

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

JOINT EXECUTIVE REVENUES AND BENEFITS SHARED SERVICE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Monday, 25 June 2018

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Stevenage Borough Councillors: Mrs Joan Lloyd, Ralph Raynor and Jeannette Thomas.

East Herts Councillors: E Buckmaster and G Williamson.

In attendance: C Fletcher (Assistant Director Finance and Estates SBC) and S Tarran (Head of Revenues and Benefits).

C Bulloch (Shared service manager –Systems, Support and Control) T Mortimer (Shared service manager –Benefits) S Huntingford (Shared service Manager –Business rates).

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm
Time: End Time: 7.01pm

1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

Nominations were requested for the appointment of the Chair and Vice Chair of the Joint Revenues and Benefits Committee for the 2018 / 2019 Municipal Year.

It was duly proposed and seconded that Councillor G Williamson be appointed as Chair for the 2018 / 2019 Municipal Year.

There being no other nominations it was **RESOLVED** that Councillor G Williamson be appointed as Chair of the Joint Revenues and Benefits Committee for the 2018 / 2019 Municipal Year.

It was duly proposed and seconded that Councillor Mrs J Lloyd be appointed as Vice Chair for the 2018 / 2019 Municipal Year.

There being no other nominations it was **RESOLVED** that Councillor Mrs J Lloyd be appointed as Vice Chair of the Joint Revenues and Benefits Committee for the Municipal Year 2018 / 2019.

Councillor G Williamson in the Chair.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were submitted on behalf of East Herts Councillors L Radford and C Woodward.

There were no declarations of interest.

3 **MINUTES - 26 JUNE 2017**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Joint Revenues and Benefits Committee held on 26 June 2017, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **ANNUAL REPORT - JOINT REVENUES & BENEFITS SERVICE**

The Committee received a report detailing the current position in the following areas:

- Performance Reporting
- Other Challenges
- Budget outturn

The Committee was advised that the service had exceeded its target for processing Housing Benefit claims and had harmonised performance across the two Councils. It was noted that although caseload numbers had decreased the resultant workload had increased by almost 5% due to the complexity of the cases involved.

With respect to the recovery of housing benefit overpayments the Committee was advised that the service now had access to HRMC database which facilitated the tracing of individuals and provision of employment details to enable attachment to earnings. However it was too early to identify any change in recovery trends from this change.

In reply to a question concerning the Homeless Reduction Act the Committee was advised that, together with the introduction of Universal Credit (UC), there would be an impact on discretionary housing payments although the extent of the impact was unknown at this time.

Members were advised that the introduction of UC will reduce the Housing Benefit caseload, and if customers fail to realise that they must separately claim council tax support they could experience council tax arrears. It was acknowledged that the role out of UC could increase the pressure to provide personal budgeting help for customers. The Committee was advised that some limited funding was currently available from the department of work and pensions (DWP) to provide this service.

The Committee was advised that Council Tax collection rates were slightly reduced on previous years. It was noted that many of the Council Tax support customers' arrears comprised of low amounts each year and consideration had to be given to adding summons costs to small debts.

The Committee was further advised that the Council Tax premium on empty properties would be reviewed once the Government had laid the legislation enabling a 100% premium to be applied.

In reply to a question concerning publicity following prosecutions for single person discount fraud the Assistant Director Finance and Estates undertook to instigate a Council communication following a Shared Internal Audit Service report on the

subject to the next meeting of the Audit Committee.

With regard to the digital agenda Members suggested that an email be sent to all Councillors and Council staff to request that they themselves use digital channels to access Council services wherever possible, and encourage customers to do so, in order to realise savings in both staff and postage costs.

The Chair expressed his thanks to the Officers for the clarity of the report and for their work over the previous year.

It was **RESOLVED** that the report is noted.

Reasons for Decision: as contained in the Report.

Alternative Options Considered: as contained in the Report.

5 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

6 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not Required.

7 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR