

BUSINESS BUDGET CONSULTATION 2014

The 2014 consultation was conducted by the Economic Development Manager in partnership with the Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Small Business. Working with organisations representative of business has the advantage of identifying business opinion from a wide range of members through a reliable methodology e.g. business surveys conducted by the organisations and regular ongoing direct consultation that the Council is not resourced to deliver. The disadvantage is that some of the local flavour can be lost. However, direct local consultation can sometimes result in an over emphasis on specific issues with car parking as a common example.

The economy is strong in East Herts but representative business organisation is weak in parts of the district with Bishop's Stortford and Buntingford as the only towns with Chambers of Commerce (or indeed any formally organised representation).

In the past the consultation has taken the form of direct town based consultation or online surveys.

On this occasion both organisations were asked the same questions.

- **What priorities do your businesses think East Herts Council should adopt?**
- **How should these priorities be reflected in budget decisions?**

The headline summary of responses from each organisation is included below. It is worth stating that businesses are not always fully aware of the budget responsibilities of local authorities, however the results do show what businesses are actually saying.

The Federation of Small Business has approximately 240 members from East Herts. The Hertfordshire Chamber has a strong East Herts membership as a proportion of 1,000 members across the county.

Federation of Small Business

- A campaign to promote business rate relief and support to businesses in understanding the eligibility requirements
- The improvement of Broadband in rural areas. There is a significant problem in the north of the district where coverage is inadequate.
- Some action to improve areas with weak mobile phone access
- Events to promote the districts High Streets and Town Centres

- Measures to address skills shortages and business recruitment needs especially the development of technical skills
- FSB recognise the contribution made to SME's through the Eastern Plateau RDPE programme and hope that East Herts Council will be successful in their bid to operate a new programme from 2015.

Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce

- Improvements to the road and rail infrastructure
- Better Broadband coverage
- Support and signposting to businesses seeking to participate in apprenticeship schemes
- Advice and support to businesses seeking to increase their export trade
- Access to finance advice
- Sector mentoring – especially the identification of mentors from the manufacturing sector to advise the education sector in developing technical skills in the curriculum

Paul Pullin December 2014