

Report to: Budget Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 10 February 2020

Report Title: Budget and Corporate Plan consultation response and draft Corporate Plan 2020/24

Report By: Jane Hartnell, Director of Corporate Services and Governance

Key Decision: Yes

Classification: Open

Purpose of Report

To present the draft corporate plan 2020/24, together with feedback from the public consultation on the draft budget and corporate plan.

Recommendation(s)

- 1. That the Cabinet recommends to the Full Council, that the content of the attached documents form the basis of the council's corporate plan 2020/24, 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 Deputy 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 all those 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 its statement of Hastings Borough Council's strategic direction, mindful of the views received as part of the public consultation process on the draft corporate plan and associated budget.

Introduction

1. This report provides a summary of public consultation responses on the draft corporate plan and budget received prior to the publication deadline of this report. (Note the consultation period ends on 7th February)
2. These responses (set out from paragraph 9) reflect the important and valuable contribution the council has received from a cross section of the local community together with follow up responses where appropriate.
3. The views received and response given will assist councillors in their final consideration of, and approval process for the draft corporate plan and budget.
4. Paragraph 23 introduces the corporate plan and sets out the context within which it has been written, and how this document will enable local people to hold the council to account for its performance over the next few years.
5. Please note that the summary budget figures (pages 4/5) in the draft corporate plan are still subject to change, until the budget is agreed by Council on 19th February, any changes will be made under delegated authority in consultation with the deputy leader.
6. Delegated authority is therefore sought to amend the corporate plan where necessary to reflect final figures and associated decisions on the draft budget.

Consultation

7. Comments on the council's draft corporate plan and budget have been sought from residents, council staff and a range of community and business organisations.
8. The consultation closes on 07 February. A summary of the responses received so far can be found below. Any further comments received after this report has been published will be submitted to Cabinet separately, after the consultation has closed.

Hastings Area Chamber of Commerce

9. Councillor Chowney attended the chamber meeting on 30 January and presented the draft corporate plan and budget. The following questions were asked:

Question: Could the model the council uses to purchase commercial property be applied for sustainable social housing thereby ensuring complementary investment to address homelessness and guarantee housing as well as raise income?

Response: Currently Hastings Borough Council is not a housing provider. However we are looking into this. At present social housing has to be grant funded because of the levels of social rents and this is largely distributed to housing associations. The 'Right to Buy' threatens the potential for future rent if the council became a housing provider, but if these rules change then this may become more feasible. We have our arm's length housing company that was initially set up to build and acquire property. However when the government

changed the borrowing rates this intention became less viable. Instead we are purchasing housing for temporary accommodation. If homelessness does improve then this accommodation could be used to generate a future income for the council through rent and sales.

Question: If more houses are built attracting more residents what provisions are there for schools?

Response: Provision of schools is considered through the planning process but it is not something that the council directly influences. National government officials will decide if new school places are required as part of the planning process.

Hastings Youth Council

10. Councillor Forward met the Youth Council at their meeting on the 16th of January in the Council Chamber. The following questions and comments were forthcoming:

Comment: Corporate plan document looks good, like improved design, like how concise it is.

Question: I noticed that Hastings Opportunity Area wasn't mentioned at all in any of this. Is there a reason for this? Could they fund anything?

Response: That is because they are external to the council. One of our officers sits on the board but they don't fund us directly in any way however there may be some partnership work.

Question: I saw Cornwallis Street on one of the slides is getting a lot of funding compared to other parts of the town which seems unfair. Why is this?

Response: This is because we were approached by an organisation that was keen to put a hotel on the site. We are in discussions about this proposal as councillors. We are short of hotel bed space in the town. The site is set out in our local plan as a site for development.

Question: With regard to CCTV monitoring, wouldn't the cost of criminal damage as a result of the loss of this service outweigh the cost that you save by reducing the service. The police are strapped of resource themselves and don't have the capacity to pick up this service.

Response: Yes, we know CCTV is important. We are only proposing to cut our role in monitoring it. The police will still have access to it. We have been talking to the police for a while about our difficulties to continue resourcing this given our financial situation. We don't want to cut anything but have had to look across all our services and have to consider which services would not or could not be picked up anywhere else if we cut them. The fear of the impact of the loss of the CCTV is something we know is a concern to businesses in the town.

Question: Do we have to submit a Freedom of Information request to access the information about the actual jobs that will be cut?

Response: No, the information is available on our website in an Appendix K document which has been separated out.

Staff and Management Forum (SMF)

11. The Staff and Management Forum met with the Deputy Leader and Senior Officers on 23rd January. Following a presentation on the budget and corporate plan, the Leader and officers answered questions which had been raised by staff members via their union representatives.
12. Questions covered details about individual's posts and the processes being followed as part of the formal staff consultation which is undertaken according to employment law and council policy.
13. The SMF/Trade Union confirmed they will be making a formal submission on the broader points (not about specific individual's circumstances) to the Budget and Corporate Plan consultation process for consideration by Councillors at the Budget Cabinet and the subsequent Budget Council.

Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)

14. Cllr Chowney gave a presentation to the LSP as part of their meeting on the 27th of January. The following questions and comments were raised:

Question: What is likely to be the impact on the community of proposed service and staff reductions?

Response: The impact is perhaps less prominent in terms of frontline services than has been the case in previous years when we've had to reduce capacity for community engagement work. There are no plans to close any more toilets at present so we still have 17 of these to maintain. These are often of interest to the community but we will need to continue to review these arrangements. Our proposals for reducing our CCTV monitoring will mean that we would become in line with other similar councils. We accept that proposed service reductions will always have an impact on the community and sometimes this is unknown and this is a key reason why we do these consultation meetings.

Comment: The ceasing of Community Partnerships Funding will have a massive impact on the community.

Response: This funding will be transferred to the Foreshore Trust and future provision will need ever more creative and imaginative ways to do more with less.

Question: What is the impact of new waste arrangements in terms of the budget?

Response: Under previous contractual arrangements for waste the fall in value of recyclable materials meant that the previous contract became unviable. The costs for subsequent waste arrangements became higher. The council took the decision to bring part of the service in house but did so at a time when waste services were becoming more expensive, in part because of the fall in value of recyclable materials. The council remains confident that the benefits of our

Direct Service Organisation (DSO) for street cleansing will outweigh increasing costs that all authorities responsible for waste are experiencing.

Question/comment: Has the council been consulting with the police in terms of its CCTV proposals? Also proposed changes to development control are also very publically visible and impactful.

Response: Managers in development control are confident that service changes and efficiencies can be made while retaining service levels. Officers are trusted to continue to deliver on this basis.

In terms of the police, council officers have been liaising with the police in terms of CCTV costs. In the light of the recent announcement of more police funding there has yet to be any further interest from the police in supporting retaining the existing CCTV service.

Question: What about the remaining workforce left afterwards...how will/might they work with partners and how might this be communicated to the public?

Response: There will be an additional burden on remaining staff at a time when real wages have fallen. There are processes in place to support with transition and redundancy arrangements. The remaining staff cohort will be around 300 having halved in recent years. It is part of the reason why the current leader is choosing to stand down as it is dispiriting to have to constantly make difficult and unpalatable decisions around which services to reduce or stop.

Questions/comment: Cllr Forward thanked for her attendance at the Hastings Community Network meeting. Steps welcomed on mitigating the impact of Community Partnership Funding by transferring this to the Foreshore Trust...What extent might the Town Deal/Fund be able to offset this further...and what scope will there be to shift from capital to revenue funding within the prospective Town Deal arrangements? Also given the continuing uncertainties around Brexit implementation would the council consider a phased reduction to Hate Crime support?

Response: What the Town Deal Board (once agreed) will ultimately decide to do and where to spend in terms of the Towns Fund will not be a council decision. There will need to be a proposal that will ultimately be approved by Government. There will also be the need for clear evidence base for community engagement and consultation. It is agreed that in terms of the Hate Crime work that this is a difficult decision and challenging.

Question: Will the council go below its 6 million reserves and what are the associated impacts and options?

Response: The council is waiting on the outcome of the fair funding review but suspects more monies will go to the upper tier authorities. In terms of going below 6 million, this would be at odds with the advice of the Council' Section 151 Finance officer... If we dipped below this threshold by spending an additional 1 or 2 million this only postpones the problem. Our options are very narrow.

Comment: New Homes Bonus monies should assist with the council's budgetary challenges?

Response: These should be based on achievements in terms of our local plan. Since there are no Greenfield and few Brownfield sites to build on the council is very limited in terms of New Homes Bonus potential than its larger, less urban neighbouring authorities.

Hastings Community Network

15. Councillor Forward attended a meeting of the Hastings Community Network on 23rd January. The following questions and comments were raised:

Comment: A query was raised about some of the questions prepared today being very specific and detailed. If they cannot be answered today what is the process for them being responded to?

Response: They can be submitted by email or in writing as part of the consultation process before the consultation closes on 7 February. Details about this can be found on our website. These comments will be included in the consultation report that will go before Cabinet on 10 February and Full council on 19 February – both of which are public meetings and you are welcome to attend to hear the discussion.

Question: You said in your first slide that Hastings is going to be a green town but how do you reconcile that with the damage you are going to do to the country park by putting solar panels there?

Response: We are still undertaking studies about this, nothing has been decided yet.

Question: About the proposal made at the start of last year for solar arrays in the Country Park Nature Reserve: since then, the Council has commissioned PPS to look also at other options for solar arrays on Council-owned land.

Appendix P: capital programme includes items OS06 and OS10 for Energy - Solar Panels and Energy - Ground mounted solar respectively.

OS06 provides for £1.638m in 2021/22; this would be for "Solar Panels on Council-owned land/buildings".

OS10 has £200k earmarked for 2020/21 for "Ground Mounted Solar". A further £1.9m is allocated for 2021/22

Neither budget head specifically mentions the Country Park. But how would these monies be split between the Park and elsewhere? In both cases the funding source is described as "Council"; we can't tell from the budget papers whether this might include funding from the Public Works Loans Board.

Appendix K2, Item 49 in under the heading "Climate change" makes a provision of £50k a year for the next 3 years "to establish a budget to demonstrate what resources will be applied to meeting Renewable Energy Commitment". We don't understand what this means. What will the £50k actually be spent on? Is it relevant to plans for the Country Park?

The budget also provides for the deletion of an Economic Development Officer. Does this post's deletion have any effect on plans for the Country Park, including the proposal for solar arrays there, given that the Council's plan was motivated by wanting to earn money by selling the energy generated?

Response: The reason the budget Appendix K doesn't split out the funding headlines into specifics of what it will be spent on is that we don't know yet. We are still conducting surveys and talking to Natural England about putting solar panels in the Country Park. We haven't specifically put money aside to spend on solar arrays in the Country Park because we don't yet know for sure that we are going to be doing that. At the minute we are just looking at all of the land and buildings that we own and conducting surveys and investigating whether it is feasible to put solar arrays on them. We were never saying this is definitely what we are going to do, we have always said we have a duty to investigate and properly research which of our land and buildings are suitable for solar. For every proposed site there are separate considerations.

Question: I understand one of the proposals in Appendix K2 about specific posts to be cut is the Youth Council support officer. However there is still a budget line against the Youth Council. Can you clarify the council's plan for how the youth council will continue to function?

Response: Yes you are right. One of the posts proposed to be cut is the one that includes Youth Council support. We are still committed to the Youth Council and to hearing the voice of our young people but we need to look at a different way forward which may include other funding methods. We are looking into ways other partners in the town could help host, work with and support the Youth Council. We will continue to support the Youth Council but it may not operate in exactly the way it does now. Our aim is to make it sustainable with the potential to develop this as conditions change.

Question: We work with the Youth Council a lot and we have the youth voice with our playground work. Our funding has been cut for the adventure playground in Ore that we run. This will make it difficult for us to continue funding the playground and keep it open in the future as a vital service for deprived communities.

Response: I will feed this back as this is clearly important.

Update: The council (in the interim Appendix K2) acknowledges that this will have a disproportionate impact to associated service users, however our financial position means we are unable to continue our support in this way. The council will work with in2play to support looking at alternative funding opportunities, should they wish.

Question: You are spending a lot of money to tackle homelessness on temporary accommodation. Is all the money that the government are giving you to tackle this issue being spent on temporary accommodation?

Response: I will have to come back to you about this. I'm not sure. We are doing everything we can to buy temporary accommodation as it is the best way to

tackle homelessness locally. We are also working with developers and housing associations to ensure all new developments include 40% social housing.

Update: In 2020/21, the council will receive a Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and Homelessness Prevention Grant from the government to support people at risk of homelessness and people living in emergency accommodation find a new long term home. The number of people living in emergency accommodation has increased significantly over recent years, and the grants alone are not sufficient to fully cover the council's costs. We are looking at ways of managing our use of emergency accommodation more cost effectively, including expanding our private sector leasing scheme and acquiring our own properties as an alternative to bed and breakfast accommodation. However, increasing the supply of affordable accommodation locally is key to addressing this issue in the long term. The council's new homelessness and rough sleeping strategy gives more information about the work we will be doing with partners to minimise our use of emergency accommodation
<https://www.hastings.gov.uk/housing/strategies/>

Hastings Borough Council recently lead a successful bid, in partnership with the other district and borough councils in East Sussex and the county council, to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government for a project which will continue to reduce the number of rough sleepers locally.

Question: When the council buy temporary accommodation do they own and manage them? Or do they give them to the housing association?

Response: We own and manage them.

Question: What about New Homes Bonus, why is it down?

Response: We are trying to attract development to the town. We are also doing what we can to buy housing and refit properties we own. We are also working with developers to ensure they produce the highest number of social houses. We don't have the space and resources to build all the homes that the town needs itself though this is the aspiration, we'd love to be in the position to do this.

Question: What about the proposed hotel development at Cornwallis? Why is the council paying £7m for the hotel?

Response: We would build the hotel and own the asset and agree a long-term lease deal to bring in revenue over a long period of time. The development would also help deal with the lack of hotel bed space in the town.

Question: The council has continued to cut community transport. They have cut funding for Dial a Ride it on the grounds it can self-fundraise, but it can't. The people that use community transport can't use taxis like the council suggests. You have ditched them and it isn't a great deal of money. If the government does give the town money can you please consider giving £1000 to community transport?

Response: I realise that some people rely on this transport and I see the service operating around town. I hope they manage to continue to do so.

Question: The council's financial position over the past few years, challenging as it is, has led to cuts to community organisations. The council has exhausted its reserves and now has to look at opportunities to make income. This has consequences for community organisations. Look at CHART, it was a big lot of money and it seems to have just been spent on council staff and buildings. The two projects so far have been council projects. It seems like community organisations are having to compete with the council for funding. We need to do something about this. I see the Town Fund in the budget and wonder what the council is proposing to do with the £25m and whether there will be any money for community projects?

Response: CHART is not just being spent on council staff and buildings as suggested. The European funding requires significant levels of administration which is very complicated and nuanced. The town fund is not a guarantee of £25m. At the moment we have been asked to bid for funding. It is a capital led scheme, though we will be pushing for revenue funding.

Update: At the LSP meeting the following Monday a Town Fund Board was set up including key stakeholders in the town, based on government guidance, which sets out who should be on the board and it is understood there will be a large community element.

Question: We need to learn from CLLD with the Town Fund.

Response: The rules for CLLD aren't our own. We have to follow the rules and guidance from the EU. Without these constraints I have confidence that we would have delivered more.

Update: Do make your voice heard about the Town Fund by contacting TownDeal@hastings.gov.uk.

Question: What is the impact of Brexit on the council's planning? The council is cutting funding, on the brink of Brexit, of valuable community schemes and organisations and to community safety, such as cutting the Hate Crime Community service. This seems the wrong time to do it, can this not be done gradually?

Response: The council is exploring ideas of how best to use the money that was allocated to it to prepare for a no deal Brexit. The ending of the transition period in December 2020 may for example require preparation to manage the situation at that time, but we will not know that for many months. We will however keep the situation under review and may respond in the light of new intelligence from the Police/our partners or outreach officers, or if we are given new responsibilities or funding.

Question: Number 28 in the budget appendix, it says future play activity will be targeted closely at deprived communities. This is what we are doing so why is there a proposal to cut our funding?

Response: We will note this and feed it into the consultation.

Question: Lots of people are concerned about the proposed deletion of the Natural Resources manager. That post covers a lot including parks, gardens,

countryside and allotments. The deletion of this post comes at a very sensitive time for the council regarding the management of the country park with the opening of the visitors centre and the hidden Hastings heritage project which the natural resources manager oversees as well as working with DEFRA on the high level stewardship scheme. This is quite a big chunk of work in the next financial year. We don't understand yet how all of this work will be handled. Especially as in the revised budget there is increased spending on this area, without a clue about what this increase is for.

Response: About your last point I would have to ask officers and come back to you. I presume that this is just increased operational costs but I will look into and come back to you.

16. Further to the HCN meeting a follow up letter was received with regards to further associated information. A response has been sought from appropriate officers and will be sent to the recipient to be shared with HCN attendees accordingly.

Budget Overview and Scrutiny Committee

17. A meeting of the council's overview and scrutiny committee was held on 23 January, to consider the draft corporate plan and budget.
18. The Committee contributed a range of views, comments and questions on the draft documents and these can be found in the draft minutes of the meeting at the following link:

<https://hastings.moderngov.co.uk/documents/g3766/Printed%20minutes%2023rd-Jan-2020%2018.00%20Overview%20and%20Scrutiny%20Committee.pdf?T=1>

19. The committee proposed the following text changes to the draft corporate plan and responses are given to each below:

Under the priority heading Tackling Poverty on Pages 10/11, 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.

Response: Rather than include in the corporate plan as proposed, it is intended to instead include as part of our key criteria against which new ideas and existing areas of work are reviewed. This will happen as part of our proposed work on 'developing our corporate standard,' which will help us plan and review all our work as outlined as a 'key activity' (page 13) in the draft corporate plan. On this basis, the Overview and Scrutiny committee can track progress and call cabinet to account on this key activity.

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

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

Response: Regeneration activity should include a strong focus on ensuring how marginalised groups benefit. All schemes whether to create employment, training,

education or climate change will need to be assessed in terms of the benefits they will offer directly or indirectly to our poorest communities. The commitment to 'developing our corporate standard' (page 13) in the draft corporate plan will assist in this regard, ensuring that benefits are clearly identified and clarified before schemes commence.

It is proposed that the following wording be included:

Focused directly or indirectly 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

Response: The council does not have the capacity to do this within existing resources at present unless other areas of work to forgo are identified. However we will keep this under review should there be capacity created for both HBC and our partners to achieve this objective in the future perhaps through our LSP or other arrangements then we will do so. There is no indication that other partners are willing or able to participate in designing a new anti-poverty strategy in the broad sense. This has contrasted with close work across the County around issues of welfare benefits and homelessness.

Other Consultation responses

20. The council received consultation responses via the council's consultation e mail address.
21. Some were in specific relation to those proposed staff and service reductions outlined in appendix K2. Other included more general comments, queries and questions. These are outlined and summarised below.

Comments: Some comments were received acknowledging the important support and service the Housing Solutions officer role has supplied to date.

Response: Thanks acknowledged for flagging the positive impact of this service support.

Comment: Staff suggestion made to better raise the profile of our cultural assets.

Response: Draft corporate plan amended.

Question: Clarification sought on the amount of Council tax owed to the Council.

Response: Specific information requested was provided.

Comment: Request to reconsider CCTV proposals to reduce incidents of theft at a local retailer.

Response: Noted and reported.

Comments/ indirect questions: Support for sensible and worthwhile proposals outlined in the draft corporate plan and budget papers and acknowledgement of the associated challenges...In this regard are the new developments proposed realistic and viable or should there be a focus on making the most of existing assets and recent developments? Also could more be made of our museum by promoting the study rooms to students? Should we focus on lobbying for improvements to getting in and out of the town in terms of travel infrastructure?

Response: Noted.

Comment: Two letters of concern relating to proposals to potentially make redundant the Natural Environment and Resources Manager were received from a resident and on behalf of the consortium of contractors at the country park visitor centre.

Response: Comments have been noted and will be considered as part of the consultation process. The revised budget published on 31 January for consideration at the Budget Cabinet on 10 February, no longer includes this post.

Comment: Two letters was received from the Chair of the 'Big Local' and the In2play Director expressing concern at the proposals to withdraw funding to In2Play that contributes to keeping the Adventure Playground open and requesting that this be reinstated.

Response: The council (in the interim Appendix K2) acknowledges that this will have a disproportionate impact to associated service users, however our financial position means we are unable to continue our support in this way.

Draft corporate plan 2020-24

22. The corporate plan sets out the council's strategic direction. The draft corporate plan outlines the challenging financial climate in which the council continues to operate, what we want to achieve in terms of outcomes by 2024, how we will deliver and key activities we will undertake during 2020/21 under each refreshed priority.
23. The plan includes infographics for our borough and the council that set the scene for our new three outcomes and six renewed priorities. By clicking on the infographics you can drill down on each and view how we compare and measure up.
24. Once the draft corporate plan has been approved, further work will be undertaken to firm up performance measures for the year ahead for those key activities under our renewed priorities, so that these become more easily accessible and trackable on our website from the beginning of the new financial year in April 2020.
25. Our performance indicators and performance measures for our key activities during 2020/21 will be agreed in July 2020 once we have analysed year-end performance from 2019/20 and Overview and Scrutiny have had the opportunity to consider the targets to be set in detail.

Equalities

The draft assessment of equality impacts was included with the draft budget proposals for 2020/21 within Appendix K2. The budget papers elsewhere on this agenda contain an interim refreshed Appendix K2, informed by feedback to date from the consultation process. A further version is likely to be submitted.

Options

No alternative options were considered. Regular performance monitoring is required to ensure the Overview and Scrutiny Committee can undertake its scrutiny function as set out in the Constitution.

Timetable of Next Steps

Action	Key milestone	Due date (provisional)	Responsible
Performance information readied for HBC website	Corporate Plan translated to council website with associated performance information for the year ahead.	1 st April	Mark Horan with senior managers and lead councillors
Yearend performance for 2019/20 and associated performance measures finalised for the year ahead.	Cabinet report detail 2019/20 performance and prospective performance indicators for the year ahead.	July	Mark Horan

Wards Affected

All wards

Policy Implications

Reading Ease Score: 49.4

Reading Grade Level: 11.2

Project tools used: Basic scope, SWOT.

Please identify if this report contains any implications for the following:

If your report contains implications for any of the following you should include a brief paragraph in the main body of your report providing further detail.

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness	Yes
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)	Yes
Risk Management	Yes
Environmental Issues & Climate Change	Yes
Economic/Financial Implications	Yes
Human Rights Act	Yes
Organisational Consequences	Yes
Local People's Views	Yes
Anti-Poverty	Yes
Legal	

Additional Information

Appendix A – Draft Corporate Plan 2020/21

Officer to Contact

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