

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 TUESDAY 24 JANUARY
2012, AT 5.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs J Lloyd (Chairman).
Councillors S Batson, L Haysey, P Moore
and A Webb.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor D Andrews.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Carol Bulloch	- Systems and Support Manager
Scott Crudgington	- Strategic Director (Resources)
Alan Madin	- Director of Internal Services
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Assistant
Theresa Mortimer	- Benefits Manager
Graeme Reid	- Revenues Manager
Mark Simpson	- Corporate Change Manager
Tom Simpson	- Control and Fraud Manager
Su Tarran	- Head of Revenues and Benefits

6 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of
Councillors G McAndrew and M Tindale. It was noted
that Councillor P Moore was substituting for Councillor G

McAndrew.

7 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman invited Members and Officers present to introduce themselves.

8 MINUTES - 19 OCTOBER 2011

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2011 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

9 BUDGET

The Head of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service submitted a report in respect of the 2012/13 draft budget proposals for the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service. Members were advised that the report focused on high level budget proposals and more detail would be provided if required.

Members were advised that the contact Member section of future reports would include names of Councillors at both Authorities. In response to a query from the Chairman, the Joint Committee was also advised that the Corporate Priorities of Stevenage Borough Council would also be included in future.

Councillor L Haysey stated that the high level nature of the budget proposals was sufficient. She requested that Officers only report more detailed information if there was any abnormal budget information that Members should be aware of.

In response to a query from the Chairman, the Joint Committee was advised that Members had correctly interpreted the contribution figures detailed in paragraph 2.5 of the report now submitted. Members were also advised that Officers would report back in respect of retained costs and recharges in respect of the shared

service.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that (A) the indicative total shared budget for 2012/13, in respect of the shared service, as detailed in the report submitted, be approved; and

(B) each of the Member Authority's contributions to the budget as detailed in the report submitted, be approved.

10 IMPLEMENTATION

The Head of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service submitted a report advising Members on the progress of the implementation of the shared service.

Members were advised of the progress relating to the implementation of the shared service, in particular in respect of a number of IT challenges that Officers were working to resolve. It was hoped to achieve a position where Officers would be able to work at home more effectively.

The Joint Committee was assured that the year end billing would not be compromised by the shared service going live as key Officers would prioritise the year end billing over any work arising from the new shared service arrangements.

Members were advised that clearly defined plans were in place in terms of how the customer service arrangements would work at both Authorities. There had been a number of difficulties relating to IT in terms of moving to the new shared service in a live working environment.

The priority for Officers at all times was maintaining a strong performance in terms of the quality of the new shared service whilst not compromising service continuity.

Officers had adopted an approach that was deliberately risk averse.

In response to a query from the Chairman, Members were advised that all the vacancies within the shared service were currently the subject of a selection process and prospective employees would be interviewed and posts filled as soon as possible.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the arrangements and timescales for implementing the revenues and benefits shared service be noted.

11 SERVICE PLAN 2012/13

The Head of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service submitted a report inviting Members to receive the draft 2012/13 service plan for the shared service.

The Joint Committee was advised that the service plan was a provisional document that should be considered alongside the corporate budget information. Members were advised that the service plan should contain a balance of information from both Authorities, as well as capturing a balance of outputs from Gov Metric surveys.

Members were reminded that the service plan reviewed where the shared service had been whilst also looking to the future. Members were referred to page 38 of the report now submitted for the key projects for the shared service in 2012/13.

Members were advised that the service plan provided opportunities to ensure efficiencies and resilience were achieved from the shared service.

Councillor L Haysey highlighted IT as a particularly high risk area for the shared service. The East Herts Director of Internal Services stressed that scope for major IT

changes was limited given that 100 Authorities all used the same software provider. Members were advised that a future development was the possibility of a local Council Tax/Benefits system, which was due to go live in 2013.

Members were reminded that it was now important to allow Senior Officers the opportunity to let the new shared service bed in at East Herts and Stevenage. Officers needed the time to get the shared service working before both Authorities looked at how to improve the service.

In response to a number of queries from the Chairman, Members were advised that the Head of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service had direct control over the service. However, the Head of the Shared Service had little control over IT issues and Directors at East Herts and Stevenage would ensure the priorities of the shared service were being met.

Senior Officers would ensure that any IT matters relating to the shared service were being given priority over all other IT development work that was not directly related to the shared service.

The Joint Committee was advised that performance targets would need to be standardised and agreed by both Authorities. East Herts and Stevenage would however retain an element of flexibility in terms of target setting.

In response to a query from the Chairman, Members were advised that the standardised targets would very likely be approved prior to the next meeting of the Joint Committee. Officers were meeting to discuss this issue the week beginning 30 January 2012 and the targets would be set in the weeks that followed.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the draft 2012/13 service plan be approved.

The meeting closed at 6.15 pm

Chairman
Date