

Committee: Environment Committee

Agenda Item

Date: 7 September 2010

7

Title: **Lead Officer's Report**

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Item for Information

Summary

1. This report relates to matters that are not included elsewhere on the agenda.
2. Consultation on the council's corporate priorities and budget was carried out via the Uttlesford Voices citizens panel – a representative sample of more than 500 district residents.
3. Consultation was also carried out via Uttlesford Life and on-line.
4. A summary of the key findings is set out below. In addition, more detailed results are in the two following appendices.
5. A second round of consultation will be conducted in the autumn, focusing on the current level of spending in service areas and asking residents to pick the areas of spending they feel most strongly about and whether they believe the council should spend more, the same or less on those services or whether they believe the council should stop providing that service.

Uttlesford Voices Key Results

6. Panel members were asked to rate the importance of the council's current corporate priorities under the four headings of Finance, Partnerships, People and Environment. Under the "Finance" priorities, well over half of respondents thought that "continually improving financial management" should be the most important priority (58.4%). In partnerships, improving prosperity, safety health and well-being was considered most important (36.3%) while "developing and maintaining a motivated and high performing workforce" was the most important priority under "People" (36.7%). Opposing further expansion at Stansted Airport was the most important environmental concern (43.3%).
7. Under the Financial management section of the questionnaire, the majority of panellists (53.9%) tended to agree that the council provides enough information to residents about its financial performance and management. However, while 33.6% believe value for money has improved and 19.7% believe it has not, some 37.6% were unable to give an opinion.
8. When asked about council tax rises (the questionnaire was formulated prior to the Government's announcement of a council tax freeze) 48.9% said they would favour an increase in the district part of the bill in line with inflation compared to 35.6% who wanted no increase and 15.5% who wanted a 4% increase (ie about 2% above inflation).
9. The survey also asked about spending on council services. Respondents consider the council should maintain the same level of spending on the

majority of services, with Benefit Fraud being the only area identified as requiring extra funding (55%). By comparison, 56.2% said less money should be spent in committee information and members. A significant majority (68.4% to 31.6%) believe pursuing partnerships for service delivery was the right way to go.

10. When asked to consider whether a selection of frontline services represented good value for money, refuse and recycling collection was considered to do so by 80.1%. In contrast, members, elections and democracy was not considered good value for a majority of more than 2:1.

Uttlesford Life and Online Consultation Key Results

11. This consultation was based on a simplified version of the council's corporate priorities to those presented to the citizens panel and asked respondents to rate each priority from 1 to 5 depending on how important they considered them (1 being not at all important, 5 being very important).
12. By totalling the scores, it is possible to demonstrate the relative importance of each priority.
13. All three elements listed under "Finance" scored highly, with "Ensuring the council remains financially sound" the most important. Elsewhere, "Stepping up enforcement against environmental crime" was highly rated, closely followed by "Promoting recycling" and "Working with other organisations... to improve the safety and health of people in the district, including those affected by the recession".
14. The lowest scoring priority overall was "Improving access to services for all sections of the community" despite this being rated "very important" by more than a third of respondents (34.9%).