

Cabinet

10 February 2026

South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership Business Plan 2026 – 2029

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Simon Curry, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration

Report from: Adam Bryan, Director of Place

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Summary

This report seeks agreement to the South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership Business Plan for 2026 to 2029.

1. Recommendation

- 1.1. The Cabinet is asked to approve the Business Plan for 2026-2029 for the South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership, as set out in the Exempt Appendix.
- 1.2. The Cabinet is asked to agree the contribution arrangements set out in section 2 of the business plan incorporating Registered Building Inspector (RBI) establishment growth plan, proposing a phased increase of one RBI per year over the next three years, as approved by STG Joint Committee on 11 December 2025 and the proposed contribution of £415,629.00 for 2026-2027.

2. Suggested reasons for decision

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

3. Budget and policy framework

- 3.1. 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 Partnership's business plan outlines how the

building control function for the four Partnership Councils will be delivered over the next three financial years.

4. Background

- 4.1. The South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership (involving Medway Council, Canterbury City Council, Gravesham Borough Council, and Swale Council) went live in 2007 and was expanded in 2018 with Canterbury City Council joining on the 1 April 2018.
- 4.2. 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; and
 - 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).
- 4.3. 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.
- 4.4. Whilst much of the building control partnership operation is subject to competition from registered building control approvers (RBCAs), the service retains statutory responsibilities regarding public protection eg, dangerous structures, demolitions, unauthorised works, and maintenance of public registers etc.

- 4.5. The Government is introducing an enhanced Local Government Reform (LGR) Framework, which places a strong emphasis on collaborative arrangements that bring together multiple local authorities across a wider geographic footprint. This approach is intended to strengthen strategic capacity and deliver efficiencies within key service areas. The four partner authorities within this partnership have successfully operated under such a model for over 18 years in the delivery of building control services, achieving substantial financial savings for member authorities through economies of scale.
- 4.6. The effect LGR will have on the partnership is currently unknown, but any impacts and proposed changes will be scrutinised through the Joint Committee.

5. Advice and analysis

- 5.1. The business plan reflects the significant transformation currently reshaping the building regulation sector and outlines how the partnership will continue to respond proactively to these challenges.
- 5.2. The landscape has changed dramatically following the implementation of the Building Safety Act. Licensing requirements, enhanced supervision standards and mounting recruitment and retention pressures are redefining the industry. These changes are mandatory and carry substantial implications for compliance and service delivery.
- 5.3. Three major pressures stand out:
- Registered Building Inspector (RBI) shortages - A considerable number of surveyors have exited the profession, which was already suffering from shortages, with many opting for early retirement due to increasing complexity and regulatory demands;
 - supervision requirements - Greater emphasis on mentoring and on-site oversight of inspections has intensified resource needs; and
 - salary competition - Private sector organisations are offering significantly higher remuneration packages creating a serious risk to staff retention.
- 5.4. To build resilience and maintain statutory service delivery, this plan proposes a phased recruitment strategy; one additional RBI per year over the three-year period. This approach acknowledges the realities of staff turnover, competitive market conditions and the need to support career progression within the partnership.
- 5.5. While we currently cannot compete with private sector salary packages, we will invest in developing talent through structured training and qualification pathways. Growing our own RBIs will take time and resources, but it is essential for long-term sustainability and to ensure we meet future competency requirements. We also recognise that salary competitiveness will need to be considered in future business plans to remain an attractive employer and retain skilled professionals within the partnership.

6. Risk management

6.1. If chargeable applications, and therefore income, fall below expectations, and proposed mitigation measures fail to achieve a balanced budget, additional financial contributions may be requested from partner authorities. This would only be considered as a last resort.

6.2. A shortage of RBIs at the required licence levels would impact service delivery. Consequences include:

- delays in site inspections, certificate issuance, and communication responses;
- need to contract suitably licenced surveyors at additional cost; and
- limited ability to develop staff to higher levels, increasing risk of staff leaving for private sector roles due to workload and lack of career progression.

6.3. Difficulty in recruiting qualified, experienced and licensed RBIs places extra pressure on existing staff. Contributing factors include:

- shortage of licenced RBIs; and
- uncompetitive salary levels compared to market rates.

6.4. There is a high risk of staff being poached due to:

- industry-wide shortage of RBIs;
- new licensing requirements increasing demand; and
- private sector offering significantly higher salary packages.

Since May 2025, four RBIs have left for better-paid positions.

6.5. All identified service risks are detailed in Part 9 of the Business Plan.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Financial stability	Non-chargeable activities require clear funding arrangements.	Approval on forecasted contribution level	C III
Capacity shortfalls	Increasing inspection volumes, supervision and regulatory complexity not growing the RBI workforce	Propose increase in one RBI per year over the next three years and increase use of digital tools to reduce RBI workload	B II

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Regulatory risk	BSR expects proactive workforce planning.	Develop strategic plan to build resilience	B III
Competitive disadvantage	Market for RBIs is tight, worsening staffing pressures and inflating future costs.	Maintain a talent pipeline through trainees and career pathway	B II
Impact on quality and timeliness	Without additional RBIs meeting targets may become unachievable, affecting service reputation and statutory compliance.	Prioritise inspections based on risk and investigation development of automating reports to meet KPI 1.12 targets more effectively	B III

Likelihood	Impact
A Very likely	I Catastrophic
B Likely	II Major
C Unlikely	III Moderate
D Rare	IV Minor

7. Climate change implications

7.1. There are no direct climate change implications as a result of this report.

8. Financial implications

8.1. 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 £415,629 has been provided for in the 2026-2027 draft budget.

8.2. This demonstrates exceptional value for money. To illustrate, the cost of employing one RBI including on-costs, is approximately £87,000. Medway Council’s contribution would therefore equate to funding 4.78 RBIs with no allowance for other staff, supplies or services. By comparison, engaging a Class 2D-F contractor would cost around £135,000, plus recruitment agency fees.

8.3. This highlights the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the service model compared to the cost of delivering the statutory function independently.

9. Legal implications

- 9.1. The 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.

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Appendices

Exempt Appendix 1 South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership Business
Plan 2026-2029 (version 5)

Background papers

None