

Report To:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	Monday, 8 February 2021
Report Title:	Corporate plan draft annual update and draft budget consultation responses 2021/22
Report By:	Jane Hartnell, Managing Director
Key Decision:	Y
Classification:	Open

Purpose of Report

To present the draft annual update to the Council's Corporate Plan 2020-24. The annual update reflects the changes in the context within which we are now working and summarises some of the key activities the council will undertake in 2021/22.

To present to Cabinet the consultation feedback summary and responses from the exercise to seek local people's views on the draft corporate plan annual update and draft budget.

Recommendation(s)

- 1. That Cabinet recommends to Full Council, to note and approve the draft annual update to the corporate plan 2020-24, subject to the proviso that any significant amendment made to the council's draft budget be reflected in the update.**
- 2. That delegated authority be given to the Managing Director, after consultation with the Leader of the Council to make further revisions as is considered necessary, 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 annual update to the corporate plan as its statement of strategic direction for the period 2020 - 2024, mindful of the views received as part of the public consultation.

Introduction

1. The council agreed its [corporate plan \(2020-24\)](#) and budget (2020-21) back in February 2020. Shortly after, COVID-19 spread with unprecedented impacts across the globe.
2. As a result, alongside other local authorities and their partners, HBC took on, and continues to take on, several new activities, roles and responsibilities.
3. In October 2020 the council's COVID-19 recovery [themes and actions](#) were approved by cabinet, setting out new and or changed council activities at that time in response to the ongoing pandemic.
4. The council's recovery themes and actions align with ongoing partnership working with the Hastings and St Leonards Local Strategic Partnership, reflected in the town wide response and recovery efforts, and a shared [statement of intent](#).
5. This report sets out the annual updates that are proposed to the corporate plan (2020-24) reflecting our current response and recovery intentions, and associated performance reporting arrangements for 2021/22 together with consultation feedback summary on the corporate plan and budget (Appendix B).

Corporate plan 2020 – 2024 what's new?

6. The bulk of the corporate plan [2020-24](#) is unchanged, this includes our [approach](#) and the [three outcomes and six priorities](#).
7. Where new data is available, the '[Our borough](#)' and '[Your council](#)' sections have been updated to provide the latest figures. These set the local scene and give the demographic context for the [key work we are doing](#).
8. The draft corporate plan annual update is set out in appendix A. The headline key activities proposed for delivery in 2021/22 include:
 - a. ongoing actions – including those that were paused or delayed by the pandemic or which were not expected to be completed in 2020/21
 - b. the relevant [recovery themes and actions](#) commitments agreed by Cabinet in October 2020
 - c. new key activities
9. The pandemic continues to bring into sharp focus a continued need and desire to work together with our partners and residents so that together our town can emerge from the pandemic better and stronger.
10. This partnership focus was identified in the recovery themes and actions commitments agreed by Cabinet in October 2020 alongside a desire to ensure that our most vulnerable residents continue to be prioritised in line with the Council's equalities intentions.
11. Both a partnerships and equalities focus cross cut the priorities in the corporate plan, our recovery themes and actions, and the proposed updated headline key activities for 2021/22.

12. Following approval of the draft annual update, further work will be undertaken to firm up milestones and measures for each key activity so performance can be tracked via the reporting arrangements for 2021/22 outlined below.

Performance reporting 2021-22

13. In December 2020 we began publishing performance information online via a new [performance dashboard](#). We intend to further refine and improve this approach in 2021/22. The key activities included in the annual update will be incorporated into this dashboard from the 1st of April 2021, so that local people can hold the council to account for its performance.
14. On this Dashboard there are a number of performance indicators that will continue to be monitored that complement key activities. The targets for these performance indicators will be set after the year-end in March, as identified in the next steps table below at paragraph 18.
15. In addition, the Overview and Scrutiny (O & S) committee will continue to monitor performance quarterly, these meetings are held in public and are streamed live on our website.

Consultation

16. Comments on the annual corporate plan update and draft budget have been sought from residents, council staff and a range of community and business organisations.
17. The consultation closed at 9am on the 8th February 2021 after publication of this report. A summary of the responses received prior to publication of this report is attached below at Appendix B. All other comments will be published as a supplementary item just before the meeting.

Equalities

The draft assessment of equality impacts on the service changes proposed is included with the draft budget proposals for 2021/22 within Appendix K2.

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

18. Please include a list of key actions and the scheduled dates for these:

Action	Key milestone	Due date (provisional)	Responsible
Corporate plan annual update finalised and published on the council's website	Updates approved	1 st March 2021	Continuous Improvement and Democratic Services Manager
2021/22	Dashboard	1 st April 2021	Continuous

performance milestones and measures integrated into performance dashboard	refreshed.		Improvement and Democratic Services Manager
2020/21 yearend performance data collated and used to propose draft Performance Indicator targets for 2021/22 for consideration by O&S and Cabinet	Cabinet report	July 2021	Continuous Improvement and Democratic Services Manager

Wards Affected

All wards

Policy Implications

Reading Ease Score:

Have you used relevant project tools: Basic scope, SWOT

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

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

Additional Information

Appendix A – Draft headline key activity updates 2021/22

Appendix B - Consultation feedback summary and responses

Officer to Contact

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Draft Corporate Plan update and draft Budget Consultation feedback summary

Hastings Area Chamber of Commerce

19. Councillor Forward attended the chamber meeting on 28 January and presented the updated corporate plan and draft budget. The Assistant Director for Finance and Revenues also contributed responses where appropriate:

- a) Question: As a result of the announcement on the closure of Debenhams and amongst other challenges in the town centre, what is the impact on the local economy and to the council?

Response: We have reached out and will welcome a discussion with the new owner. It is a very sad time for those working there and we should spare a thought for people's livelihoods. In terms of what might happen going forward, it is hoped this will be a chance to reinvigorate the town centre. The Town Deal board is looking at the town centre being a hub for regeneration, and it is hoped that the building, being a prominent one in the town centre, can be part of this.

- b) Question: Is there no decision yet on what is happening with business rates? Will there be an extension of the grace and is there any lobbying going on by the council or district?

Response: Certainly, as lockdown carries on, Government have said they will continue to look at this and there will be announcements on 3rd March. Until then, we haven't received any other notifications. Bills will be going out as normal, but we may have to re-bill which causes additional costs for us. Until then, things remain uncertain.

- c) Question: In terms of Locate East Sussex work, we are particularly interested in the mix of office space, co-working space and the provision for industrial space around the town.

Response: The draft Local Plan is out for consultation and this looks to support a future scenario including all of those mentioned, including more residential and mixed developments. We are looking at co-working space, remembering that there are lots of creatives in the town and we need to identify their needs, look at developing places that people will want to live and work. We are hoping the Town Deal will be successful in regenerating and reinvigorating the town going forward. When we see the projects listed in it, we may not necessarily support all of them, but it is hoped that partners can support it.

The council has many assets and we own a 10% stake in Priory Meadow as the freeholder. We are very interested and committed to ensure this is a viable and vibrant proposal going forward. There is some good news though in terms of office space, the DWP has recently finished the fit out of Lacuna Place and it is hoped it will be filled up with office workers shortly. In terms of Churchfields Industrial Estate, there is considerable investment hopefully through the Town Deal, and the first phase is for 29 start-up units, followed by other mixed-use units. This is an opportunity to not only look at industrial but also office space. It is also hoped that we can rent out spare office space at Muriel Matters House. If we successfully get the Town Deal, it will give us a foot in the door to make the necessary changes.

- d) Question: With the English Channel on one side and the physical restrictions to the space that we have, how does the council go about maintaining the commercial space?

Response: There is real pressure on maintaining it and with more demands on broadband and working from home and more remotely. Cheaper accommodation costs are needed and we need support, although all commercial units are fully let, which is good news but there is still lots of pressure.

- e) Comment: One key thing is that businesses have consciously commented on is the support received from the council. However, one regular negative comment we get from members and non-members is around planning, on brownfield and redevelopment of existing offices or industrial units. There are often issues getting planning permission on most of the schemes. Any support from planning and if they can be more flexible, will be gratefully received.

Response: There are constraints that the planners work under. However, please do have early conversations with them where you can, so we can assist better in the early stages. I would be interested to hear examples of difficulties so we can continue to see thriving businesses and a successful economy. Thank you for the positive comments, I recognise how difficult things are for all.

- f) Comment: The Chamber is part way through a survey and will share the results. One point is a very pertinent one, it is very clear there is a high proportion of self-employed people falling through the cracks, who have been ineligible for support. This is a great concern which is regularly mentioned in the press, but the frustration is that they don't seem to be getting anywhere with solutions.

Response: The council recognises these gaps in current provision and continues to lobby for assistance and assumes the MP is doing the same.

- g) Comment: It is great to hear that DWP is at the point of moving into Lacuna Place. From what we hear, going forward, the demand will come from smaller businesses. There will be less demand for large offices and more demand for small flexible work space.

Response: There is an employment needs assessment to identify what the need is in the area as part of the Local Plan consultation. Everyone is encouraged to comment if there is anything missing from it.

- h) Question: Has the Local Plan consultation gone live?

Response: It went live on the council website yesterday. We are not doing face to face appointments but if you want to speak to anyone please get in touch using the details on the website.

- i) Question/comment: What can the council do to help with recovery and support the visitor economy? It sounds like another year of staycations and holidays in the UK. Hastings is a tourist town and the tourism sector is the hardest hit, if we could get our 3 wonderful festivals going again, although we know we are not dependent on HBC for that, but the government. Once the green light is there, we must do everything we can do to attract tourists and money in the town. The Chamber will do everything it can to support that.

Response: We look forward to it, too. There is no certainty. People are having to make best guesses in planning for the festivals. As soon as we can, we will be behind this. Online communications, social media and Visit 1066 Country have all be successful in keeping spirits up and pushing messages out. We will all be ready to go, support and boost the local economy and get tourists to spend money in the town when the time comes. It is one of the sunniest seaside towns in the country.

- j) Question: Is there any appetite to devolve power and is there a coordinated council group to undertake any local tax reform?

Response: We have sat in many meetings with ministers who have been singing our praises and it would be lovely to think the support is there. We are still busy combating Covid and responding to the needs of the town. When this is over, there will be a need to push for more funds.

On a national basis, there is a review into business rates. We are now seeing a major change in how businesses are operating, given the online competition. Business rate re-evaluation had been postponed for another year and the Fair Funding review has been suspended for another year.

- k) Question/comment: Is there any update on the A21 connection? There was a flurry of activity which seems to have ground to a halt, but the lobbying is continuing.

Response: The A21 reference group hasn't met since the pandemic. Work was being done to allow access and a temporary connection was being made, but work has been delayed for some time.

- l) Question: Mentioned in the presentation was work on developing pan-Sussex track and track systems. Is anything being done around mass testing, why is there none in the area and is there any work to make it happen?

Response: We have been pushing for this as hard as we can on all levels and fronts as this is what is needed in the area. It will have to be central and easily accessed and it will take some time to set up, but we are on the case.

- m) Follow up comment: The Chamber is happy to help in terms of associated lobbying and support where appropriate.

Hastings Youth Council

20. Councillor Forward met the Youth Council at their meeting on the 28th of January in the Council Chamber. The following questions and comments were forthcoming:

- a) Comment: Moving the Tourism Information Centre (TIC) to the college site at the station was welcomed due to its ease of access.

Response: Thanks for the support on this as there are some mixed view on relocating.

- b) Question: What will be the TIC space be used for going forward?

Response: We will still use it to offer things like homeless advice and we need to retain some presence as reception for the rest of the building. We are keen to let out more of the building where we can, as the pandemic has shown we do not need all the space all the time.

- c) Does homeworking work well for council staff?

Response: It depends on each individual member of staff's personal circumstances. We need to support staff needs and remain flexible where we can. We are unlikely to return to how we used the office before the pandemic.

- d) Comment: Unaware that the council has a reservoir...

Response: It is a decommissioned one and is at the top of Alexandra Park.

- e) Comment/Question: Interested in how the council plans to invest in the future and role of the Housing company going forward?

Response: The council was keen to use the Housing company to buy property to help address some of our housing challenges in terms of providing affordable rents. The council can now build its own homes again, so we will be looking at all options for the housing company going forward.

Staff and Management Forum (SMF)

21. The Staff and Management Forum met with the Leader and Senior Officers on 26th 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.

- a) Question: When can we expect Budget Appendix K2 to be available?

Response: This will be published with the budget cabinet agenda papers on Friday.

- b) Question: Is our proposed budget sustainable?

Response: Our draft budget for 2021/22 meets all legal requirements for a balanced budget.

- c) Question: Is there a number for FTE posts being deleted as part of the budget process?

Response: 1.29 FTE posts are being deleted as a result of restructuring within the TIC. 1 FTE vacant post will be deleted as agreed last year from the Community Contact Centre. Housing staff reductions are also expected but do not form part of the wider budget review process. We have, and are still, lobbying central government to approve a new Selective Licensing Scheme.

- d) Question: Has the funding provided by central government been enough to cover our expenditure with relation to business and other Covid support grants?

Response: Overall, yes. However, we will be unable to reclaim some loss of income and the impact of staff resources is not recognised. Further cuts to budgets will be required in future to address these burdens.

- e) Question: Will 'all staff' briefings on the budget be scheduled?

Response: Staff briefings will be scheduled in February as usual and information on the budget will be included.

- f) Question: Can a list of vacant posts across the organisation please be provided?

Answer: Yes, this can be provided.

Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)

22. This year an LSP meeting was not scheduled during the consultation period. LSP partners were invited to submit their comments directly via email or by attending other partnership meetings taking place during the consultation period.

Hastings Community Network (HCN)

23. Councillor Fitzgerald attended a meeting of the Hastings Community Network on 18 January. The following questions and comments were discussed.

a) Question: Why has the size of the deficit shot up?

Response: The costs of taking on additional Covid-19 work combined with loss of income, increased service costs e.g. homelessness and inability to make planned savings and investments has all meant that our future years deficits projections are higher than they would have otherwise been.

b) Comment/Question: Why is the budget showing a reduction in Community Partnership Funding?

Response: The decision was made in February 2019 to cease the community partnership funding programme and seek alternative sources of funding for the programmes this fund supported. From 2021 onwards the Foreshore Trust will be operating a new grants programme which has objectives closely aligned to the CPF schemes.

c) Questions: Clarity was sought on where the extra 340 000 on the visitor centre along with 40,500 appears in the budget and with the latter, what are the plans for the management of the centre and the HBC post that was up for deletion in the consultation this time last year?

Response: Both sums are set aside for contingency although it is hoped that contingency spend is nowhere near these worse cases. The visitor centre is nearly complete with snagging left to do and the running contingency is based on what we know of our running costs to date and the agreement with our Groundworks partners running for the first year. The post referred to was not deleted as part of the budget process last year and is not included in the list of potentially affected posts this year.

d) Question: Is there a Town Deal update?

Response: The Town Deal Board will submit the Town Investment Plan (TIP) by the deadline of 29th January – this is the early stage ‘expression of interest’ to the Government for funding for programmes of projects that have been identified to best meet the town’s challenges. In early February the board will be launching its own communications pages and social media setting out details of the TIP and explaining the next stages of the process. The initial four projects being funded by the Accelerated Fund are progressing well and are on course to be completed by the 31st March deadline.

e) Comment/Question: Despite the budgetary challenges the council should not be inward looking, local third sector collective funds probably run a par with the Council’ monies.... It is important to maintain cross sector and partnerships. It is requested that a named person be identified from the council as a link person to the partners represented at this meeting?

Response: The point is noted, and the valuable input of the sector is well recognised by HBC. We are keen to continue work with partners at a strategic level on the LSP and Town Deal Board, as well as through substantial operational delivery vehicles such as the Community Hub and projects supporting rough sleepers and homeless people.

f) Comment/question: There has been successive reductions in the council officer interface with the third sector, so the previous comment is welcomed... also how is the council mitigating against digital poverty?

Response: The council takes steps to mitigate digital poverty where we can, but our collective effort needs to be stepped up as this is not something the council alone can address, as the recent experience of lockdown home schooling has highlighted.

- g) Comments: Among HCN partners there is a digital inclusion working group with a dedicated officer...it would be good to have a named officer who can liaise with this officer even if the council has little or no capacity to do any associated work in this. Warmer Homes and the Shine project has evidenced how we can work together, and we are keen for such working to continue given the shared challenge of the pandemic.

Response: A continued partnership focus is welcomed, but our challenge remains to resource work as our workforce has more than halved from around 650 posts to round about 300 now. The council is going through a period of ongoing transformation. This is why the Town Deal is such an exciting opportunity one that the whole council team will be engaged with. It is important that we ensure our key projects and programmes are effectively managed to make the most of internal and partnership capacity and the deputy leader is happy to have these conversations and to use the structures such as the LSP and SELEP so these conversations are not lost. The deputy Leader also committed to attend a future HCN meeting to continue these discussions.

- h) Comment/Question: HCN need to be able to look at the budget earlier and have earlier discussions to better mitigate against the effects of reductions. What is the impact of the 96k in terms of senior management restructure?

Response: The council is committed to engaging more during the process of budget development, however pressures this year have meant this has not been possible. The £96k is the balance of the savings that were planned to be made this year from further management restructure. The restructure has been delayed as the council needs all its resources to meet the challenges the pandemic has created for our communities and businesses.

- i) Comment/Question: A great wealth of knowledge on this Zoom call...how can we transform and do things differently, how will the council integrate new ways of working internally and externally?

Response: Our intentions for recovery have been set out alongside the work of the LSP towards their statement of intent. The recovery plans we took to our Cabinet in October have had to take a back seat given successive phases of the pandemic and the need to move from recovery thinking and planning back to response. These still set our direction of travel. During the first phase of the pandemic the council was able to reassign staff to work on plans for recovery with our overview and scrutiny and audit committees. However, the subsequent phases have impacted more as 'business as usual' services were re-started and have had to be delivered at the same time as on-going pandemic related work. As soon as we are able to dedicate more resource to this we will of course do so.

Budget Overview and Scrutiny Committee

24. A meeting of the council's overview and scrutiny committee was held on 20 January, to consider the draft corporate plan update and budget.
25. 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/g4199/Printed%20minutes%2020th-Jan-2021%2018.00%20Overview%20and%20Scrutiny%20Committee.pdf?T=1>

26. The committee proposed no changes to the draft corporate plan update and budget, accepting that the unprecedented circumstances of the pandemic has meant that details in the budget reports are still being firmed up and likely to change for budget cabinet and full council.

Other Consultation responses

27. The council received consultation responses via the council's consultation e mail address.
28. One questioned the continued funding of the White Rock Theatre despite it being closed for business during the lockdown phases of the pandemic.

In response, the council has a legal contract with HQ Theatres which sets out the sums due to be paid each year. Simply closing a building to the public does not mean that all costs cease.

29. Follow up correspondence with regards to the Country Park Visitor centre were received via e mail, following on from the meeting with the deputy leader and the HCN.
30. The deputy leader is provided a written reply to the further points raised in this regard.
31. A resident wrote in regarding a range of issues including: waste collection, that the corporate plan update is too internally focussed on councillors, staff and their resources; perceived contradictions in climate change action including Alexandra Park cycle path proposals, reducing car use being at odds with the cost of public transport; and, concern with assumed use of the old bathing pool site.
32. This resident (in line with all other correspondence received from consultees via email) has been thanked for submission of views with the commitment to cascade to the relevant service departments as appropriate.