

ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER 'E

East Herts Council Budget Consultation 2013

East Herts Council is committed to effective consultation when setting each year's budget. This year, consultation concentrated on 4 key areas with an opportunity to raise any other ideas or suggestions in regard to the budget for the Council. The consultation activity with regard to setting the 2014/15 budget is detailed below.

BUSINESS BUDGET CONSULTATION 2013

The 2013 Business Budget Consultation took place with representatives of Bishop's Stortford Chamber of Commerce on 10th December at Next Step Centre in Bishop's Stortford (part of Hertford Regional College).

The following questions were presented to Chamber Members covering 4 key areas, which helped structure the meeting and prompt discussion. A summary of the responses is included under each question heading.

1. If the Council were in a position to make a single significant investment to support the local economy what do you think it should be?

There was a very strong feeling in the group that car parking is the most critical issue for towns and that multi storey car parking would contribute to prosperity. Linked to this was a view that transport masterplanning was needed and should incorporate car parking policy.

2. If the Council had the resource to develop a business centre locally what activities would you like to see at the centre? (e.g incubation, enterprise training, manufacturing, services to business)

This issue was not addressed in detail but strong interest exists for incubation support for start up business. There was also a need to support existing and developing businesses.

3. Is the Coalition Governments welfare reform having an impact upon your business? (workforce issues, recruitment)

There were no clear opinions about this. Comments indicated that welfare reform is a fairly new policy and that it was too early to understand the impact upon business.

4. What local car parking initiatives might be helpful for business?

Parking rebate schemes for town centre workers might also help as would low occupancy time rebates. The RINGO scheme was good but people find it difficult to understand. Pay On Exit system preferred to Pay and Display.

5. Other issues/comments

The idea of support models for Chambers of Commerce was raised. France and Germany provide public sector funding for their Chambers in return for the delivery of economic services. Could Bishop's Stortford be a pilot for a similar approach?

There were a range of ideas proposed including grant support for small business, youth enterprise schemes, urban funding schemes/urban conference, apprenticeships, national insurance holidays and a general feeling that access to business related support should be simplified.