Appendix 4

Briefing Note for Staff on Budget Prioritisation Exercise

In June this year the Resources Committee set up a Member / officer working group to look at prioritisation of the Council's services in the light of:

- A difficult budget position, with the threat of Central Government ' capping ' of the Council Tax
- Comments in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) about lack of clarity on the Council's priorities

The working group used the Council's Corporate Plan as the basis of this exercise, awarding points to each service based on **its contribution to the 9 Quality of Life Themes** (character of the district, affordable homes, leisure opportunities etc). On this basis every service was identified as **High/Medium or Low priority.**

The exercise is therefore **not** about whether:

- A service is important for other reasons (eg it is statutory or earns income etc)
- Whether the staff are committed and are performing well
- Whether the service is currently of a good standard and is well received by the public

It **is** about:

- Where Members want the focus of the Council's efforts to be
- The need to put any new and limited resources into higher priority areas (proposals for new spending next year currently stand at several hundred £000s, yet this cannot be afforded)
- The need to reduce spending, if possible and over time, on lower priority areas

The extent of any adjustments to current resources in a service will become more apparent as the Council's budget process unfolds in the months ahead. Members are unlikely to make unrealistic decisions about our ability to do this, and whilst none of us have a jobs guarantee, there is a general recognition that the Council's overall staffing numbers are not excessive. This could mean changes of roles for some staff, managed in a structured and supportive way, including training where necessary.

Support services were clearly more difficult to score regarding a direct contribution to the Quality of Life Themes, but must face their own fair share of any necessary change in the Council's resources. On this basis, they have been put in the Low contribution category.

EMT wish to stress that this necessary process is not a reflection on the excellent staff that work throughout the Council and are committed to working with any staff affected by the changes that may occur. Uttlesford is not alone in needing to go through this process and at an operational level there should be no sense of reduced value or worth on the part of any staff based on the categorisation involved in the process. The Council's commitment to improved development and opportunities for staff mean that everyone will continue to be valued on an equal basis.

Prioritisation has, to an extent, always happened, but in a vague and poorly understood way. There have been budget freezes in the past, and a failure to invest in services. The process currently being undertaken makes it more open and explicit, which can of course hurt. It isn't however a reflection on individuals.

Once Resources Committee on 18th November see the overall budget scenario, targets for savings and /or increased income can be set (as they always are), but will be service, rather than committee specific.

EM's will work with staff to explain to Members the effect of any proposed reductions in budgets. Whilst Members will not move away from the principles of prioritisation, they will be interested in the potential effects, and will take on board views from within the Council and via the extensive external consultation being undertaken on the budget.

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