

Agenda Item No: 4

Report to: Cabinet (Budget)

Date of Meeting: 16 February 2015

Report Title: Draft corporate plan 2015/16 -2017/18

Report By: Neil Dart
Director of Corporate Resources

Purpose of Report

1. To present the feedback from the consultation on the draft corporate plan and budget for the period 2015/16 - 2017/18 for Members consideration.
2. To present a draft of the corporate plan 2015/16 - 2017/18.

Recommendation(s)

1. That the Cabinet recommends to the Council, that the content of the attached documents form the basis of the Council's corporate plan 2015/16 - 2017/18, subject to the proviso that any significant amendment made to the Council's draft budget be reflected in the final corporate plan text.
2. That delegated authority be given to the Director of Corporate Resources, after consultation with the Leader of the Council to make further revisions as is considered necessary to the attached plan prior to publication to reflect decisions made on the Council's budget.
3. That a retrospective year-end report on performance and the actual performance indicator information for 2014/15 be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny committees in June, prior to consideration by the Cabinet in July 2015; and that the Council be asked to delegate authority to that Cabinet meeting to agree 2015/16 performance indicators based on previous year's performance
4. That all who submitted views as part of the consultation process be thanked for their contributions.

Reasons for Recommendations

The Council needs to approve the corporate plan as it is a statement of Hastings Borough Council's strategic direction to 2018. It sets out how we will ensure that we successfully address our priorities, meet the needs of our communities, and ensure we have a strong dedicated and motivated workforce to deliver our strategic priorities.

Introduction

1. The outcome of the Council's annual strategic and financial planning processes is the attached draft corporate plan for 2015/16 – 2017/18. This confirms the strategic direction for the Council, the associated corporate priorities and service activities to be undertaken during this period.
2. This draft corporate plan marks a departure from the traditional layout of the corporate plan of recent years. It is anticipated that the style, format and associated performance management arrangements will continue to change in subsequent years, in line with the transformation and efficiency programme outlined in this draft corporate plan.
3. The Budget Council on 25th February will be asked to approve the attached draft of the corporate plan at the same time as the budget which supports these plans. These documents together with the draft budget papers formed the basis of consultation outlined below.

Consultation

4. Specific comments on the draft corporate plan and budget have been sought from: residents via the Council's website, a joint meeting of the Council's two Overview and Scrutiny Committees, the Council's Staff and Management Forum, the Chamber of Commerce, the Young Persons' Council, Hastings Intercultural Organisation, Hastings Community Network, the Seniors Forum, the Disability Forum; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community representatives, and partnership organisations on the Hastings and St Leonards Local Strategic Partnership.
5. The deadline for receipt of comments on the draft corporate plan and budget was after the publication of this agenda (6th February). While the majority of consultation meetings have taken place, further submissions of views may be expected and will be reported to members at the Cabinet meeting.
6. A summary of the responses received is set out below. The bulk of responses received from consultation with groups did not highlight specific amendments to either the draft corporate plan or budget.

Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee

7. A joint meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees was held to seek Members comments on the draft corporate plan and budget. The following comments and responses directly relate to suggested amendments to the Corporate Plan and Budget only. The minutes from this meeting detail broader areas of discussion and are available here:

<http://hastings.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=131&MId=1324&Ver=4>

Comment: Can target 2 'Efficient & Customer Focussed Services' milestone (a) under the Transformation and Efficiency Programme be amended to give greater clarity to the activity proposed?

Response: Plan amended.

Comment: Can target 5 'Workforce Development Project' under the Transformation and Efficiency Programme be amended to reflect how the council intends to proactively address potential skills gaps and prevent loss of expertise?

Response: Plan amended.

Chamber of Commerce

8. Councillor Birch addressed the Chamber of Commerce at their late January Breakfast meeting. The following comments/questions were raised:

Questions: How many empty and derelict properties are there in Hastings and how does this compare with places like Eastbourne? Given the budget challenges facing the council can the council acquire empty properties and sell them on? Are prospective plans for private sector licensing simply a tax on landlords?

Response: Cllr Birch committed to circulating the exact numbers but explained that numbers of empty properties is higher locally than the national average. The council's grot-busting powers are used to ensure that landlords keep properties in good order. The council also uses compulsory purchase to tackle long-term empty properties. In 90% of cases the threat of compulsory purchase encourages owners to bring these properties back to use. For the remainder, properties are bought and then sold at auction, sometimes at a profit subject to market conditions.

In terms of licensing, it was suggested that businesses such as pubs and taxis are currently licensed to ensure quality of service. In terms of private rented accommodation the intention of a potential licensing scheme is the same - to ensure improvements in the standards of accommodation where they are lacking. A decision on this potential scheme has yet to be made.

Comment/Question: The White Rock area is in need of regenerating, with the Pier opening and White Rock Baths improvements forthcoming, (how) will the council be supporting further improvements to this surrounding area?

Response: The council is not in a position to be providing grants but can help potential investors by signposting funding opportunities. The council will take action in terms of grot-busting where required to tackle poor appearance. The Pier and White Rock Bath renovations will act as a catalyst for investment in the surrounding area and, as outlined in the presentation, the council has set aside monies to plan the further revival and determine the best use of the White Rock area.

Question: What proportion of Hastings regeneration is public or privately driven?

Response: It is difficult to say. The council's grot-busting and facilitation of cultural activities and events has certainly helped inspire recent positive press coverage. There would not have been the impetus for investment without Government support in recent years that has enabled Sea-change, the University and others to play an important role in local regeneration. Unlike Blackpool and Great Yarmouth, research by Sheffield Hallam University suggests that Hastings as a coastal town is certainly on the up, having made more favourable investment decisions.

Question: What is the council's role going forward in terms of skills, employment and jobs?

Response: East Sussex County Council has a partnership to progress the skills agenda. In terms of employment and jobs, HBC has worked closely with Sussex Coast College to develop courses particularly in relation to vacuum engineering thanks to Councillor Hodges and associated work on local business profiling. HBC is keen to build on the success of its 'Own Grown' scheme to continue to develop opportunities for young people to gain employment. HBC is also exploring EU funding opportunities to further this work.

Comment/question: Given the positive improvements seen and felt in Hastings why did the presentation include a question mark following the statement that 'Hastings [is] at a turning point.'?

Response: The much debated question mark was included to seek confirmation by others that the way the council views our regeneration is shared.

Question: If HBC can make efficiencies why were these not made earlier?

Response: The council has a good track record at making efficiencies but the drivers for change and opportunities for economies of scale savings have now come together. However taking the example of the joint waste contract, that has made considerable savings for HBC and our neighbouring authorities there is the view that partners should have got together earlier to realise efficiencies and savings. However with hindsight, we can own up and say that the imperative and opportunity for changing the way we do things so dramatically simply wasn't there before. It is important to note that given the financial challenges HBC faces, there are not just efficiencies in the draft budget but real service reductions.

Comment/question: Would you agree that given the social challenges associated with depleting budgets that the local faith communities have stepped up?

Response: Agreed. The Hope Kitchen, Street pastors and Snowflake project have certainly stepped up to support local rough sleepers. HBC has also given the Snowflake project support in terms safety and security guidance.

Question: Should the existing levels of councillor allowances and number of councillors be continued given reductions elsewhere across the organisation?

Response: It is our belief that allowances should be retained, in part to serve as an incentive for the next generation of councillors. A boundary review is soon to take place that will explore the imbalance of ward sizes. The electoral commission suggest that approximately 30 councillors would be appropriate to maintain effective democratic functioning, including the separation of responsibilities between policy development, regulation, scrutiny and executive functions.

Question: Should the subsidy to the White Rock theatre stop?

Response: The council's subsidy is bound by contract. The council will be reviewing the White Rock area as implied in the presentation, and plans for the future of the theatre will be firmed up as part of this review.

Question: Could the council not sell land such as the 'Firs' football ground?

Response: The stability of this land may be an issue. There is also a multi-use games area here and we would very much welcome Sport England making this a 3 G area. The council does need to agree a plan for this area.

Question: What lessons have been learned from the castle Heritage Lottery bid?

Response: We've learnt that we can do more to seek further guidance from the Heritage Lottery fund on how to pitch our next bid, to tailor a potentially more ambitious bid in line with the historical significance of 1066 and learn from the experiences and successes of Nottingham council who have recently been very successful. Officers are due to visit shortly.

Staff and Management Forum (SMF)

9. The Leader of the council addressed the SMF at their January meeting and sought comments on the draft corporate plan and budget. The following questions/comments were raised:

Question: What are plans for the Old Town Museum building if the proposed closure is agreed?

Response: If the Budget Council decides as part of the draft corporate plan and budget approvals process that this closure should go ahead, the council will market the building and either sell the freehold or go into a leasehold agreement with a prospective tenant. Given the location there is confidence that the building will not stand empty for long.

Question: As part of ongoing work to explore scope for efficiencies and savings would the council be specifically considering the terms and conditions of employees, particularly those with lease cars or parking permit arrangements?

Response: The number of staff with lease cars has substantially reduced. It was agreed that it would be helpful to reconvene the staff Working Terms and Conditions Group to collectively explore these and associated issues.

Comment: Job descriptions need to be reviewed as the council reduces and remaining staff potentially take on new areas of work.

Response: Agreed. This needs to coincide with looking again at terms and conditions in the context of both staff and the needs of the service.

Question: Could the council confirm which hay grades from within the organisation were requests for voluntary severance coming from?

Response: Generally the majority of requests were coming from below hay grade 5.

Question: What budget implications are there (if any) for the provision of Occupational Health?

Response: The council have never had a contractual arrangement to supply Occupational Health support. Given existing levels of demand it is currently provided on a case by case basis. It was confirmed that should demand for such support change, then the council would reallocate funds accordingly.

Question: Has there been an increase in Occupational Health referrals?

Response: No.

Question: Could the cut to the Active Hastings budget be clarified?

Response: There is no impact on HBC staff levels from this reduction.

Question: Could we have further details on the proposed reduction of the corporate training budget?

Response: There is a proposed reduction of 10K to this budget and a more rigorous approval process is in place whereby prospective trainees will need to demonstrate in more detail than previously how training will support the business needs of the organisation.

Question: How does this proposed reduction square with succession planning and staff development?

Response: The workforce development plan will clarify how in a smaller organisation we can continue to develop opportunities for our staff. It will be important that as the organisation contracts we improve our knowledge management as part of our succession planning.

Hastings Intercultural Organisation (HIO)

10. Councillor Birch met with HIO members in early February to give an overview of the draft corporate plan and budget. The following questions and comments were raised:

Question: In terms of the council's ongoing twinning work with Sierra Leone is this activity religious or politically driven?

Response: Michael Foster initiated this work which has so far seen ten local schools twin with schools in Sierra Leone. Current work involves focussed efforts to support the building of a health centre - crucial given the challenges of Ebola to the area. A number of the friends group are people of a particular faith.

Question: What is the position with council tax?

Response: HBC is proposing a 1.9 percent increase which is below the threshold of 2 percent that triggers a referendum and the associated costs. Hastings receives 17 pence out of every pound of council tax paid by residents, so the proposed increase is still modest in our view.

Question: Are we paying more council tax to get fewer services?

Response: Yes essentially, but the reductions in service are as a result of a reduction in government grant of over 50% since 2010.

Question: What support will be forthcoming to support those at risk of digital exclusion such as older people or those who may not have English as their first language?

Response: Enabling our residents to do more online for those that are comfortable doing so should help free up staff time to support those who may struggle. Where we can help residents access services better via our website, it may help improve their confidence to use the web for other aspects of their lives. HBC through the Community Partnership Fund we are commissioning the Reach project to support electronic access and skills development for those who find this difficult.

Question: Would the council support the possibility of group learning for particular minority communities to support them access services online?

Response: HBC will give this further thought and will feed this request back to colleagues working on the 'digital inclusion' work package that complements work to improve how residents can use the council website to access services.

Comment/Questions: Proposed reductions to the voluntary sector such as HARC and CAB are concerning as they help residents understand the system...how can HBC support HIO with funding...is HIO considered part of the strategic plan for the council?

Response: HBC is in a very difficult position. HBC provides £100 000 of support to CAB/HARC and the Brighton Housing Trust. They have told us that reductions in funding will mean reductions in service and HARC and CAB are looking at potentially closing one afternoon a week.

HBC is placing increasing emphasis on developing external funding opportunities. A recent example is the Success Fund awarded to HBC, Clacton and Margate to provide up to £2 million to support creative start-ups...HIO will be better placed than HBC to apply for particular funding streams and HBC will support and assist HIO with such applications. The Foreshore Trust grant is a particular local funding stream that HIO could consider.

Question: Will the council continue to support the community cohesion post?

Response: The council will continue to support cohesion activity but this role will involve a wider remit supporting other communities of identity such as the older people's forum and the youth council. On this basis community groups will need to become more self-sufficient and manage their own affairs where possible. We would welcome continued dialogue to ensure we are aware of any difficulties.

Hastings Community Network (HCN)

11. Councillor Birch addressed HCN at their February meeting giving an overview and key details of the draft corporate plan and budget. The following points were raised:

Question: Will HBC continue to support an older and younger person liaison officer?

Response: Yes, but the remit of the post will be wider and will also cover community cohesion activity. This means that associated community groups will need to be increasingly self-sufficient where possible.

Comment: HCN wishes to thank HBC for continuing to attend HCN meetings to consult on the draft corporate plan and budget.

Response: Thanks noted.

Comments/questions: HCN would value a further discussion with HBC with regards to the community interface once the dust settles with the current senior management restructure...HCN supports the council's plans for private sector licensing...this isn't a growth item in the budget can costs be assimilated? Is the disabled facilities grants flat-lining in the budget...will the council only be able to do the mandatory part or is there a discretionary element?

Response: In terms of private sector licensing this isn't a growth item but the council has not made a final decision to do this yet, so the associated fees are also still to be firmed up. There is also likely to be a potential discount for those that sign up early and fees are intended to cover a five year period. The fees will only cover associated costs. A separate response will be send with regards to disabled facilities grant.

Comment/question: Concern with HBC's plans to do more online particularly around access and skill levels...Also around the practicalities of doing particular forms online given the lengths of some existing paper forms...Will the council be looking to collaborate with partners to consider such issues?

Response: In terms of digital inclusion, the council is funding the Reach project through the Community Partnerships fund to support those requiring support to use the web to access services. The shift to doing more online reflects a change in the way HBC currently provides services with frontline staff assisting and helping residents complete forms online so that they can potentially self-serve next time. Collaboration with partners on this agenda will be necessary so that we can learn from and support each other to support our residents.

Comment/Questions: The digitalisation agenda is both useful and challenging and it will be important that the council and partners look at staffing levels and skill sets to ensure a successful shift online...Given that the presentation implies that Hastings is at a turning point, how can we ensure we take everyone with us...as the impact of budget cuts tend to fall disproportionately on our most marginalised residents...and how can we support organisations bring monies into the town?

Response: The corporate plan indicates that HBC plans to step up efforts to acquire external funding. However such funding cannot repair gaps in our budget as any success we have with external funding requires that associated monies are spent on specific activities. We have recently applied to be a lead partner in an employability bid to build on our 'own grown' apprenticeship activity. We are also working on an Intereg bid with Great Yarmouth to further our cultural aspirations.

The voluntary sector in certain instances is better placed to apply for funds and HBC wishes to continue working in partnership so we can best meet the needs of all our residents, taking as many with us as possible.

Comment: There appears to be little mention of working with the voluntary sector and no mention of the greenway in the corporate plan...Access to the country park via the greenway is preferential to a new building.

Response: HBC is looking at things incrementally and is currently consulting on cycling proposals within Alexandra Park.

Question: Should HCN be making a statement about the budget cuts and austerity in general?

Response: The council would welcome any comments on this matter. Officers are available to provide factual information.

Comment/question: Increases in council fees do not seem to be consistent across council services, should the council look at a corporate approach to fee setting?

Response: The council does consider a range of factors when setting its fees but will consider this point further for next year.

Question: In terms of the HBC social lettings agency mentioned, how will this work and what rates will be used?

Response: All the associated details are in the public domain and available on the council website as this was agreed by the council's Cabinet on the 2nd of February. Attendees were advised to look at the details and the council will respond to any further questions.

E mail submissions

12. Comment: An e mail was received inquiring about potential use of the income stream or capital receipt should agreement be reached on leasing or selling the Old Town Museum building. Furthermore was the request that should such income become available, could this be used to fund an alternative history display area and resource centre at St Johns Place?

Response: No decision has been made about the use of any potential capital receipt from the Old Town Museum should it be sold.

Comment: A further e mail requested that should the decision be reached to close the old town museum then a suitable 'repairing lease by granted to a suitable enterprise for approximately 20-25 years' to ensure consistency, commitment and a steady stream of rental income.

Response: Suggestion noted.

Comment: That the proposed closure of the Old Town hall Museum be re-considered as this appears at odds with ambitions outlined in the draft corporate plan and budget in terms of cultural regeneration and as a visitor destination and learning resource. It was also suggested that St Johns Place is inadequate in

terms of space to host existing collections and that valuable staff knowledge as a community resource will be lost.

Response: Comments noted.

Policy Implications

Equalities

13. The assessment of equality impacts accompanying the budget proposals for 2015/16 is included with the budget report.

Next Steps

14. A retrospective report-back of performance in 2014/15 and proposed performance indicator targets for 2015/16 - 2016/17 will be drafted in April, after the end of the current financial year, and will be agreed and published in July 2015.
15. The 2014/15 year-end achievements and performance indicator data will be made available to the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, and to the Staff and Management Forum in June and will be reported to Cabinet on the 6th July 2015.
16. The 25th February Council will be asked to approve that delegated authority be given to the Cabinet to agree the retrospective report-back of performance in 2014/15 and proposed performance indicator targets for 2015/16 - 2016/17 prior to publication.

Wards Affected

Ashdown, Baird, Braybrooke, Castle, Central St. Leonards, Conquest, Gensing, Hollington, Maze Hill, Old Hastings, Ore, Silverhill, St. Helens, Tressell, West St. Leonards, Wishing Tree

Area(s) Affected

Central Hastings, East Hastings, North St. Leonards, South St. Leonards

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	Yes
Economic/Financial Implications	Yes
Human Rights Act	Yes
Organisational Consequences	Yes
Local People's Views	Yes

Background Information

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