

CABINET

7 FEBRUARY 2023

SOUTH THAMES GATEWAY BUILDING CONTROL PARTNERSHIP BUSINESS PLAN

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Jane Chitty, Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation and Member of Joint Committee

Report from: Richard Hicks, Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive

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Summary

This report seeks agreement to the South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership Business Plan for 2023-2026 and accompanying Delivery Plan for 2023-2026.

1. Budget and policy framework

1.1. The approval of the South Thames Gateway (STG) Building Control Partnership Business Plan is a matter for Cabinet; however, specific parts of the plan may need to be progressed in accordance with the Council's relevant policies and procedures. The STG Building Control Partnership involving Medway, Gravesham and Swale went live in 2007 and was expanded in 2018 with Canterbury City Council joining on the 1st April 2018. The Partnership's business plan outlines how the building control function for the four Partnership Councils will be delivered over the next three financial years.

2. Background

2.1. The South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership (involving Medway, Canterbury, Gravesham, and Swale) went live in 2007 and the Partnership's business plan outlines how the building control function for the four Partnership Councils will be delivered over the next three financial years.

2.2. The Joint Committee's Constitution sets out the process for approval of the business plan each year and the timing required to ensure that each partner authority can incorporate associated budget requirements into the financial planning process for the subsequent year. The stages to this process are as follows:

- Before 1 October each year the Joint Committee is required to approve and send its draft Business Plan for the following year to each partner authority for comments.
- Each Council has 35 days (from receipt) to provide comments to the secretary of the Joint Committee on the draft business plan. To streamline the process, the Cabinets in each partner authority have agreed to delegate authority to the relevant director, in consultation with the council's Chief Finance Officer and appointed member on the Joint Committee to deal with this element of the process.
- The Joint Committee is then required to meet to consider any comments received and agree any revisions to the draft business plan.
- By no later than 5 January the Joint Committee must send a revised draft to each partner authority for their final approval.
- Each partner authority must advise the Secretary to the Joint Committee whether it approves or rejects the revised draft business plan by no later than 10 days before the Annual Meeting of the Joint Committee. (The Joint Committee will formally adopt the Business Plan at its Annual meeting).

2.3. There are also provisions in the Constitution of the Joint Committee stipulating the process and timescales for agreeing amendments to the Business Plan during each year.

2.4. Whilst much of the building control partnership operation is subject to competition from approved inspectors, the service retains statutory responsibilities regarding public protection eg, dangerous structures, demolitions, unauthorised works, and maintenance of public registers etc.

3. Executive Summary

3.1. The Business Plan outlines how the building control function will be delivered on behalf of the four Partnership Councils up until 2026 and indicates what the contributions will be between 2023-2026.

3.2. The partnership like other council services is experiencing resourcing pressures having lost three senior surveyors to the private sector and two to retirement over the last two years. Whilst it operates an excellent in-house training programme, it can take up to four years to train a surveyor and this heavily impacts existing staff who already have extensive workloads and mandatory training as part of the Building Safety Act 2022.

3.3. Developing our own surveyors helps to maintain resilience and future proof the partnership. The Business Plan continues to follow this training path to ensure surveyors can demonstrate the competencies to achieve the relevant licences, under the Building Safety Act, to carry-out their duties.

- 3.4. Under the Act the Building Safety Regulator will oversee the performance of the whole building control profession. All surveyors both public and private will have to be registered with them regardless of whether they work on higher-risk buildings or not. It is anticipated that once registered there will be an ongoing re-registration on a four-year cycle.
- 3.5. Demand for experienced and qualified surveyors is more competitive and surveyors are already leaving the public sector for the higher salaries attainable in the private sector which also comes without the challenges of the managing enforcement, dangerous structures and the immediacy of response customers are demanding on the increasing volume of communications.
- 3.6. In 2022/2023 a review of salary and grades was undertaken by the partnership with a view to addressing the inconsistencies with pay and assist in competing with the private sector. To remain competitive, it is vital that this is not a 'one and done' process. The partnership needs to introduce a competitive salary policy where a bi-annual review is undertaken to review posts and salaries within the industry. This can help mitigate some of the competitive repercussions and demonstrate to staff their value and benefit of working for the partnership.
- 3.7. The partnership needs to adopt a more proactive recruitment and training strategy that is looking forward at potential shortages and developing trainees now to fill the vacant posts of the future. This would build in greater resilience and increase motivation.
- 3.8. Creation of a trainer role and utilising the knowledge and experience of retiring or retired surveyors to deliver the training to trainees would remove the pressure from operational surveyors. This would have the benefit of existing surveyors able to focus on the service delivery, speed up the training programme for trainees and increase motivation for the team.

4. Risk management

- 4.1. Should chargeable applications and therefore income fall below expectations and outside of any mitigating proposals put forward to enable a zero-based budget there may be further calls on the contributions from each of the partner authorities. However, this would be only applied for as a last resort.
- 4.2. Service risks are set out in Part 3 of the Service Delivery Plan 2023-2026.

5. Financial implications

- 5.1. The Memorandum of Agreement, which underpins the Partnership, states "each Council shall notify the Partnership no later than 28 February in each year the amount the Council has allocated to the Partnership from its revenue budget". For Medway the sum of £135,064 has been provided for in the 2023-2024 draft budget, which demonstrates exceptional value for money as in

comparison to the costs of one building control surveyor, including on-cost, is £73,000.

- 5.2. The table below shows the number of surveyors each partner authority's contribution pays for.

	Number of Surveyors (FTEs)		
	2023/2024	2024/2025	2025/2026
Canterbury	1.04	1.05	1.08
Gravesham	0.68	0.69	0.70
Medway	1.85	1.88	1.92
Swale	0.95	0.96	0.98

The partnership has 17 FTE surveyor posts and requires 5 surveyors for the Medway area.

6. Legal implications

- 6.1. Building Control function is a statutory duty under the Building Act 1984 and therefore must be provided by each authority – whether as a partnership arrangement or a standalone service.

7. Recommendation

- 7.1. That the proposed Business Plan for 2023-2026 and Delivery Plan for the South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership, as set out in the Exempt Appendix, be approved by the Cabinet and the proposed contribution of £135,064 for 2023-2024 be noted.

8. Suggested reasons for decision

- 8.1. The constitution of the Joint Committee requires approval of the Business Plan for the following year by the Cabinet of each Partner Authority.

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Appendices

Exempt Appendix - South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership Business Plan 2023-2026 and Service Delivery Plan 2023-2026

Background papers

None