

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 9 SEPTEMBER
2024, AT 6.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor C Brittain (Chair)
Councillors L Briscoe, A Daar and J Thomas

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Carol Bulloch	- Shared Service Manager (Systems, Support and Control)
Clare Fletcher	- Assistant Director of Finance
Sandra Huntingford	- Shared Services Manager (Business Rates)
Peter Mannings	- Committee Support Officer
Graeme Reid	- Shared Service Manager (Council Tax)

1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

It was proposed by Councillor Daar and seconded by Councillor Briscoe, that Councillor Brittain be appointed Chair of the East Herts Council and Stevenage Borough Council Joint Revenues and Benefits Committee.

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

RESOLVED – that Councillor Brittain be appointed Chair of the East Herts Council and Stevenage Borough Council Joint Revenues and Benefits

Committee.

2 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

3 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no chairman's announcements.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5 MINUTES - 4 JULY 2023

It was proposed by Councillor Daar and seconded by Councillor Thomas that the minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

6 SHARED REVENUES AND BENEFITS SERVICE - ANNUAL UPDATE

The Shared Service Manager (Systems, Support and Control) submitted an annual update report and said that it had been a challenging year in respect of council tax and business rates. She said that housing benefit processing times had improved, and Officer caseloads were reducing.

The Shared Service Manager referred to new ways for customers to self-serve and said that any activity by Members to promote take up would be welcomed.

Members were advised that digital take up of self-service options for customers had been slow.

The Shared Service Manager (Benefits) said that the bulk of customers had been migrated onto universal credit and officer caseloads were stable. He said that council tax was no longer considered as a priority debt where people had other debts. Members were advised that debt collection levels were below pre pandemic levels of collection.

The Shared Service Manager detailed what services were available to customers online and summarised how this saved officers time by avoiding double processing. The Strategic Director said that any changes to the council tax support scheme would mean consulting residents.

The Shared Service Manager (Benefits) said that Officers were looking at ways of simplifying the application process. He referred to streamlining of the claims process and addressing the confusion caused by means testing.

Members were advised that officers were under pressure due to staff sickness and vacancies within the team. The Strategic Director talked about workforce planning. The Shared Service Manager (Council Tax) referred in particular to the challenges of recruiting trained staff and the fact that recruitment activity was not attracting a younger generation to these areas of work.

The Shared Service Manager and the Strategic Director responded to questions from Members. The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the report be received.

7 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 7.19 pm

Chairman
Date