

ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER D
AGENDA ITEM 7

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Dear _____

I am writing to thank you for participating in the Council's consultation event on Saturday 10th October 2009.

Your contribution to the budget setting process is greatly appreciated. It was a great pleasure for myself and the Council members and officers to meet you and gain an appreciation of the diversity and strength of community opinion. Please find below a summary of the key messages from the event, which will be used by councillors in deciding how to spend the budget for 2010/ 11.

Car Parking

- All groups were keen to ensure that any changes to car parking would not have a detrimental effect on the vitality of town centres and all endorsed efforts to consult businesses
- The 18 – 35s suggested that park and ride services should be looked into and that charging for evening parking could be introduced.
- The 36 – 55s stated they would like to see more motorbike spaces.
- The Over 55s and the 36 – 55s thought that the enforcement should be more visible and pro-active.

Sunday and bank holiday charging:

- The under 18s and the 36 – 55s stated that bank holidays should remain free
- Three groups felt that if Sunday and bank holiday charging was introduced the £1 option should be chosen over the 50p option as it offers a larger percentage increase in revenue, with only the 18 – 35s disagreeing.

On street charging:

- There were mixed views with regards to on street charging. Although individuals could see the benefit the over-riding concern was its impact on smaller stores.
- The 18 – 35's particularly felt that on street charging should be implemented, based on the view that there should be consistency in what you are charged for i.e. if there is a charge for parking in pay and display car parks then a charge should be applied to parking on the street.
- The over 55's thought this might mean that people would go to the larger stores to shop as they offered free parking.

Increase pay and display charges:

- Groups felt that the pay and display system had already seen a sharp increase so if it is to be increased further this should not be by more than 3%.
- The Under 18s group suggested that charging more for the pay and display system might encourage people to use public transport more but were concerned about how this might affect those that do not have sufficient access to public transport.
- The over 55s were concerned that an increase in pay and display charges would mean that people on fixed incomes would be affected as for example pensions are not going up by this percentage
- The over 55s stated that the short stay cost should remain static and increases should only be made to long stay costs
- The over 55s thought there should be concessions for those who work in the town centres
- The 18 – 35s suggested introducing a nominal charge for a 30 minute stay.

Top up of services where Hertfordshire County Council is primarily responsible

- All groups were keen for safety to be maintained with the three highways proposals and felt this needs examining further. However the 18- 35s were split in terms of whether it was more important to keep public highways clear than subsidise poorly utilised bus routes (and vice versa).

Clearing leaves:

- Many of the groups felt that residents carried out this task for themselves/their roads
- The over 55s thought that shopkeepers should have a duty to clear the front of their premises.
- The under 18s were concerned that wet leaves could cause a slip hazard

Spraying weeds:

- The over 55s and the under 18s identified this as the least important option to retain.

Swathe cutting:

- The over 55s suggested a gratuity could be paid to farmers to undertake job.

Bus service contributions:

- All groups agreed that transport for people in rural areas should remain a priority as people may not have other options. However it was recognised that certain routes are poorly utilised.
- Three groups suggested alternative transport provision could be looked at to reduce cost but prevent people from being isolated.

- 36 – 55s suggested that alternative provision could be in the form of taxis or dial-a-ride buses.
- The over 55s felt this proposal did not sit well with Council policies to reduce car use in town centres
- The over 55s suggested smaller buses to make routes more affordable
- The under 18s suggested cutting some services to make sure a basic service is maintained as well as possibly increasing the cost to customers to maintain the service.
- 18 – 35s thought stopping the contributions contradicted the policy to encourage people to use public transport as reducing bus routes would not help. They also thought that profitable routes should divert profits to subsidise lesser used routes

Charges

- All groups agreed that an optional extra charge for fast tracking for planning applications is a good idea
- 3 out of 4 groups (except the over 55s) felt that the nominal £10 payment for rats pest control was a fair amount and should not cause any problems. All groups thought that those on lower incomes should not have to pay the £10 cost.
- There were mixed views on increasing the cost of the charge for Hackney Carriage licences. Most groups agreed that there should be some amount of increase but that the current economic climate needed to be reflected in this.

Councillor Grants

- Three groups agreed that if kept the grants should be allocated at Community Voice. The only group that felt they should be scrapped were the over 55s
- Although some individuals thought they should be scrapped the overriding thought was that community groups rely on this money.
- Suggestions were made to look into pooling the money to make it more meaningful.

Thank you again for participating in the workshop. Your views play an important part in helping the Council to decide what their service priorities should be in the future as part of a wider consultation.

Details of the budget, once it has been set, will be published in the Spring 2010 Link magazine – this will include an explanation of how the results of the workshop influenced decisions.

Yours sincerely

Alan Madin
Director of Internal Services