

SOUTH THAMES GATEWAY BUILDING CONTROL JOINT COMMITTEE

2 DECEMBER 2021

MONITORING REPORT SEPTEMBER TO NOVEMBER 2021

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

Summary

The report updates the Joint Committee on the current forecast for the 2021/2022 financial year and gives details against the progress of the objectives of the Business Plan 2021/2022.

1. Budget and policy framework
 - 1.1. The Joint Committee requires the preparation of monitoring reports to be reported to the Officer's Steering Group and the Joint Committee.
2. Director's comments
 - 2.1. The report gives an overview of the position of the budget and the progression against the objectives.
 - 2.2. Our assistant building control surveyors continue to develop their skills and technical knowledge to enable them to increase the level of independence on site and plan examinations.
 - 2.3. The loss of staff has a profound effect on those that are left to carry out the work. Despite endeavours to recruit experienced/qualified surveyors, the partnership has been unsuccessful and continues to rely on developing its own. Currently carrying two building control surveyor vacancies, this was further compounded in October with a further reduction in flexible retirement working days for a senior surveyor and the retirement of the operations manager in December.
 - 2.4. Canterbury City Council provided the opportunity in November for the consultancy to carry out condition surveys on 31 of their public conveniences. Medway Council also provided further consultancy work with condition surveys being carried out on four of their residential blocks and a further programme of works planned between December 2021 and March 2022.

2.5. Finally, the budget monitoring at Appendix 2 shows us achieving a balanced budget and whilst this will be dependent on income continuing at its current rate for January through March, it is considered at this stage this position will be maintained again this year.

3. Delivery plan update

3.1. Within our service delivery plan for 2020/2021, there are a number of actions under each of the three objectives. This section will update Members on the progress on a number of actions within each objective.

3.2. Through October refresher training undertaken by all surveyors on asbestos, it was ensured that they receive the correct level of information, instruction, and training so they can continue to work safely and without risk.

3.3. Our assistant building control surveyors attended a virtual training course run by the Local Authority Building Control (LABC) on structures. This builds on their current training and understanding and better assists with their on-site assessment and when inspecting and reviewing site investigation reports.

3.4. All staff have been undergoing safeguarding training as part of Medway Council's mandatory training programme.

4. Use of resources overview

4.1. Having been with the partnership from the start, one of our most experienced surveyors and head of operations will be semi-retiring in December. A senior surveyor, also having been with the partnership from the start, has reduced their working week further as part of their flexible retirement plan as well as due to family commitments. The expected loss of these senior/experienced surveyors was highlighted in our current Business Plan 2021/2024.

4.2. Following a successful interview, the partnership had the opportunity to recruit a semi-qualified surveyor who would join STG on 1 December 2021. Unfortunately, their current employer offered more favourable working conditions which has since persuaded them to remain.

4.3. STG were approached by Canterbury City Council to carry out condition surveys on 31 of their public conveniences, having been let down by an external provider. Delivery of the project was delayed due to contractual requirements by Canterbury's legal services in employing the partnership to undertake this work. This has now been resolved and the work is scheduled to be completed by the end of November.

4.4. The consultancy continues to carry out weekly decent homes surveys on behalf of Medway Council as part of the housing programme of works. In October, additional work was undertaken with the delivery of condition surveys on three of their residential blocks.

- 4.5. The consultancy will also undertake condition surveys on 225 of Medway's housing properties from December 2021 to March 2022 to facilitate a programme of works over the next two years.
- 4.6. Following the unprecedented failure of several approved inspectors (AI's) unable to obtain or renew their insurance cover in 2019/2020 the building control environment saw a number unable to carry out their function. In the last few months, the Construction Industry Council Approved Inspector Register (CICAIR), has taken the decision to withdraw the licence to operate of two approved inspectors from March/April 2022. This decision would not have been taken lightly and continues to demonstrate the changeable environment.

5. Performance

- 5.1. Details of our performance statistics are shown in Appendix 2. Given that the number of fee-earning applications submitted for this period are 9% higher than the same period in 2020/2021, the performance on processing and plan examination remains above 94%.
- 5.2. As the partnership has been unsuccessful in recruiting qualified/experienced surveyors and is currently carrying three vacancies, a consultation with surveyors was undertaken. The consultation looked at what is working well and what is not and how we can adapt to continue to deliver with less resources. The outcome of the consultation will be used to modify the partnerships site inspection and plan checking procedures.
- 5.3. Customer's awareness of our new online inspection booking facility is increasing as customers experience the ease of booking and tracking their requests 24/7.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1. The budget monitoring sheet attached at Appendix 1 shows a balanced budget.

7. Legal implications

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

8. Risk management

- 8.1 The inability to recruit suitably qualified/experienced building control surveyors places increased pressure on existing staff. As projected in our current business plan, a number of senior surveyors are expected to retire over the next two years.

8.2 There is concern within the surveying teams with risk, accountability, and training. The heavy workloads already cause difficulty with facilitating training which will need to be undertaken if staff are to evidence their competencies to ensure they are licensed to work on the relevant category of development.

8.3 Potential for staff to be poached due to the lack of building control surveyors within the industry and approved inspectors offering higher salaries.

9. Recommendation

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

10. Suggested reason for decision

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

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Exempt Appendices

Appendix 1 – November 2021 Monitoring Statement for STG Building Control Partnership

Appendix 2 – Performance Monitoring

Background papers

None