

Meeting of South Thames Gateway Building Control Joint Committee

Tuesday, 27 September 2011

2.00pm to 3.00pm

Record of the meeting

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

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

In Attendance: Janine Boughton, Head of Administration and Business Development (South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership)
Paula Charker, Employee Relations Manager (Medway Council)
Sarah Kilkie, Assistant Director (Communities) (Gravesham Borough Council)
Anthony Law, Democratic Services Officer (Medway Council)
Angela Riches, Senior Accountant (Medway Council)
Tony VanVeghel, Director, South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership
Kevin Woolmer, Finance Manager, Business Support & Regeneration, Community & Culture (Medway Council)

14 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Vikki Finneran (Gravesham Borough Council), James Freeman (Swale Borough Council) and Stephen Gaimster (Medway Council).

15 Record of Meeting

The record of the meeting held on 9 June 2011 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

It was also clarified, in relation to minute 8(b)/6/11, that Eric Fisher had now been replaced by Nick Vickers from Swale Borough Council as the Deputy S151 Officer.

16 Declarations of interest

There were none.

17 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were no urgent items.

18 South Thames Gateway Building Control Customer Service Survey

Discussion:

This report advised Members of the outcome of a customer survey undertaken on the service provided by the partnership.

The survey had been conducted over a one-week period in June 2011 via telephone, direct mailing and also in the partnership's reception. It was noted that there had been a 45% response rate with respondents covering all three authority areas within the partnership.

A copy of the findings was attached to the report and the Head of Administration and Business Development gave details of the findings and areas for improvement. This included:

- The importance attributed by all client groups to processes involved with communication and the speed of delivering the service.
- The finding that consistency of interpretation, in both plan checking and site inspection, had scored highly amongst the professional groups.
- The wish to improve the service for customers by engaging with property owners to explain the building control process and the responsibility for functions. This would seek to address any issues around owners not being kept informed by their architects or agents.
- The high scores achieved in relation to both communication and the knowledge of officers in delivering a responsive and efficient service.
- The finding that all groups considered the tracking of applications online as important and both owners and solicitors regarded the ability to search the history of properties as essential. The implications of this would need to be considered when the IT Strategy was presented to the Joint Committee.
- The equality and diversity information that had been sought to evaluate whether the partnership was providing fair access to services.

Members discussed the findings as set out in the report. They considered how respondents had heard of the service, the opportunity for further improvement through the development of technical guidance sheets and the importance of providing clarity on the role of the building control service. The pragmatic approach adopted when responding to client issues was also discussed and Members expressed their concern as to the appropriateness of the questions included within the equality and diversity form, which had been provided by Medway Council.

Decision:

The Joint Committee noted the contents of the report.

19 Exclusion of Press and Public

Decision:

The Joint Committee agreed to exclude the press and public for the consideration of agenda items 7 (South Thames Gateway Building Control Business Plan 2011/2014) and 8 (Monitoring Report April 2011 to August 2011) as they contained commercially sensitive information under paragraph 3 part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

20 South Thames Gateway Building Control Business Plan 2011/2014

Background:

The Director of the South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership presented a report that sought agreement to the draft South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership's Business Plan.

The business plan outlined how the building control function would be delivered for the three partnership Councils. It identified five main objectives for 2012/14 and contained delivery plans for each, together with actions. It was noted that the Partnership's constitution required the Joint Committee to approve and send its draft business plan for the following year to each partner authority for comments before 1 October each year.

The Director provided an overview of the business plan and explained that having prepared a three-year plan last year the opportunity had been taken to refresh it with current data and statistics and review progress against each objective whilst developing new strategies to accommodate new challenges. As the plan was taken through the approval process this data would continue to be updated. The inclusion of a financial model for 2012/2013 – 2014/2015 and benchmarking information was highlighted and it was noted that an IT Strategy would be developed. The Director also updated Members on the Partnership's accommodation arrangements.

The outcome of a Diversity Impact Assessment screening was attached to the report and it was noted that this showed that a full Diversity Impact Assessment was not necessary.

The Joint Committee considered the business plan and the future of the Building Control Partnership. It was noted that the Partnership's agreement was due to expire at the end of September 2012. The Joint Committee Members discussed and supported the continuation of the Partnership and stressed the importance of members of the Officers Steering Group taking reports to the respective authorities as soon as possible to take this forward. The Committee also considered and supported the potential expansion of the Partnership and

South Thames Gateway Building Control Joint Committee, 27 September 2011

requested that the Director of the South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership liaise with neighbouring authorities accordingly.

Decision:

- a) The Joint Committee approved the South Thames Gateway Building Control Business Plan for consultation as set out in the summary of this report.
- b) The Joint Committee supported the continuation of the South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership and requested that members of the Officers Steering Group submit reports to their respective authorities as soon as possible to take this matter forward.
- c) The Joint Committee requested that the Director of the South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership speak to neighbouring authorities as to their potential inclusion within the Partnership (with a caveat that any costs arising from redundancies/retirement payments would not be transferred to the South Thames Gateway Partnership in the event of joining the Partnership).

Reasons:

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

21 Monitoring Report April 2011 to August 2011

Background:

This report updated the Joint Committee on the current forecast for the 2011/12 financial year and gave details against the progress of the objectives of the Business Plan 2011/2014.

Details of applications and income received compared against the last two years was shown in Appendix 1 to the report. The budget monitoring report for May 2011 was included in Appendix 2 to the report and an updated budget monitoring report, with information up to and including August 2011, was tabled at the meeting.

The Director of the South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership gave details of a number of issues included within the report, such as new ways of working, workforce development, emerging issues for the partnership and key work streams for the next 3 months.

Decisions:

The Joint Committee noted the contents of the report.

South Thames Gateway Building Control Joint Committee, 27 September 2011

Reasons:

The Constitution requires the Joint Committee to maintain a monitoring role on the progress of the Partnership.

Chairman

Date:

Anthony Law, Democratic Services Officer

Telephone: 01634 332008

Email: democratic.services@medway.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank