

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 WEDNESDAY 19
OCTOBER 2011, AT 5.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs J Lloyd (Chairman).
Councillors S Batson, L Haysey,
G McAndrew, M Tindale and A Webb.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors D Andrews.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Scott Crudginton	- Strategic Director (Resources)
Alan Madin	- Director of Internal Services
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Assistant
Mark Simpson	- Corporate Change Manager
Su Tarran	- Head of Revenues and Benefits

1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN

It was proposed 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.

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.

2 TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service submitted a report inviting Members to receive the Committee's Terms of Reference and to address any issues of clarity.

The East Herts Council Director of Internal Services reminded Members that the Terms of Reference had been agreed by the Executives of East Herts and Stevenage in June 2011.

The Director advised that the overall performance of the shared service would be monitored by the Committee although both Authorities would continue to receive specific performance data. The Committee could request reports and would also oversee future development plans and consider the terms on which other Authorities wished to be included in the shared service arrangement.

The Committee would not be involved with the setting of Council Tax or the Council Tax base or collection funds. Issues in relation to policy direction and NNDR would also not be within the remit of the Committee. The Director detailed the voting arrangements that would be used when the Committee made decisions.

In response to a query from Councillor G McAndrew, the Director confirmed that the Chairman had the option of exercise a casting vote where there was an equality of votes. The Director stressed that if no second or casting vote was made, a motion would automatically be declared lost.

Councillor M Tindale referred to whether decisions had to be unanimous to be approved by the Committee. The Director advised that the quorum would be three elected Members with one Councillor from each Authority being present. All Members present had to be in agreement for a decision to be approved by the Committee.

Councillor L Haysey referred to whether there were any appointed substitutes for the Committee. Members were advised that, at present, there were no named substitutes for either Authority and any substitute arrangements must be passed to the Committee Officer 24 hours before a meeting was to take place.

The Committee agreed to meet 4 times in the first year and 3 times a year thereafter. The meetings would be hosted by East Herts Council in the first year and by Stevenage Borough Council in the second year.

Councillor G McAndrew sought and was given clarification in respect of the telephony arrangements for the shared service. He also queried whether joint branding would be used on benefits claim forms.

The East Herts Council Director of Internal Services advised that he was meeting with the Strategic Director (Resources), Stevenage Borough Council on a weekly basis to discuss all aspects of project management for the shared service. Members were advised of all the aspects of work being undertaken to ensure the shared service arrangements remained on schedule.

The Committee was advised that the single shared system would go live on 5 December 2011.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Terms of Reference for the Committee, as now detailed, be noted;

(B) the Committee meet 4 times a year in the first year and 3 times a year thereafter; and

(C) meetings take place in the East Herts Council Chamber this year and at Stevenage Borough Council Offices next year.

The Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service submitted a report to advise Members of the progress and future plans for implementation of the Revenues and Benefits shared service and associated risks.

Members were advised that the Authorities had now entered the final 6 to 7 weeks of focus for the implementation of the shared service. The Directors of East Herts and Stevenage were meeting on a weekly basis to address any issues as these arose.

The Committee was advised that the process of matching Officers' strengths to where their skills could be best applied was progressing well and should be concluded by Friday 21 October 2011.

In response to a query from Councillor G McAndrew, the Committee was advised that 21 out of 32 Officers at East Herts were home workers. Members were advised of the challenging timelines being adhered to as part of the process of business reengineering to ensure the "go live" date was not missed.

In response to a query from Councillor J Lloyd, the Committee was advised that documents scanned onto systems at Stevenage or East Herts would appear as available information on the systems in place at both Authorities.

Councillor McAndrew referred to the business processes in place at both Authorities. The Committee was advised that these processes would be standardised where possible.

Members were also advised of the key service features that Officers had identified as indicators that the shared service had gone live. Members were referred to paragraph 2.7.1 of the report now submitted.

Councillor McAndrew commented on whether interface testing would be taking place in the weeks before the "go

live” date. Members were advised that such testing could be carried out in separate modules in advance of the “go live” date. In response to a further query from Councillor McAndrew, Members were advised that both Authorities would retain separate identities in terms of correspondence and forms issued to customers.

In response to a query from Councillor J Lloyd in respect of telephony, Members were advised that customers would be able to make a choice as to who they called when contacting the new shared service. Members of the public could be redirected to East Herts Officers from the Stevenage Customer Service Centre for example.

Members were reminded that Officers anticipated that the move to a Revenues and Benefits Shared Service would result in efficiency savings for both Authorities.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the arrangements and timescales for implementing the Revenues and Benefits shared service be noted.

4 PERFORMANCE REPORTING

The Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service submitted a report setting out the performance of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service.

The Committee was referred to local differences in collection rates and collection profiles. Members were also reminded of the cultural differences between East Herts Council and Stevenage Borough Council in terms of the collection rates process. Members were advised that the situation was not as straightforward as carrying out a like for like comparison of both Authorities.

The Committee noted that some of the processes in place were dictated by the courts. Members were advised that performance at East Herts was monitored via a monthly Corporate Healthcheck whilst Balance Scorecards were

used at Stevenage.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that (A) the performance of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service be noted; and

(B) the future format and content of performance information for the Revenues and Benefits shared service be approved.

5 WORK PROGRAMME AND BUDGET ARRANGEMENTS

The East Herts Council Director of Internal Services reported that the next meeting would consider budgets. The Committee requested that the date for the next meeting be arranged for the end of January 2012 as soon as possible.

In response to a query from Councillor S Batson in respect of the communications plan, the Stevenage Strategic Director (Finance) confirmed that the East Herts Director of Internal Services would give a presentation to Stevenage Officers and also to East Herts Officers.

Members were advised that correspondence had been prepared for issue to the press and to the Citizens Advice Bureaux. E-mails had also been prepared for issue to East Herts and Stevenage Members as soon as the Senior Management Team was in place.

RESOLVED – that (A) the next meeting would consider budgets; and

(B) the date for the next meeting would be arranged as soon as possible.

The meeting closed at 6.50 pm

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Chairman
Date