

# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23 JANUARY 2020

Present: Councillors Levane (Vice-Chair), Barnett, Battley, Beaney, Cox, Foster, O'Callaghan, Rankin, Roberts, Turner and Webb

## 35. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Davies. Councillor Webb is present as substitute.

## 36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor	Minute	Reason
Rankin	38	Personal- Operates a commercial property business
Webb	38	Personal – Currently on the East Sussex Pensions Board.
Roberts	38	Personal – Chair of Governors for two primary academies.

## 37. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**RESOLVED – (Unanimously) that the minutes of the meeting held on the 17 December 2019 be approved.**

## 38. DRAFT BUDGET AND CORPORATE PLAN CONSULTATION 2021/22-2022/23

The Director of Corporate Services and Governance presented a report to invite the Budget Overview and Scrutiny Committee to comment on the draft budget and corporate plan for 2020/21 to 2021/22 and alert Scrutiny members to the wider consultation, approvals timetable and next steps.

The Director of Corporate Services and Governance asked the Councillors to be mindful that there are Hastings Borough Council staff present at this meeting who are affected by the proposed budget reductions and should be considerate of this.

Previous to this meeting, the committee asked the Director of Corporate Services and Governance and the Director of Operational Services to provide answers to a list of pre-prepared questions regarding the draft budget and corporate plan. Answers to these questions were circulated before the meeting, and Councillors were encouraged to ask supplementary questions at this meeting if and where they required further clarity.

The Chair invited the Leader and Deputy Leader, to the table.

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The Councillors asked the Officers, Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council a series of supplementary questions regarding the draft budget and corporate plan.

**Question:** Is there an approximate timescale for the senior management restructure in terms of the 260k per year savings proposed in Appendix K2?

**Response:** The Leader of the Council stated that this would be done within approximately six months.

**Question:** How can staff savings be made (referring to Appendix K2 of the budget) if the senior management restructure isn't finalised?

**Response:** The Director of Corporate Services and Governance explained that the ongoing process is actually two processes that have merged. There is the budget deficit that Hastings Borough Council has to address and when making savings at this level staff savings are necessary, and also the management restructure which focuses on how we can make changes to the way we work and further savings in the future. Unfortunately, because of the General Election, the restructure has had to be delayed.

**Question:** How can the officers be sure that they're not at risk of deleting a post that may be needed in the future after the management restructure?

**Response:** The Director for Operational Services explained that by putting staff posts 'at risk', this allows time for further review. These positions may change depending on responses received from this consultation period.

**Question:** How will remaining staff cope with the strain it leaves on them?

**Response:** The Director of Corporate Services and Governance stated that they are aware the impact will be significant and requires careful management. Aiming for a more resilient organisation, and some of the proposed structural changes, such as the Admin Hub, may help with this.

The Director of Operational Services also mentioned the stress of perceived unevenness in the organisation. Some areas, such as those involved with the Town's Fund, are likely to have an expansion of resources while other posts are being deleted. However, these changes are necessary and, in this case, funded separately.

**Question:** This referred to question 9 on the supplementary document which discusses 'survivor's guilt'. How will staff remaining at the organisation be supported?

**Response:** The Director of Corporate Services and Governance stated they would manage it in a humane way. HR will prioritise those directly affected, and then the teams that will be losing posts. It is acknowledged that these reductions will have an impact on how the whole organisation feels. The staff also have access to an Employee Assistance Programme which also offers them help.

**Question:** Will frontline services be prioritised and if so will this have an impact on other areas?

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**Response:** The Director of Operational Services stated that the prioritisation will not be as simple as this. To answer the needs of the community you need to both run services and play a leading role in taking the town forward.

**Question:** Will staff be given support with finding other employment, such as assistance with CV writing?

**Response:** The Director of Corporate Services and Governance said that once the final decisions are made, we will offer in-training support around things such as CV writing. They will also try to place as many people as possible in other vacant posts within the organisation, and where this is not possible, we will help them as best we can find places at other organisations.

**Comments and Question:** It is difficult to ask questions about the budget completely separately to the corporate plan. The corporate plan tells a different story to the budget. It is not clear within the budget the difference the changes will actually make to frontline services. Do we not know the answer or are we just not sharing it?

**Response:** The Director of Corporate Services and Governance noted the issue with communicating the budget. There are complexities with the effects the cuts will have, but officers will try and improve the presentation of this going forward.

The Director of Operational Services used the example of CCTV. There will be impacts, but not as significant as people may fear as Sussex Police will still be monitoring these CCTV channels. However, officers are happy to give more detail on the impacts within the budget documentation going forward.

Councillors discussed CCTV monitoring and expressed their concerns that this service would potentially now not be under council control.

**Question:** Are the unions involved in the process?

**Response:** The Director of Corporate Services and Governance assured councillors that unions had been involved since before staff were even made at risk and have consistently been in dialogue and seeking feedback from them.

**Question:** How will the budgetary changes, particularly referring to the staff changes, affect the corporate plan?

**Response:** The Director of Corporate Services and Governance stated that this will come at a later date once specific indicators and project plans/timescales are developed. Right now, the Corporate Plan is intended to be an overarching and high level document with the performance detail to follow.

**Question:** What is the potential impact in terms of Revenues and Benefits provision if Council approve the budget?

**Response:** The Assistant Director for Financial Services and Revenues stated that the savings were identified last year but not all IT changes which will lead to greater efficiency have been completed in time. There will not be any significant high impact

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on Revenues and Benefits performance, as the changes were already starting to take place before this round of staff savings.

**Question:** Will changes impact the Disabled Facilities Grant?

**Response:** The Director of Operational Services assured that the changes would not impact this grant.

**Comment:** Concerns were raised about whether communication between councillors, the public and the council organisation would be affected.

**Response:** The Director of Cooperate Services and Governance stated that the public are encouraged to use the council's online systems and will continue to make sure that communications channels remain firmly in place.

Councillors also discussed ethical investments, and how this will be monitored during a time of financial uncertainty.

At this point in the meeting, the Director of Operational Services was taken unwell and left the meeting.

**Question:** Do we attempt to do use our staff first before employing external consultants?

**Response:** The Director of Corporate Services and Governance stated that they assess in-house skills before calling in consultants and sometimes ask consultants to train staff whilst their work is ongoing so that council staff acquire knowledge and skill sets for the future.

**Question:** There is a plan to be carbon neutral by 2030, why isn't there much information about how this will happen in the draft corporate plan?

**Response:** The Director of Corporate Services and Governance explained that there is a commitment to bring forward to Cabinet a climate change strategy and action plan in the coming weeks. This is where the actions regarding climate change will be included. This document is in development.

**Question:** How can the Scrutiny committee be earlier involved and better utilised in the future, in terms of feeding into draft corporate plan and budget development?

**Response:** The Deputy Leader proposed holding a meeting and the Deputy Leader would meet with Scrutiny Steering Group (on the 10<sup>th</sup> Feb) to consider how this might best be done and that this meeting would serve as the basis for further associated ongoing dialogue in the future.

**Question:** Should Councillors be sharing part of the budget cuts e.g. by reducing the number of councillors?

**Response:** The Leader of the Council explained that this is very unlikely as the group of councillors is already small compared to other councils, and any changes would

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have to go through the electoral commission. The current number does mean that all committees can be covered.

**Question:** Could more be made in the draft corporate plan in emphasising the challenge of addressing educational issues in the borough?

**Response:** 'Providing the best possible education' is included in the draft corporate plan as part of our vision for the town. It is however not an area that we can control directly but we'll need to continue to work together with partners and councillors to lobby for improvements through initiatives such as the Opportunities Area Fund.

The following amendments to the draft corporate plan were proposed:

**Under the heading 'Tackling poverty, homelessness and ensuring quality housing' on Page 10, add a new bullet point:**

***'Ensure that all council services are focused at narrowing the gap between communities most in need and the town as a whole.'***

**Under 'Delivery our major regeneration schemes', add to the list, as the first item:**

***- 'Focused on transforming life opportunities for those with the greatest need'***

**Add to the 'Key Activities during 2020-21 section on Page 11:**

***'Publish a new Anti-poverty Strategy in partnership with key local agencies'***

Councillors also raised issues with communication, and the Officers said that this will be improved going forward, especially as the corporate plan becomes more digitally based.

Councillors ended discussions by thanking all staff members for their hard work and commitment on developing the corporate plan and budget, and also appreciation to all the council staff who will be affected by the staff redundancies in one way or another. Councillors appreciate the drive to carry on delivering services despite the current difficult conditions.

**RESOLVED** – (Unanimously)

- 1. That the comments of the Budget Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the draft budget and corporate plan be referred to Budget Cabinet on the 10th February 2020.**

**Reasons for Recommendations**

1. To ensure the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's comments can be considered by the Budget Cabinet, prior to recommendations being made to the Full Council.

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### 39. DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN 2020/21

The Director of Corporate Services and Governance presented a report to invite the Budget Overview and Scrutiny Committee to comment on the draft corporate plan for 2020/21.

**RESOLVED** – (Unanimously)

- 1. That the comments or the Budget Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the council's draft corporate plan for 2020/21 be referred to Budget Cabinet for consideration.**

#### Reasons for Recommendation

1. To ensure the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's comments can be considered by the Budget Cabinet, prior to final recommendations being made to the Full Council.

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at. 7.26 pm)