

Economy & Property Committee Meeting	
Meeting Date	7 th July 2026
Report Title	Swale House Increased Security – Costed Options
EMT Lead	Lisa Fillery Director of Resources
Head of Service	Joanne Johnson Head of Place
Lead Officer	Debbie Hardy Building Operations and Maintenance Manager
Classification	Open
Recommendations	1. That members note the options to secure the footprint of Swale House (and in particular the undercroft). 2. That members reject the options for the reasons set out in the report. 3. That members agree that there should be no tolerance to trespassers within the undercroft and that this stance informs service approaches to relevant action and support.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 At its March meeting, following consideration of a report on the Security and Safety of Swale House, Economy & Property Committee members agreed:

That officers look in to the options to secure the Swale House undercroft and the footprint of the building, including cost implications to enable Members to recommend the best way forward at the next meeting of the Committee.

- 1.2 This report sets out and assesses the related options and costs. It balances the advantages and disadvantages of each option and recommends no action is taken.

2 Background, Context and Proposals

- 2.1 At its 8th October 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, 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.

- 2.3 The report was discussed at Economy and Property Committee in March and officers were asked to provide options, costs and recommendations for additional undercroft security.
- 2.4 Separately, a one-off budget of £125,000 was agreed at Policy and Resources Committee (P&R) on 4th February 2026 for “chamber / meeting security” for financial year 26/27. To date, £24,500 of this budget has been spent on extra internal building security measures with a further £17,400 notionally committed (for public gallery screens, access control points to Chamber doors, cameras in stairwell 1 and upgrades to the member voting system). This will leave £83,100 of that budget available.
- 2.5 Officers have reviewed and costed the following options:
- **Security patrols of external areas.** This would provide security and reassurance during meetings but would still leave the undercroft exposed out of hours. This cost will be approximately £26,300 per annum and would need to be budgeted in all future years. This option has been rejected as not fully meeting the brief and having ongoing financial implications.
 - **Temporary Heras fencing of the undercroft.** This has the advantage of providing visible security at a modest cost of approximately £2,000. However, temporary fencing is unsightly and more vulnerable to break-in than permanent security. It would also not be possible to secure the vehicle ramp in this way, so would require supplementing with controlled vehicular gates.
 - **Fencing of the undercroft with two access control points and a vehicle barrier on the ramp.** This has the advantage of being a comprehensive security response, protecting the building and its users permanently. It is within the available budget, at a cost of approximately £65,000 and would provide optimum reassurance for members, officers and building users. A CGI of this option is shown at Appendix I. There are, however, a range of disadvantages, including:
 - access issues for vehicles and deliveries from the main road, which could likely impact traffic flow / block the highway.
 - staff would need to be available to answer an intercom for deliveries and visitors. This would require intercom investment and a continual interruption in officers’ core duties. Adoption of this function by CCTV is possible, at no additional cost.
 - The intercom system would be open to abuse and ASB (e.g. people claiming to be deliveries to enter without permission; people using the buzzer deliberately to cause disruption). This would be hard to mitigate against.
 - There is a risk of tailgating of users and vehicles. This could then result in vehicles and individuals being ‘trapped’ or ‘kettled’ within the

undercroft, and (feeling / being) more vulnerable than with an open perimeter.

- People utilising the undercroft to 'make a point' may transfer this behaviour to the front entrance, or to the access points to the undercroft.

- **As above, but with the vehicle gate moved further up the access ramp.** This would have the advantage of mitigating the highways issues identified above, but would leave the doors to the Swale House basement exposed and would leave a sheltered area in front of the gate which may attract the kinds of behaviours the fencing is intended to avoid.
- **Fencing off the undercroft with no vehicle or pedestrian access.** This is the most comprehensive security response and would be within budget, but has been rejected as it would require all members, staff and building users to use the front entrance to Swale House. This would cause difficulties for deliveries and disabled user access, and may impact lettings. It would also create redundant space, and put pressure on adjacent surface car parks.

- 2.6. All of the above options share the disadvantage of likely displacing the issues to other areas of the town centre or wider borough. This may lead to negative reputational impact, and / or requests to support other buildings with similar investment.
- 2.7. On balance, officers consider the disadvantages of a fenced solution to outweigh the benefits. This would mean any unauthorised use of the undercroft would continue to be dealt with as it arises using existing services and the powers and means available to them.
- 2.8. Following the misuse of undercroft in 2025, cross-department officer meetings have been convened to focus on the optimum, swiftest solutions should repeat behaviours and issues occur. Actions are reflected in the internal, working Summer Preparedness Plan, which also engages external partners, such as Kent Police, in appropriate action.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 That members note the options to secure the footprint of Swale House (and in particular the undercroft).
- 3.2 That members reject the options for the reasons set out in the report.
- 3.3 That members agree that there should be no tolerance to trespassers within the undercroft and that this stance informs service approaches to relevant action and support.

4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

- 4.1 Members may support any of the options assessed in section 2.5. Options which require investment will be recommended to Policy and Resources Committee.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 This report has been informed by member discussion at Economy and Property Committee.
- 5.2 The agreement to allocate £125,000 for chamber / meeting security was agreed by members at Policy and Resources Committee on 4th February 2026.
- 5.3 The existing spend from the £125,000 budget has been discussed and agreed by Members following an informal meeting of 10th December 2025.
- 5.4 Any recommendations by this Committee for further expenditure from the balance of the available budget will be presented to Policy and Resources Committee on 9th September 2026.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Effective security of staff and premises supports two actions under the 'Running the Council' objective of the Corporate Plan 2023-2027. • Support and develop staff. • Ensure well managed assets
Financial, Resource and Property	Security measures already in place are all funded within the base budget 26/27. Full Council agreed during the 26/27 budget setting in February to allocate funds for chamber / meeting security at Swale House and additional measures could be considered within that (subject to Policy and Resources Committee approval). Some of the options set out above would have ongoing financial implications (e.g. relating to staffing and maintenance) which would need to be addressed during budget setting for future years.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	Built solutions would be procured via the Council's usual processes.
Crime and Disorder	The measures outlined above seek to reduce and mitigate the impact of potential crime and disorder concerns at Swale House, although would impact on the location of the behaviours, not the behaviours themselves.

Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	No specific implications identified
Health and Wellbeing	Member and officer safety and perceptions of safety are a foundation of health and wellbeing.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	The rough sleeping outreach team consider safeguarding needs and make appropriate referrals when working with individuals rough sleeping.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	Homelessness 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. The health and safety of, and risks to members, staff and building users are considered in the report.
Equality and Diversity	The impact of the options on those who require disabled parking and access to the building has been considered and has informed this assessment.
Privacy and Data Protection	The implications of increased CCTV and body-worn cameras which have been invested in from the £125,000 budget have been considered from this perspective.
Local Government Reorganisation	If the building continues to be used by the new unitary authority, any measures enacted will continue to have an impact. If the building is disposed of, any physical measures may be viewed as an asset or disbenefit by a new occupier / tenant.

7 Appendices

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

- Appendix I: Fencing Visual

8 Background Papers

[Agenda for Economy and Property Committee on Wednesday, 8 October 2025, 7.00 pm](#)

[Minutes for Economy and Property Committee on Wednesday 8th October, 7:00pm](#)

[Agenda for Economy and Property Committee on Thursday, 19 March 2026, 7.00 pm](#)