

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
EAST HERTS COUNCIL AND STEVENAGE  
BOROUGH COUNCIL JOINT REVENUES AND  
BENEFITS COMMITTEE HELD IN THE  
COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS,  
HERTFORD ON THURSDAY 1 JULY 2021, AT  
6.00 PM

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PRESENT: Councillor J Thomas (Chairman)  
Councillors L Briscoe, J Hollywell,  
M Stevenson and G Williamson

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors P Ruffles

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Clare Fletcher	- Assistant Director of Finance
Sandra Huntingford	- Assistant Revenue Manager
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Officer
Graeme Reid	- Revenues Manager
Su Tarran	- Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service

1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN

It was proposed by Councillor Williamson and  
seconded by Councillor Briscoe that Councillor Thomas

be appointed Chairman of the East Herts Council and Stevenage Borough Council Joint Revenues and Benefits Committee for the 2021/22 civic year.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, this motion was declared CARRIED.

**RESOLVED** – that Councillor Thomas be appointed Chairman of the East Herts Council and Stevenage Borough Council Joint Revenues and Benefits Committee for the 2021/22 civic year.

## 2 APOLOGY

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Lloyd. It was noted that Councillor Hollywell was substituting for Councillor Lloyd.

## 3 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no Chairman's Announcements.

## 4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

## 5 MINUTES - 25 JUNE 2020

It was proposed by Councillor Williamson and seconded by Councillor Thomas that the minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, this motion was declared CARRIED.

**RESOLVED** – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## 6 ANNUAL UPDATE

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

- Performance reporting
- Other challenges
- Budget outturn

The Head of the Shared Service said that it had been an interesting year and, in respect of housing benefits, it had been a year of best performance for both Councils. She said that there had been 24,000 additional items of work and Officers had processed the additional work without any unnecessary waiting for customers.

Members were advised that the shared service was there to help people and the increasing level of work was a concern. The Head of the Shared Service said that the frequency of changes was increasing due to the instability of income being experienced by some residents. She also highlighted the national reduction in respect of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP).

Members were advised that Officers were doing

everything they could to keep residents in their own homes due to the impact re-housing had on the Council's finances and also on the resident circumstances. The Head of the Shared Service referred to the impact of Universal Credit being ongoing and continuous. She said that the housing benefit caseload continued to fall and the impact of those returning to housing benefit after reaching retirement would affect caseload for a considerable period of time.

Members were advised that despite increasing numbers of properties Officers had done amazing work in supporting residents who had been struggling with the pressures of coping with the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic and council tax payments.

The Head of the Shared Service praised the work of the Officers who had supported residents under pressure in respect of meeting council tax payments. She referred to support that had been given to customers in allowing tolerances in terms of payment deferrals for council tax.

Members were advised that the 2020/21 combined collectable debt for East Herts Council (EHC) and Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) had increased by over £8.1m.

The Head of the Shared Service advised Members of the impact of empty homes on the Council. The Assistant Director of Finance (SBC) said that the number of empty homes was much lower in Stevenage Borough.

Members were given a detailed update in respect of the position in respect of business rates and were advised that the total value of grants and values paid out since March 2020 was £44m for Stevenage and £76m for East Herts.

Members were urged to utilise their community links and inform Officers of any businesses in need of support. The Head of the Shared Service said that Officers were talking to communities to establish where help was needed the most.

The Assistant Director of Finance thanked Officers for their efforts and hard work. The Shared Service Manager (Business Rates) said that it had been a difficult year but Officers had got through the worst period.

The Shared Service Manager (Council Tax) said that the appreciation and thank you messages that had been received from businesses were a significant boost to Officers.

Councillor Williamson expressed his thanks to the Officers on behalf of the Members of the joint Executive. The Head of the Shared Service and the Assistant Director of Finance responded to a number of questions from Members.

The Committee received the report. Councillor Williamson proposed and Councillor Briscoe seconded, a motion that that a formal Member acknowledgement of the efforts of the Revenues and Benefits Shared

Service be passed onto Officers.

**RESOLVED** – that (A) the report be received;

(B) a formal Member acknowledgement of the efforts of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service be passed onto Officers.

7 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 6.42 pm

Chairman .....
Date .....