

Medway Council
Meeting of South Thames Gateway Building Control Joint
Committee

Thursday, 2 December 2021

10.25am to 10.55am

Record of the meeting

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

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

In Attendance: Gemma Dand, Technical and Administration Manager - South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership
James Freeman, Head of Planning, Swale Borough Council
Wendy Lane, Assistant Director (Planning) - Gravesham Borough Council
Dee O'Rourke, Assistant Director Culture and Community
Janine Weaver, Director, South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership
Debbie Yau, Democratic Services Officer

17 Apologies for absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Spooner.

18 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting of the Joint Committee held on 16 September 2021 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

19 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Other Significant Interests

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

Other interests

There were none.

20 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

21 Monitoring Report - September to November 2021

Discussion:

Members considered the Partnership's monitoring report from September to November 2021 which set out the current forecast for the 2021-2022 financial year and gave details against the progress of the objectives of the Business Plan 2021-2022. They appreciated the Partnership's performance during the past 18 months when it had faced real challenges and difficulties brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

There was a concern about the need for the Partnership to recruit and retain qualified professionals in the surveying teams by offering more competitive salary packages as otherwise the local authorities might end up deploying more resources in building control work. Members were advised that the Partnership was in a good position when it came into existence in 2007 and was able to offer a market premium to help recruit staff. However, following a pay freeze since 2008, salaries had become less competitive enabling surveyors to find better salary packages in the private sector. The Partnership would be more competitive if there was a salary uplift.

Members further noted that as a result of the Building Safety Bill, surveyors would be regraded accordingly to domestic and non-domestic tiers. If a post-restructuring salary review could be done with more resources deployed by the local authorities, the Partnership would be able to recruit and retain quality surveyors. Views were expressed that while injecting additional resources by individual local authorities was inevitable, the end result might bring about more business/income and hence help balance the additional resources for the salary uplift, and that the local authorities should pursue this option if there was a business case.

Nevertheless, the Partnership was requested to keep abreast of the latest proposed changes in building control and to provide a report by February/March 2022 on the related adjustment to the Partnership's budget as a result of the proposed salary uplift for surveyors.

Decision:

The Joint Committee agreed to note the contents of the report.

Reason for Decision:

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

22 Business Plan 2022-2025

Discussion:

Members considered a report seeking agreement to the South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership's Business Plan and Delivery Plan for 2022-2025 (dated 3 November 2021 Version 2).

Decision:

The Joint Committee agreed to approve the updated version of the Business Plan and refer it to the Cabinet or relevant Committee of each partner authority to approve the Final Draft Business Plan.

Reason for Decision:

The Joint Committee has a duty under the Memorandum of Agreement to formally consult with partner authorities on the draft Business Plan.

23 Fourth Term Report

Discussion:

Members noted that the third term of the Partnership ended on 30 September 2022. They considered the report which reflected some of the achievements of the Partnership over the past 5 years and provided a recommendation for the Joint Committee to endorse continuing onto a fourth term and understood that it was a decision for each authority to continue into a fourth term.

A Member recalled the challenges faced and overcome by the Partnership and the proactive support given by the local authorities to the building control business in the past 14 years, and the achievements of the Partnership had proved the endeavour to be worth pursuing. This view was echoed by another Member who highlighted the high management charges for building control run by individual local authorities without the Partnership, and the positive working relationships among the boroughs/districts and trade union bodies. He nevertheless urged for a closer connection between the local authorities and the Partnership with a view to better understanding its work.

In this connection, a Member requested and the Partnership agreed to give a short presentation to councillors at Swale Borough Council on the real benefits brought by the Partnership. He added his appreciation on the magnificent work achieved by the Partnership during the pandemic.

Decision:

The Joint Committee agreed to recommend to Canterbury, Gravesham, Medway, and Swale Councils that the South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership continues for a fourth term from 1 October 2022 and requested that

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the Director of the Partnership in consultation with the Officer Steering Group submits reports to the respective authorities.

Reason for Decision:

The Partnership agreement is for a period of five years and any decision to extend this term requires the agreement of the four councils referred to in the paragraph above and the Joint Committee.

24 Schedule of meetings

Discussion:

Members considered a report regarding a provisional programme of meetings for the 2022/2023 municipal year.

Decision:

The Joint Committee agreed the provisional timetable of meetings for the 2022/2023 municipal year as set out in paragraph 2.3 of the report.

Reason for Decision:

The Joint Committee agreed to the provisional programme of meetings for the 2022/2023 municipal year, so as to provide some certainty for Members and the Partner Authorities.

Chairman

Date:

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