

## **Findings from the Business Focus Group – Wednesday 2 February 2011**

As part of the Budget Consultation process the link to the online budget simulator was sent out to East Herts Council business contacts (approximately 7 different organisations which represent a large number of people). Only the Federation of Small Businesses provided a response, which is detailed in **Essential Reference Paper G** of the **Consolidated Budget Report** due to be discussed at Executive on 8 February 2011.

Given the low response it was agreed that a further focus group should be held with the business community to boost the response received from this key stakeholder group. In total eight business representatives were invited to attend a focus group session on Wednesday 2 February, of which two attended.

The session was very useful and helped to provide further feedback on some of the budget items (see below); however given the number of attendees it was not possible to provide a clear consensus on the business view.

### **1. PCSOs**

- There was support for retaining expenditure on PCSOs.

### **2. Community grants**

- There was support for retaining the grant to support towns and encouraging businesses.
- There was a view that if further cuts needed to be found from the grants budget then the small grants such as funding for the museums, festive party grants and the grant to engage with children and young people, should be reduced as this would result in the least impact on the community, in context with the other grants listed.

### **3. Consultation**

- **Public Consultation** – No specific steer was given as to whether funds should be retained or reduced. However there was agreement that the most cost effective method should be pursued when undertaking consultation and that the right balance needs to be reached between surveys and face to face consultation.
- **Council Meetings** – There was support for moving council meetings from the evening to the day, as long as it did not reduce the opportunity for members of the public to attend or ask questions.
- **Public Meetings** – There was support for making this saving, but it was felt that the Community Voice events could still continue, by the Council making more use of its own facilities to host such events (particularly as attendance is low) therefore eliminating the need for the budget.

### **4. Public toilets**

It was felt that the Council should keep the toilets open, as the availability of these facilities play a key role in making a place attractive to people to visit, live and work in.

#### **5. Homeless help**

This was not supported, as it was felt that no further funding is required. It was felt that as the funds are recycled over a period of time, then this is a case of a 'cash flow' position, so there is a budget for it.

#### **6. Museums, the arts and other cultural activities**

This item was discussed although no clear steer was given as to whether funds should be retained or reduced.

In addition to the above items the following general points were raised:

- A general concern was raised about the adverse impact all the savings could have on making East Herts an attractive area for growth and investment.
- The budget consultation exercise only focused on 6 areas, however the savings the Council needs to find is much larger and therefore the attendees felt that there may have been other items they wished to comment on.