

Report to: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 15 February 2016

Report Title: Draft corporate plan 2016/17-2018/19

Report By: Jane Hartnell
Director of Corporate Services and Governance

Purpose of Report

1. To present the feedback from the consultation on the draft corporate plan and budget for the period 2016/17 - 2018/19 for Members consideration.
2. To present a draft of the corporate plan 2016/17 - 2018/19.

Recommendation(s)

1. That the Cabinet recommends to the Council, that the content of the attached documents form the basis of the Council's corporate plan 2016/17 - 2018/19, 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 a retrospective year-end report on performance and the actual performance indicator information for 2015/16 be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny committees in June, prior to consideration by the Cabinet in July 2016; and that the Council be asked to delegate authority to that Cabinet meeting to agree 2016/17 performance indicators based on previous year's performance.
4. That all 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 it is a statement of Hastings Borough Council's strategic direction to 2019. It sets out how we will ensure that we successfully address our priorities, meet the needs of our communities, and ensure we have a strong dedicated and motivated workforce to deliver our strategic priorities.

Introduction

1. The outcome of the Council's annual strategic and financial planning processes is the attached draft corporate plan for 2016/17 – 2018/19. This confirms the strategic direction for the Council, the associated corporate priorities and service activities to be undertaken during this period.
2. This draft corporate plan marks a departure from the traditional layout of the corporate plan of recent years. It is anticipated that the style, format and associated performance management arrangements will continue to change in subsequent years, in line with the transformation and continuous improvement intentions outlined in this draft corporate plan.
3. The Budget Council on 24th February will be asked to approve the attached draft of the corporate plan at the same time as the budget which supports these plans. These documents together with the draft budget papers formed the basis of consultation outlined below.

Consultation

4. Specific comments on the draft corporate plan and budget have been sought from: residents via the Council's website, a joint meeting of the Council's two Overview and Scrutiny Committees, the Council's Staff and Management Forum, the Chamber of Commerce, the Young Persons' Council, Hastings Intercultural Organisation and HOPE G, Hastings Community Network, the Seniors Forum, the Disability Forum; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community representatives, and partnership organisations on the Hastings and St Leonards Local Strategic Partnership.
5. The deadline for receipt of comments on the draft corporate plan and budget was after the publication of this agenda (5th February). While the majority of consultation meetings have taken place, further submissions of views may be expected and will be reported to members at the Cabinet meeting.
6. A summary of the responses received is set out below. The bulk of responses received from consultation with groups did not highlight specific amendments to either the draft corporate plan or budget.

Hastings Young Person's Council

7. Councillor Forward met with the Youth Council at their meeting on 14 January 2016. The following items were discussed:

Question: Given the reductions to the parks and gardens budget, will the council be relying on volunteers more to maintain open spaces around the town?

Response: The reduced budget for parks and gardens has resulted in less staff to maintain the green spaces in the town; this has increased the council's reliance on volunteers to maintain these facilities. The council would continue to engage with community groups throughout the town.

Question: Could some of the savings from the parks and gardens budget be put towards the recruitment of more volunteers?

Response: Council staff already worked closely with a number of well-established community groups, including the Friends of Alexandra Park and the Friends of Hastings Country Park. Councillor Forward agreed to take these comments back and see if this could be developed further.

Question: Will more council assets be privatised in the future?

Response: It is not the council's intention to privatise assets. The council will continue to work with local community groups to explore new ways to run facilities. Consideration has been given to bringing some services back in house where this can be achieved at a reduced cost.

Question: How does the council encourage community projects?

Response: The council signposts local community groups to a range of support services, including Hastings Voluntary Action (HVA).

Question: Is Hastings Voluntary Action (HVA) funded by the council?

Response: HVA receives a funding contribution from East Sussex County Council (ESCC) and Hastings Borough Council's Community Partnership Fund (CPF), Councillor Forward agreed to find out the exact amount of CPF support. Councillor Forward commented that HVA played a key role in supporting local community groups.

Question: Where are the Cross Street public toilets located?

Response: The toilets are located off London Road, close to the Crystal Square car park. The toilets had become a focus of anti-social behaviour and the closure had been requested by local residents and businesses. Alternative public toilets are available nearby on the seafront and the council would also explore alternative options with local businesses.

Question: Where is the local needle drop off point?

Response: Councillor Forward agreed to circulate this information separately.

Question: Did the needle bins in the Cross Street public toilets encourage drug abuse?

Response: Councillor Forward acknowledged that this was a complex issue; she commented that a range of activities to tackle drug addiction were already underway by the council and its partners, including a new Police hub located in St Leonards.

Question: Who else owns cliffs in the town?

Response: Councillor Forward agreed to circulate this information separately.

Question: Are any artist's impressions available online of how Bottle Alley will look after it has been refurbished? Will it still be available for use for arts and cultural projects? Has it been considered as a venue for pop up markets?

Response: The refurbishment would include essential repairs to the concrete structure and new lighting scheme. There were a variety of potential uses for the area in the future, and these would require further investigation to see how they could be supported.

Question: What are the plans for a public consultation on the proposed development of the former bathing pool site at West Marina?

Response: An update and next steps event would be held at 5.00pm on 26 January at the Royal Victoria Hotel. Careful consideration would be required as to how the area could be developed into a mixed use site.

Question: Does the Disabled Facilities Grant included works to make the beaches in the town more accessible?

Response: The grants are specifically provided and can only be used to carry out adaptations to people's homes. Works had recently been carried out to make the beach at Rock-a-Nore more accessible for wheelchair users.

Question: Does the Empty Homes Strategy include funding for the Grotbusters scheme?

Response: No, the Grotbusters scheme is funded separately.

Question: Is there a risk of flooding on the new link road as it was built on marshland?

Response: Additional trees had been planted near the site to help minimise this risk.

8. The Youth Council were advised that their funding arrangements were the same as the previous year. Funding of £9,000, which included contributions from local housing associations, HVA Youth partnership, the Police and Hastings Borough Council, had also been set aside for grant allocations as part of the Hastings Youth Cash scheme.

Staff and Management Forum (SMF)

9. The Leader of the council addressed the SMF at their January meeting and sought comments on the draft corporate plan and budget. The following questions/comments were raised:

Question: What are the current numbers of HBC staff?

Response: Average over year (2015) is 317.24 FTE and 356 headcount.

Comment: Although no proposed changes to parking is proposed until April 2017 the high parking charges in the town centre may deter visitors and parking revenue?

Response: Prices are comparatively low relative to neighbouring and similar authorities.

Question: Is there scope for developing more factories and manufacturing within our regeneration ambitions?

Response: HBC will not build new units speculatively and instead only where there is clear demand, return on investment and a sensible business case.

Question: Are HBC tourism ambitions confused between wanting to attract families, day-trippers and overnight stayers, does HBC have a coherent tourism offer and identity?

Response: HBC certainly wants to attract overnight stays as this market sector will spend most locally. The mixed offer that Hastings provides from boutique hotels and galleries to Fish and Chips and slot machines, gives the Borough a unique and quirky identity that appeals to various markets. This has been acknowledged through recent positive national press coverage. . A review of our tourism and marketing strategy will be undertaken this year to decide our future direction and priorities.

Question: While HBC aspirations to generate income are welcome does HBC have the capacity and the skill set to start associated projects and keep them going?

Response: It is certainly a challenge to keep existing revenue streams and work commitments going while developing new income generation schemes that are unlikely to yield immediate or even short term returns. Income generation initiatives do require different skill sets and whilst the efficiencies we are making from increasingly moving key council services online may mean this capacity can be diverted, each business case for income generation will need to consider what additional 'invest to save' specialist resources are required to deliver effectively.

Question: How is HBC equipping staff and ensuring it has the right staff to take on providing services differently and potentially delivering different services?

Response: HBC is implementing career grade structures across the council as part of succession planning. This enables staff scope for progression and learning and coincides with HBC's intention to 'grow our own' and invest in the development of staff. An example of this is the proposed investment made in the budget to upskill staff in Development Control by supporting University accreditation and training for associated staff.

Chamber of Commerce

10. The Leader of the Council addressed the Chamber of Commerce at their late January Breakfast meeting. The following questions were raised:

Question: How is the town working together to address street drinking in places like the Town Centre and Central St Leonards?

Response: The 'Reduce the Strength' campaign has helped to reduce the alcohol content on sale in off licences. Where there are new venue licences to be granted the council can look to impose conditions that can assist in offsetting or reducing

scope for street drinking. The Council with Police partners can instigate public space protection orders potentially preventing anti-social behaviours such as street drinking or even busking in particular areas of the town. It is important that people are not simply moved on, but are ideally supported to access appropriate services.

Question: While the presentation clearly conveys many uncertainties brought about by stark financial challenges, can you be more specific about particular service impacts and or changes going forward?

Response: It is very difficult to be more specific but the council is keen to generate income by potentially bringing services in house. Chichester and Sevenoaks have proved successful in selling in house services to others and Hastings is keen to learn from such success. The intention is that Hastings will become a more entrepreneurial council doing things differently that we can potentially sell on to others and doing things that pay for themselves.

Question: Can you comment on the announcements earlier in the week that the University of Brighton are reviewing their future viability in the town?

Response: The announcement was a surprise and the prospect of the University arriving at a conclusion that their presence in the town may not be viable is deeply troubling. There is definitely work still to do in terms of improving the accommodation offer for new students and providing an attractive local students union, the council is keen to work with the university to achieve this. A significant level of public money has been invested into the University as part of the broader regeneration of the town and this will form part of the economic case made to retain the University in the town and the council will be working with partners to ensure this case is well made.

Seniors Forum

11. Councillor Chowney met with the Seniors Forum on 28 January, the following items were discussed:

Question: How is the bedroom tax working and how does the council support those facing hardship?

Response: The council has funding for allocation as discretionary housing payments. This is mainly used to support people during short term emergencies, for example if people are facing benefit sanctions, and to prevent homelessness.

Question: How is selective licensing working?

Response: Whilst there had not been an initial rush of applications from landlords, this has enabled the council to inspect all the properties that were put forward for the scheme. The council will continue to investigate income generation opportunities and self-financing projects.

Question: How will the revenue from the 2% council tax increase be spent?

Response: This revenue will be spent maintaining services, rather than on a specific project.

Question: Does East Sussex County Council retain all the money collected from on street parking?

Response: Yes, this money is intended for transport improvement schemes.

Question: How could the council build housing? Could this then be made available for rent?

Response: Building new housing has been identified as a potential income generation opportunity. The council would need to set up a private company, which would then build the properties and rent them out on assured shorthold tenancies. The properties built would currently be exempt from the right to buy scheme, and the council would have the opportunity to add additional securities when renting the properties out.

Question: Will the council continue to receive a new homes bonus?

Response: Yes, however, the government is currently consulting on a proposal to reduce the period of new homes bonus payments from 6 years to 4 years.

Question: If the council does build housing, would there be options for shared ownership?

Response: Shared ownership schemes are usually offered by housing associations. They generally work better in areas where average house prices are higher, although some housing associations may offer shared ownership schemes at their developments in Hastings.

Question: Did the council hold reserves in Icelandic banks?

Response: No, the council follows strict guidance on the institutions it can invest its reserves with – these are generally approved banks and government bonds.

Question: What does monetising the seafront mean?

Response: This may involve making retail outlets and kiosks available on the seafront, in a similar way to other seaside towns, including Eastbourne. A kayak company are intending to operate out of the former café at Bottle Alley. Any changes would need to be sensitive and enhance the existing structures on the seafront.

Question: When will the Source Skate Park open?

Response: The skate park, located in the former White Rock Baths, is due to open on 16 February 2016, it will include a new café area which will be open for members of the public to attend.

Question: It was surprising that there was a negative view expressed by some people at the West Marina consultation?

Response: A number of supportive emails have been received since the consultation meeting. A number of the written comments made at the meeting were also positive.

Question: What will be the future of the pier?

Response: The pier is not owned by the council, but the council will continue to support Hastings Pier Charity. The structure will require ongoing maintenance and these costs will need to be met from income generated by activities on the pier.

Question: How will the shopping area at St Leonards be improved?

Response: A number of new businesses have recently opened in King Road and Norman Road and the area continues to develop. New independent businesses have also recently opened in the America Ground area of Hastings and the Rock House development in Cambridge Road is now fully let. Rock House consists of smaller units of office accommodation and consideration is being given as to whether this model could be used elsewhere in the town.

Question: Are any grants available for the repair and maintenance of the cliffs?

Response: Unfortunately not, as they are inland cliffs.

Question: Is there an update on plans to develop Hastings Castle, can it be improved before the events to mark the 950th anniversary of the Battle of Hastings?

Response: The council has been inspired by Nottingham Castle to develop a more ambitious long-term project for Hastings Castle, which would require funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. In the meantime, £200,000 has been allocated in the budget to improve the visitor experience and accessibility of the venue.

Question: Is there an update on the North Bexhill Road?

Response: The Link Road is now open. The Queensway Gateway proposal is subject to a further judicial review.

Question: Would it be possible to meet with the relevant Lead Member at a couple of times throughout the year?

Response: Yes

Question: Is there an update on the University?

Response: The University is carrying out a review of its campus in Hastings. The council will continue to lobby to ensure a base remains in Hastings, as an important part of the broader regeneration of the town. The MP has also taken up this issue.

Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee

12. A joint meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees was held to seek Members comments on the draft corporate plan and budget. The following comments and responses directly relate to discussion of content or suggested amendments to the Corporate Plan and Budget.
13. The minutes from this meeting detail broader areas of discussion and are available here:

<http://hastings.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=131&MId=1719&Ver=4>

Comment: The committee welcomed the updated layout of the corporate plan, commenting that it improved the accessibility of the document for members and the public.

Response: Views noted.

Comment: The committee acknowledged that a number of aspects of the plan included work with partners to support improvements to key services which the council was not directly responsible for, such as education, highways and securing a high speed rail service.

Response: Councillor Chowney commented that it was important that the corporate plan reflected the council's broader ambitions for the town, and that the council would continue to work with its partner agencies to support improvements to key services.

Comment: Members sought reassurance that it was intended for the council-run leasing scheme for privately rented accommodation to become cost neutral by 2019, subject to the results of a pilot scheme in 2015/16?

Response: Members will continue to receive updates on this service as part of their quarterly performance monitoring reports and confirmed that cost neutrality would be indicative of success. Councillor Chowney explained that interest in this scheme had increased over recent months.

Comment: The committee recommended that section 10 of the draft Corporate Plan, leisure, health and wellbeing, should reference the development of the Combe Valley Countryside Park.

Response: Agreed and draft plan amended.

Comment: Members recommended that the key activities listed at viii in section 9, a good place to live, regarding bringing long term empty properties back into use should be amended to reflect that the target applied to 70 long term empty properties over two years and the improvement of 50 neglected properties each year.

Response: Agreed and draft plan amended.

Hastings Community Network (HCN)

14. Councillor Chowney met with the Hastings Community Network on the 4th February 2016, the following items were discussed:

Question: Has the council considered a co-operative project to support the re-development of long term empty properties, which has proved successful elsewhere and could provide the opportunity for training in building skills?

Response: This has not specifically been investigated to date. The council has used its Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) powers to bring long term empty

properties back in to use. In order for the council to become a housing provider it would need to set up an independent private company, and this is currently being investigated.

Question: At the presentation to the community network last year, discussion took place regarding the council spending on subsidising other activities. Is the subsidy to the White Rock Theatre sustainable in the future?

Response: The council is in a contract with the theatre's current operator until 2018. It will not be possible, in the current economic climate, for the council to sustain the level of subsidy to the theatre after the contract period. The current operator has approached the council regarding potential longer term improvements, and this will be investigated.

Question: Is there an update on Xtrax?

Response: Xtrax does not currently receive funding from the council. Bids will be invited to the Community Partnership Fund next year. The priorities and level of funding available will need to be considered by the council as part of its budget setting process.

Question: As more services are made available online, how will the council support people who are at risk of digital exclusion?

Response: Although people will be encouraged to access services online, it will still be possible to contact the council by telephone or at the Community Contact Centre. It is acknowledged that people are at risk of digital exclusion for a variety of reasons and the council is exploring through its Overview and Scrutiny Committee Review how best to assist those facing or at risk of digital exclusion.

Comment: HCN representatives highlighted the importance of ensuring that online content was easily accessible.

Response: Agreed and noted. The Council will be re-launching its new website in the spring – this has been redesigned as part of our Customer First programme to meet user expectations and will make finding information and undertaking on-line transactions much simpler.

Question: The budget shows a deficit for the social lettings agency over the next two years, how many properties were leased during the past year and how does the council plan to reduce the deficit in the future? Will the scheme be affected by increasing rents in Hastings and St Leonards?

Response: Approximately 17 properties were leased last year. The council is continuing to vigorously promote the scheme and awareness and interest in the scheme has grown. The deficit shown in the budget is largely down to staffing costs, a fair proportion of which would have accrued to the previous Letstart scheme had it not been replaced by the Social Lettings Agency. Although competition for privately rented properties has increased, particularly in parts of the town, the council believes it will still be possible to successfully operate the scheme. The scheme is a valuable tool in preventing homelessness.

Question: The Corporate Plan does not include reference to greenway or the walking and cycling network, which are important for the town. Can this be amended?

Response: The council is committed to promoting practices that minimise our carbon footprint through our policies and our own operations, protect and enhance biodiversity, and limit damaging consequences of human intervention on the natural environment. The adopted Hastings Local Plan outlines the detailed policy initiatives to achieve the walking and cycling network. The council has approved the development of a cycle route through Alexandra Park and will be working with East Sussex County Council and partners to realise this over the coming year.

Question: The council currently supports the voluntary sector through the Community Partnership Fund and rate relief, is it anticipated that this will change in the future?

Response: The council provides rate relief to charities of 90%, 10% above the statutory minimum. There are no plans for this to change. It was acknowledged that the voluntary sector carries out a variety of activities which help to manage demand for council services.

Question: Is there an update on projects funded by the Clinical Commissioning Group?

Response: This information will be provided separately by email.

Question: What can be done to minimise the risk of London-based drug dealers exploiting young people in Hastings?

Response: Sussex Police have carried out a range of anti-drug activities over the past year. The Home Office has recently carried out a review of gang culture in Hastings, which found that there may be a risk of vulnerable young people being exploited by gang culture. It is currently unclear if any additional support will be made available following the review.

Policy Implications

Equalities

15. The assessment of equality impacts accompanying the budget proposals for 2016/17 is included with the budget report.

Next Steps

16. A retrospective report-back of performance in 2015/16 and proposed performance indicator targets for 2016/17 - 2017/18 will be drafted in April, after the end of the current financial year, and will be agreed and published in July 2016.
17. The 2015/16 year-end achievements and performance indicator data will be made available to the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, and to the Staff and Management Forum in June and will be reported to Cabinet on the 4th July 2016.

18. The 24th February Council will be asked to approve that delegated authority be given to the Cabinet to agree the retrospective report-back of performance in 2015/16 and proposed performance indicator targets for 2016/17 - 2017/18 prior to publication.

Wards Affected

Ashdown, Baird, Braybrooke, Castle, Central St. Leonards, Conquest, Gensing, Hollington, Maze Hill, Old Hastings, Ore, Silverhill, St. Helens, Tressell, West St. Leonards, Wishing Tree

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

http://www.hastings.gov.uk/decisions_democracy/voting_petitioning_having_your_say/consultation/current_consultations/draft_corpplan/

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