

The council ran a public consultation on the budget proposals from Friday 10 November to Friday 1 December with comments welcome by email and on an online form. This was promoted on the council's website, social media channels and in the residents' newsletter. There were 109 responses on the form and email. The comments have been shared with councillors and senior officers.

Comments were broadly in support of shared services and the proposals to make savings. There were many comments about the cost of housing services and how this could be tackled, with suggestions around increased council tax for holiday homes/Air BnB properties. These will be passed to the Housing and Homelessness Task Force for discussion as part of their work to tackle the housing crisis. The responses also showed strong support for keeping public toilets open and free, and for keeping cash options available. Reviewing contracts, looking at the IT reserve, changing contracts for CCTV provision and stray dogs, carrying out a review of empty homes and bringing food standards inspections back in-house were very strongly supported.

Cllr Paul Barnett presented to the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) on Monday 27 November and there was discussion about the budget consultation. Comments included that the voluntary and community sector is keen to work with the council but that there needs to be capacity at a senior level to make decisions at meetings with the sector. Lots of the issues facing Hastings are town issues rather than borough council issues so there is the chance to keep working together with real partnership and joint investment. Working with other agencies including Southern Water, the Police and East Sussex County Council was also encouraged to improve some of the issues within the town.

There were questions about what proposed cuts will leave, eg for the youth council or events – will there be any funding left for these after the proposed cuts.

There were concerns about moving more services to digital around inclusion, and a discussion around the digital inclusion work being done by HEART and the sector. There is the opportunity for the council to get involved with that work.

The council also held a drop-in session at Stade Hall on Tuesday 28 November where residents could speak to councillors and senior officers. Comments and suggestions from the public meeting at Stade Hall included support for selling council assets; the need for post-flooding planning and climate change action; whether we could pay senior officers less; are there other services that could be brought back in house; and the importance of marketing Hastings further and louder.

Cllr Barnett also presented to the Hastings Chamber of Commerce at their meeting on Thursday 30 November. Questions included an update on how things have changed since he attended the January meeting; how we're learning from other councils around housing and how to manage the housing crisis; what's happening after flooding in the town centre; he also explained what a s114 means for councils and how he is keen for the public, private and third sector to work together to achieve the best for Hastings.