

ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER 'D'

East Herts Council Budget Consultation 2012

East Herts Council is committed to effective consultation when setting each year's budget. Detailed consultation was carried out as part of the 2011 budget cycle, with the majority of savings set in that year across the MTFP. This year, consultation concentrated on 2 key areas. The consultation activity with regard to setting the 2013/14 budget is detailed below. The objectives of the exercise were to:

- Consult on the setting of a localised Council Tax Support scheme. The detail of the consultation that was received from this consultation exercise has already formed part of the detailed Council Tax Support Scheme report that was considered at Executive on 8th January 2013.
- Consult with local businesses on issues which affect them.

BUSINESS BUDGET CONSULTATION 2012

This years consultation took place at a Bishops Stortford Chamber of Commerce breakfast on 4th December. Thirty Chamber members were present. Councillor Paul Philips (Executive Member for Economic Development) and Paul Pullin (Economic Development Manager) attended on behalf of East Herts Council.

There were three themes addressed at the consultation –

- Pay on exit parking
- Empty property council tax deductions
- Accessing council services online

Members completed a brief questionnaire about these issues. 19 questionnaires were returned.

There was a broad but not unanimous view that pay on exit would be helpful and would be prepared to pay extra. 11 respondents supported pay on exit at an extra cost of between 10p and 20p, 7 respondents said they would not be prepared to pay any extra.

A stronger view that empty property discounts should be reduced to 50%. 15 respondents thought that the reductions should not continue as at present. 11 respondents thought a reduction to 50% would be appropriate.

Businesses were in favour of reducing costs by increasing online access to services. 12 of the 17 respondents ticked the yes box. There was also a view that the Council website would benefit from becoming more user friendly in general. Specific services mentioned included planning online, domestic services and a what's on in town section.