

Draft Corporate Plan key activities update for 2023/24

The council agreed its four-year Corporate Plan* in 2020 and set out its vision and objectives for the period up to the end of 2023/24.

While these ambitions remain, the global, national and local landscape has changed significantly, and the council is now working in a very different social, economic, financial and political context. The council takes these challenges very seriously and has had to change the way it works since Covid, and will continue to address these through our 2023/24 update.

We remain passionate about Hastings, ambitious for the town, and determined to find new and effective ways of delivering for all our residents. One of the positive aspects of Covid has been the effective new partnerships which bring together the council with our innovative voluntary sector, as well as key agencies such as the NHS, East Sussex College and local business.

Increasingly we recognise that councils can only deliver transformation through these partnerships, and so as we focus more on enabling, new platforms that provide ways for local expertise in different fields to be heard are needed. This year the council will start discussions about how best to harness this talent in culture, in the environment and in health. Hastings is full of remarkable people, and by working together we can make it an even more special and more equal place to live, visit and work in.

We are committed to speeding up the regeneration of our town centre, making it an attractive and sustainable place that people want to spend time in, whether to live, shop or enjoy themselves. We are committed to tackling the real challenges of the climate emergency, and to supporting those residents who are struggling with poor health, not enough money and insufficient work and education opportunities.

Our corporate plan update carefully balances the continuing work begun in 2020 with these new initiatives, allowing residents, partners, and stakeholders to understand our commitments and the targets we have set ourselves for the coming year. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee play a key role in holding the administration to account for delivery of these activities.

To determine the commitments set out below, detailed assessments are made by service managers of the capacity of their teams to deliver the council's responsibilities and ambitions. These assessments are informed by statutory (legal) requirements for things the council must do, the level of demand for services (which is higher in the cost of living crisis), the availability of staff and other resources (recruitment and retention of staff remains a challenge in some areas), funding available for activities (including external or from grants), the ability for activities to generate income that can support other council activity, and of course political priorities and aspirations.

The council's financial position is the biggest constraint on its ambition. The significantly reduced level of direct government support over the last decade, the inability of the borough council to raise high levels of council tax and business rates (compared to other councils), and the high demand for key services such as homelessness and benefits have all combined to create a significant deficit - the council's costs are higher than it is able to raise through fees, council tax, other income and government grants.

The largest impact on the council's financial position is that of the costs of temporary accommodation to house those entitled to support under homelessness legislation. The housing crisis in our town is characterised by a continually reducing supply of affordable private rented housing as landlords sell up or increase rents; a significant waiting list for social housing; low wages; and a gap between what housing costs the benefit system will pay for and the level of rent required.

This housing crisis has a huge impact on the lives of the almost 500 households currently living in temporary accommodation, and has a direct impact on the council's financial situation. The net cost for statutory temporary accommodation costs in 2019 was £731,706. The forecast net cost for the whole of 2022/23 is £4,470,220 a rise of more than 500% since 2019/20.

These costs are unsustainable and are threatening the financial stability of the council. Despite all our initiatives and interventions, the short-term position of the council (until further significant numbers of affordable accommodation is built in around two years' time) is extremely challenging.

In response, the council is moving to a model whereby it no longer directly delivers some of the non-statutory activities it has supported in the past but will seek to work in partnership with others where this can be done more cost-effectively or enables others to step in.

The council of course also needs to ensure that it can continue to employ the best and most committed staff team to deliver services to local people.

Tackling homelessness, poverty and ensuring quality housing
1. The Housing and Homelessness Taskforce will continue to prioritise the key delivery objectives identified aimed at reducing our temporary and emergency accommodation usage. We will also progress and implement cost effective alternatives to high-cost emergency housing provision.
2. Conclude implementation and encourage take up of new self-service system for revenues and benefits.
3. Achieve key performance and collection targets in respect of benefit processing times and collection rates for council tax and business rates.
4. Continue our programme to maximise delivery of much needed new, Local Housing Allowance rate, affordable and retrofitted homes in our town: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Including 500 affordable homes by 2027, maximising the number of rented homes, with first 200 due to be completed from this year.• Progress developments on council owned land such as Bexhill Road South and Mayfield E to meet this affordable homes target.

5. Improve access to settled housing for homeless people through our social lettings agency and property owner incentive programmes.
 6. Continue our Housing First programme and explore new funding and partnership opportunities to increase the range of accommodation options for people with multiple and complex needs.
 7. Utilise available grant funding aimed at reducing fuel poverty and improving energy efficiency by promoting and referring residents to the Warm Home Check Service.
 8. Develop our acquisitions programme to supply up to 200 units of cost-effective temporary accommodation, starting this year, by 2026.
 9. Ensure that all homes delivered by the council or partners comply with the Healthy Homes principles as outlined by the Town and Country Planning Association.
10. Develop and adopt a new Housing Strategy and review key policy documents, including the Social Housing Allocation scheme.
11. Housing and Homelessness Taskforce will continue to review our temporary and emergency accommodation options, ensuring that suitable provision is available and achieve best value, and apply lessons learned to firm up future provision arrangements.
12. Use Disability Funding Grants funding available through the financial assistance policy to supply adaptations more effectively to eligible residents to allow them to live independently for as long as they feel able, involving local partners and housing providers.

Keeping Hastings clean and safe

13. Ensuring delivery of our statutory refuse, recycling and street cleansing services, including:
- Enhancing our existing contracted out refuse and recycling service by working closely with the contractor. For example, where appropriate, adjusting collection rounds to improve service delivery to residents.
 - Seek Government guidance on the implementation of relevant sections of the Environment Act 2021, including food waste, enhancing the garden waste scheme and reviewing the Technically Environmentally and Economically Practicable (TEEP) assessment on our recycling service and progress accordingly.
 - Building on the good performance of our in-house street cleansing service, continue to work in partnership (including our voluntary sector partners) towards finding potential improvements to the way the service is run, and implement them where sufficient budget is found and authorised.

14. Ensuring effective delivery of our statutory street scene enforcement services delivered through our Warden team including:
- Continuing to tackle anti-social behaviour and enviro-crime in line with our statutory commitments in partnership with other agencies such as the police.
 - Maintaining a primary focus on the multi-agency approach to reducing negative environmental, social and economic impacts on areas such as the town centre and seafront, including reporting highways issues weekly.

15. Ensuring statutory delivery of our licensing and environmental health commitments including:
- Continue to support local businesses to comply and keep food hygiene ratings.

Making best use of our land, buildings, public realm and cultural assets

16. Implement the in-house grounds maintenance contract from November 2023.

17. Complete the landscaping work required to return Alexandra Park to its former standard following the statutory improvement works at Buckshole Reservoir.

18. Publish new Cultural Regeneration Strategy 2023-28.

19. Keep open council owned and run visitor attractions where it is safe and we can afford to do so, bringing forward ways to run these better or differently with the funding and resources available. Proactively explore revenue earning opportunities at Hastings Museum & Art Gallery such as promoting it as a wedding and corporate venue, with a view to extending this model to other properties if it is successful and resources allow.

20. Promote Active Travel across Hastings to encourage active and healthy lifestyles and accelerate through a new cross party working group.

21. Complete our work on our Local Plan engaging our citizens and partners to help set how the borough will shape up for the future. Ensure the Local Plan complies with Age Friendly principles.

22. Complete new Asset Management and Capital Strategies, and 2023/24 plans and actions refreshed and delivered accordingly, including exploring earning opportunities from council property and assets.

23. Ensure both the local plan and asset management strategies include the promotion of land suitable for community food growing opportunities.

Minimising environment and climate harm in all that we do - tackling our climate and biodiversity crisis

24. Implement our actions in the updated climate change strategy and action plan, including converting waste vehicles from diesel to HVO, HBC vehicles to electric, new approaches to biodiversity through the in-house grounds maintenance service, reducing vehicle use where possible and improving pedestrian access in Hastings Town centre, prioritising sustainable and active modes of transport in the new Local Plan, expanding Solar for Business and Green Energy training.
25. Ensure every decision that the council makes will be made with climate change and the environment as a key focus, framing decisions through a climate change emergency lens with key performance indicators agreed. Encourage greater use of active travel and sustainable public transport by residents and visitors.
26. By being honest about the scale of the task ahead, we will become a campaigning council actively calling on the government for the funding that local government needs to be able to help residents and communities make the changes that are necessary to reduce our carbon emissions, including the challenge of retrofitting local housing stock.
27. Set up a cross party working group to support climate emergency work, with officer support to focus on bringing in funds for partnership working with the third and business sector and tapping into the huge skill resource available in the town.
28. Ensuring our assets are delivering on our climate action goals.

Delivery of our major regeneration schemes

29. Having successfully bid for £24.3m Town Deal Funding, ensure delivery of the programme, keep the Town Board and other stakeholders updated and work to lever in any further private investment or other government funding streams as possible. Examples for 2023/24 include supporting:
 - Design work on plans for a new Castle visitor centre including improved access
 - Consultation on detailed plans for a greener, safer, and more attractive pedestrian friendly Town Centre
30. Town Deal and other regeneration schemes will move forwards including
 - o Independent town deal projects (ie East Sussex College Green Training Centre and EFT Green Classroom with Plumpton College) will be open in 2023
 - o Other approved town deal projects will be implemented for completion by 2026.
 - o Refining proposals, developing a business case and submitting Levelling Up bid for new health and leisure centre at Summerfields.
 - o Work with Homes England to capture the wider regeneration interests in the town centre, including Station Plaza.
31. Taking Connecting Hastings and Rother Together projects to completion in June 2023.
32. Implementation of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund proposals including improvements for Broomgrove, working with local community, culture, environment, health and housing partners. Use this project to test embedding the lessons learnt from the Health Equalities work and the HVA 'Facing the Future' report.

33. Refocus support for the town's visitor economy and its c7000 jobs

34. Continuing to monitor the developer's progress with proposals to regenerate the West Marina site.

Ensuring the council can survive and thrive into the future

35. Reprioritising and reorganising services in order to meet our statutory commitments, budgetary challenges and rebuild reserves, and where necessary make reallocations of resources to reduce the impact of the housing crisis.

36. Further improve our performance reporting arrangements using our dashboard on our website to help citizens track how we are doing by:

- smartening existing targets.
- better integrating performance, risk and finance reporting.
- publishing an action plan for the delivery of our corporate standard, subject to capacity.
- include carbon reduction goals.

37. Integrate lessons learned and continue to realise benefits from the digital first programme and keeping online access to services, subject to capacity and budget.

38. Facilitating good programme and project management practice across the Council's key areas of work, subject to capacity and budget.

- Ensure that budget managers are equipped with the necessary tools and skills, aware of their responsibilities and accountability by providing further finance for non-finance managers training.
- Implement (as far as possible and in line with our Treasury Management Strategy) the Responsible Investment Policy committed to as part of the 2018 council motion to divest from fossil fuel businesses.

New key activities (*not previously included in our 2020-24 Corporate Plan*)

39. Continue to work with partners to address the health inequalities in our town:

- Ensuring that the Universal Healthcare work delivers on the objectives of re-designing access options for local people
- Support the Local Strategic Partnership Boards work on addressing the wider determinants of health inequalities
- Continue to lobby to keep and sustain resources in the town, for example, to keep as many specialist units at the Conquest Hospital as possible.

40. Review the council's procurement approach to engage local and community businesses where possible working towards a local circular economy.

41. Consider the case to move to four yearly local elections and undertake a governance review of council decision making and report to Full Council on options.
42. Begin conversations with residents and local, regional and national partners with a view to establishing new health, culture and environment partnerships in 2024.
43. Support work of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and Local Strategic Partnership, to strengthen promotion and delivery of equalities for staff and residents.