

Budget Consultation Workshop – Verbal feedback for Scrutiny Cttees

Event took place in Waytemore Room, BS on Saturday October 11

30 people, recruited by our research partners ORS through the Citizens Panel, attended.

Attendants were split into four age groups:

- Under 18s
- 18-35s
- 36-55s
- Over 55s

Groups were asked to feed back on six items:

- Proposed changes to the way we deliver the Community Meals Service
- Alternative Toilet Provision in town centres
- Changes to the way we pay for things (particularly Council Tax)
- Whether we should continue spending money on fighting to protect East Herts (from Stansted/East of England Plan threats)
- Town centre enhancements
- What the council should be doing to help people in these times of the credit crunch

Community Meals Service:

- Three out of the four groups were largely in favour of opting into the county contract but
- wanted to ensure that any price rises would be staggered and
- that those who least could afford it were financially supported.
- One group felt that the council subsidy should continue to ensure this.
- The youngest group were keen to see more recyclable options being used.

Alternative Toilet Provision:

- All groups were happy to see this initiative explored further.
- Wanted to make sure that this would increase provision, rather than reduce provision
- Important to keep toilet provision near open spaces, not just in town centres
- Need to ensure we still meet the requirements of specific groups – those with disabilities or school trips!

Changes to the way we pay for things:

- Three out of the four groups were generally in favour of removing the 'pay over 12 months' option for council tax
- All groups felt new/alternative/cheaper solutions should be found by the council for those people without bank accounts
- The youngest group felt any incentives to pay early or easier (for us) were unfair, although the oldest group felt there should be discount for paying council tax in full at the start of the year.

Fighting to protect East Herts:

- Three out of four groups felt we should continue to represent the immediate and long-term interests of the district on behalf of residents. The oldest group had more mixed views.
- General feeling that if the council didn't do this, who would?
- General acknowledgement that the investment in doing so didn't guarantee success, but was vital.

Town Centre Enhancements:

- Some very good ideas and suggestions generated from all groups.
- General support for limiting delivery times in town centres to make them safer for pedestrians
- All wanted to see more information boards, maps, signage in town centres
- Continued need for the presence of police officers/PCSOs, parking attendants and street cleansing operatives to keep towns safe, easy flowing and litter-free.

- Young people wanted to see more covered area shopping, later opening hours, and less coffee shops

Credit Crunch response:

- All groups were keen that the council didn't 'jump in' and offer direct financial support to families at risk in the current economic climate.
- Feeling it was 'too early' and felt there were better ways to use the money
- The council should continue and expand the existing more traditional ways we help people.
- General support that we work more in partnership with housing associations to provide affordable housing