

Portfolio Holder's Report to Full Council 2 October 2012

Councillor Robert Chambers – Portfolio Holder, Finance & Administration

Local Council Tax Support

The advent of Local Council Tax Support is a central Government initiative as part of their plans to reduce the cost of welfare and to give people greater work incentives.

Our Local Council Tax Support scheme will replace Council Tax Benefit in April. Our proposals were published in August and the consultation period ran until 28 September. Our proposals would involve all pensioners and disabled people being protected from reductions in support, but working age non-vulnerable people would be required to pay more Council Tax, an average of £6 per week.

This will be a challenging issue for the households affected by the change, and is a big issue for the Council to manage in the months and years to come. The consultation responses are being analysed and it is intended that final scheme proposals will be brought to the Cabinet shortly, ahead of consideration by Full Council in December.

Please review the material on the Council's website www.uttlesford.gov.uk/lcts and familiarise yourself with the issues before the December Council meeting.

2011/12 Accounts and Audit process

The accounts have been audited and published and signed off by the external auditors with a clean opinion. There were no significant issues arising from the audit, and no changes to our revenue position or reserves. The auditors have also given a clean opinion on the Council's value for money arrangements. The accounts and the auditor's report can be viewed on the Council's website www.uttlesford.gov.uk/finance

2012/13 Budget

The General Fund is forecasting a modest favourable variance for the year, although this will be affected by the recent planning appeals. In general, we are on track to achieve the outcomes expected from this year's budget growth items, and to realise the planned efficiency savings.

The Housing Revenue Account is also forecasted to achieve a favourable variance. Some of this year's £2.7 million headroom has been allocated for new projects including cladding for oil heated properties and electrical rewiring works. Around £1.1 million of headroom remains uncommitted. Developing

plans for the use of headroom is a priority that the Housing Board will be addressing during the next few months.

2013/14 Budget Planning

We are starting work on next year's budget and a financial plan for the medium term, against the backdrop of considerable uncertainty about local government funding. Prudent assumptions are being made in the meantime, and priorities are being identified. I would encourage all Members to contribute their suggestions for the budget, council priorities – and non-priorities.