

| Policy and Resources Committee | |
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| Meeting Date | 27 November 2024 |
| Report Title | South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership Business Plan 2025 – 2028 |
| EMT Lead | Emma Wiggins Director of Regeneration & Neighbourhoods |
| Head of Service | Joanne Johnson Head of Place |
| Lead Officer | Joanne Johnson Head of Place |
| Classification | Part Open / Part Exempt |
| Recommendations | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Members are asked to provide comment on the draft South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership (STGBC) Business Plan for 2025 – 2028. 2. Members are asked to endorse a partnership review of STGBC budget and expenditure during the course of the next financial year to evaluate the appropriateness of the chosen financial model. |

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek comments on the draft South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership (STGBC) Business Plan for 2025 – 2028.
- 1.2 The STGBC Constitution states that before 1 October each year the STGBC Joint Committee is required to approve and send its draft Business Plan for the following year to each partner authority for comment. This draft was considered at the STGBC Joint Committee meeting of 26 September 2024.
- 1.3 This draft Business Plan sits within the Council's membership of the fourth term of the STGBC partnership.
- 1.4 Following consideration by each partner authority, the revised business plan will be reviewed at the December STGBC Joint Committee, including the final financial statement. This will then return to each authority for ratifying in the new year.
- 1.5 The Joint Committee has a duty under the Memorandum of Agreement to formally adopt the Business Plan at the Annual General Meeting.

2 Background

- 2.1 The STG Building Control Partnership (involving Medway, Gravesham and Swale) was formed in October 2007 with Canterbury joining in April 2018. Under the terms of the Memorandum Agreement between the partner authorities, a rolling business plan needs to be agreed.
- 2.2 Each partner authority is requested to comment on the draft business plan and advise the STBGC Joint Committee.
- 2.3 Much of the STGBC operation is subject to competition from approved inspectors within the private sector. The service however retains statutory responsibilities regarding public protection e.g. dangerous structures.
- 2.4 Over recent years, the service has found itself increasingly competing with approved inspectors within a diminishing market. This has put pressure on income generation within the service, and correspondingly has put pressure on the resourcing of the service itself. This has been exacerbated by the Building Safety Act 2022 which mandated the licensing of all individuals within the profession, placing further pressure on staff resources, with many surveyors opting to leave the profession / not operate at advanced levels. This is set against a national picture of 25% of local government building control posts being vacant (LGA Capacity Survey – Building Control: December 2023).
- 2.5 The draft Business Plan 2025-2028 (Appendix I) outlines how the building control function is proposed to be delivered on behalf of the partnership local authorities up until 2028, and forecasts budget contributions from 2025/26 to 2027/28.
- 2.6 It sets out steps to secure ongoing stability in the face of resourcing and regulatory challenges. Three possible future financial and operational models are proposed. At its meeting of 26 September 2024, Joint Committee agreed to recommend option 3, with an end of year financial review to determine its ongoing suitability.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 Members are asked to comment on the draft South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership Business Plan for 2025 – 2028.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Council could consider recommending option 1 or option 2. Option 1 is not considered to offer a sustainable future for the partnership. Both alternative options were considered in detail during the Joint Committee on 26 September 2024. The Committee shared the view that option 1 would not be a sustainable choice. Option 2 was rejected as the least affordable for the partner authorities, and was considered be out of kilter with local financial pressures. Option 3 (plus review) was the Joint Committee's recommendation.

4.2 The Council could consider removing itself from the partnership (by giving the requisite year's notice). However, one of the recognised successes of STGBC is the efficiencies secured by economies of scale. This has been borne out through separate reviews undertaken by the partner authorities. There is considerable value in resilience and risk mitigation through being part of the partnership. As such, this option is not recommended.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

5.1 The draft Business Plan was approved by the STGBC Joint Committee at its meeting of 26 September 2024. Councillor Gibson is Swale Borough Council's representative on this Joint Committee.

5.2 Officer input had been sought and provided on earlier drafts, from Planning and Finance teams.

5.3 This same process is carried out with each of the partner authorities.

6 Implications

| Issue | Implications |
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| Corporate Plan | The Business Plan supports the 'Running the Council' priority of the Corporate Plan, by supporting the operation of a fiscally sound and resilient partnership arrangement. |
| Financial, Resource and Property | <p>Costs involved in being a partner authority are set out in the appendix.</p> <p>The Medium Term Financial Plan will reflect the proposed contributions as set out in the appendix.</p> <p>Finance colleagues were consulted on the draft plan.</p> |
| Legal, Statutory and Procurement | <p>The Partnership and Joint Committee operate under a memorandum of agreement signed by each of the partner authorities.</p> <p>Legal colleagues were consulted on the draft plan.</p> |
| Crime and Disorder | Effective control and enforcement of building standards and dealing with dangerous structures is consistent with an increased perception of security and wellbeing. |
| Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency | None identified at this stage |

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| Health and Wellbeing | None identified at this stage. |
| Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults | None identified at this stage. |
| Risk Management and Health and Safety | The risk of insufficient operational resources is documented in the appendix. The Building Control function makes important contributions to health and safety, many of which are statutory. |
| Equality and Diversity | None identified at this stage. |
| Privacy and Data Protection | None identified at this stage. |

7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

Appendix I: Draft STBGC Business Plan 2025 – 2028 (exempt)

8 Background Papers

[Local Government Capacity Survey – Building Control: December 2023](#)