

Cllr Peter Chowney
Leader
Hastings Borough Council
Murial Matters House
Bredes Place
Hastings

7 February

Dear Cllr Chowney

**Hastings Borough Council Draft Budget and Corporate Plan
Joint Submission on behalf of Hastings Community Network and Hastings Voluntary Action**

HCN and HVA welcome the opportunity to discuss with the Borough Council its strategic plan and budget. We would like to thank Cllr Kim forward for attending our recent workshop event to present the budget and facilitate discussion with voluntary and community sector organisations.

We are grateful for the opportunity to engage with Council officers and elected members in constructive dialogue even though the financial context is extremely challenging for the Borough.

In term of our specific comments these are as follows:-

Financial Support to the Voluntary Sector: We note the proposed deletion of the Community Partnerships Fund (CPF) and the ending of the Councils direct investment to the voluntary sector. The CPF fund enabled key services relating to advice, infrastructure and support for the most vulnerable residents to be provided for many years. The ending of the CPF commissions is significant but the steps being taken to source alternative other funding sources such as the Foreshore Trust are acknowledged and welcomed. Through this process it is hoped that continuing investment into key services delivered by the Voluntary Sector can be maintained.

Community Cohesion/Support to victims of Hate Crime: Hastings Community Network is concerned about the proposal to reduce the Councils capacity to engage with communities and address the needs of those who may be subject to discrimination or incidents arising faced by groups who have protected characteristics within the Equalities Act. In its present form, the budget proposes a reduction of both the Council post with responsibility for Community Cohesion together with the termination of the delivery contract offering support to victims of hate crime/incidents. This would be of concern to us at any time but as this loss of capacity coincides with the UK withdrawal from the European Union we would wish the timing of this decision to be reviewed. An alternative proposal to “match fund” a future 12 month arrangement between HVA and HBC has been advanced and we hope that the Council will consider this as a potential way forward.

Climate Change: We note and support the Councils word in relation to Climate change and the provision made to accommodate this. However concern exists regarding the prioritisation of the Hastings Country Park as the primary site rather than a more holistic approach which can encompass roofscapes, public buildings and the many other sites within the Borough **before** the Country Park is considered. Whilst recognising the need for drastic action It is our view that the Park is a site of special status and should be viewed as a “last resort” rather than a “first option”.

CCTV Coverage/Monitoring: We understand that the Council propose to end the current arrangements regarding CCTV coverage and monitoring. It is of concern that the “real time” monitoring of the system will end particularly given the number of large public events which take place in Hastings. We agree that the Council should not be expected to bear the cost of this alone and regret that attempts to co-finance this across the public agencies who benefit from it have not been successful.

Hastings Youth Council: We note with concern the proposal to delete the HBC post which supported the activities relating to the Hastings Youth Council. We are keen to see a sustainable future for this activity and for the views of young people to remain very much a part of local dialogue. We were reassured to hear that the Council, remain committed to this area of activity and have made provision for £11,000 to be available to enable this to be delivered externally. We believe there is an opportunity to align this activity with the work being done to develop a Youth Partnership between the public sector and voluntary sector providers of work and support for young people.

In 2 Play: We are unable to support the proposal to taper financial support to In 2 Play and note that the Council accept that this would have a high impact to residents on low incomes (in a geographical area when statistically high numbers of Children live in poverty. Early years interventions are crucial in providing a firm base for future social and educational development. A tapering of the present arrangement is a retrograde step particularly in the context of the Councils wider plans to support social mobility and educational attainment.

HR Support to staff: The budget plans anticipate a reduction in staffing amounting to 30 (fte equivalent roles). The Councils desire to avoid compulsory redundancies wherever possible is valued but as the staffing capacity is reduced we are concerned about the work-load and pressures faced by staff. It seems to us that at a time when there are considerable and growing demands on the Council and a reducing workforce that there are robust processes in place to engage with staff on work-load and potentially stress issues.

The Town Fund/Town Deal: HCN and HVA support the steps being taken to present the Hastings proposals to deliver a Town Deal and the potential this offers to lever in £25m of investment and a mechanism through which this can be channelled in a transparent and strategic manner. We look forward to continuing this work as Part of the Town Deal Board and hope that an approach can be adopted which offers sustainable and long term benefit to the residents of Hastings.

We hope that these comments are helpful in assisting elected members develop a budget and plan in extremely challenging financial circumstances.

Yours Sincerely

Carole Dixon
Chair
Hastings Community Network

Steve Manwaring
Chief Executive
Hastings Voluntary Action