

Report to: Budget Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 12 January 2018

Report Title: Draft Corporate Plan 2018/19 – 2020/21

Report By: Jane Hartnell, Director of Corporate Services and Governance
and Simon Hubbard, Director of Operational Services

Purpose of Report

To present the draft corporate plan 2018/19 – 2020/21, together with feedback from the public consultation.

Recommendation(s)

1. That the Cabinet recommends to the Full Council, that the content of the attached documents form the basis of the council's corporate plan 2018/19-2020/21, subject to the proviso that any significant amendment made to the council's draft budget be reflected in the final corporate plan text
2. That delegated authority be given to the Director of Corporate Services and Governance, after consultation with the Leader of the Council to make further revisions as is considered necessary to the attached plan prior to publication to reflect decisions made on the council's budget
3. That all those who submitted views as part of the consultation process be thanked for their contributions

Reasons for Recommendations

The council needs to approve the corporate plan as its statement of Hastings Borough Council's strategic direction to 2021.

Introduction

1. The corporate plan sets out the council's strategic direction. The draft corporate plan is based around 3 key opportunities; inclusion, growth and futureproofing. Teams across the council have been reviewing progress against the targets in the current corporate plan to identify key projects and activities for inclusion in the plan for 2018/19.
2. The plan includes an infographic of key statistics for each of the opportunities followed by a summary of key projects and activities which will be taking place over 2018/19.
3. The new format of the plan reflects that much of the council's work involves teams from across the organisation working together and provides greater flexibility when reporting performance monitoring information each quarter.
4. A list of performance indicators from the 2017/18 plan have been included at the end of the draft document. The performance indicators will be agreed in July 2018.

Consultation

5. Comments on the council's draft corporate plan have been sought from residents, council staff and a range of community organisations.
6. The consultation closes at 5.00pm on 9 February. A summary of the responses received so far can be found below. Any further comments received after this report has been published will be submitted to Cabinet separately, after the consultation has closed.

Hastings Area Chamber of Commerce

7. Councillor Chowney attended the chamber meeting on 25 January. The following questions were asked:

Question: Could HBC capitalise on renewable energy potential in terms of waste disposal?

Response: Hastings is the waste collection and East Sussex County Council is the disposal authority. All waste from across the County goes to Newhaven. If HBC were to go it alone, it would not benefit from the associated economies of scale of existing arrangements.

Question: Given the Council appetite for 'insourcing' and 'renewables' will the possibility of a wind turbine on Queensway be revisited?

Response: Doing so in line with existing Government regulations would involve revisiting and reviewing the Local Plan which could take up to two years. Parallel work is currently underway in terms of scoping potential for vertical axis wind turbines along the seafront and exploring the feasibility of creating a local supply network and plugging into the national Grid. Given the flat long nature of our seafront these could be ideal but it is also recognised that these are controversial.

Question: Is the request to pick up pink sacks from Muriel Matters House a temporary measure?

Response: Existing contractual arrangements do not commit the provider to make regular doorstep deliveries of pink sacks. There has also been a problem with people ordering more sacks than required and these not being necessarily used for recycling purposes. Picking up additional pink sacks from Muriel Matters House assists the council monitor additional demand for these. It is also acknowledged that picking up additional sacks maybe challenging for some residents and may inhibit recycling so we are carefully considering this as part of new contractual arrangements.

Question: Given the challenges in relation to homelessness, how is the council collaborating with existing structures and providers in terms of homelessness prevention?

Response: The council collaborates directly with (e.g. Brighton Housing Trust, Clinical Commissioning Group) and funds (e.g. Seaview through the Community Partnership Fund) a range of partners to work to prevent homelessness. Incidences of homelessness can be reported on the Council website so that where possible help is given. It is acknowledged that there is a cross section of services from the statutory to the voluntary sector working hard locally to address homelessness and it can be a challenge to coordinate these. For example, provision of sleeping bags and tents maybe at odds with other work focused on helping people off the streets and into accommodation. A coordinated response is crucial and the Council will continue to collaborate with partners to provide an integrated package of support.

Question: Does the Council have plans for Priory Street car park particularly in relation to drug use and associated paraphernalia in the stairwells?

Response: The council can clean this up or potentially revisit the car park opening times and, as suggested, consider using a gate as a proposed solution. However these may simply move suggested drug use elsewhere rather than addressing this challenge head on.

Question: Does the council use a lot of national contracts/contractors and if so is there any room for local smaller suppliers?

Response: The council has lots of discussions about this and is keen to go local rather than national where possible, but this is challenging for areas like refuse collection given the associated economies of scale. Recently the council facilitated a consortium of straw bailers in line with plans at the Country Park. The council will apply the learning from this to see how it can better work with smaller (sometimes individually led) businesses and enterprises that can often find our procurement arrangements through the East Sussex Procurement Hub challenging.

Hastings Community Network

8. Councillor Chowney attended a meeting of the Hastings Community Network on 25 January. The following questions were asked:

Question: can you confirm how much allotment rents will increase over the next year?

Response: The council has to consider increasing the fees and charges across many of its services in order to raise the additional income it needs. Given the significant reductions to its funding, the council needs to set its priorities carefully. There is an aim to make discretionary services self-financing, where possible. In some cases, allotment associations have been formed to manage some sites. Councillor Chowney agreed to provide a written response setting out the proposed increase to allotment rents in this year's budget.

Question: what view is the council taking in respect of future uses for the buildings previously occupied by the University of Brighton and how will the public money invested in these schemes be protected?

Response: it was noted that there had been strong community opposition to the closure of the University of Brighton's campus in Hastings. The university has indicated that it intends to sell the buildings it owns in the town. The buildings are allocated for educational purposes in the local plan, so any potential change of use in the future will require planning permission. Sussex Coast College had considered taking over the properties as part of its development of its University Centre, but this was not viable. The council was continuing to have discussions with higher education providers about the potential for them to locate new services in Hastings.

Question: have the harbour developers secured a grant from the government to carry out a feasibility study for the proposal?

Response: No, the harbour developers are still negotiating with the government to secure a grant, which will enable them to commission a feasibility study. The council is not committing any funding or officer time to the project at this time.

Question: investment in commercial property provides a large source of income to the council, but the purchase costs are often high. What are the constraints on the council's investment in commercial property and has the council considered building its own properties?

Response: The council has earmarked funding in its budget to invest in commercial property. The council can borrow money comparatively cheaply, which has enabled this investment. Investment in commercial property is widely used by council's to generate additional income and the government has not currently applied any restrictions to this activity. The council manages the risks of its investment in commercial property carefully. Consideration has been given to developing new commercial property units. However, construction costs are currently high, compared to commercial rents.

Question: Is there an update on the pier? Is the council supportive of the owner of Eastbourne pier taking over Hastings Pier?

Response: it is understood that a deal between Hastings and Eastbourne piers is not likely to proceed. However, interest has been received from the owner of Brighton pier. Whilst the council is not directly involved in this process, as the local planning authority it will work with the new owner to assist them operate the pier on a more sustainable basis. This could include developing a new planning policy for the pier, in consultation with Historic England.

Question: what is the funding set aside in the budget for Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO) for? Why has the council set up a new housing company?

Response: it is unusual for CPO action to be completed against long term empty properties. Often, the threat of CPO action is sufficient for the owner to bring their property back into use. The funding allocated in the budget is to cover the legal costs associated with the process.

The council has set up a housing company to invest in residential property. This approach will generate additional income for the council and increase the supply of good quality rental accommodation in the town. Properties owned by the housing company are exempt from the right to buy. The Directors of the housing company are council officers, a manager will be appointed to find properties for the company to purchase.

Question: how has the projected income from energy generation in the budget been calculated?

Response: the projections in the budget are based on income from the installations of solar panels on council owned and occupied buildings. The council will also work with the tenants of the buildings it rents out, if there is potential to install solar panels on these units too. The council is also investigating opportunities for wind energy generation.

Question: the council has been successful in bidding for funding from the European Union (EU) in the past. Has the government indicated whether these grants will be replaced, once the United Kingdom leaves the EU?

Response: Hastings has secured approximately £15 million worth of EU funding over the past 10 years. As some parts of the town have high levels of deprivation, we are eligible to bid for a variety of different EU funding streams supporting a wide range of activities. The government has not indicated that these funding streams will be replaced.

Question: will the council commit more officer time to lobbying East Sussex County Council (ESCC) and other agencies to bring forward a new walking and cycling network in Hastings and Bexhill?

Response: the council supports sustainable transport initiatives, but has limited capacity to commit additional officer time. The walking and cycling network is primarily the responsibility of ESCC, which has secured funding from the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to support the project. The council continues to participate in the Hastings and Rother Transport Action Group.

Question: is there an update on SeaChange?

Response: SeaChange continues to work on a number of projects in the Bexhill area. SeaChange originally focused their activities on the regeneration of the town centre, in particular the development of office spaces in Havelock Road. Although demand for large office space is currently low, there is higher demand for small start-up units. The next phase of the programme included the redevelopment of Queensbury House, but it will be necessary to develop new plans for the use of the site before this can proceed.

Question: Is there an update on the country park, particularly the development of a new visitor centre, plans to re-open the public footpaths and the provision of ranger services?

Response: the country park was recently awarded an innovation award by the Green Flag. Due to the unstable make-up of the layers of clay, it has not possible to re-open the footpath. Consideration has been given to a number of options to address this, but a solution has not yet been found which would be affordable and in-keeping with the sensitive nature of the site. The council does try to protect services within the country park, but this can be challenging with the reductions in it funding.

The unusual straw-bale construction of the proposed new visitor centre at the country park has created challenges with the procurement process. A consortium of artisan builders, who specialise in straw-bale buildings has been formed, to advise on the project. Funding has been set aside in the council's capital programme to support the project.

Question: why does there appear there appear to be a cut in the country park revenue budget from last year to this year?

Response: Councillor Chowney agreed to provide a written response to this question.

Question: will the existing licensing scheme for landlords of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's) be extended to smaller private landlords in the future?

Response: the council has a range of initiatives in place to improve the quality of homes in the private rented sector, including both the HMO and selective licensing scheme. The HMO licensing scheme has been reviewed and will be relaunched in May. There may be opportunities to extend the scheme to other parts of the town in the future. Both schemes have been effective at improving the management and quality of homes in the private rented sector.

Question: there has been a significant increase in homelessness in the town. Are all the rough sleepers in the town from the local area; if not is there a way of gaining additional support from other local authorities? Why were the public conveniences in the town closed on Christmas Day?

Response: rough sleeping forms part of the homelessness issues in the town. Traditionally, many seaside towns have faced challenges with homelessness. There are around 36 – 40 people in the town who regularly sleep rough, although not all of them are from Hastings originally. It is not possible for local authorities to claim assistance from each other. There is a very active voluntary and charity sector in the town which provide homelessness support services, and the council is looking at new ways of preventing homelessness. Councillor Chowney agreed to follow up the point regarding the opening arrangements for public conveniences.

Question: what is the former bathing pool used for?

Response: This space has been converted into the Source skate park.

Budget Overview and Scrutiny Committee

9. A meeting of the council's overview and scrutiny committee was held on 25 January, to consider the draft corporate plan and budget.
10. While no amendments to the draft corporate plan and budget were proposed, a number of related issues were discussed and will be included in the minutes. The minutes of the meeting will be published on the council's website shortly.

Email

11. An email has been received requesting more information about the council's investment in commercial property.
12. An email has been received from Hastings and St Leonards Allotment Federation opposing the increases to allotment rents proposed in the budget.
13. An email has been received from the Hastings Association of Twin Towns opposing the reductions to the budget for twinning partnerships.

Equalities

14. The assessment of equality impacts accompanying the budget proposals for 2018/19 is included within the budget report

Wards Affected

All wards

Policy Implications

Please identify if this report contains any implications for the following:

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness	Yes
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)	Yes
Risk Management	Yes
Environmental Issues	Yes
Economic/Financial Implications	Yes
Human Rights Act	Yes
Organisational Consequences	Yes
Local People's Views	Yes
Anti-Poverty	Yes

Additional Information

Appendix A – Draft Corporate Plan 2018/19 – 2020/21

Officer to Contact

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