

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 MONDAY 1 JULY 2013, AT
6.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs J Lloyd (Chairman).
Councillors L Haysey, G McAndrew,
J Thornton and A Webb.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Scott Crudginton	- Strategic Director (Resources)
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Officer
Su Tarran	- Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service
Adele Taylor	- Director of Finance and Support Services

1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN

It was proposed and seconded that Councillors J Lloyd and M Tindale be appointed Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively of the East Herts Council and Stevenage Borough Council Joint Revenues and Benefits Committee for the 2013/14 civic year.

This was agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED – that Councillors J Lloyd and M Tindale be appointed Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively of the East Herts Council and Stevenage Borough Council Joint Revenues and Benefits Committee for the 2013/14 civic year.

2 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors S Batson and M Tindale. It was noted that Councillor G McAndrew was in attendance as substitute for Councillor M Tindale.

3 MINUTES – 18 FEBRUARY 2013

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 18 February 2013 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 respect of performance reporting and future challenges facing the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service. A detailed summary of the Discretionary Housing Payments awarded by East Herts Council and Stevenage Borough Council as at 1 July 2013 was also tabled for Members.

Members were also provided with a summary of the volumes of correspondence received by Benefits Officers. The Head of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service stated that the volumes of correspondence received by Officers had fluctuated significantly. She advised that the transfer process to Personal Independence Payments from Disability Living Allowance was ongoing.

The Head of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service reminded Members of the significant changes in welfare reform that had come into effect since April 2013. Members were further advised that the major implementation phase of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service had concluded and Officers had worked very hard to date in ensuring this was the case.

In response to a number of queries from Members regarding discretionary housing payments, the Stevenage

Strategic Director (Resources) advised that such payments were not a replacement or proxy payment for housing benefit. Members were advised that it was important that the public's expectations were managed in respect of discretionary housing payments.

In response to a query from Councillor A Webb, the Head of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service updated Members regarding the housing benefits situation for families of armed forces personnel who were absent from home whilst on deployment.

In response to a Member's query regarding the differing approaches regarding data protection in place at East Herts Council and Stevenage Borough Council, the Head of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service stated that Officers never released data unless there was a specific signed authority from a housing benefits claimant.

The Stevenage Strategic Director (Resources) and the East Herts Director of Finance and Support Services undertook to provide Members with a written response regarding the issue of data protection and data sharing between Council departments.

Councillor L Haysey requested that Members' gratitude be passed onto Officers for their recent hard work.

Officers stated that, given the in-year increases in both the amount of correspondence and the complexity of issues, there was the possibility that there would be an increase in the number of complaints in respect of response times.

The Director of Finance and Support Services stated that Officers also received a number of complimentary letters from residents thanking them for their efforts.

The Committee received the report.

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

(B) a written response regarding the issue of data protection and data sharing between Council departments be provided by the Stevenage Strategic Director (Resources) and the East Herts Director of Finance and Support Services.

The meeting closed at 7.17 pm

Chairman
Date