

Questioner	Question	Answer
Councillor Edwards	<p>It is more than four years since the Labour Council demolished the well used Harold Place toilets. Plans to fill the site with an “iconic” restaurant building using borrowed money were thwarted when the planning committee rejected the scheme.</p> <p>How much did HBC spend on demolishing the former toilets?</p> <p>How much did HBC spend on consultancy/architectural services leading up to the aborted restaurant scheme?</p> <p>What are the new plans for this hoarded eyesore in its central position in the town?</p>	<p>Councillor Barnett:</p> <p>The final cost of the demolition works was £73,000 (Ex. VAT).</p> <p>A total of £67,615.30 was spent on the restaurant scheme.</p> <p>Cabinet has allocated the site to be part of the Garden Town project (led by ESCC), and detailed designs for this are being done by Arup under the Town Deal programme. In addition Coastal Currents recently arranged for artists to transform the hoardings as part of their annual festival.</p>
Councillor Patmore	<p>An emergency cabinet was called in November 2021 where it was announced that reserves were likely to fall to £5.5 million, below the minimum level of £6 million set by the council.</p> <p>Cabinet was told that immediate emergency cuts needed to be made from the budget.</p> <p>9 months later those figures have been recalculated to show that reserves are now at a level in excess of £9 million. Given that reserve levels have now been re-calculated to be 65% greater than expected;</p> <p>Was the emergency cabinet in November 2021 necessary?</p> <p>Were the emergency measures taken last year necessary when the budget figures were so inaccurate?</p> <p>How can the council be expected to set a budget when the figures supplied to it are so erroneous?</p>	<p>Councillor Willis:</p> <p>The report that was taken to Cabinet on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2021 was the best estimate of the situation at the time. At that point there were a number of unknown variables, and a prudent approach was taken. It was not known if the Covid-19 situation would improve or if further strains would develop and additional lockdowns be imposed. This effectively led to us taking a worst-case and prudent approach with regards to the draw on reserves at year end with greater expenditure and lower levels of income.</p> <p>At the end of the financial year, it transpired that the forecast expenditure was lower than anticipated (partly due to delays resulting from Covid, and partly due to the remedial action taken) and income held up better than expected.</p> <p>This was in part due to the final round of government grant support for sales, fees and charges income being audited and agreed, whereas the income had not been accounted for previously (due to uncertainty over it being received).</p>

Furthermore, the impact of Covid-19 in 2019/20 meant that many capital programme items were delayed and the full budgeted capital expenditure (to be financed by borrowing) was not incurred. This has a knock-on effect of leading to savings on approved interest and MRP revenue budget in 2020/21. A saving of £420k was achieved which would have reduced the call on reserves to balance the budget at the year end.

In November 2021 the audit of the 2019/20 accounts was not complete and therefore officers did not have a firm base on which to calculate the opening balance of reserves, a point included in the report itself. The audits for the 2020/21 and 2021/22 Statement of Accounts are still ongoing and therefore the final reserves figures could still be subject to change.

Going forward the Council still needs to find significant savings and remove the draw on reserves as a way of balancing the budget. The action taken in November 2021 was part of managing the situation and helping us plan for the future. It helped us maintain the reserves position. The savings achieved to date have helped offset the increased costs for temporary accommodation and other cost pressures which we have seen continue to escalate over the proceeding months since the initial report.

As highlighted in the MTFs update report from the CFO at Cabinet previously, it highlighted the £6m minimum reserve level and how this would be reviewed as part of the ongoing work and as part of the weekly meetings between senior officers and Cabinet leaders.

Officers are also in regular discussions with LGA advisors around any efficiencies that can be made and improvements to the financial situation here at Hastings, in order for us to ensure that we have a financially sustainable model for the future and not just surviving year to year.

		<p>The General Reserve balance was historically calculated to be the absolute minimum amount considered necessary and should we drop below this level then additional savings and reductions would be needed to bring that balance back up to its required level.</p> <p>The recent volatility in markets, increasing interest rates, and worrying rise in inflation are good reasons why that safety net is required along with any cover for emergency scenarios such as we have seen in the past.</p> <p>However, predicting the future financial position can be a challenging exercise, and just as we have seen balances increase, they could easily have been lower than expected and had that been the case the Council would have found itself in an even more challenging financial situation that the one it already faces.</p>
<p>Councillor Foster</p>	<p>How many Electric Vehicle charging points are provided within car parks in the borough?</p> <p>Since the scheme started how much electricity has been provided free of charge to Electric Vehicle owners and what has been the cost to council taxpayers?</p> <p>For how much longer do you anticipate this generous scheme will continue?</p>	<p>Councillor Haffenden:</p> <p>Within Car parks we have installed 21 publicly accessible EV charge points in the last 18 months. In previous administrations it was decided to allow free charging for the electricity to incentivise their use. Electricity costs were also much cheaper at this time being only around 12p kw/h.</p> <p>In the year 2020 to 2021 the EV chargers used 6088 KW which would have cost us about £730, last year they used 44,261KW which would have cost us about £5000.</p> <p>Now with the increases in electricity costs we are looking at the appropriate charges to pass onto customers likely to be around £0.6 per kw/h to make sure the costs of the electricity are covered, along with the standing charge and the other associated costs.</p>

		<p>To charge for the electricity has already been approved by budget setting and once the charges have been set correctly we will look to introduce them as quickly as possible.</p>
<p>Councillor Cooke</p>	<p>Could the lead member give an update on the progress the council has made on reducing carbon emissions in Hastings so far since the council was last updated, in particular,</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) What partnership working has been introduced with Voluntary and business organisations?</li> <li>2) Work being carried out with housing providers to better insulate housing stock?</li> <li>3) Reduction in co2 emissions and if we are on track to meet our 2030 target?</li> </ol>	<p>Councillor Hilton:</p> <p>The last update was provided to Cabinet on the 7<sup>th</sup> March 2022 where Cabinet resolved: <i>To recognise the breadth and scale of the challenge of our net-zero ambitions, and that these can only be delivered by collaborating and working together across all sectors from national and local government to local business and organisations and individuals through their lifestyle choices.</i></p> <p>In the summer BEIS released the next iteration of the annual greenhouse gas emission data for local authority's which shows there has been an 8% reduction in emissions in Hastings between 2019 &amp; 2020, a 47% reduction since 2005. So the town still has some way to go to meet the net zero ambitions <a href="#">UK local authority and regional greenhouse gas emissions national statistics, 2005 to 2020 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</a></p> <p>The Council's main focus for the last 6 months has been supporting the Town Deal programme and ensuring wherever possible all of the projects contribute to our net zero ambitions. The Council has met with and shared resources with the Chamber of Commerce and lets Do Business about climate change and will continue to promote resources that local business can take advantage of in meeting their net zero ambitions e.g. Locase <a href="#">LoCASE   Low Carbon Across the South and East</a> and Business East Sussex Net Zero Campaign <a href="#">'East Sussex Zero' - Our</a></p>

[Campaign for Net Zero - Business East Sussex : Business East Sussex \(southeastbusiness.org.uk\)](https://southeastbusiness.org.uk)

We have met with the procurement hub to look at how to integrate our net zero ambitions into our procurement policy and decisions Housing – we continue to work through the East Sussex energy partnership to insulate local people’s homes – but recognise there is so much more to do. A housing provider climate change working group has been set up under the auspices of the East Sussex Housing Officers Group to coordinate the delivery of activities to improve the energy performance of housing stock across the county and in Hastings ensuring we can take full advantage of govt funding schemes like the Home upgrade grant scheme (HUG) and the Social housing decarbonisation scheme (SHDS) as they come on stream. The recently approved Town deal Project with the East Sussex college group will ensure that we train local people and our supply chain in the skills needed to retrofit the existing building stock including local homes.

The Partnership for People and place project is exploring new ways of tackling fuel poverty and poor energy efficiency in the private rented stock and is focusing its work in Hastings [Partnerships for People and Place: guidance for local expressions of interest - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/partnerships-for-people-and-place)

Councillor Hilton has met with the Chamber of Commerce, representatives of the 1066 Manufacturing group and local food businesses to discuss the opportunities and barriers on the pathway to transitioning to a zero carbon economy. She is hoping to re-establish a climate working group through the Local Strategic Partnership which will share good practice between stake-holders and identify any opportunities for shared working. This group would also work with local housing providers (if willing) to share good practice on insulating our housing stock. In terms of reaching our 2030 target as a town, that will require a much greater investment and funding beyond that which the council has direct access to.

		<p>A huge part of our local carbon footprint comes from the gas used for heating our drafty housing stock. The current funding comes through Sustainable Warmth (LAD3 and HUG1). In Hastings this has resulted in installed measures for 10 homes totalling £64,835.33. These were all solar PV and will result in an estimated annual cost saving of £300 for each household and a combined estimated annual carbon saving of 5,950 kg CO<sub>2</sub>e.</p> <p>Through the earlier phase (LAD 1A/B) in Hastings we installed measures for a total of 44 homes resulting in an average SAP improvement of 17, an estimated energy bill saving of £273.73 per home and a combined carbon saving of 70.14 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e. The current scheme (LAD3/HUG1) is ongoing so we are expecting to do additional properties in Hastings, we will be doing 150 properties across East Sussex.</p> <p>Also, the government have now opened applications for the next round of funding; 700 million available across England, HUG2.</p> <p>From these figures you can see how far we have to go. Given the current energy crisis it would make a lot of sense for the government to invest not just in an energy price cap but in a huge retrofit programme to cut our energy bills. So far it has shown no inclination to do this.</p> <p>A refreshed climate action plan will be coming to cabinet in November so more detail will be available then</p>
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<p>Councillor Hay</p>	<p>Could the lead member please update the council on what progress has been made with the in-house cleaning contract? In particular</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The amount of hours the staff will be contracted to work and the rate of pay they will receive?</li><li>2. How many of the cleaning staff have chosen to transfer(tupe) over to employment with Hastings borough council?</li><li>3. What extra benefits have we as a council given these staff members compared to their previous employer?</li></ol>	<p>Councillor Haffenden:</p> <p>The service has been operational since April and is running fine. The staff were employed on the hours they were working before transferring to HBC.</p> <p>5 in total – 3 full time, 2 part time , have transferred over. The staff are on a higher hourly rate then they were on previously, staff can join LGPS but at least two of them have chosen to opt out of the scheme.</p> <p>Finally, their annual leave entitlement changed from 28 days including bank holidays to 26 days excluding bank holidays.</p>
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