

# **SOUTH THAMES GATEWAY BUILDING CONTROL JOINT COMMITTEE**

**15 MARCH 2018**

## **EXPANSION OF PARTNERSHIP UPDATE**

Report from: Tony Van Veghel, Director, South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership

### **Summary**

The report updates the Joint Committee on the work that has been carried out thus far to successfully incorporate Canterbury City Council building control section as a fourth member of the Partnership.

### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

- 1.1. The Joint Committee requires updates as to the progression of the expansion of the partnership to include Canterbury City Council and to ensure the agreed conditions are met.

### **2. Project Delivery Update**

- 2.1. We are close now to the “go live” date for Canterbury City Council’s building control section to join the partnership. From the outset of revised negotiations in November 2016 the viability of this project was always seen being far greater than that of the previous attempt in 2014, due to the digital transformation the partnership has been undergoing and the facility to work remotely using digital applications.
- 2.2. Of course this new way of working would require a sea change in the way Canterbury process applications and deal with all aspects of plan vetting, inspection and recording. However, whilst processes may change the fundamental requirements of the building control function remain the same and therefore it has been important to try and convince all staff to transfer with the service as local knowledge, contacts and consistency are extremely important in the highly competitive market we operate in.

### HR

- 2.3. Whilst both the partnership and Members wished to ensure there was a position for every member of staff from Canterbury to transfer into, it became evident that different circumstances applied to the administration team than

that which applied to the surveying team. In order to maintain a quality administrative service at a viable cost it was imperative that technical administrative staff were relocated to the Rochester main office and positions were made available for all staff. Unfortunately, the offer of relocation was not taken up by any of the staff and as a consequence the partnership has been engaged in a recruitment process for two technical assistants and a scanning assistant.

- 2.4. Transferring the surveying staff was, however, more viable as these would be operating in an agile remote working environment using four hot desks at the Canterbury offices. During negotiations a number of proposed staff structures were put forward and as these staff were covered by TUPE protection a “measures document” was drawn up which would facilitate protection of their contractual rights but assist in ameliorating the non-contractual rights so as to accord with STG’s and Medway’s policies and procedures.
- 2.5. In January it was finally agreed that a “lift and shift” approach to the existing staff was the most appropriate way of accommodating them. By this approach the existing team would remain in the Canterbury area and the Canterbury district would become a team of its own. The partnership would then be made up of a West team covering Gravesham and part of Medway, an East team covering part of Medway and Swale and a Canterbury team based in that district. Of course, the benefit of the partnership is that it can operate across council boundary lines within the member councils and thus move staff to where demand is the highest. In order to facilitate this freedom of movement a mobility clause was introduced as a measure, however, it was envisaged that this would only be enacted on rare occasions. The Canterbury team will also benefit from augmenting their numbers when necessary with surveyors from the other teams. Where equivalent posts are available Canterbury staff were able to apply for STG/Medway contracts and we are pleased to report that two members of staff have taken up that opportunity.

#### Legal

- 2.6. The revised Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) and Deed of Variation (DOV) has been agreed by all four partners of the partnership. The agreement needs to be sealed by all the authorities and these are typically kept by their legal teams and require internal forms for authorisation before the seal can be used. Four hardcopies of the agreement will have to be circulated to each authority.
- 2.7. The opportunity has been taken to amend the partnership’s name from South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership to STG Building Control Partnership as this is the more familiar name that clients and customers recognise us as. It will also make any further expansion more geographically acceptable.

#### Finance

- 2.8. The financial plan and consequent partner authority contributions have now been agreed at all four authorities.

- 2.9. As from the 19<sup>th</sup> February STG's fee structure has been incorporated with all quotes and applications made to Canterbury. This will allow for a smooth transition from the 1<sup>st</sup> April.
- 2.10. It is important that any work that is carried out in the new financial year which attracts a fee or charge is reconciled against any income paid prior to transfer. Agreement has been reached on the methodology of assessing that figure. Whilst it is impossible to determine an exact amount as the legacy systems used at Canterbury are not able to provide the relevant data a pragmatic approach has been agreed. This will provide funding to deal with work paid for before the transfer but not taking place until after 1<sup>st</sup> April. This will include, for example, plan examinations, site and regularisation inspections relating to all types of work submitted. It has also been agreed that any substantial sums which come to light within the first six months of transfer and which haven't been previously accounted for will be recovered from Canterbury and paid into the partnership. All income which is due to Canterbury will be recovered by their own finance department and not STG.

## IT

- 2.11. In order for the operation to work effectively all applications must be available in digital format, therefore, Canterbury embarked and completed a major project in digitising their historic records. All hard copy applications have now been scanned including historical records and those that have been more recently deposited. Arrangements are in place to move microfiche records into the partnerships reception where similar details are held from the other authorities.
- 2.12. Data transfer of Canterbury's applications into the Tascomi system has been mapped and tested and is due to take place on 21<sup>st</sup> March. This will, however, leave a number of applications between the 21<sup>st</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> April that will not have been scanned and not located on the system. A dual arrangement is in place to ensure both the partnership and Canterbury can maintain their operations whilst the data transfer is taking place and the system unavailable to both parties. Whilst this will cause substantial additional work to existing staff and a duplication of applications and records it is imperative that the service to customers is not interrupted.
- 2.13. Equipment of the Canterbury team both for the hot desks and for working remotely has been provided and will be funded by Canterbury City Council. New phones have also been ordered for the Canterbury team at no cost to the partnership. Access to Medway's systems will be available through the council's remote access software.

## Operations

- 2.14. The operations manager has been carrying out training sessions with Canterbury staff on the new system and has included training on plan examination on screen. The requirements of the operation in regards administering and enforcing the building regulations remains as it currently is but with support by new members of the team and the facility for cross-

boundary working. However, the way the service is delivered will be completely different as it is based on digitised applications and allocation of work through the Tascomi system. Indeed all aspects of work will be driven by the system which can record, monitor and provide access to all digitised information.

- 2.15. Whilst training has been ongoing arrangements have also been made for the operations manager to be located at the Canterbury site for the week prior to transfer as well as two weeks following the transition.
- 2.16. As none of the technical administrators are joining STG a recruitment process has been ongoing and appointments made for two technical assistants and one scanning assistant based at the Rochester main office. Due to the additional staff and the confines of the office, all technical administrators will operate using a hot desk arrangement on both floors.
- 2.17. A revised structure chart is provided at Appendix 1 detailing how the staffing arrangements will be after the 1<sup>st</sup> April.

### **3. Delivery of service following data transfer**

- 3.1. As mentioned above the delivery of the services is structured around digital applications and a digital process to accept submissions, validate and record these, allocate to appropriate staff and for that staff member or members to progress the work. 80% of the partnership's current applications are submitted in digital format and it is envisaged that this will be replicated at Canterbury within the first six months of operation.
- 3.2. The registration and processing of applications has been speeded up and simplified by this process. It allows for quicker distribution to the surveying team leaders to allocate work to appropriate team members. Plan vetting will be done digitally either in the main office, at Canterbury's hot desks or where agreed at home. Some plan vetting can also be carried out at the partner's hot desks arrangements in Gravesham, Medway or Swale.
- 3.3. Inspections for all types of work are allocated by team leaders to the appropriate surveyor, normally by 16:30 the afternoon prior to the visit, however, the partnership accepts requests for same day visits up to 10am in the morning. The surveyor can prepare for the daily workload, in the office, at home or at one of the satellite offices.
- 3.4. One area of the operation which may change is that of the out of hours dangerous structure call out. Currently the partnership operates a rota whereas Canterbury use a cascade system. Given the larger area and through the measures document we are present consulting staff as to whether one larger rota covering all four authorities or two smaller rotas covering two districts each would be the most favoured option. As part of the partner contributions fund the dangerous structures service it is important that a secure system is in place going forward.

- 3.5. The digital transformation of the enlarged partnership will ensure continue high standards of service and a greater consistency. Whilst electronic applications are the favoured method of deposit there remains the facility for applicants to send in or hand in hardcopy applications at the Canterbury site, just as there are at the other three sites. These would then be transferred to the Rochester office via by the DX system. They are delivered to the main office the next working day and then scanned into the system to follow the normal process.
- 3.6. Canterbury staff were initially concerned about the lack of presence on the site in order to deal with personal callers and the arrangement for four hot desks have now overcome that concern. However, our experience at the other authorities is that footfall quickly diminishes as agents become used to sending in details to the main office.
- 3.7. With regards technical enquiries we have a resident duty surveyor who can deal with general technical enquiries during the day. We have found that because we offer to visit customers on site to discuss any issues, even prior to application, clients and customers prefer that service as it saves on them travelling and allows for the discussion of the practical elements of the issue on site where they can be resolved.
- 3.8. Having the extra resources in the partnership allows for the time for these visits to be made. These are very well received by both new and regular clients and it is another distinguishing additional service available through the size of the group. With the addition of Canterbury as a fourth partner this and other benefits can be utilised across a much wider area.

#### **4. Financial Implications**

- 4.1. There are no direct financial implications from this report as the financial plans have been agreed at each of the four authorities.

#### **5. Legal Implications**

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

#### **6. Recommendation**

- 6.1. Members are asked to note the contents of the report.

#### **7. Suggested Reason for Decision**

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

**Lead officer contact**

Tony Van Veghel, Director, South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership,  
Foord Annexe, Eastgate House, High Street, Rochester, ME1 1EW

Tel: 01634 331552

E-mail: [tony.vanveghel@stgbc.org.uk](mailto:tony.vanveghel@stgbc.org.uk)

**Appendices:**

Appendix 1 – Revised Structure Chart

**Background papers**

None