

**BUDGET CONSULTATION 2013**

**COUNCIL SPENDING**

**Budget Consultation Results**

**October 2013**

**QUESTIONNAIRE ON COUNCIL SPENDING FOR THE YEAR  
2014-15**



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**October 2013**



# BUDGET CONSULTATION 2013

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### 1. Executive summary

This is the third year that a consultation asking for residents' views on the headline priorities for setting the budget has been run. Information about the budget setting process and the survey was distributed to every household in the district as part of the council's magazine *Uttlesford Life*. Breaking with previous practice and as part of the authority's drive towards channel shift, the 2013 survey was available primarily through an online questionnaire rather than as a printed sheet included with the magazine. A small number of printed copies, though, were distributed to libraries and the council's CIC points across the district to ensure that all residents would have a chance to taking part. A copy of the survey was not, this year, included in the summer Citizens Panel questionnaire as it was considered that panellists could respond independently. The results are detailed below.

Simply choose your top three priorities from the list below and select the corresponding letter from the drop down list. If there are any priorities listed which you believe the council should NOT pursue, then you can tell us that too.

- A. Continuing with sound financial management to ensure continued stability of the council and its services in difficult times
- B. Giving responsibility to local communities to run services where possible (for example for town/parish councils)
- C. Providing affordable housing for local people
- D. Reducing crime and antisocial behaviours in partnership with the police and others
- E. Keeping our streets and open spaces clean and free of litter
- F. Maintain support for charities and the voluntary sector
- G. Develop opportunities for local residents to influence decision-making on public services (such as through the Community Forums)
- H. Work with Essex County Council to improve the condition of the district's roads
- I. Work more closely with the business community to benefit the local economy
- J. Other (if you would like to choose a priority that is not in the list above, select 'Other' and specify in the appropriate box)

1. Highest Priority

Drop down menu showing options A through J and Other.

Other - Please specify in Box 2 provided below

Questions posed in the 2013 budget consultation are similar to those asked in previous years and take account of the council's long term strategy as promulgated in the Corporate Plan 2013-18. Amongst respondents to the budget consultation there was a marked preference for "Continuing with sound financial management to ensure continued stability of the council and its services in difficult times" with 36.7% indicating that they felt this area of spending should be the council's highest priority. This is a continuation of the trend, though with a slight decrease, established in 2011 and 2012 when 51.8% and 45.7% respectively selected the same option. The headline view for the second highest spending priority was jointly tied between "Providing affordable housing for local people" and "Work[ing] with Essex County Council to provide the condition of the district's roads". Both options received a 20% opinion rating. This stands in contrast to the previous years when crime reduction was rated as the second most important objective for spending.

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Interestingly, of those who selected a third highest priority, a further 18.3% again considered that working with the County Council on road issues should be of importance.

Respondeees were also offered the option to select a category of spending where they considered the council should be curtailing resources. In 2012 almost a quarter of those who expressed an opinion (23.0%), selected that “Giving responsibility to local communities to run services where appropriate” should not be a priority area for council consideration. For 2013, though, there was a marked opinion by 25.9% that the council should not be allocating funds to “Work more closely with the business community to benefit the local economy”.

The results are summarised below and fully detailed findings can be seen in Section 3.

Priority	Spending Area
Highest priority	[A] “Continuing with sound financial management to ensure continued stability of the council and its services in difficult times”
Second highest	[C] “Providing affordable housing for local people” and [H] “Work with Essex County Council to improve the condition of the district's roads”
Third highest	[H] “Work with Essex County Council to improve the condition of the district's roads”
Don't do	[I] “Work more closely with the business community to benefit the local economy”

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### 2. Purpose methodology

Each year Uttlesford District Council sets a budget to decide how to allocate money to the wide range of services that the council provides. The budget is linked closely to the priorities in our Corporate Plan - the key document which sets out what the council wants to achieve over the next five years. The council is obliged to consult with the residents of the district when setting the budget for the forthcoming year. The results of this consultation will inform the decisions made by officers and councillors when setting spending for the year April 2014 to March 2015.

The consultation was run over the period 27 August to 23 September 2013. Respondents were asked to select their top three spending priorities from a list of 10 options covering the full range of the council's activities. They were also offered the opportunity to indicate a preference for reducing spending in any area and for appending additional comments.

Information about the survey was distributed to every household in the district as part of the summer issue of the council's in-house magazine, *Uttlesford Life*. In line with the authority's drive towards channel shift, the 2013 survey was available primarily through an online Snap 11 questionnaire rather than as a printed sheet included with the magazine. A small number of printed copies, though, were distributed to libraries and the council's CIC points across the district to ensure that all residents would have a chance to taking part. A copy of the survey was not, this year, included in the summer Citizens Panel questionnaire as it was considered that panellists could respond independently.

By the close of the consultation period, 51 electronic submissions had been received using the Snap consultation and 10 paper copies had come in, making a total return of 61 for the consultation. This represents a significant decrease on the previous year when 257 responses were received and is possibly attributable to a relative lack of engagement with online surveys from the sector of the population most likely to respond.

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### 3. Survey results, detailed findings

Key results from the survey are as follows:

#### SECTION 1: HIGHEST PRIORITIES - GENERAL AREAS OF SPENDING FOR THE COUNCIL

- On the highest spending priority, just over a third of respondents (36.7%) considered that the council should concentrate on “Continuing with sound financial management to ensure continued stability of the council and its services in difficult times”. A further 16.7% of people who answered this question considered that “Providing affordable housing for local people” should be the most important area in which to concentrate resources.
- Option C was again popular with those marking a secondary priority. Here exactly a fifth (20%) of those consulted rated [C] “Providing affordable housing for local people” as being the second highest priority. A further 20% also selected [H] “Work with Essex County Council to improve the condition of the district's roads”. Interestingly, in the 2012 survey, 21.6% had flagged up their concerns over expenditure on “Providing affordable housing for local people”. The present results would seem to indicate that opinion is on the wane with greater public awareness of the need for social housing.
- “Work with Essex County Council to improve the condition of the district's roads” was also selected by 18.3% as the third highest priority for spending. This option was also selected as the ‘highest priority’ by 13.3% of the respondents. Whilst not the headline priority for the overall survey, it is important to note that in a cumulative total 51.63% people chose to include this option as of concern.

#### SECTION 2: LOWEST PRIORITIES – “DON’T DO” AREAS OF SPENDING

- Of those who expressed an opinion, just over a quarter 25.9% considered that that the council should not consider “Work[ing] more closely with the business community to benefit the local economy”, though a further 18.5% also suggested that funding should be withdrawn from “Giving responsibility to local communities to run services where possible (for example for town/parish councils)” and “Maintain[ing] support for charities and the voluntary sector”.

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### SECTION 3: ADDITIONAL COMMENTS RECEIVED

- Consultees were also invited to submit further comments additional to the formalised questions with some 13.1% choosing to do so. These responses, appended verbatim to the full report, covered a wide range of subjects but generally show a topical preoccupation with infrastructure including comments on maintaining community services, roads and sports facilities. Further comments covered health issues and concerns over airport development.

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### **4. Appendices**

#### **Priority options**

**A. Continuing with sound financial management to ensure continued stability of the council and its services in difficult times**

**B. Giving responsibility to local communities to run services where appropriate (for example to town/parish councils)**

**C. Providing affordable housing for local people**

**D. Reducing crime and antisocial behaviours in partnership with the police and others**

**E. Keeping our streets and open spaces clean and free of litter**

**F. Maintain support for charities and the voluntary sector**

**G. Develop opportunities for local residents to influence decision-making on public services (such as through the Community Forums)**

**H. Work with Essex County Council to improve the condition of the district's roads**

**I. Work more closely with the business community to benefit the local economy**

**J. Other**



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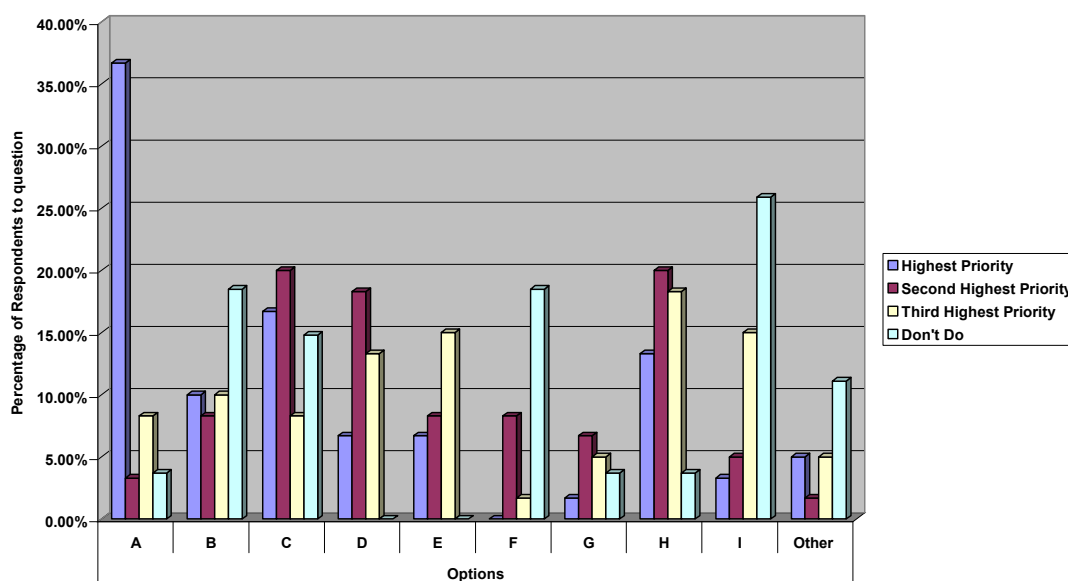
Total number of  
respondents to  
question

	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Highest Priority</b>	22	6	10	4	4	0	1	8	2	3
	36.70%	10.00%	16.70%	6.70%	6.70%	0	1.70%	13.30%	3.30%	5.00%
<b>Second Highest Priority</b>	2	5	12	11	5	5	4	12	3	1
	3.30%	8.30%	20.00%	18.30%	8.30%	8.30%	6.70%	20.00%	5.00%	1.70%
<b>Third Highest Priority</b>	5	6	5	8	9	1	3	11	9	3
	8.30%	10.00%	8.30%	13.30%	15.00%	1.70%	5.00%	18.30%	15.00%	5.00%
<b>Don't do (If applicable)</b>	1	5	4	0	0	5	1	1	7	3
	3.70%	18.50%	14.80%	0	0	18.50%	3.70%	3.70%	25.90%	11.10%

**Table 1** Response counts and percentages for each option

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## Council Spending Consultation - August 2013



**Chart 1 NB.** Option 'J' comments for "other" priorities can be seen included as part of the table of "Respondents Comments"

### Legend

<b>A</b>	Continuing with sound financial management to ensure continued stability of the council and its services in difficult times
<b>B</b>	Giving responsibility to local communities to run services where possible (for example for town/parish councils)
<b>C</b>	Providing affordable housing for local people
<b>D</b>	Reducing crime and antisocial behaviour in partnership with the police and others
<b>E</b>	Keeping our streets and open spaces clean and free of litter
<b>F</b>	Maintain support for charities and the voluntary sector
<b>G</b>	Develop opportunities for local residents to influence decision-making on public services (such as through the Community Forums)
<b>H</b>	Work with Essex County Council to improve the condition of the district's roads
<b>I</b>	Work more closely with the business community to benefit the local economy
<b>J</b>	Other (if you would like to choose a priority that is not in the list above, select 'Other' and specify in the appropriate box)

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### Open text responses

61 responses were received – 51 online responses and 10 completed paper questionnaires.

The following open text responses were provided where the respondent did not choose from the listed priorities but selected the 'Other' option:

#### Highest Priority 'Other'

Provide defibrillators to all our schools. Pressure all local sports centres/ clubs into providing AED's in their premises.
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Develop a strategic infrastructure plan for the district.
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Seriously improve monitoring and control over money allocated to ensure it is spent thriftly (sic) and with maximum benefit
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#### Second Highest Priority 'Other'

Stop wasting money on some charities and voluntary sector activities where the council provides similar. You have no real knowledge of what they really are achieving (if anything)
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#### Third Highest Priority 'Other'

Consider poverty (particularly child poverty) when making policy decisions, for example with regard to setting Council Tax. Lobby for reduction in bus fares on rural routes, if necessary subsidise from revenues. Improve affordability of sport facilities for people on low incomes, to encourage healthy lifestyle.
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Maintain community services operated by the Council e.g. Community Information Centres, Day Centres, Saffron Walden Museum
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#### Don't Do 'Other'

Don't support airport expansion in any form
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I am a resident of the newly built houses in Little Canfield. Sort the on road parking issue. Some roads especially are very narrow and the people don't even bother to park the cars on to the foot paths. It is one of the prime issue which if resolved can avoid accidents. I have noticed this issue on the Dunmow road very often close to Four Ashes signal.
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