

Policy and Resources Committee	
Meeting Date	26 th November 2025
Report Title	South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership Business Plan 2026 – 2029
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Joanne Johnson Head of Place
Lead Officer	Joanne Johnson Head of Place
Classification	Part Open / Part Exempt
Recommendations	1. Members are asked to provide comment on the draft South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership (STGBC) Business Plan for 2026 – 2029.

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 2026 – 2029 as set out in appendix I.
- 1.2 STGBC is a partnership arrangement between the local authorities of Gravesham, Medway, Canterbury and Swale. The partnership was established in 2007.
- 1.3 The STGBC Constitution states that before 1st 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.
- 1.4 Following consideration by each partner authority, the revised business plan is required to 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. (If the draft is supported and no changes are subsequently made, ratification is deemed to be given and Policy and Resources Committee does not consider the document for a second time).
- 1.5 The appended draft was due to be considered at the STGBC Joint Committee meeting of 18th September 2025, in accordance with the Constitution. Unfortunately, this meeting was not quorate and could not proceed. The replacement meeting was unable to be scheduled within the required timeframe. As a result, members met informally on 30th October 2025. Each partner authority was represented.

- 1.6 Members of the Joint Committee reviewed the draft Business Plan and discussed the two options it contains. Consensus was reached that option 2 would be recommended to each partner authority for approval.
- 1.7 The Joint Committee has a duty under the Memorandum of Agreement to formally adopt the Business Plan at its Annual General Meeting. Given, therefore, that Joint Committee will meet formally to approve the Business Plan, it is considered acceptable for Policy and Resources Committee to consider the draft following an informal recommendation, in order to adhere to the required timescale. All partner authorities have agreed to follow this route.
- 1.8 The Joint Committee to receive and discuss partner comments on the draft is scheduled for 11th December 2025.

2 Background

- 2.1 The South Thames Gateway 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 of 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 STGBC Joint Committee of these comments.
- 2.3 STGBC provides statutory services. Much of its operation is subject to competition from approved inspectors within the private sector. The service also has statutory responsibilities ringfenced to the public sector, 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, leaving significant vacancies.
- 2.5 The draft Business Plan 2026-2029 outlines how the building control function is proposed to be delivered on behalf of the partnership local authorities up until 2029, and forecasts budget contributions from 2026/27 to 2028/29.
- 2.6 It sets out steps to secure ongoing stability in the face of these resourcing and regulatory challenges. Two future financial and operational model options are considered. At its informal meeting of 30th October 2025, Joint Committee agreed to recommend option 2.
- 2.7 The financial adjustments outlined in the plan are deemed to reflect a realistic assessment of income trends and cost pressures, responding to the ongoing

economic challenges. They result in either an 18.9% or 26.6% increase in partner contributions for the 2026/2027 financial year compared to the current business plan.

- 2.8 The importance of the Building Control service as a statutory service is widely recognised and the work of STGBC is held in high regard by its partners. The benefits of the partnership approach to resourcing the volume and nature of the work (especially in terms of out of hours requirements) are significant.
- 2.9 Given the unexpected increase in contributions, Joint Committee is expected to consider returning the additional uplift from any 2026/27 surplus to the partner authorities rather than allocating it to the STGBC reserve (which is the default position as set out in the Memorandum of Agreement). Partner authorities have been reminded to actively promote the delivery of all relevant workstreams through the partnership, ensuring alignment with strategic objectives and maximising collaborative benefits.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 Members are asked to provide comment on the draft South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership Business Plan for 2026 – 2029.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Council could consider recommending option 1 within the draft Business Plan. This was considered in detail when Joint Committee met on 30th October. The Committee rejected this, citing the complexity and operational challenges within the building control industry. In particular, the licensing requirements necessitate a sufficient number of qualified surveyors to deliver the service effectively, ensure appropriate supervision, and support economic development through the built environment.
- 4.2 The Council could consider removing itself from the partnership (by giving the requisite one 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 at the informal meeting of Joint Committee on 30th October 2025. Councillor Tim 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 within the partner authorities.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
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	Costs involved in being a partner authority are set out in the appendix. Joint Committee expects to consider a change to the default position that in-year surpluses contribute to the STGBC reserve for 26/27. The Medium Term Financial Plan will reflect the proposed contributions as set out in the appendix. Finance colleagues were consulted on the draft plan.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	The Partnership and Joint Committee operate under a Memorandum of Agreement signed by each of the partner authorities. Legal colleagues were consulted on the draft plan.
Crime and Disorder	Dealing with dangerous structures efficiently can reduce crime and disorder associated with abandoned / deteriorating structures.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	None identified at this stage
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 2026 – 2029 (exempt)

8 Background Papers

None