

South Thames Gateway Building Control Joint Committee

Thursday, 20 March 2014

10.00am

Present:

Cllr John Burden (Chair)
Cllr Jane Chitty (Vice-Chair)

Maria Beaney	Senior Accountant (Medway Council)
Janine Boughton	Head of Administration & Business (South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership)
Paula Charker	Employee Relations Manager (Medway Council)
Vikki Finneran	Principal Accountant (Revenue & Capital Budgets)
James Freeman	Head of Planning (Swale Borough Council)
Stephen Gaimster	Assistant Director, Housing and Regeneration (Medway Council)
Sarah Kilkie	Assistant Director (Communities) (Gravesham Borough Council)
Anthony Law	Principal Accountant (Medway Council)
Sarah McEwan	Principal Legal Assistant (Gravesham Borough Council)
Tony Van Veghel	Director, South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership
Terri Williams	Resourcing Manager (Medway Council)
Christopher Wakeford	Committee Services Officer (Scrutiny) (Gravesham Borough Council)

20. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Gerry Lewin (Swale Borough Council).

21. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2013 were signed by the Chair.

22. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

23. 2013/2014 Proposed Audit Timetable

The Senior Accountant (Medway Council) presented the Committee with the South Thames Gateway Building Control annual audit and inspection letter 2012/13.

On the 12th December 2013, The Joint Committee requested the Senior Accountant seek clarification and draft a proposed audit closedown timetable ensuring the 2012/2013 recommendations were incorporated.

To ensure the 2013/2014 Minute reference sections are completed, the Senior Accountant has been in contact with the auditors to arrange a suitable timetable to allow the Minutes to be produced within the audit timetable.

However the auditors advised they are unable to agree a formal timetable until the audit pack is produced towards the end of March due to the automated nature of their computer system.

They have however agreed in principal to the following deadlines:-

Action	2012/2013 Deadline	Proposed 2013/2014 deadline
Annual Return signed at the AGM.	13 June 2013	12 June 2014
Annual Return to be received by the auditors.	24 June 2013	4 July 2014
Date of Audit Announcement	3 June 2013	7 July 2014
Start of Inspection Period	17 June 2013	21 July 2014
End of Inspection Period	12 July 2013	15 August 2014
Appointment Date	15 July 2013	18 August 2014
Public Display of the audited Annual Return	30 September 2013	30 September 2014

The above timetable assumes the Annual Return will be signed at the 2013/2014 Annual General meeting on the 12 June 2014.

In order to meet this deadline the Minutes or a Minute reference number must be produced by 2nd July 2014.

Decision:

That the Joint Committee approves the proposed audit timetable shown in section 2.7 of the report.

Reasons for decision:

The Joint Committee has a key role in monitoring the performance of the Partnership and is required to approve the Statement of Accounts.

24. Accommodation

The Director (South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership) presented the Committee with a report that sought approval from Joint Committee to the proposed change to the Accommodation which Medway Council offer the STGBC Partnership.

Medway Council own the Foord annex in Rochester High Street which is next to Eastgate house. This office accommodation offers approximately 248 m² (2669 ft.²) of floor area over two floors. It is currently leased to a third sector organisation until 31st of March 2015, however, the tenant has indicated that they would be prepared to leave the property earlier.

Officers have viewed the property and feel it would be suitable as a head office for the Partnership. Given that the Partnership is moving towards mobile working and with the use of hot desking and roaming profiles, it is felt it would still provide a suitable floor area should the Partnership expand. The property would require some enhancements including a new hundred megabyte IT feed which would be capable of dealing with the large electronic data files which incorporate plans and drawings. Planning permission is also required so as to confirm its continued use as an office, as it is a grade 2 listed building but this is not seen as an obstacle.

Gravesham have also offered potential accommodation at Gravesham Civic Centre which would equate to approximately half a floor of the Civic Centre equalling around 237 m² (2552 ft.²).

Although costs are comparable a move to Gravesham would impact heavily on the operation of the Partnership including additional travel time and costs for surveyors and administrative staff based at the main office.

A 15 per cent reduction in premises costs has been included in the Business Plan for 2015/16. A move to the Foord annexe in Rochester should generate approximately 30 per cent savings against current costs. The Partnership is liable for the existing lease until it expires in March 2015. Therefore, negotiations are underway to agree surrender terms of the current lease when the Partnership vacates the premises at the end of September 2014 with a view to the liability reverting to Medway until the end of the lease in March 2015. If agreed, the savings generated from the costs of the old and new lease would be used to pay for dilapidations in the Compass Centre required by the Partnership's lease arrangements. This saving together with some borrowing against the savings the following year, will be used to pay for the costs of removal, modifications and IT enhancements required to the new premises. A further report will be made on the outcome of these discussions.

Decision:

The Committee approved the proposed relocation of the Partnership head office accommodation to the Foord annex in Rochester High Street and for the Partnership to enter into a lease agreement with Medway Council on the terms outlined in the report and for continued negotiation for early surrender of Compass Centre Lease.

Reasons for decision:

It is a decision for Joint Committee to make in regards to where the Partnership is accommodated.

25. Exclusion

Resolved that pursuant to Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 that the public be excluded from the following item of business due to the nature of business to be transacted and the likelihood that there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

26. Monitoring Report - December 2013 to February 2014

The Director (South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership) updated the Joint Committee on the current forecast for the 2013/14 financial year and provided details against the progress of the objectives of the Business Plan 2012/2017.

The Director (South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership) highlighted the following areas:-

- Building Regulation applications for the year remain approximately 12 per cent higher than last year though the resultant income is currently around 3 per cent lower than this time last year. However, given the additional income being generated through the

consultancy and additional savings forecast in staffing and supplies and service we are still predicting a balanced budget at the end of year.

- Discussions have been on going with a prospective authority regarding the potential of them considering joining the Partnership as one of their options in a review of their building control service. Productive meetings have been held at senior officer level, and they have now engaged a project officer to drive the proposal forward. Working groups have been set up to examine the issues in respect of HR, finance, legal and operations.
- A report on progress, including due diligence, with the prospective authority will be presented to the Committee at the Annual General Meeting in June 2014.

The Chair advised that it would be beneficial to meet with key Members from the prospective authority.

Decision:

The Joint Committee noted the contents of the report.

Reasons for decision:

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

The Assistant Director (Communities) (Gravesham Borough Council) advised the Committee that the meeting dates for the next municipal year had been circulated by e-mail earlier in the week and requested Committee Members to confirm that the dates are suitable:-

12 June 2014 (proposed AGM)

2 October 2014

11 December 2014

19 March 2015

Paula Charker, Employee Relations Manager (Medway Council) advised the Committee that she is retiring and Terri Williams, Resourcing Manager (Medway Council) would be taking her place.

The Committee thanked the Employee Relations Manager (Medway Council) for all her hard work and wished her well in her retirement.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 10.30 am.