



MEETING : EAST HERTS COUNCIL AND STEVENAGE
BOROUGH COUNCIL JOINT REVENUES AND
BENEFITS COMMITTEE
VENUE : ROOM 27, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD
DATE : MONDAY 21ST OCTOBER, 2013
TIME : 6.00 PM

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE:

EAST HERTS COUNCIL:

Councillors: L Haysey, J Thornton and M Tindale (Vice-Chairman).

Substitutes: G McAndrew.

(Note: Substitution arrangements must be notified by the absent Member to Democratic Services 24 hours before the meeting).

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL:

Councillors: J Lloyd (Chairman), S Batson and A Webb.

Substitutes: R Raynor.

CONTACT OFFICER: Peter Mannings
01279 502174
E-mail: peter.mannings@eastherts.gov.uk

DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

1. A Member, present at a meeting of the Authority, or any committee, sub-committee, joint committee or joint sub-committee of the Authority, with a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPI) in any matter to be considered or being considered at a meeting:
 - must not participate in any discussion of the matter at the meeting;
 - must not participate in any vote taken on the matter at the meeting;
 - must disclose the interest to the meeting, whether registered or not, subject to the provisions of section 32 of the Localism Act 2011;
 - if the interest is not registered and is not the subject of a pending notification, must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest within 28 days;
 - must leave the room while any discussion or voting takes place.
2. A DPI is an interest of a Member or their partner (which means spouse or civil partner, a person with whom they are living as husband or wife, or a person with whom they are living as if they were civil partners) within the descriptions as defined in the Localism Act 2011.
3. The Authority may grant a Member dispensation, but only in limited circumstances, to enable him/her to participate and vote on a matter in which they have a DPI.
4. It is a criminal offence to:
 - fail to disclose a disclosable pecuniary interest at a meeting if it is not on the register;
 - fail to notify the Monitoring Officer, within 28 days, of a DPI that is not on the register that a Member disclosed to a meeting;
 - participate in any discussion or vote on a matter in which a Member has a DPI;
 - knowingly or recklessly provide information that is false or misleading in notifying the Monitoring Officer of a DPI or in disclosing such interest to a meeting.

(Note: The criminal penalties available to a court are to impose a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale and disqualification from being a councillor for up to 5 years.)

AGENDA:

1. Apologies
2. Chairman's Announcements
3. Declarations of Interest
4. Minutes – 1 July 2013 (Pages 5 – 8).
5. Quarterly Update (Pages 9 – 26).
6. Urgent Business

To consider such other business as, in the opinion of the Chairman of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration and is not likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information.

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

EAST HERTS COUNCIL AND STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

EAST HERTS COUNCIL AND STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
JOINT REVENUES AND BENEFITS COMMITTEE – 21 OCTOBER
2013

REPORT BY THE HEAD OF REVENUES AND BENEFITS SHARED SERVICE

5. QUARTERLY UPDATE

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report:

- To report to committee the current position in the following areas.
- Performance reporting
- Future challenges
- Consideration of Customer Charter.

<u>RECOMMENDATION FOR EAST HERTS COUNCIL AND STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL REVENUES AND BENEFITS COMMITTEE:</u> That	
(A)	The report be received.

1.0 Background

1.1 Since the last report to committee (July 2013) The Benefit Cap has been introduced, and various changes introduced in the wider welfare reforms agenda.

1.2 These have not been without their challenges and the report details these with the current position and future challenges facing the service.

2.0 Report

2.1 **Performance reporting Workload**

2.1.1 The workload received by the Benefits Service continues to increase and is currently 13 % higher (East Herts 17% and Stevenage Borough 10%) than that for the same period last year.

Work received April to August	EHC	SBC	Total
2012	20136	23446	43582
2013	23606	25721	49327
% increase	17.23	9.7	13.18

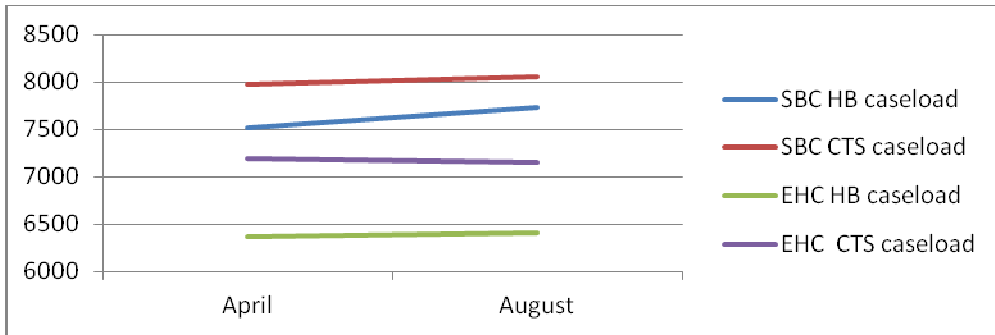
“Workload” relates to the number of case level items of correspondence received The main sources are; 1. From the customer/landlord or other representative in the post or hand delivered to the offices. 2. From the DWP via ATLAS, 3. from the DWP via ETD, 4. From any party via email or other electronic source.

E.g. If a claim form is received in the post with 10 supporting documents this is counted as 1 item because it relates to one claim.

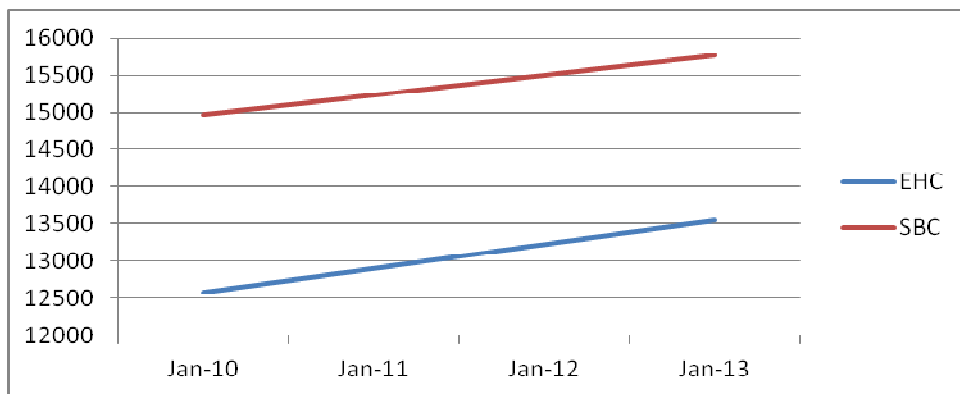
2.1.3 To put these figures into context, the following table demonstrates the increased benefits workload since the shared service was scoped.

	East Herts	Stevenage	Total
Workload received April-August 2010/11	12845	14886	27731
Workload received April to August 2013/14	23606	25721	49327
% Increase	84%	73%	78%

2.1.4 Caseload has in contrast remained relatively stable this year, although EHC’s CTS caseload has reduced slightly.



2.1.5 In contrast the caseload since the scoping of the shared service has increased more significantly.



2.1.6 In conjunction with the increased caseload the transactions per claim have increased. Anecdotally this is attributed to changes in tax credits.

Based on 5 months workload	East Herts	Stevenage
Transactions per HB caseload at August 2010	2.2	2.1
Transactions per HB caseload at August 2013	3.7	3.3
% Increase	63%	57%

Discretionary Housing Payments

2.2.1 The demand for Discretionary Housing payments arising from the changes in the welfare reforms has also risen significantly, and has proven to be a very resource intensive work stream.

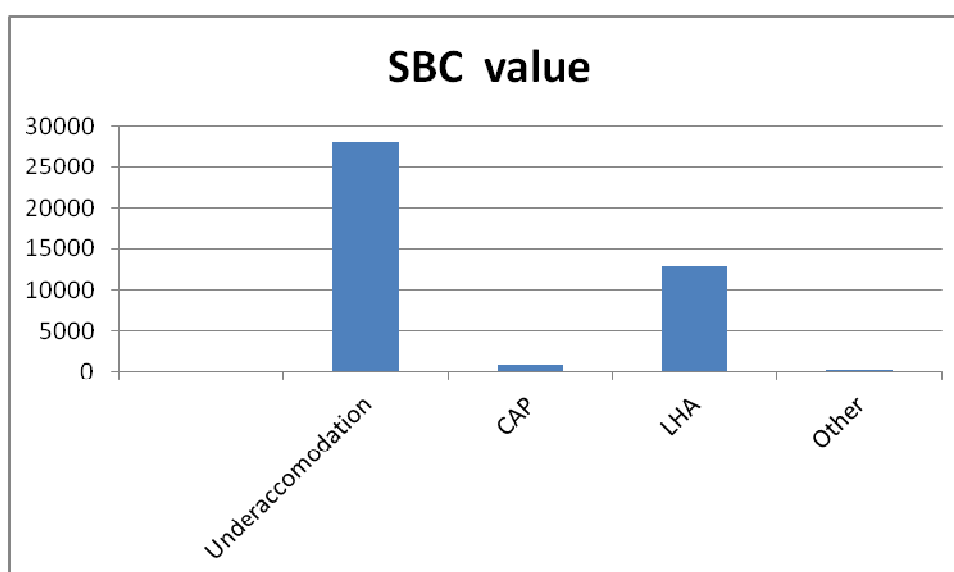
	DHP claims awarded <u>in all</u> of 12/13	DHP requests received April to September 2013
East Herts Budget £162 055	161	237
Stevenage Budget £163 535	110	232

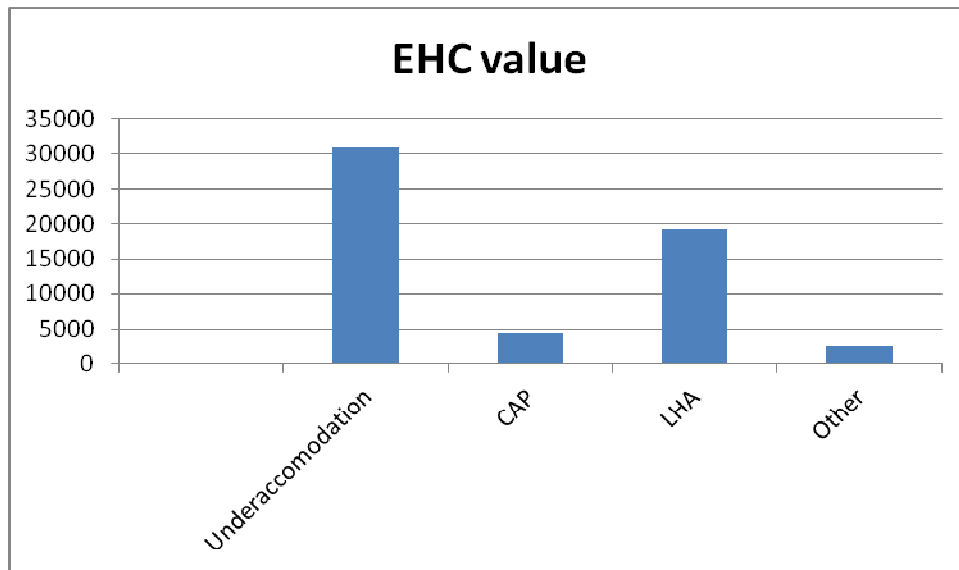
2.2.2 Most awards are made for three month periods, which encourages customers to explore longer term solutions to the impact of the welfare reforms. Customers are free to reapply for a further award, but there is an expectation that they will provide evidence of their activity in resolving the situation.

2.2.3 Those customers affected by the under accommodation restrictions living in properties with significant disabled adaptations etc were awarded 50% of their shortfall for six months, in an attempt to offer some degree of certainty to those least able to find alternative accommodation.

2.2.4 As part of the ongoing monitoring and review of spend in this area, we have been able to offer improved support to those with disabled adaptations from October. This will give 100% of the shortfall until the end of the financial year.

2.2.5 The graphs below shows where the DHP has been spent in relation to cause of request.





2.2.6 It is unlikely that we will know what the DHP budget will be for 14/15 until the new year.

N181 performance

2.3.1 The current performance for Benefits N181 shows a disparity, between Councils. However as the outstanding workload continues to be at the same date* for each Council, other factors may need to be considered for the cause.

**Work is processed in date order. Aligning each work stream means for example that both Councils Atlas files have been processed up to the 18 September 2013.*

2.3.2 Initial investigations indicate that some differences may be attributed to customer behaviour. This is best demonstrated by an example. Consideration will be given as to how best to address these customer behaviours to improve service delivery.

Customer “A”

Customer A, submits a claim form which is partially completed and includes only some of the necessary evidence. The performance indicator starts counting on receipt of this incomplete claim form.

The service writes to the customer advising what information is necessary to complete the application. The customer has one

month to provide this information before the claim is deemed defective.

The customer provides some of the required information after three weeks but not enough for the claim to be assessed.

The service has to write to the customer again. Depending on how much information is missing, the customer may be given additional time to produce the data, beyond the one month statutory period, which commenced at the initial request date.

It is worth noting that the service does not have to grant this additional time. It could deem the case defective after one month, and the customer would have to reapply. This would improve the performance statistics but not provide a high level of customer service.

The customer provides the remaining information, enabling the claim to be assessed. The performance clock now stops.

Customer “B”

Customer B submits a claim form and all necessary evidence to assess his claim. The performance indicator starts counting on receipt of the claim form. The claim is assessed and put into payment. The performance clock now stops.

- 2.3.3. New claims performance indicators for this year show the following disparity.

New Claims	East Herts Days	Stevenage Days
April	22.65	43.05
May	27.42	48.36
June	29.03	39.62
July	32.41	37.02
August	24.86	30.06

- 2.3.4. As previously discussed, the SBC new claims caseload required some tidying up at the beginning of the year, producing higher timelines. This was because if a claim becomes defective but is not manually closed down by an officer, the performance indicator clock keeps ticking.

	Cumulative average time to process new claims and changes in circumstances for Housing Benefit.
East Herts	13.44 days (6 data cuts)
Stevenage	26.08 days (5 data cuts)

2.3.5 From mid September the processing of some ATLAS files will be partially automated. This will contribute to improvements in changes in circumstances performance and reduce overpayments created by the frequent alterations in awards of working and child tax credits.

2.4 Benefits CAP

2.4.1 The Benefit cap was introduced between July and September 2013. Pre introduction, the DWP advised of 42 households in East Herts and 74 households in Stevenage were likely to be affected. The current position is:

Households affected by the Benefits CAP	East Herts Households	Stevenage Households
Expected	42	74
Actual at 23.9.13	30	35

The impact on the Discretionary Housing Payment fund has as yet been less than initially expected. Only five applications for DHP (3 for EHC and 2 for SBC) have been received to date.

2.5 Council Tax and Business Rates

2.5.1 The Revenues service have also been affected by the impact of welfare reforms.

It was not possible prior to April to adequately quantify the additional burden on resources that the introduction of CTS would have on the service. This has been two fold.

- 2.5.2 Firstly the level of enquiries to the service in respect of the reduced 'benefit award' affecting in excess of 8200 (working age) properties.
- 2.5.3 Secondly the ongoing increase in 'management' of the collection and recovery of council tax from in excess of 6500 accounts which previously had their full liability paid automatically by Council Tax Benefit. These accounts are disproportionately more resource intensive than non benefit dependant properties.
- 2.5.4 The technical changes in Council Tax in relation to empty and uninhabitable homes is a further source of communication and complaint.
- 2.5.6 Every change in Benefits generates a new Council Tax bill, revised payment profiles and or recovery actions. As demonstrated above, the frequency of changes administered has also increased since the shared service was scoped, and the impact of this on the Revenues workload should not be underestimated.
- 2.5.7 One indicator of this impact is demonstrated by the increase in reminders issued to Council Tax payers.

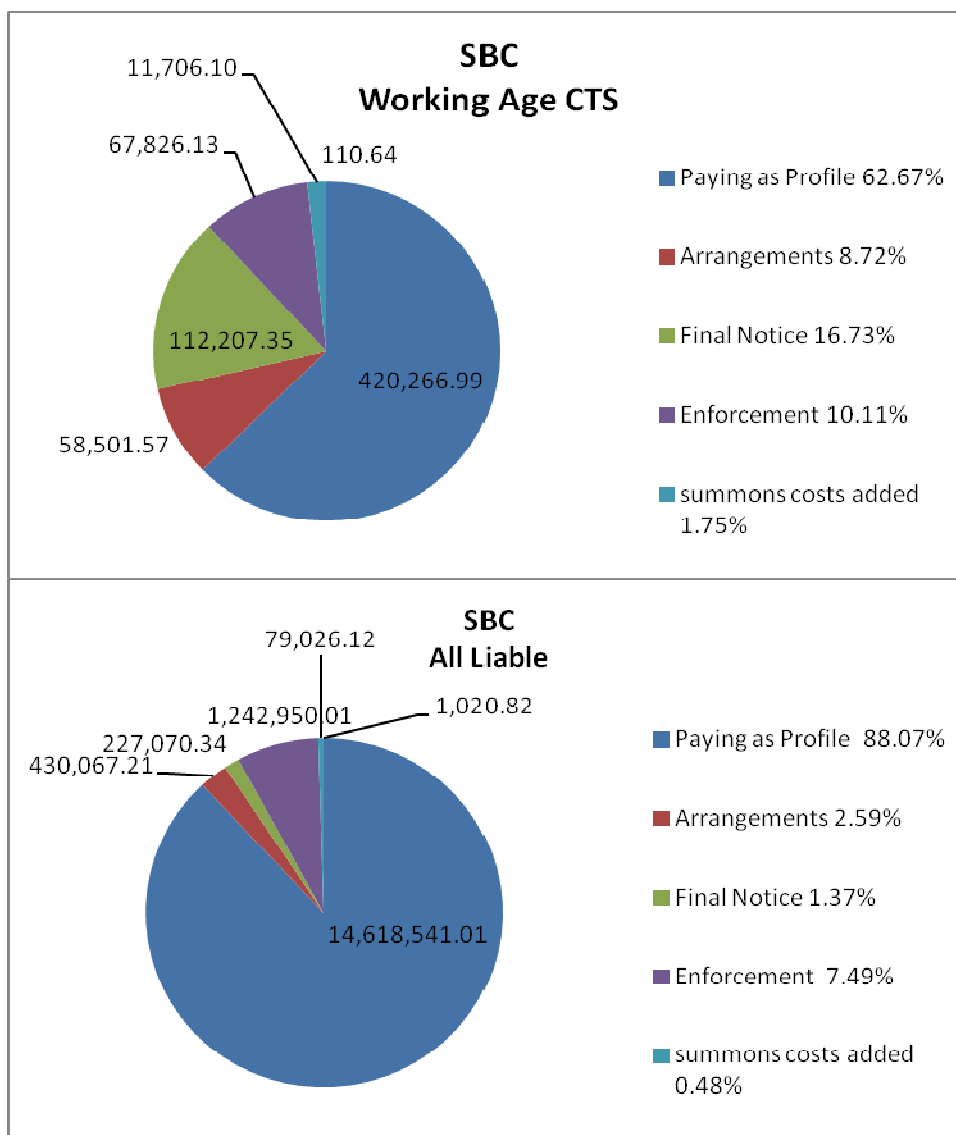
	Reminders issued 2012 April-September	Reminders issued April-September 2013-14	Average value of reminder in 2013-14	% change
East Herts	9044	10536	£111.99	16.5%
Stevenage	6399	11254	£96.08	75.8%

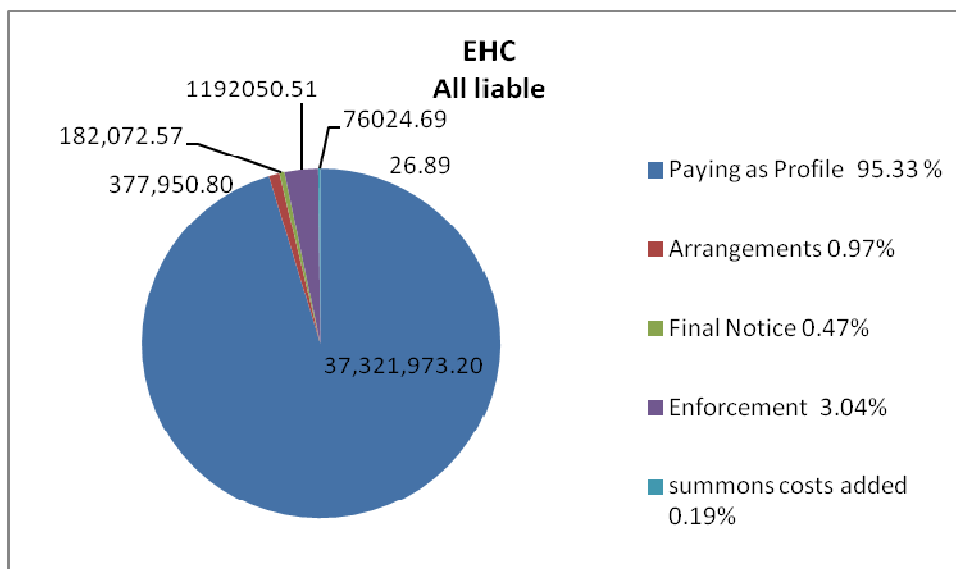
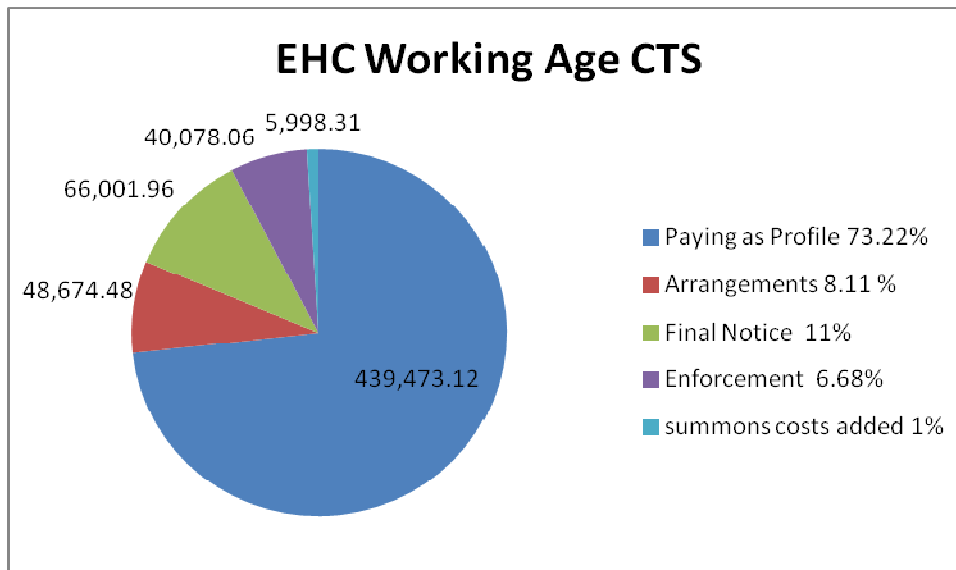
- 2.5.8 There were approximately 6530 customers on the 31.3.13 who received 100% of their Council Tax liability paid for by Council Tax Benefit. They would previously have had little interaction with the revenues service other than a bill each March confirming that they had nothing to pay for the coming financial year. These customers have proved to be resource intensive, and consequently existing customers (both Council Tax and Business Rates) have experienced a deterioration in the level of service that they are accustomed to.

2.5.9 In an attempt to support these new payers, additional letters have been sent encouraging payment of the liability and encouraging them to avoid the additional £80 costs when a summons is generated. Summons action has been deferred until October on these cases.

Once a liability order is secured, any account owing over £130.00 (approximately) will be sent to bailiffs for collection. This represents £80.00 costs and £50.00 arrears.

The arrears profile in September for all customers, and for those working age customers in receipt of CTS are detailed below.





2.5.10 Both Councils are addressing the welfare reform issues corporately and significant joint working is being carried out. East Herts have funded three administrative posts to 31 March 2014, and increased the transactions managed by the councils corporate customer support team. Stevenage have increased capacity in the customer support centre to assist with telephone contact for Housing Benefit enquiries.

2.5.11 The service continues to rely on the support of agency staff and off site processing, and £100k was provided by each council within the budget to support this during 13/14. External resources are becoming more difficult to secure.

2.5.12 An 'anytime' contract for offsite capacity for Revenues and Benefits services was put out to tender recently, and is currently undergoing the review process. This should prove access to resources as and when needed over a four year period, subject to need and available funds.

2.6. Budget Monitoring

2.6.1 The 2012/13 budget outturn has been approved by Directors and is attached at **Essential Reference Paper 'B'** for consideration.

2.6.2 Work has commenced on the budget for 13/14 and will be reported separately.

2.6.3 Retained costs: Stevenage Councils retained costs in the 2012/13 budget are currently £382,266. Following a review of these costs, the Directors are in discussion over their accessibility.

3.0 Future Challenges

3.1 Universal credit has had significant press coverage in recent months, and it is unclear from the various reports exactly how much progress is being achieved towards national roll out. It is increasingly unlikely however that there will be any significant impact on the service during the first half of 2014/15.

3.2 The DWP are unable to provide any timescales for the transfer of claims, but are already identifying areas of work they are unable to take on in the medium term as they are deemed too complex.

3.3 The transfer of Pensioner claims into the pension service (they are not included in universal credit) may also slip beyond the last 2016 target.

4.0 Customer charter

4.1 The service plan for the shared service included an objective to devise a customer charter for approval by the shared service Members committee in October 2013. The attached Customer Charter is attached therefore for approval. Please see **Essential Reference Paper 'C'**.

5.0 Implications/Consultations

5.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers:

None.

Contact Members:

Councillor J Lloyd, Executive Member for Resources (Stevenage Borough Council).
Councillor M Tindale, Executive Member for Finance (East Herts Council).

Contact Officer:

Su Tarran – Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service, Extn: 2075.

Report Author:

Su Tarran – Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service, Extn: 2075.

ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER 'A'

IMPLICATIONS/CONSULTATIONS:

<p>Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/ Objectives <i>(delete as appropriate):</i></p>	<p>East Herts Council (People)</p> <p>This priority focuses on enhancing the quality of life, health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, particularly those who are vulnerable</p> <p>Stevenage Borough Council: Priorities</p> <p>A Vibrant Town: Improve the economy and encourage financial resilience Regenerate the town centre and neighbourhoods</p> <p>A Quality Environment Provide affordable homes and housing growth Help people feel safe</p> <p>An Excellent Council Deliver value for money Putting customers first</p>
<p>Consultation:</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Legal:</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Financial:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Only as referenced in the report</i>
<p>Human Resource:</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Risk Management:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Only as referenced in the report.</i>

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FINANCE & SUPPORT SERVICES

ISR2

Code: Service	2011/12 ACTUAL £	2012/13 ESTIMATE £	2012/13 PROBABLE £	2012/13 ACTUAL £	2013/14 ESTIMATE £
17719 REVENUES & HOUSING BENEFITS - SHARED SERVICE					
EXPENDITURE					
Employees					
0110 Salaries	782,310	2,189,200	2,170,160	2,237,623.63	2,209,330
0590 Professional Training	1,360	1,500	1,500	735.00	5,000
0630 Home Working Allowance	855	3,500	6,850	7,252.48	6,910
0651 Long Service Award	0	560	540	570.00	350
0661 Staff Appointment Expenses	0	0	1,500	1,080.00	0
0670 Retirement Gifts	0	120	150	0.00	280
0682 Eye Tests	0	600	600	0.00	600
0693 Childcare Fees	129	100	1,300	1,029.69	350
0810 Agency Staff	11,728	0	240,000	311,409.14	200,000
Transport Related Expenses					
2510 Car Expenses	7,351	31,200	26,000	27,068.41	25,500
2610 Lease Car Costs	2,475	6,670	4,070	4,134.32	3,400
2710 Travel Allowance	723	1,400	1,400	1,260.90	1,400
Supplies & Services					
3010 Purchase & Maint of Equipment	2,734	5,000	5,000	3,215.36	5,000
3015 CRB Payments	26	0	50	52.00	50
3038 BFI Funding	3,525	5,000	6,000	6,850.40	6,000
3110 Protective Clothing & Uniforms	0	100	100	0.00	100
3210 General Stationery	3,414	27,000	24,000	20,445.21	24,000
3220 Printing	20,000	40,400	40,000	40,000.00	40,000
3230 Photocopying	480	7,000	5,000	2,449.60	5,000
3250 Books & Publications	389	3,000	1,600	1,392.13	1,600
3310 Advertising	0	10,600	5,030	4,610.20	6,000
3401 Subscriptions	1,325	6,000	5,000	4,787.03	5,000
3510 Telephones	998	8,700	7,500	3,728.34	7,600
3572 Postages	32,219	195,000	137,000	137,475.50	140,000
3610 Subsistence Allowance	0	150	50	12.44	50
3620 Training & Development	3,066	9,500	9,500	7,600.00	6,000
3820 Misc & Third Party Insurance	4,223	15,420	14,630	14,630.00	14,930
3870 Other Expenses	2,020	10,000	10,000	6,086.80	10,000
3594 Data Link	0	16,000	0	0.00	0
3594 Additional Licences	0	7,160	0	0.00	0
3594 Broadband	0	21,880	0	0.00	0
Support Services & Divisional Costs					
6010 Central Offices Apportioned	0	64,770	63,950	63,950.00	62,880
6110 Divisional Costs	0	92,310	98,720	98,720.00	98,220
6110 Support Services	0	796,650	834,210	834,210.00	850,540
6223 Internal Printing	0	3,110	5,000	5,000.00	5,070
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	881,350	3,579,600	3,726,410	3,847,378.58	3,741,160

FINANCE & SUPPORT SERVICES

ISR2A

Code: Service	2011/12 ACTUAL £	2012/13 ESTIMATE £	2012/13 PROBABLE £	2012/13 ACTUAL £	2013/14 ESTIMATE £
17719 REVENUES & HOUSING BENEFITS - SHARED SERVICE					
INCOME					
Government Grants					
9056 DWP Grants	0	0	0	28,704.59	0
Other Grants Reimbursements and Contributions					
9130 Income From Other Authorities	355,833	1,281,720	1,242,580	1,380,303.51	1,273,830
Supplementary	0	0	120,000		0
T's and C's Savings	0	0	0		7,030
Strain Cost	0	0	1,720		1,720
SBC Post	0	0	0		-19,000
Share of Growth/Savings	0	0	0		90,180
Recharges					
9970 Section Recharge	525,517	2,297,880	2,362,110	2,438,370.48	2,387,400
TOTAL INCOME	<u>881,350</u>	<u>3,579,600</u>	<u>3,726,410</u>	<u>3,847,378.58</u>	<u>3,741,160</u>
NET EXPENDITURE TO SUMMARY	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0.00</u>	<u>0</u>

When things go wrong

If you disagree with a decision in relation to your Housing Benefit award (rent allowance or rent rebate) you can ask us to look at it again by writing to us within a month of your benefit decision saying why you think it is wrong - we will review the decision to see if we can change it for you. If we cannot change the decision we will tell you why. If you wish to appeal this decision there is a further independent appeal process administered by the Appeals Tribunal which we will tell you about.

If you disagree with a decision in relation to your Council Tax Support (reduction in council tax) you can ask us to look at it again saying why you think it is wrong. We will look at your claim again and write to you with our decision. If we do not respond to you within 2 months, or if you are still aggrieved by the decision you may appeal direct to the Valuation Tribunal. You can appeal online at www.valuationtribunal.gov.uk or by post to the Valuation Tribunal, Council Tax Reduction Team, First Floor, Hepworth House, 2 Trafford Court, Doncaster, Yorks, DN1 1PN.

If you disagree with a decision in relation to your Business Rates assessment you can contact your local Valuation Office direct:

Stevenage businesses

Valuation Office Agency, St Peters House,
45 Victoria Street, St Albans, AL1 3WZ
Telephone: 03000 501501

East Herts businesses

Valuation Office Agency, Eastbrook,
Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge, CB2 8DU
Telephone: 03000 501501

If you disagree with the level of your Council Tax and think you should be entitled to a discount or reduction/exemption please write to us within 28 days of receipt of your bill. For appeals about the banding of your property you can contact your local Valuation Office direct:

Stevenage & East Herts residents

Valuation Office Agency, Ground Floor, Ferrers House,
Castle Meadow Road, Nottingham, Notts, NG2 1AB
Telephone: 03000 501501

If you wish to complain about how we delivered the service, you can lodge a complaint as follows:

Stevenage residents

If you are not satisfied with the response from the service provider you can contact the Customer Service Centre to make a formal complaint:
Telephone: 01438 242242
Textphone: 01438 242555
email: csc@stevenage.gov.uk

East Herts residents

If you are not satisfied with a response that you receive from an enquiry made to a service, you may feel that you wish to make a complaint.

Please e-mail complaints@eastherts.gov.uk or use the on-line form www.eastherts.gov.uk



Customer Charter

The Revenues & Benefits Service,
Council Offices, Wallfields,
Hertford SG13 8EQ

SBC Tel: 01438 242875 EHC Tel: 01279 655261

The Revenues & Benefits Shared service for East Herts and Stevenage is hosted by East Herts Council. We are committed to providing a high standard of service to all of our customers.

Who we are and what we do

The Revenues & Benefits shared service is responsible for administering the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support schemes, the Discretionary Housing Payment scheme and for the billing and collection of Council Tax and National Non-Domestic Rates (Business Rates).

The service is also responsible for investigating and prosecuting fraud.

Further information about the services are also available on the Council Websites by clicking on the links to Benefits:

Stevenage Borough Council website: www.stevenage.gov.uk

East Herts District Council website: www.eastherts.gov.uk

Customers can also contact the shared service as follows:

In writing: Revenues & Benefits, East Herts Council, Wallfields, Pegs Lane, Hertford, SG13 8EQ

By email: benefits@hertspartnership-ala.gov.uk or revenues@hertspartnership-ala.gov.uk

By telephone (Stevenage residents): 01438 242440 (Benefits)

By telephone (Stevenage residents): 01438 242875 (Council Tax)

By telephone (Stevenage businesses): 01438 242876 (Business Rates)

By telephone (East Herts residents): 01279 655261

Telephone lines are open 9.00am to 5.00pm Monday - Friday

In person: Each Council provides a face to face service for its residents to receive correspondence and to provide information and advice.

For Stevenage residents this is through the Customer Service Centre at Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage, Herts, SG1 1HN open Monday to Friday 8.30am to 5.30pm.

For East Herts residents this is at Bishop's Stortford Council Offices, Charringtons House, The Causeway, Bishops Stortford, CM23 2EN which is open Monday to Friday 8.30am to 5.00pm, and Hertford Council Offices, Wallfields, Pegs Lane, Hertford, SG13 8EQ which is a drop in service on Tuesdays 8.30am to 4pm and Wednesday mornings 8.30am to 12.30pm.

We aim to

- Be professional, helpful and courteous
- Take responsibility for your enquiry
- Deal with your enquiry as quickly as we can
- Provide equal access to our services
- Say sorry when we get things wrong
- Be cost efficient in all our processes, to keep costs to residents to a minimum

We ask that you treat our staff with respect

Operationally we aim to

- Process correspondence within 14 working days from the supply of all necessary information
- Ensure that the take up of Housing benefit, Council tax support, exemptions and discounts is maximised throughout the whole community
- Prevent fraud, investigate and prosecute where appropriate those who claim benefits, exemptions and discounts to which they are not entitled.
- Take steps, where necessary, to minimise overpayments of benefits, but where these do occur, seek to recover with due regard to individual circumstances.

Working together

You can help us to provide a good service in a number of ways:

- Tell us as soon as possible about any changes to your circumstances
- Make sure that the information you give us is accurate and provided in a timely fashion
- If you are unsure or have any questions regarding benefit entitlement, council tax or business rates, contact us as soon as possible.