

| <b>Economy and Property Committee</b> |                                                                     |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Meeting Date</b>                   | 19 <sup>th</sup> March 2026                                         |
| <b>Report Title</b>                   | Swale House – Security and Safety                                   |
| <b>EMT Lead</b>                       | Emma Wiggins<br>Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods         |
| <b>Head of Service</b>                | Joanne Johnson<br>Head of Place                                     |
| <b>Lead Officer</b>                   | Debbie Hardy<br>Buildings Operation and Maintenance Manager         |
| <b>Classification</b>                 | <b>Open</b>                                                         |
| <b>Recommendations</b>                | 1. That members note the report and provide comment as appropriate. |

## **1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This report summarises the measures in place at Swale House regarding the safety and security of the building and its users.

## **2 Background**

- 2.1 At its 8th October 2025 meeting, following consideration of a report on the draft Voluntary and Community Sector Lettings Policy, Economy and Property Committee members discussed the letting of Swale House. In the ensuing discussion, concerns were raised that safety and security may impact lettings.
- 2.2 Officers were asked to provide a report on the above, which is set out below.
- 2.3 This report was originally scheduled to come to Committee in January. However, following the incident at Full Council in December, it was agreed to postpone the report to enable public meetings to be included within its considerations.

### **General: Exterior – Building Security**

- 2.4 CCTV: CCTV cameras are placed at multiple locations which cover the visitor parking area, the undercroft parking, the rear entrance door, staircase exits and the rear road including the compound area. All feeds are livestreamed to the facilities office and recorded. There is a further CCTV camera covering the front entrance which is monitored 24/7 by the Council's CCTV centre. The centre takes over the monitoring of all Swale House cameras out of hours.
- 2.5 Lighting: Motion sensor lighting is installed in the undercroft area and the front entrance is permanently lit.

- 2.6 Walkway: the walkway is locked overnight.
- 2.7 Vehicle access: the gates to the access ramp are closed overnight and at weekends.

#### General: Interior - Building Security

- 2.8 Door locks: interior doors which protect confidential information have coded locks.
- 2.9 Entrance / exit: both doors are on the fob entry system and both can be locked internally to prevent access as required.
- 2.10 Fobs: all members, staff and tenants are issued with photographic identification which acts as a security pass to the building and which is expected to be worn visibly at all times. The fob system records which staff are present in Swale House, and this also acts as a fire safety measure (roll calls automatically print in the Facilities Office when the fire alarm is triggered). Facilities Officers can control access within the building, so that, for example, particular fobs are only active on certain floors.

#### General: Staff Security

- 2.11 Security guard: a security guard is present in reception from 8.45am to 5pm Monday to Thursday, and 8.45am to 12noon on Fridays (or as long as there are members of the public within reception). Hours are extended and staffing increased in response to specific alerts.
- 2.12 Panic alarms: panic alarms are installed within reception and interview booths which sound within the ground floor. Staff in identified roles are issued individual alert devices, and there are clear protocols in place for activating them.
- 2.13 Visitor access: all visitors to Swale House must be signed in by reception or by the Facilities staff and sign out again when leaving. Visitors are hosted by a designated representative from the organisation or meeting they are attending.
- 2.14 Contractor access: contractor access is given by Facilities staff. Contractors are signed in and out so there is a clear record of who is in the building and from what company. All contractors need to report to Facilities staff so they are aware of fire procedures and the asbestos register.
- 2.15 Fire safety: Swale House fire evacuation procedures are explained to members and staff on the first day of induction and are available on the intranet. They are set out to contractors upon arrival. Staff are responsible for advising visitors of fire procedures when meetings begin. The fire alarm is tested weekly and fire drills are held and evaluated at least annually. The Council leads the safe evacuation of all those in the building, including members, staff tenants, visitors and contractors.

- 2.16 First aid / mental health: there are first aid kits on each floor of Swale House, and two defibrillators within the building. First aid kits are checked quarterly and replenished as required. A list of qualified first aiders and accredited mental health first aiders is available on the intranet, and there is a call hunt group for seeking assistance where required. First Aid / Mental Health First Aid policies cover the above.
- 2.17 There is also an Employee Assistance programme, Care First, available to all members and staff, which can provide practical and emotional support. Its full offering is set out on the intranet.
- 2.18 Text alerts: Members, staff and tenants are able to sign up to a text alert system to receive messages relating to Swale House. This has been used with regard to operational matters such as broadband access and building closures, but can be used for any need to communicate rapidly.
- 2.19 All tenants have clauses within their licences relating to adopting / abiding by Swale Borough Council's health and safety and estate management policies.

#### General: Risk Assessments

- 2.20 The following risk assessments are all communicated during staff inductions. They are updated regularly, or as required, and are available on the intranet. Updates are communicated via the weekly all-staff and all-member emails.
- Lone working
  - Asbestos
  - First aid
  - Work related violence and aggression
  - Swale House
  - Swale House plant rooms
  - Fire
- 2.21 An example of a situation which would require a review of these risk assessments outside of the usual cycle is the anti-social behaviour experienced in the undercroft in the summer of 2025.
- 2.22 In response, a multi-departmental group of officers was convened to understand new and updated risks; to develop actions to address the situation, and to determine appropriate mitigations to reduce any risk to building users. Risk assessments were updated and communicated, and information on wider action shared with staff and tenants.
- 2.23 Example actions taken included:
- A reporting system was introduced for members, staff and tenants to log any incidents quickly and easily within a central intelligence source.
  - Regular internal meetings to discuss this and other intelligence regarding ASB and rough sleeping. This sought to strike a balance between managing the needs and behaviours of the individuals concerned (who were in some

cases SBC service users) with the safety and security of the building and its wider user groups.

- Enforcement action (in conjunction with the Police).

2.24 Actions ongoing or for further exploration, include

- Planning with Kent Police (including the (relatively) new 7-strong Kent Police Town Centre Task Force) to determine and agree which actions can be put in place to prevent a repeat occurrence. This includes, for example, pro-active work with local off-licences and enforcement action against repeat perpetrators of ASB (ongoing)
- The completion (by Kent Police) of an Environmental Audit for the town centre (including Swale House) to recommend potential actions to deter ASB (complete, with recommendations to be reviewed jointly and actioned)
- Review of the potential use of the Police and Crime Commissioner Grant to fund external enforcement works to enforce the Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) which includes the undercroft (ongoing)
- Potential to review physical measures to protect the undercroft area, ranging from temporary fencing to permanent structures (cost, practicality and reputation considerations to be factored in).

Public meetings:

2.25 The incident at December's Full Council led to a thorough review of the operation of the Council's public meetings (at Swale House and elsewhere), involving elected members, officers with relevant professional remits (Legal, Community Safety, Democratic Services, Emergency Planning, Property, Communications), and Kent Police.

2.26 An officer debrief was held on the afternoon of 18<sup>th</sup> December to agree immediate actions. This followed a debrief with the Police that morning. A all-member listening session was held on 6<sup>th</sup> January.

2.27 New procedures introduced include:

- Security guards at all evening meetings in the initial weeks following the incident.
- The purchase of new, improved radios for internal communications
- The identification of safe spaces within Swale House for members and staff (with an evacuation exercise planned)
- The introduction of body-worn cameras for staff and security, and appropriate notices within Swale House
- Creation of a new overflow viewing area in reception supported by a ticketing system to ensure the public gallery does not exceed seated capacity.
- Closure of toilets on first and second floors during evening meetings (those on the ground and third floors remain available)
- The introduction of age restrictions for unaccompanied young people
- The development of a Kent Police / Swale Borough Council protocol, founded on a RAG-rating risk assessment process for public meetings. Red and amber ratings recommended by officers are agreed with the meeting

Chair, and are based on agreed triggers. Red and amber meetings will engage specific additional security actions.

- Additional CCTV has been installed, providing improved coverage of the public gallery (for internal use, i.e. not broadcast).

2.28 In addition, officers have acted to support the welfare of those members who were targeted during the incident, and members and staff who have been affected. This has included phone calls and check-ins from senior members of staff and regular highlighting of the Employee Assistance Service (also open to members).

2.29 Actions rejected or for further exploration, include

- Moving all meetings on line (rejected)
- Screen between the public gallery and Chamber (review ongoing)
- Mandatory ID checks (review ongoing)

2.30 Following Policy and Resources Committee's recommendation, Full Council agreed on 18<sup>th</sup> February an increase in the 26/27 revenue budget to accommodate costs associated with these measures.

### **3 Proposals**

3.1 That members note the update and provide comment as appropriate.

### **4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

4.1 As this is a to-note report, there are no alternative options.

### **5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed**

5.1 As this is a to-note report, no consultation has been undertaken or proposed.

### **6 Implications**

| <b>Issue</b>                     | <b>Implications</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Corporate Plan                   | Effective security of staff and premises supports two actions under the 'Running the Council' objective of the Corporate Plan 2023-2027. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support and develop staff.</li><li>• Ensure well managed assets.</li></ul>                                                                                                         |
| Financial, Resource and Property | The measures committed to above can all be funded within the base budget with the exception of <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Additional security presence in 25/26, which is an agreed budget pressure.</li></ul> <p>Full Council agreed in February to allocate funds for Swale House security in the 26/27 budget. This will accommodate additional</p> |

|                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
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|                                                              | security costs, as required, along with some of the additional measures indicated for consideration.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Legal, Statutory and Procurement                             | The Council has statutory obligations with regard to members, officers and operational premises. The measures outlined above support these obligations.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Crime and Disorder                                           | The measures outlined above seek to reduce and mitigate the impact of potential crime and disorder threats to staff and premises.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency                 | No specific implications identified.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Health and Wellbeing                                         | Member and officer safety is a foundation of health and wellbeing.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults | No specific implications identified.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Risk Management and Health and Safety                        | <p>The report sets out the relevant risk assessments which relate to staff and premises safety, and how they are updated and communicated.</p> <p>Homelessness in particular is an emotive subject, with sometimes polarised views about how it should be addressed. There may be a reputational impact for the Council if it is perceived that the situation has been mismanaged.</p> |
| Equality and Diversity                                       | No specific implications identified.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Privacy and Data Protection                                  | The implications of increased CCTV and body-worn cameras have been considered from this perspective.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

## 7 Appendices

None

## 8 Background Papers

None