

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
EAST HERTS COUNCIL AND STEVENAGE
BOROUGH COUNCIL JOINT REVENUES
AND BENEFITS COMMITTEE HELD IN THE
ROOM 27, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
MONDAY 29 JUNE 2015, AT 6.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs J Lloyd (Chairman).
Councillors E Buckmaster, G McAndrew,
R Raynor and G Williamson.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Clare Fletcher	- Assistant Director of Finance (Stevenage Borough Council)
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Officer
Su Tarran	- Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service
Adele Taylor	- Director of Finance and Support Services (East Herts Council)

1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN

It was proposed and seconded that Councillors J Lloyd and G Williamson be appointed Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively of the East Herts Council and Stevenage Borough Council Joint Revenues and Benefits Committee for the 2015/16 civic year.

This was agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED – that Councillors J Lloyd and G Williamson be appointed Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively of the East Herts Council and Stevenage Borough Council Joint Revenues

and Benefits Committee for the 2015/16 civic year.

2 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors L Haysey, J Thomas and A Webb. It was noted that Councillors G McAndrew and R Raynor were substituting for Councillors L Haysey and A Webb respectively.

3 MINUTES – 19 JANUARY 2015

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2015 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4 QUARTERLY UPDATE

The Head of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service submitted a quarterly update report in relation to the following areas:

- Performance reporting
- Other challenges

Members were reminded that the benefits workload had increased and the shared service had just completed the necessary recruitment to upsize the service. The Officer workload was constantly increasing but at a reduced rate.

The Joint Committee was updated in respect of performance relating to Council Tax collection, Business Rates and the processing of Housing Benefit. The performance achieved by Officers had represented a significant achievement for the shared service in the face of welfare reforms and changes in local government finance.

The Head of the Shared Service commented that Officers were anticipating a budget announcement next week and Members were reminded that the Government grant for

Discretionary Housing payments for 2015/16 had reduced significantly for both Councils. Members were also reminded that they had previously expressed a desire to support the most vulnerable residents, particularly those with significant disabilities.

The Head of the Shared Service provided an update in respect of the Benefits cap and Universal Credit. In reply to a query from Councillor G McAndrew, Members were reminded that, as soon as a claim was received by Officers the clock was ticking in terms of meeting targets even if an incomplete claim had to be sent back for extra information.

The Head of the Shared Service summarised the policy objectives that had been announced in the Queen's Speech and how these would impact on Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support.

The East Herts Director of Finance and Support Services commented that, if necessary, there would be engagement with wider project teams such as the Welfare Reform Group and also with communications and the Housing Associations. There would also be a briefing for the relevant portfolio holders.

The Head of the Shared Service provided a detailed summary of the Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS) and Members were advised that both Councils were taking part in the Department of Work and Pensions' (DWP) latest initiative to reduce fraud and error called FERIS. The Stevenage Assistant Director of Finance confirmed that the SFIS had been the subject of countrywide publicity and would cover all types of fraud.

Members were advised of recent developments regarding a New Business Rates Team and also in respect of an improvement relating to in year collection rates of Business Rates Tax. The Head of the Shared Service stated that training would improve the knowledge base in the Office and she referred to the 2015/16 Service Plan

objectives for the Shared Service.

Members were advised of a number of other areas of focus that were detailed in the report such as a new document management system, the enforcement framework and the sources of free early intervention advice that were available to customers in financial difficulty.

The Committee received and noted the report.

RESOLVED – that the report be received and noted.

The meeting closed at 6.45 pm

Chairman
Date