

Cabinet Agenda

Monday, 6 February 2023 at 6.00 pm

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

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		Page No.
4.	Draft Corporate Plan and Budget consultation feedback <i>(Cabinet decision)</i> <i>(Jane Hartnell, Managing Director)</i>	1 - 10

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Agenda Item 4

Consultation Summary feedback

The consultation responses summarised in this document have been received through the consultation email address since the consultation started on 13 January, with internal staff and at meetings with the leader and deputy leader of the council.

Local Strategic Partnership

1. Councillor Barnett attended the LSP meeting on Monday 23 January 2023. Questions and comments are below.

Q) A comment was made around being pleased to see health included in the conversations, whole systems approach is really needed.

Response: Cllr Barnett agreed that this is the case, we keen to work together, making Cllr Batsford the first portfolio holder for health and culture shows how seriously we're taking this one.

Q) A comment was made about social media comments and some chatter around migrants being prioritised for housing – are there separate pots of funding?

Response: Cllr Barnett explained that there are lots of different funding pots and Hastings will always welcome anyone who arrives. Funding doesn't cover everything, government needs to sort messaging out around this. There are specific issues around the spot-booked hotels in Hastings currently.

Q) A question was asked about whether reducing tourism funding have a negative impact on tourism businesses across Hastings?

Response: Cllr Barnett said he believed that marketing ourselves as Hastings rather than paying into the Visit 1066 pot will help us – there has been lots of media interest in Hastings as Hastings. We have had strong visitor figures for the last two years and signs are that this will continue, unless there is a significant downturn in people taking UK-based holidays.

Hastings Area Chamber of Commerce

2. Cllr Barnett attended the chamber meeting on Thursday 26 January and presented the updated corporate plan and draft budget.

3. Questions were asked at the meeting and Cllr Barnett spoke to some of the attendees after the presentation.

4. The Chamber of Commerce also sent a written response which covered the questions mentioned below.

Q) A question was asked about Hastings United Football Club moving to a new site at Tilekiln.

Response: Cllr Barnett explained that the council is protecting green spaces and will not be selling any of these sites for development. He agreed the town needs better sports facilities but said there needed to be some creative solutions.

Q) A question was asked about funding that Snowflake has received.

Response: Cllr Barnett said he was going to speak to officers about this and respond.

Q) A comment was made about how the planning department is performing, and where housing should be built if green spaces are being protected.

Response: Cllr Barnett responded that housing should be built on brownfield sites and encouraged anyone who had any land to let us know as the council doesn't own many. There are lots of sites that have been land banked for several years so the process of encouraging owners to release these for development has started.

Q) A question was asked about how communication is going with the manufacturers in the town.

Response: Cllr Barnett explained that he had been out and meeting business owners including manufacturers and many of them are reporting full order books and that they are looking for bigger spaces. Skills are a challenge for the town so upskilling is a key aspect to improve.

Q) A follow up question was around getting planning permission for larger units.

Response: Cllr Barnett said he wanted to hear about any problems.

Q) A question was asked about Priory Street car park which has a broken gate which is causing some safety concerns.

Response: Cllr Barnett said he was going to raise these issues with officers and find out what has happened. He talked about the Priory Street redevelopment part of the Town Deal projects which are longer-term.

Q) A question was asked about help for start-up businesses.

Response: Cllr Barnett said that business support isn't part of HBC's remit, it's something that ESCC have responsibility for, but he is keen to help open doors where possible. He talked about the units at Churchfields Business Centre which are almost ready to open.

Q) A question was asked about how the council is working to help businesses who are providing jobs in Hastings, and how this could help the council reduce homelessness and what European funding is available now.

Response: Cllr Barnett explained that the council is receiving £1m of funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund which has replaced some of the EU funding we used to receive. This is being spent in Broomgrove over three years.

Q) A follow up question was asked about how this funding is being received but it isn't helping businesses.

Response: Cllr Barnett and Jane Hartnell (MD) explained that the money could be spent on upskilling and development in year three. Cllr Barnett asked if anyone knew of other funding that the council could apply for that they should let us know.

Q) A question was asked about whether the presentation and information was shared with staff.

Response: Cllr Barnett explained that yes, the information is shared with council officers.

Staff and Management Forum (Budget Consultation)

5. The Leader met the Staff and Management Forum.
6. Unison submitted a formal response which covered increased stress for staff due to reductions in staffing to make a balanced budget. The reduction of consultants in the planning department is a concern because of this.

Hastings Community Network

7. The Deputy Leader Cllr Maya Evans met HCN on Friday 27 January. The following questions and responses were forthcoming:

Q) A question was asked about how costed the savings mentioned had been, with £1m saving from staff costs and how that work would be shifted.

Response: The Chief Finance officer explained that the staff savings aren't all salaries, and that it is a total over three years. Museum costs will be looked at when the manager role has been filled.

Cllr Evans continued that for the climate change role, staff across the council will be given extra training to help embed climate change into their roles, spreading it across the council rather than one officer. Consultants may also be used for specific projects. She also reiterated the point about wanting to work closely with the voluntary and community sector on various non-statutory things that the council has previously worked in.

Q) A further comment was raised about the savings proposed for the museum and how these would be achieved.

Response: Cllr Evans noted those points.

Q) A question was asked about how the voluntary sector can deliver some of the services the council is talking about when the voluntary sector doesn't feel supported and that the council has the staff and resources to work together.

Response: Cllr Evans said she had been meeting lots of community groups and would continue to do that. There are ambitious plans and we won't just be delivering statutory services. She explained that the council is having to deliver with the funding we have, after 13 years of austerity and reduced funding.

Q) A question was asked about the increased cost of allotments and whether this increase would be reinvested in the allotments.

Response: Cllr Evans confirmed it would be.

Q) A comment was made about the relationship between the council and the VCS. This included a comment about the new roles identified to help tackle increasing TA costs sitting within the VCS.

Response: Cllr Evans noted the comment about the roles being within the VCS and that she was keen to meet with groups to find best ways of working.

Q) A comment was made about a strategic conversation between community organisations and the council to get better relationships and working together.

Response: Cllr Evans agreed with the need for a meeting.

Q) A comment was made about the VCS being an equal partner with the council in providing services.

Response: This comment was noted, and Cllr Evans explained that the VCS is seen as an equal partner, being able to do some things better than the council because of the experience within the VCS. She acknowledged there was work to be done on the relationship but reiterated the desire to work together.

Q) A comment was made about housing workers being based within the VCS and previous projects where this has worked well.

Response: Cllr Evans noted this point.

Q) A comment was made about West St Leonards and investment in that area of the town.

Response: Cllr Evans mentioned several projects that have happened there recently, but agreed more could be done.

Q) A question was asked about a consultation and engagement budget.

Response: There is no specific budget for this.

8. Hastings Community Network and Hastings Voluntary Action also submitted a formal response to the consultation which covered the questions above, as well as partnership activity, future investment, housing and age friendly community work.

Public consultation responses

9. The council received a range of consultation responses via the council's consultation email address. These are outlined below.

10. 164 responses from the public and organisations have been received. There were 55 comments about events, 40 about tourism, 12 about housing and 57 on other topics including voter ID, road maintenance and the cleanliness of the town.

11. The consultation pages on the website were viewed by 1,716 people over the consultation period – 2.3% of the adult population of Hastings.

Tackling homelessness, poverty and ensuring quality housing

Q) A response was received about an empty property and the state of the road.

Response: These comments have been noted and shared with the appropriate service areas.

Q) A comment was received about not building on Bexhill Road and using other empty buildings for housing.

Response: These comments have been noted and shared with the appropriate service areas.

Q) A comment was received about the number of second/holiday homes within Hastings.

Response: The council has a Housing and Homelessness task force which is currently looking at all options to improve the housing situation in our town. These comments have been shared with this group.

Q) A comment was received about empty buildings in Hastings, including The Havelock, and how they could be used for housing.

Response: The council's Housing and Homelessness task force is looking at all aspects of housing within Hastings, including empty homes. This comment has been shared with the task force.

Q) Comments have been received with suggestions on tackling the housing crisis in the town. This included encouraging landlords to join the council's Letstart scheme, encouraging more people to rent out rooms in their homes, an increase to the local housing allowance, using prefab homes on council owned land, or ESCC land that HBC could licence, or using shipping containers to provide housing.

Response: The council's Housing and Homelessness task force is looking at all aspects of housing within Hastings. This comment has been shared with the task force.

Q) A comment was received about the importance of sorting out the housing crisis from a resident who is waiting for a move.

Response: The council's Housing and Homelessness task force is looking at all aspects of housing within Hastings. This comment has been shared with the task force.

Q) A comment was received about limiting the number of Air B&Bs in the town, or increasing the council tax for second homeowners.

Response: The council's Housing and Homelessness task force is looking at all aspects of housing within Hastings. This comment has been shared with the task force.

Q) A comment was received suggesting ways the Disabled Facilities Grant could be used to help more people stay in their homes.

Response: The DFG policy is under review. The council's Housing and Homelessness task force is looking at all aspects of housing within Hastings. This comment has been shared with the task force.

Q) A comment was received suggesting that the council should tax developers who have planning permission so there is more funding available for housing.

Response: The council's Housing and Homelessness task force is looking at all aspects of housing within Hastings. This comment has been shared with the task force.

Keeping Hastings clean and safe

Q) A response was received about the enforcement of the pedestrian zone in the town centre.

Response: Councillors and officers are working with partners to address these issues.

Q) A comment was received about the intention to focus on the safety of residents and how this should include Hollington and the areas around Wishing Tree Road North. The comment also mentioned that while a cleaner environment in the town centre is desirable, the resident does not want measures like those introduced in London.

Response: This comment was noted and shared with the appropriate service area.

Q) A comment was received about the definition of 'active travel' and the importance of keeping pedestrians safe, including the bollards in the town centre.

Response: The comment about active travel has been shared with the appropriate service area. Councillors and officers are working with partners to address the bollards in the town centre.

Q) A comment was received about the number of rangers in the town and how they should ensure that vehicles are not allowed in parks.

Response: This comment has been noted and shared with the appropriate service areas.

Q) A comment was received about the use of seagull sacks in some areas of the town and how animals can get into these and spread the rubbish across the streets.

Response: This comment was noted and shared with the appropriate service area.

Q) A comment was made about the flooding and how this will happen again in the future.

Response: The comments have been noted and shared with the appropriate departments. The corporate plan has been updated after the flooding in January to include working with partners to address any issues and causes for this.

Q) A comment was received about the cleanliness of the town centre – in the town centre and in the town's gardens and parks.

Response: These comments have been noted and shared with the appropriate service area.

Q) A comment was received about relying on volunteers to litter pick meaning the town looks less attractive to visitors.

Response: This comment has been noted and shared with the appropriate service area.

Q) A comment was made about better lighting and more hygienic practices for an alleyway in the Old Town.

Response: This comment has been noted and shared with the appropriate service area.

Making best use of our land, buildings, public realm and cultural assets

Q) A comment was received about the funding cut at the museum and how the funding that was previously given to Hastings Contemporary could be redirected.

Response: This comment has been noted and shared with the appropriate service area.

Q) There was a comment received about the future of Hastings Pier.

Response: This comment has been noted.

Q) A comment was received about the revised plans for Summerfields leisure centre and the refurbishment of the White Rock Theatre.

Response: This comment has been noted and shared with the appropriate service area.

Q) Comments were received about the Ore Valley Reserve.

Response: The budget papers have been amended in accordance with this.

Q) A comment was received about Pelham Crescent and St Mary in the Castle.

Response: St Mary in the Castle is currently being marketed for sale or rent, and the council is keen to hear from anyone who is interested in taking over this building.

Q) A comment was received about how the council should invest in money making projects to help residents' lives and also encourage visitors. The suggestion is to work towards better rail connections so residents can access well-paid employment rather than tourist venues when visitors cannot visit.

Response: Rail connections are not the responsibility of ESCC but we will continue to work with partners to improve access to our town for both residents and visitors.

Q) A comment was received about the future of Hastings Contemporary gallery having an open-door policy.

Response: We are looking forward to working with Hastings Contemporary in the future on a range of initiatives to enable more local people to visit.

Q) Comments have been received about the future of the White Rock Theatre and St Mary in the Castle.

Response: These comments has been noted and shared with the appropriate service area.

Q) A comment has been received about the increase in fees for allotments and whether this will be allocated to allotment expenditure.

Response: Cllr Evans answered this question at the HCN meeting and said it would be.

Q) A comment was received about preserving the Victorian buildings and history in the town, and not building more concrete buildings.

Response: This comment has been noted and shared with the appropriate service area.

Q) A comment was received about the funding cut proposed to the museum.

Response: This comment has been noted and shared with the appropriate service area.

Q) A comment has been received suggesting that funding for parks and gardens (including public toilets) should be increased, with funding reduced for planting to compensate. The comment also said that the council should stop speculative projects like the proposals to build at Bulverhythe.

Response: Officers have begun the work of bringing grounds maintenance in-house, which will give us greater control of how our parks and green spaces are managed, including being able to alter planting where necessary.

Q) A comment has been received suggesting that the council pause capital expenditure projects (Cornwallis Hotel, Bexhill Road South housing and industrial expansion at Castleham) until the economy is more buoyant.

Response: This comment has been noted and sent to the appropriate department.

Q) A comment has been received suggesting that the council should reduce the number of cars in the town centre by repurposing some land out of the town centre for parking, therefore allowing current car parks to be redeveloped into residential or commercial. The suggestion continues that pavements should be wider and that this would help promote active travel.

Response: This comment has been noted and sent to the appropriate department. This is not something that HBC could do without partnership working with ESCC who have responsibility for the roads.

Minimising environment and climate harm in all that we do - tackling our climate and biodiversity crisis

Q) Comments have been received about the future of cycling in Hastings now the cycle path in the park is not happening.

Response: Officers are working with East Sussex County Council to find alternatives where possible.

Q) A comment was received suggesting that the council should spend funding on more immediate pressing needs than the 'green agenda'.

Response: This comment has been noted.

Q) A comment has been received stating that using the council's budget to offset the climate emergency does not help immediate local causes.

Response: This comment has been noted.

Delivery of our major regeneration schemes

Q) A comment has been received about the lack of mention of Hastings Commons in the corporate plan update in terms of partnership working.

Response: This comment has been noted and shared with the appropriate service area.

Ensuing the council can survive and thrive into the future

Q) A comment was received suggesting that residents are charged for parking permits to bring in revenue and reduce the demand for parking spaces.

Response: This comment has been noted and shared with the appropriate service area.

Other

Q) A comment was received about getting people back into work in the town and how we can encourage people to take action and accountability for their actions. The comment also talked about the range of shops in the town centre, the safety of the roads with potholes and antisocial behaviour.

Response: These comments have been noted and passed to the appropriate service areas.

Q) Several comments were received about the introduction of voter ID.

Response: The council is working on plans to promote this change ahead of the local elections in 2024.

Q) Several comments were received about the future of live music and events in the town.

Response: These comments have been noted.

Q) Comments have been received about the plans to reduce funding for the Information Centre and the tourism marketing through 1066 Country.

Response: These comments have been noted.

Q) A comment has been received about the need to boost the local economy, including attracting businesses and employers and entrepreneurs into the town to help provide local jobs and working with other organisations to help address health issues in the town.

Response: The council is keen to continue the closer working relationship with the NHS which has come out of the COVID pandemic. We will continue to push to address the health inequalities which exist in our town.

Q) A comment was received about how the updated corporate plan refers to the need to be greener and asking where this has come from. The comment also asks why government isn't helping fund the lack of housing; the importance of clean streets, a clampdown on graffiti and vandalism; the future of St Mary in the Castle and the piano competition; the link road to Queensway; and electric car points.

Response: These comments have been noted and shared with the appropriate service areas.

Q) A comment was received about health inequalities which encouraged working with partners to ensure access to GP services.

Response: This comment has been noted and shared with the appropriate service area.

Q) Comments were received about the proposals to withdraw from 1066 Country Marketing and the impact this would have on local businesses.

Response: These comments have been noted and shared with the appropriate service area.

Q) A comment was made about the level of council tax.

Response: This comment has been noted and shared with the appropriate service area.

Q) Comments have been about the state of the road, including potholes, lorry weight limits, the safety of the junction at Battle Road/Sedlescombe Road North, and the Queensway link road.

Response: This comment has been noted, roads are an ESCC responsibility.

Q) A question was asked about how the reserves will be invested so that funds can grow.

Response: This question has been passed to the relevant service area.

Q) A comment was received about council tax being the same across all types of homes.

Response: This comment has been noted.

Q) A comment has been received suggesting that events funding should be increased rather than cut.

Response: This comment has been noted and shared with the appropriate service area.

Q) A comment has been received about how the budget does not include improvements to accessibility for train stations.

Response: The council is not responsible for train stations.

Q) A comment has been received about stopping the live streaming of council meetings.

Response: This comment has been noted and shared with the appropriate service area.

Q) A comment has been received that the council tax increase should be higher to keep the town afloat.

Response: The council is limited by government around how much we can increase council tax.