Business Support & Regeneration, Community & Culture

31 Apologies for absence

There were none.

32 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 8 December 2011 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

33 Declarations of interest

There were none.

34 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

35 South Thames Gateway Building Control Annual Audit and Inspection Letter

Background:

This report presented the external auditor's certificate and opinion in relation to the 2010/2011 accounts.

It was noted that the Joint Committee had approved the 2010/2011 Statement of Accounts in June 2011. Following this, the auditor had reviewed the accounts and attached, at Appendix 1 to the report, was the external auditor's certificate and opinion in respect of the 2010/2011 financial year. It confirmed that no errors had been identified and all relevant legislation and regulatory requirements were met.

Decision:

The Joint Committee noted the external auditor's certificate and opinion as attached to the report.

Reasons for Decision

The Joint Committee has a key role in monitoring the performance of the Partnership including the findings of the external auditor.

36 South Thames Gateway Building Control Software Provider

Background:

The Director of the South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership presented a report that sought agreement to invest the Partnership's potential surplus income into the procurement of a new software back office system. This would improve the service to customers and help reduce the contributions from the Partner Authorities over the next 3 years, both of which were essential to delivering the business plan objectives.

Since the Joint Committee meeting in June 2011, clarification had been sought as to the procurement process and it had been confirmed that funds would have to be identified before the process was taken forward. It was noted that the budget did not contain any provision to meet initial set up costs and further contributions from the three Partner authorities was considered unacceptable. Members were advised however that given current income trends a surplus of up to £40,000 could be generated this financial year. This could be used to finance the initial set up cost, with any ongoing annual cost being contained within existing budgets.

It was also noted that a small contingency sum of £2,000 had been identified in this year's budget as an IT renewals fund. Further investment would be required so to ensure a rolling programme of funding. It was therefore intended

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that a contribution be made to the IT reserve of £7,000 this year, and again next year, to allow sufficient funding to renew surveyors' computer equipment. This would be funded using savings made against other budget heads that had been subject to a moratorium on spend since last October.

Members considered the proposal and the nature of the proposed contract. The importance of confirming the surplus at the end of the financial year and before starting the procurement process was emphasised.

The Joint Committee was advised that the procurement process would follow Medway Council's procurement procedures and Members expressed concern as to the potential length of this process, which, along with subsequent training, could delay the new software going live until April 2013. The Director of the South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership undertook to convey to the Strategic Procurement Team at Medway Council the Joint Committee's concerns as to the impact of a long procurement process, especially upon any large schemes coming forward in the meantime.

The Joint Committee also requested that a report, prepared by finance officers at Swale Borough Council, be submitted to a future meeting reviewing the treatment of future income surpluses.

Decision:

The Joint Committee agreed the investment of up to £40,000 surplus including contingency into the provision of a new software system which will allow the objectives of the business plan to be met and agreed the increase of the IT contributions budget into a reserve for renewal of existing inadequate equipment.

Reasons for Decisions

The Joint Committee has a key role in ensuring suitable systems are in place to deliver a first class service to customers and that adequate funding is provided. This should be achieved without adding to the contributions from each authority.

37 Duties, Functions and Activities Funded by the Three Partner Authorities

Background:

The Director of the South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership introduced a report identifying the cost of the public protection role of the partnership and other costs, which are met by the contributions from the three Partner Authorities.

It was noted that under the terms of the Memorandum of Agreement the three Partner Authorities funded a number of non-fee earning activities, including dangerous structures, demolitions, unauthorised works and disabled persons applications. For the purposes of the Business Plan these activities were

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divided into public protection inspection, public protection information and ancillary functions, such as Safety Advisory Group meetings. Detailed time analysis reports had been used to demonstrate how officer time and costs had been attributed to the partnership's non-fee earning account.

Members discussed the report and accompanying appendices, which gave details of the thirteen areas of activity and, where possible, gave details of applications deposited up to the end of February 2012. Following discussion on the increased number of disabled person applications since 2008, which was forecast to continue to grow, the Director of the South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership undertook to provide the Joint Committee and Officer Steering Group with trend details across the three administrative areas. Members and officers would then draw attention to the impact of such non-fee earning work upon the Partnership.

Decision:

The Joint Committee noted the contents of the report.

Reason for Decision

The South Thames Gateway Building Control Constitution requires the Joint Committee to monitor the activities of the partnership, which are paid for by the contributions from each authority in order to ensure value for money.

38 Exclusion of the Press and Public

Decision:

The Joint Committee agreed that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the exempt material relating to agenda item 9 (Monitoring Report: December to February) because consideration of these matters in public would disclose information falling within Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 as specified in agenda item 8, and, in all the circumstances of the case, the Joint Committee considered that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

39 Monitoring Report: December to February

Background:

This report updated the Joint Committee on the current forecast for the 2011/12 financial year and gave details against the progress of the objectives of the Business Plan 2011/2014.

Members considered a range of issues including the decision by the 3 Partner Authorities to both approve the Business Plan and for the Partnership to continue for a second term. Details of applications and income received compared against the last two years was shown in Appendix 1 to the report. An

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interim February monitoring report was shown in Appendix 2 to the report, which reported a potential surplus. Appendix 3 contained benchmarking statistics.

The Joint Committee discussed the request by Swale Borough Council to review other potential forms of service delivery. Following this discussion Members were of the opinion that officers at Swale Borough Council should lead this review.

Decision:

The Joint Committee noted the report.

Suggested Reason for Decision:

The Constitution requires the Joint Committee to maintain a monitoring role on the progress of the partnership.

Chairman

Date:

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