

PROTECTING DISCRETIONARY SERVICES STRATEGY 2021 TO 2025

Background

1. The creation of Bexhill Town Council means that the District of Rother is now fully parished. This presents an opportunity for Rother District Council to become a predominately strategic and regulatory body within the district. Part of this move is to consider how and by who, discretionary services are best provided. A guiding principle to this strategy is to ensure that discretionary services are delivered by the most appropriate organisation, one which is closest to the community which the service serves. This also affords the opportunity to minimise the carbon footprint of the services by ensuring supply chains for operational costs are as local as possible.
2. Additionally, Rother District Council is operating with a financial deficit, where following many years of limited Government grant and substantial cost pressures (particularly with contracted-out services) day-to-day expenditure exceeds income. This is causing an unsustainable reliance of reserve funding to support the revenue budget. If this situation were to continue unchecked, in the next five years the Council would likely have to take drastic action to reduce its expenditure, including the cessation of several discretionary services.
3. The Council has embarked on a programme of work to deliver financial stability to the Council. This ambition is described in the Council's Corporate Plan and part of this programme is to seek the transfer of certain community assets to organisations better able to protect the asset and secure the use into the future.

Objectives

4. The first objective of this strategy is to protect for the future enjoyment and benefit of the residents and visitors to the Rother area the following discretionary services:
 - Parks and Open Spaces
 - Public Conveniences
 - Museum buildings
 - Bus Shelters
 - Christmas special lighting
 - Off-street public parking places which are currently free to use
5. The second objective is to reduce the Council's net spend on discretionary services to ensure it can continue to deliver its statutory services to an acceptable level. The above services account for approximately £1.4m of spend each year, mainly in maintaining the underlying assets in a reasonable and useable condition.

Who the Council will work with?

6. The Council will work with the Parish and Town Councils within the Rother District and any not for profit organisation that has sufficient financial security to ensure the long-term viability of the community assets. The Council is happy

to work with new organisations including those that need help to be become established.

Protecting the Assets from change of use or disposal

7. Assets will be transferred on a long-term lease basis. Leases will provide sufficient length to give any grant funding body confidence that the long-term control of the asset has been effectively transferred. Freehold disposals are unlikely to be considered.

Early Financial Support

8. The Council will endeavour to transfer assets in good useable condition, but it is recognised that depending on the asset there may need to be some transitional financial support arrangements required to assist with the transfer. Any transitional financial support will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Schedule of Assets

9. A schedule of the assets for potential transfer is attached to this strategy. The schedule includes details the location (including map), a description of the asset including the existing use and the current direct costs.

Schedule of Assets – to be confirmed

The schedule of community assets that are likely to be devolved / transferred is currently being compiled and will form part of the consultation and subsequent discussions with interested parties.