

Agenda Item 5



Report To:	CABINET
Date of Meeting:	7TH August 2023
Report Title:	Response to Local Government Association Finance Peer Review report
Report By:	Jane Hartnell, Chief Executive
Key Decision:	N
Classification:	Open

Purpose of Report

To set out the council's response to the report of the Local Government Association's Finance Peer Review Team of the review undertaken in March 2023.
To set out the actions taken since the review and further actions planned.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- 1. Cabinet thanks the Local Government Association Peers for their time and input to assisting the Council to address its financial challenges and the impact of the local housing crisis which is impacting on the budget so significantly.**
- 2. That Cabinet note the actions taken since the Peer review in March.**
- 3. That Cabinet agree the council's response and the future actions set out in the table in appendix A.**

Reasons for Recommendations

1. The Budget Council report in February 2023 set out the issues impacting on the Council's financial stability. Most notably these are as a result of the massive increase in costs of providing temporary accommodation for those homeless people to whom we owe a legal duty.
2. The Budget report also set out the council's strategy to tackling the budget deficit, address the housing budget spend and identified that if these plans are achieved, the council would be in a position of financial stability by 2025/26.
3. In order to provide the council with confidence in its plans, the Local Government Association was invited to visit in March 2023 and undertake a Finance Peer Challenge. The Peer Team's final report and recommendations have been received and are presented together with the council's response. Details are included in the table in appendix A of the progress made to date in addressing the council's financial challenges, implementing the LGA recommendations as well as further planned actions.

Background

1. The council highlighted as part of the 2023/24 budget report that the financial pressures facing the authority have been made significantly worse by the housing crisis which is particularly acute in the town. The council has a legal duty to house homeless people in temporary accommodation, and the costs of meeting this ever-increasing bill is putting the council's viability at risk.
2. Since the beginning of austerity in 2010, when funding for district councils has continually been reduced, the council has made significant staff and service cuts as it adjusted to the reduced direct support from the government:

Budget levels

In 2010/11 the council's net budget was £22.9m.

By 2022/23 this had fallen by 28% to £16.5m.

During this period direct government support (grants) has reduced from £15.9m in 2010/11 to £1.5m in 2022/23, a reduction of over 90%.

Staffing levels

In 2010 the council employed 442 full time equivalent (FTE) staff

That figure is now much lower at 284 FTE. (NB This figure also includes the 34 new staff employed after bringing street and building cleansing services back in house).

For direct comparison purposes we now employ 192 less FTE staff than we did in 2010.

3. During this time the council has diversified to find new sources of income generation from rents, new services, fees and charges and investments in regeneration schemes. This income, whilst helpful has struggled to match the funding lost from government and keep pace with increased service demand, additional responsibilities placed on council's which are only funded for a short time, and latterly inflation, increased energy costs and wage increases.
4. Since 2010 the council has stopped or significantly reduced the scale of many services it can no longer afford to provide (e.g. CCTV monitoring, play, empty homes, tourism and marketing, some public toilets etc) and has required its staff to continue to meet increasing service demands, but with many less people.
5. Councillors and senior management recognise the pressure that all staff are working under and are extremely grateful for their commitment and continued dedication to public service and in particular their support for the most vulnerable people in our society.
6. In order to reduce costs and be more efficient, the council underwent a detailed transformation programme and changed where and how it works. The number of buildings

occupied has been rationalised, many services are provided more efficiently and cheaper on-line, and flexible working changes have helped to recruit and retain 'hard to attract' professional staff.

7. These savings and efficiencies enabled the council to be financially sustainable, but the pandemic in parallel with the housing crisis has changed the landscape both quickly and dramatically.
8. In 2019 the council spent c.£730,000 on temporary accommodation, in 2022/23 this rose to £4.5m and is predicted to rise to £5.6m in 2023/24. The council's net budget is only £16.5m so the ongoing impact of this unavoidable cost is clear.
9. With the potential of being issued with a Section 114 Notice (legally required when the council cannot balance its budget, unlike the NHS and other parts of the public sector councils are not allowed to carry a deficit) the Budget Council in February 2023 committed to focussing all efforts to positively changing this financial position.
10. It must be noted that the circumstances that caused some other councils to issue a Section 114 Notice are NOT the same here. The issues facing HBC are not because of ill-advised investments or a questionable approach to debt management.
11. The council's Treasury Advisors have told councillors that the council's management of, and prudent approach to treasury management and risk appetite has provided a very good basis for dealing with the current financial difficulties.
12. It is in this context, and following the stark warnings to Budget Council in February that the council invited the Local Government Association to give a critical friend view of the council's plans to address its financial situation.

Local Government Association Finance Peer Challenge

13. The council invited the Local Government Association to undertake a Finance Peer Challenge in March 2023.
14. The scope of the Peer Challenge was to consider the five themes which form the core components of all Finance Peer Challenges and at the council's request to also provide feedback on our plans to address the impacts of the Housing crisis.

The core component themes are:

Financial leadership: Does the authority have plans for its long-term financial sustainability, which are owned by its members and officer leaders?

Financial strategy, planning & forecasting: Does the authority understand its short and long-term financial prospects?

Decision-making: Are key decisions taken in the understanding of the financial implications, risks, and options?

Financial outcomes: Are financial results (including those of the Council's investments and transformation projects) monitored and acted upon so as to realise the authority's intentions?

Partnership & innovation: Is finance at the cutting edge of what the authority is working to achieve, working with partners, and seeking innovative approaches?

15. In undertaking peer challenges, the LGA stress that they are *'improvement focused; are not an inspection, and the process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer teams use their 'experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they meet, things they see and materials that they read.'*
16. Following the review, the LGA team composed their report which contains a number of recommendations and comments. Officers worked with LGA colleagues post-review to supply additional evidence and ensure factual corrections were made where necessary. This meant there was a longer than anticipated timeline between the review date and the report being published.
17. The delay has led to increased speculation and media interest in the report and its contents, but it must once again be stressed that this was a key piece of work requested by the Council and fully supported throughout the process by staff and Councillors. There was also no delay in the actions initiated by the council in response to the discussions held in March.

Peer Team's Final Report

18. The full report is appended (Appendix B) and includes an executive summary, key recommendations and feedback on each of the themes considered during the process.
19. The report contains figures that were correct at the time of the visit in March 2023. For completeness key figures are updated here:
- The growth in numbers of temporary accommodation clients has continued to rise as the council is implementing the measures that will reduce them in time – there are currently 522 households (over 1000 people) living in TA at an estimated cost of £5.6m per annum.
 - The balance of the General Reserves balance is now £7.6m but forecast to reduce to £3.7m by the end of the financial year.

Action Taken since Peer Review visit

20. A whole-council focus has been set on achieving financial stability and achievement of the housing costs reduction plans. Further expert advice was sought on our plans to reduce the cost of the temporary accommodation and these additional recommendations have now also been included in the priority work plans for the year.
21. Since the Peer Team visit, the council has worked swiftly to secure the right capacity and skills are in place to implement these improvement plans. Challenges experienced nationally in attracting skilled staff with experience in these areas have been overcome, and a full complement of additional housing officers are now also in place.
22. The year-end outturn position for 2022/23 has shown good early progress. The council was expecting to use £3.2m of reserves to balance its budget, however through a combination of in-year savings, reduced borrowing costs and better than expected investment performance the council has reduced this need by over £1m.

Recommendations

23. The Peer Challenge team made 13 recommendations. The council accepts each of the recommendations.
24. The table below sets out details of the actions taken to date to implement the recommendations and those which are planned.

Conclusion

25. Hastings Borough Council requested the LGA finance peer review team to provide advice and assurance as part of its commitment to doing everything possible to improve its financial position.
26. Lead Councillors and Senior Officers wish to place on record their thanks to the review team for their constructive and helpful comments and recommendations as part of this process.
27. The officer team and councillors are all continuing to work extremely hard together to focus on achieving financial stability and reduce the costs of temporary accommodation. However, the ability to achieve this will require further difficult decisions and it is likely that more services will need to be scaled back or paused until the council is on a strong financial footing again. The speed at which this can be achieved also depends on a number of external factors – the length of the cost-of-living crisis for example.
28. A recent media report identified that the numbers in temporary accommodation nationally are at a 25 year high. Officers are working with a number of other councils who are facing similar financial challenges as a result of temporary accommodation cost pressures. Collectively these councils are lobbying government to recognise that the challenges faced by councils like HBC are as a direct result of the housing crisis and more support for communities like Hastings is desperately needed.

Timetable of Next Steps

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

Action	Key milestone	Due date (provisional)	Responsible
Response to report and recommendations & further actions list agreed	Cabinet	7 th August 2023	Jane Hartnell - Chief Executive

Wards Affected

(All Wards);

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 & Climate Change	Yes
Economic/Financial Implications	Yes
Human Rights Act	No
Organisational Consequences	Yes
Local People's Views	Yes
Anti-Poverty	Yes
Legal	Yes

Additional Information

N/A

Officer to Contact

Officer: Jane Hartnell

Email: chiefexecutive@hastings.gov.uk

LGA Recommendation 1 - Immediate management actions to bring in and embed more stringent financial controls and accountability to urgently reduce spending.

Actions Taken

1. Lead Councillors have agreed the focus on Finance and Housing as priorities for 2023/24
 2. No new expenditure to be agreed during 2023/24 unless is required by law or for health and safety reasons.
 3. Refresher training sessions scheduled for all budget managers – ensuring robust monitoring and accountability for every £1 of expenditure
 4. Dedicated meetings for SLT (Senior leadership Team) to focus on savings targets, both current year and future years savings, budget monitoring variances and identification of cost pressures as early as possible to understand the strategic impact across the organisation and allow for quicker decision making.
 5. Senior Leadership Team produced a detailed delivery plan for the use of resources, focus and time to ensure there is capacity to implement the Financial Stability and Housing cost reduction plans which incorporate the advice sought from external advisers.
- Page 11
- Half day workshop with Cabinet tested this delivery plan and agreed that the priority activities in 2023/24 will be limited to:
- a. Financial stability and avoidance of S114.
 - b. Reducing costs of housing and homelessness activity.
 - c. New Statutory and on-going/previously made decisions and/or committed legal and contractual responsibilities.
 - d. New statutory responsibilities – where unavoidable e.g. new Environment Act requirements for waste
 - e. Maintaining a healthy and committed workforce - investing in our people.
 - f. Actions to implement budget savings.
 - g. Climate Emergency response actions already planned.
 - h. Delivery of major regeneration schemes already committed to.
 - i. Maintaining effective 'business as usual' (BAU) services
 - j. Service specific projects that impact on ability of BAU services to help address costs of our homeless and temporary accommodation costs.
- All other Corporate Plan targets will be re-programmed
7. Leader has explained to all councillors that there is no capacity to consider new proposals for services/activities at present and the 'councillor ideas' process to be suspended for 6 months – all new ideas will be captured and considered when resources allow.
 8. Paused recruitment of vacant posts in the new senior structure.

9. Finance team restructure underway to increase capacity for strategic work and more resources to enable dedicated senior accountant focus on housing budget management. The team are also implementing a business partnering model to work even closer with service managers to provide expert financial management support.
10. New interim Audit arrangements in place to enhance our audit capacity, resilience, and deliverability. This is essential for governance, compliance, and probity assurance. Also dedicated additional resources allocated to improve the speed of responses, now typically turning around responses to queries on the day.
11. All-staff meeting updated on current situation and senior managers tasked with identifying further savings and resources to re-direct to housing activities.

Further Actions planned

- Training for staff and councillors and work on understanding budgets and forecasts
- Briefings for all-Cllrs to ensure full understanding of the challenges and how they can play their part in this challenging but achievable process.
- Finance system Unit 4 update scheduled – this is essential to ensure we have accurate and accessible financial information and to make potential future efficiencies across the organisation.

Recommendation 2

A comprehensive review of all service budgets should be undertaken identifying areas of non-essential/non-statutory expenditure that could be stopped or significantly reduced.

Actions Taken/Underway

1. Heads of Service working with managers and service accountants to complete line by line budget review
2. Non-essential spend and activity identification reviews underway
3. Review of earmarked reserves is underway to determine if these are required or use of these can be delayed.
4. Capital Asset Management Strategy project underway with CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accounting) – to identify the council’s assets, how best to use them and if there are any assets that can be identified as surplus or change of use / sale. This will inform the Capital Programme budget, Strategy and future borrowing requirements. This thorough analysis of asset performance and income generation will also inform the Treasury Management borrowing requirements strategy.
5. Phase 2 officer restructure underway and will be completed by early August 2023

6. August 7th Cabinet to receive land disposal recommendations (if land is sold the money gained can be used to reduce borrowing costs and reduce the burden on revenue budgets)

Further Actions planned

- Quarterly outturn meetings with Chief Finance Officer, Chief Executive and budget holders to monitor savings achievements and in year monitoring forecasts
- SLT (Senior leadership Team) to bring forward savings proposals, to include impacts of reducing/ceasing non-statutory services and/or reallocating resources to priority work reducing the TA costs
- Updated MTFP (Medium Term Financial Plan) to published monthly and reported to Cabinet.

Recommendation 3 - Swiftly change the organisational narrative, financial sustainability is the priority, focus on what is within your control. The organisation needs to stop relying on general revenue reserves to fill significant budget gaps going forward.

Actions Taken/Underway

- Page 13
1. Update to all staff immediately following Peer Challenge setting out the Team's advice that our plans are achievable, but we need to increase the pace and have a total focus on achieving the savings, costs reductions and new income set out in the budget.
 2. Draft year-end outturn for 2022/23 report presented to Cabinet 03/07/23 and Overview and Scrutiny 12/07/23, the report highlighted:
 - a. A more positive outturn than previously expected as part of budget setting.
 - b. If it were not for the overspend on Temporary Housing costs the Council achieved an underspend of nearly £1m. (In part due to capital financing changes and better than expected investment returns, but also savings bought forward by services)
 - c. a forward plan projection of the financial position (part of MTFP) and performance against savings target (this will be included in future reports)
 3. Overview and Scrutiny Committee will also focus their work programme on Financial stability and Housing.

Further Actions planned

- Budget savings of £1m to be achieved over period 2023/24 to 2025/26 – first tranche to be considered in autumn 2023.
- By implementing improvement plans and the 'invest to save/avoid cost' measures – reduce the Housing budget requirement by £3m during 2023/24 to 2025/26
- Clarify with staff and public that HBC's financial challenges are as a result of structural issues in the housing market, not a as a result of factors which caused other councils to issue S114 notices.
- Monthly Finance reports to Cabinet and regular timely reports to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Training for Councillors and staff on the assurance and governance roles of the oversight bodies – Internal Audit, the Audit Committees and Overview and Scrutiny.

- Review of all reserves completed – setting out the reserves the council has as ‘earmarked’ and what an appropriate level of reserves are required for the proper management and mitigation of risk.

Recommendation 4 - The housing overspend needs to be tackled immediately: engage an interim Head of Housing to focus on this task; urgently implement the recommendations in the LGA desktop housing review; adopt an agile approach to Housing delivery and savings, with clear lines of accountability.

Actions Taken

1. An Interim Head of Housing was appointed and is driving the programme forward with support of the Deputy Chief Executive who is spending 50% of her week on this priority. The rest of the Senior Leadership Team SLT are also prioritising their respective teams’ contributions to achieving the plans. Some colleagues have been focussing on reducing the number of households in TA whereby a final decision hasn’t been made within 56 days of the homelessness duty being owed, and other Housing staff are working overtime to provide extra capacity to speed up decision making.
2. The new permanent Head of Housing starts in August, he is already engaging at key opportunities. He brings excellent skills and innovation experience having worked in both the local authority and a national third sector organisation at a senior level.
Two unsuccessful rounds of recruitment were undertaken to fill the 6 new Housing officer posts agreed by Council. The third round has seen success and the posts are now filled. These additional posts are essential for reducing costs by creating capacity within the housing team as well as carrying out home visits to prevent homelessness for those being asked to leave by family/friends through negotiation/mediation.
4. Further advice was received from the LGA Housing Advisors Programme (HAP) expert who conducted a review and made 15 recommendations which are being implemented at pace. These together with the LGA Diagnostic review set out the holistic blueprint for cost reduction of temporary accommodation, together with clarity about the KPI’s/targets and performance measures that are being used to monitor our progress. This work is being project managed by a new Recovery Manager who started in post on 1st July.
5. Housing and homelessness taskforce board meetings have moved to quarterly to enable staff to focus on delivering the actions recommended by external advisers.
6. Excellent progress is being made on the housing acquisitions programme – the focus is on acquiring accommodation to use as an alternative to privately owned and expensive nightly paid TA. (NB Although the LGA Peer team questioned this approach, the LGA Housing Advisors Programme expert advice supported the council’s approach to purchasing property as Temporary Accommodation. The council has developed a thorough business case and are monitoring the success of this programme very carefully.
7. Real-time data being used to inform budget and performance monitoring and to track trends.

8. A weekly casework management process has been implemented to support client moves to more affordable TA and determine final decisions where these are outstanding.
9. Improved inter-departmental communication and systems changes have been made to streamline and track income recovery from the benefits system to cover eligible costs of TA.
10. New interim Directors have been appointed to the Hastings Housing Company and are conducting a detailed review of the current arrangements and are assessing the future options for HHC. (Note that the HHC was not set up for, nor was it, or is it intended to be used for provision of temporary accommodation.)

Further Actions planned

- Recruitment and retaining of staff to essential housing roles remains biggest risk to success, this is therefore being monitored closely.
- Monthly monitoring of housing delivery plan and savings reported to councillors.
- Options paper for future of Hastings Housing Company being developed by newly appointed Directors.

Recommendation 5 - Streamline arrangements for managing projects, creating clearer accountability, and improving business cases

Actions Taken

1. Housing and homelessness taskforce board meetings have moved to quarterly to enable staff to focus on delivering the actions recommended by external advisers.
2. Quarter 1 monitoring focussed on key milestones to ensure progress in achieving objectives for financial stability and reducing housing budget spend on TA.
3. Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to also focus on these two priorities.
4. Regular monitoring arrangements determined by individual project boards based around risk and reported centrally with highest risk areas being brought to SLT attention.
5. Review being undertaken of all Housing grants and projects to ensure compliance and to assess if there are any additional resources that can be identified to help with the issues faced by the Council.

Further Actions planned

- All non-essential projects not resulting in financial benefit paused or stopped

- No new ideas / projects to be considered whilst the focus remains on delivering the projects currently in progress

Recommendation 6 - Plans to deliver the savings targets should be prepared and monitored, on a monthly basis with clear actions and accountabilities assigned. More visible leadership is needed on the key financial challenges and housing.

Actions Taken

1. Savings plan under-development with staff teams encouraged to contribute proposals
2. New additional finance resources have been recruited and appointed to help support Audit backlog, IFRS16 legislation introduction and also to back fill resource to allow dedicated Housing Finance Accountant to work full time on supporting the service
3. Savings are one of the key areas of focus for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and regular reporting will be provided in terms of progress to highlight any risk areas that are unlikely to achieve their targets and what mitigation measures are being taken
4. Changes in Cabinet roles to include the Council leader now also the lead Cabinet member for Finance to demonstrate more visible leadership and regular meetings with Chief Finance Officer

Further Actions planned

- Monthly finance report submitted to Cabinet which includes updated MTFP and savings monitoring appendices
- Invest to Save business cases bought forward where additional resources can reduce costs or increase income
 - Chief Finance Officer (CFO), Leader and Chief Executive to continue to lobby for fairer funding and allocations around budgets and specifically in relation to Housing costs
 - CFO to continue to meet with counterparts across the country who are facing similar challenges with regards to the Housing crisis and shortage of accommodation, to provide a consistent message to Government departments about the current state of the market and impact on Councils

Recommendation 7 - Regular budget monitoring and savings reports to Cabinet, with all member briefings on the key challenges from the S151 Officer and the Chief Executive.

Actions Taken

1. Treasury Training provided to Cllrs in May on the Treasury Management, borrowing requirements and Financial Management Code.
2. Introduction meeting with new Internal Auditors and Councillors, with further training sessions scheduled
3. One to one sessions arranged with budget managers as part of regular monthly meetings with finance colleagues.

4. CFO updated staff at all staff briefing around financial position and implications of S114 notice and what is needed for avoidance

Further Actions planned

- CIPFA to provide briefings for Cllrs and senior staff in relation to implications of issuing of a S114 notice and ways to avoid.
- Cabinet receiving regular financial reports, highlighting the latest and most up to date forecasts of savings, outturn and pressures

Recommendation 8 - Prepare a more detailed Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) covering at least the period from 2023/24 to 2026/27, undertaking scenario analysis of all income sources including council tax, business rates, income from fees and charges.

Actions Taken

1. MTFS updates informed by latest monthly monitoring set out in regular Finance update reports.
2. 2024/25 Budget setting progress already underway – Financial Resilience Working Group tasked to develop early budget proposals for consideration by councillors and engagement with staff.

Page 1
CFO discussed with colleagues across the county impacts of legislation changes (Waste), Council Tax, Inflation, Staff Pay awards and other key MTFP assumptions to inform the development of the strategy with as much detailed information as possible.

Further Actions planned

- Updated MTFP including detailed scenarios and full explanations to be published in the next quarter
- Budget proposals to be considered by Lead Councillors and then shared more widely

Recommendation 9 - Make changes to enable asset disposals to happen. This should include having clear accountability and decision making on disposals.

Actions Taken

1. The council tendered for external resources to undertake the work to develop an asset management strategy. No responses were received to the first two exercises. CIPFA Property Services have been approached directly and are now undertaking the work. This will provide a full diagnostic and recommendations of how assets can be best utilised by November.
2. A review of opportunities previously included in the Land and Property disposal programme is currently underway to explore early opportunities for achieving capital receipts circa £1m – £3m, decisions to be bought to Cabinet in August 2023 – these capital receipts could potentially be used for the transformation of the housing and TA services and reduce costs.

3. Solution identified for future of White Rock Theatre – seeking interest in leasing the building, will reduce subsidy payable by HBC but retain use of building as a theatre.

Further Actions planned

- An additional resource for the Property and Assets team will be recruited to increase capacity to deliver the new strategy.

Recommendation 10 - Review delegations and governance, so that where appropriate decisions can be delegated and enacted more swiftly, with the appropriate due diligence.

Actions Taken

1. Review is underway across all service areas.

Further Actions planned

- Recommendations to be brought to Cabinet or Full Council as appropriate.

U

Recommendation 11 - Strengthen strategic political governance and oversight to reflect corporate priorities and the scale of the financial challenge. Consider the governance arrangements for projects and programmes.

Actions Taken

1. The Financial Sustainability Programme and Housing Improvement Programme both have detailed action plans which are being delivered. With the new monitoring arrangements in place (see rec 7) the frequency of Project Board meetings has been reduced to quarterly or by exception. This has freed up officer time to focus on delivering agreed plans.
2. A sub-group of the Financial Stability Working Group will oversee the property and assets work (see rec. 9) to facilitate pace of decision making.
3. Following the early retirement of the Chief Auditor Cabinet has approved contracting ESCC to provide Audit Management for the remainder of 2023/24 – this will bring a fresh perspective and opportunity to review our governance arrangements learning from practice elsewhere.
4. Leader of the Council has taken responsibility for the Finance Portfolio, and the previous Lead for Finance now has responsibility for Housing.
5. Ongoing briefing of DLUHC about progress HBC are making to address financial stability and lobbying to secure HM Government’s attention on issues out of the council’s control e.g. levels of Local Housing Allowance in Hastings (makes private renting unaffordable for people on low incomes), support for people who have supported accommodation needs not currently being met.

Further Actions planned

- Further work with other councils who are also in a similar position to ourselves around the housing crisis to enable sharing of what has worked for them in their circumstances, lessons learnt and to gather evidence for a joined up and louder and voice to central government for the support the sector needs to manage the housing crisis.

Recommendation 12 - Take advantage of existing partnerships and further develop them to meet the financial challenge (for example, East Sussex procurement hub for Temporary Accommodation)

Actions Taken

1. HBC is leading work with London Borough of Hillingdon who are sharing their experience of using a dynamic purchasing agreement to secure experienced suppliers for the provision of temporary accommodation (TA). This should enable a reduced and fixed cost to the council, better quality accommodation for those who need to live in TA, reduce the need to use bed and breakfast-type accommodation and provide certainty for quality TA providers who are more likely to remain in the market and work with the council.
2. Also exploring the initiatives developed at London Borough of Newham and their collaborative work with Waltham Forest, Redbridge & Enfield
3. Leader announced at Full Council a focus on working with landlords, identifying those keen to help resolve the local housing crisis in partnership with the council, and to include caravan and holiday park owners in these conversations.
4. Work has commenced with Eastbourne and Lewes Councils on identification of opportunities for maximising economies of scale.

Further Actions planned

- East Sussex Procurement Hub are engaged in the block booking project as it is the intention to encourage all councils in East Sussex to sign up to this same approach
- The new Head of Housing has extensive experience in working with the VCS and will explore how they can collaborate in partnership to help reduce the numbers needed to access TA and to provide cheaper alternatives.

Recommendation 13 - Break down silos in order to get the whole organisation working together to meet the financial sustainability challenge

Actions Taken

1. New Senior Leadership team appointed, including new Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer/Section 151 officer confirmed in post.
2. Staff meeting June 2023 focussed on financial stability and housing priority and how staff will be contributing to achieving objectives. Explained that non-essential activities and spend will be paused, so that all can focus on delivery of services to most vulnerable whilst directing all-council effort to reducing costs of TA.

3. Work of the Housing Task Force has already seen significant improvements in collaboration and joined up working and innovation and new ideas progressed by staff in housing and benefits teams.

Further Actions planned

- On-going staff engagement and reassurance that the council can, as the LGA Team suggested, achieve its objectives by working together and at pace.