

Cabinet Agenda

Monday, 11 February 2019 at 6.00 pm

Muriel Matters House, Breeds Place, Hastings, East Sussex, TN34 3UY

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For further information, please contact Coral Harding on 01424 451764 or email charding@hastings.gov.uk

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4.	Draft Corporate Plan 2019/20 (Jane Hartnell)	1 - 6

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Agenda Item 4

Consultation responses received since the publication of the Cabinet Agenda

Hastings Community Network 4 February 2019

Following a presentation on the council's draft corporate plan and budget to the Hastings Community Network at Hastings Voluntary Action, the following questions were asked and responses given:

Comment: Will properties acquired through the Hastings Housing Company be rented out at market rates?

Response: They will be at a fair rent, probably more like slightly sub-market rent, but not social rent.

Comment: The town needs more affordable rent. The council needs to be renting out the properties it buys at social rent, why can't it do this?

Response: We can't do that because the rents wouldn't cover the cost of borrowing. We have to rent the properties we acquire in a sustainable way, as we don't get any grants or subsidies for house purchases.

Comment: Will you ensure that social housing is delivered as part of the West Marina development? Can and will the council set a quota on social housing?

Response: The quota will be set at 25% and we will hope for more. We will be in a good position to make it happen because we will own the freehold of the site. However it is worth saying that on other sites the national planning policy framework overrides our own local plan and through it developers can argue that providing the required level of social housing isn't financially viable for them and they may be given dispensation to provide less than the set level.

Comment: Have you considered putting council owned land in community land trusts?

Response: We have considered it – it would depend on what advantages there were to that in terms of grant funding and what worked best financially.

Comment: You talk about tackling climate change but have you got the resource and officer time to do this? And what exactly are your targets? How will you measure against them?

Response: We need to look at this in more detail as we currently have no spare resource. We also need to work out what our targets will be and how we will measure them. We will want to make sure that the measures we use are relevant nationally and not just locally.

Comment: Is there any prospect of re-opening the footpath across Ecclesbourne Glen?

Response: Not at the moment, surveys show the land is still unstable. We have looked at the possibility of a bridge across the glen, but there's no funding for that, it would be very expensive.

Comment: The council has a proud record of funding and supporting the voluntary and community sector. The community partnership fund secures this funding for another two years but what will happen after that?

Response: We remain committed to doing all we can to provide funding and support to the voluntary and community sector in Hastings. In two years' time the council's financial position might be totally different we just don't know. We'll need to explore with partners how this can best be done in the future, be it through attracting external funding which we are very successful at or through other ways of doing it.

Comment: You mentioned moving housing benefit online, won't that exclude lots of people who don't have online access?

Response: No it won't because it won't be online only, the other options will still be available. The contact centre will still be there with staff and resources to help, all of the existing ways will continue but now with an online option as well. But the contact centre still costs a million pounds a year to run. In Hastings more people are online than the national average and lots of people will want to do it online because it is quicker and easier. We will be considering making some things online only such as reporting missed bin collections, but no concrete decision on this has yet been made.

Comment: Where did you get your figures about online access and usage in Hastings? Do you know how that data is worked out?

Response: I got the information from digital inclusion heatmaps. You can find it easily online just by googling it. You can see from the heatmap that Hastings has a higher than average proportion of people who use the internet regularly and have the necessary skills.

Comment: You should be doing more to promote that fact you are continuing to fund such a good level of face to face service through the contact centre. This is something to be proud of because face to face is still really important and many people still rely on it. It is important for mental health and although online is good for providing services cheaper it still has an important place especially for those who have poor literacy and can't get online.

Response: Yes maybe we should. We will look into this.

Comment: You said you would be looking at revising the local plan and adding in new ways of generating renewable energy. You need to engage the local community in this process from the very beginning. Get local voluntary and community groups together to discuss this.

Response: Yes, that is a good idea; we will look at how we can do that.

Comment: What is happening with the public toilet site in the town centre?

Response: It is currently on the market. We are open to proposals for its development. We may also include it in future bids to develop the town centre.

Comment: The council needs to look at the walking routes through town and particularly that from the station and the town's welcome.

Response: We're looking at the possibility of improving that route through a bid to the government's regenerating town centres fund.

Comment: We need more toilets in the town centre.

Response: We have 17 public toilet facilities around town, more than most councils provide. There are toilets in Priory Meadow, Queen's Square, Hastings Library, and Pelham Place, with others available to the public in pubs, cafes and shops.

In summary HCN want to make sure that the council continues to make sure it does what it can with the resource it has to protect and deliver services to those most in need.

General consultation responses

A number of responses to the consultation have been made by members of the public and emailed through to counsluation@hastings.gov.uk.

The key themes raised in these responses are:

Energy generation - the council needs to be doing more on energy generation and should be considering and pursuing options such as putting wind generators on the end of the pier and more solar panels on council owned properties.

Arts funding – the council could have made more of a cost saving by not renewing the contract for the White Rock Theatre at all and should be cautious about committing funds to a replacement building. The current subsidy isn't effectively supporting the arts in Hastings.

Community projects and play – concerns about cuts to funding for local community projects and in particular play activities in Hastings. These events give vulnerable people such as those who suffer with mental health issues a sense of belonging. For the many families in Hastings who are living in poverty, events like Play in the Park, Play Hut on the beach, International Children's day and others can be the only days out for the children. Continuing to fund these services is vital and to the benefit of the community.

Mental health - There should be some focus on mental health. Could the council consider working with partners to create a hub in the town.

Jobs - there should be a focus more on more jobs in the winter for local people.

Merging - Scope for merging with neighbouring authorities as a means to save money.

Respondents were thanked for taking the time to submit their views.

Unison

A response to the council's proposed draft corporate plan and budget was received by Unison on 5 February 2019. Unison was thanked for the submission and their commitment to continued productive engagement into the next challenging period was welcomed. The response can be seen in full below.

Appendix 1 – Unison response

Unison Response to consultation of draft budget and corporate plan

Unison are concerned the severity of the budget deficit and proposed cuts is not accompanied by a corresponding long term plan for council services over the longer term. The current proposals have been described as piecemeal by staff and we have to agree. Simply cutting budgets without a major reconfiguration of what services the council will or will not undertake in future only results in us doing the same work with fewer resources. We cannot continue to do more for less. This will in our view result in poorer service provision.

We are concerned staff are being asked to undertake more work with less resources which we feel will lead to increased stress and dissatisfaction with staff being increasingly demoralised about the amount of work to do and the lack of support in coping with this ever increasing workload. An example is that staff have already been asked to take on the role that the empty homes officer undertook.

Unison recognise that in this time of austerity reduced budgets are difficult to set and we recommend that we work together on a long term plan for the council's future service provision in order staff can understand where we are heading and have adequate time to plan. Continuing to reduce individual budgets is unsustainable and disproportionately hits front line services.

We understand the council will look and feel differently in the future and feel this strategic planning should be considering the long term to ensure effective service provision and staff support. We therefore urge the administration to act now to stop continuing ad-hoc reductions and develop a sustainable plan for public services for the future.

Unison is particularly concerned that reduced services will have an adverse impact on the look and feel of the town, contrary to the strategic priority of An attractive Town. We take pride in the fact that we are regular recipients of the Blue Flag Award, it directly has an impact on tourism in the town. The application for this national award is drawn up by one of the posts that is identified as a post to be made redundant, what will happen if there is no Blue Flag award and if beach huts fall into disrepair? The reporting for maintenance is said to move to an online service but this facility has just been started with IT and due to the DSO project it is unlikely to be in place before April 2019. This area generates income but a delay in providing an alternative to the current system will see a reduced amount being received by the Authority. Testing and support for new online integration have not been programmed realistically and this will have a cascade effect on other services. It is not realistic for new clients to view beach Huts and hand over large sums of money just from viewing pictures online.

Another area of concern is the cost of bringing the street cleansing in house. We find this cost difficult to understand when we have to find significant savings over the next few years. The process of bringing back in-house the DSO may give a higher standard of service but how can the expenditure at this time be justified when posts and other services are being cut. The last major restructure followed a public consultation to determine what areas were important to the residents and businesses of Hastings and St Leonards. The Council is prioritising a quicker turn around for litter picking over public safety for a reduced CCTV service. We feel that visitors to the town will be more influenced by crime rates rather than response times for street cleaning. Recently our CCTV staff were commended by the police and Members for their contribution above and beyond to assist in arrests/helping to apprehend offenders.

At this stage the information of the next year's job cuts is incomplete means that how the council will look and feel in the long term is uncertain. Unison is unable to adequately explain to our members the justification for the current course of action by the council. The threat of additional staffing reduction next year does not follow a strategic approach to providing services.

We urge the administration to engage with staff representatives and managers on how we can shape our council to provide services to our community whilst safeguarding as many jobs as possible. The way service managers were informed has been criticised. Not all managers were aware that the senior management meeting on 21st November had a high significance and so, not all attended. There was no opportunity for service managers to comment on the proposed budget before members of their teams were informed of the risk of redundancy.

One of this Authorities' strengths is working in close partnership to best support the local residents and visitors. Partners are reacting negatively when told that we do not feel these areas are important enough to have the support of HBC.

The lack of communication and meaningful engagement has led to feelings of being underrated, and combined with the numbers of staff affected directly and indirectly to reduction in teams has led to the lowest level of moral that I have experienced at HBC (29 years)

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