

JOINT REVENUES AND BENEFITS EXECUTIVE MINUTES

Date: Monday 18 February 2013

Time: 6.00 p.m.

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Stevenage

- Present:** Stevenage Borough Councillors: S Batson MBE DL,
Mrs J Lloyd and A Webb.
- East Herts Councillors: L Haysey, G McAndrew and M Tindale
(Chair)
- In Attendance:** S Crudginton (Strategic Director (Resources) SBC),
A Taylor (Director of Internal Services – East Herts
Council) and S Tarran (Head of Revenues and Benefits).
- Start/End Time:** Start Time: 6.00 p.m.
End Time: 7.07 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were neither apologies for nor declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES – 23 OCTOBER 2012

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of held on 23 October 2012 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

In reply to a question it was confirmed that the ten day processing time quoted in the first paragraph under Item 3 'Performance Reporting and Budget' referred to the time taken for an initial review of a new case and not the time taken to completion.

In response to a request the Committee Clerk undertook to arrange for the agreed minutes to be posted on the East Herts Council website.

3. QUARTERLY UPDATE

The Committee received a report detailing the current position in the following areas:

1. Implementation
2. Performance Reporting
3. Budget Monitoring
4. Service Plans
5. Future Challenges

Members asked a number of detailed questions about the report which were answered by the Officers.

The Committee was advised that the underlying trend showed the number of cases being dealt with was increasing and had increased significantly since the creation of the partnership, the manpower for which had been based on the workload for the year 2010/2011.

In response to concerns that in addition to the increased workload, enquiries and caseload were becoming increasingly complex, the Head of Revenues and Benefits said that, if resources permitted, she would undertake a review the average time spent per case at the end of the year.

Further concerns were expressed about the provisions of the Welfare Reform Act and its potential to generate a large number of benefit enquiries. Both partners undertook to review their Council's contingency arrangements to ensure continuity of service to clients.

The Committee's attention was drawn to recommendations 2 – 4 in the report and advised that that the measures proposed were to reinforce the staffing base and increase resilience in the face of an expected increase in workload.

In reply to a specific question the Head of Revenues and Benefits undertook to investigate the drop off in the collection of Business Rates in East Herts.

In reply to a question about the Council Tax Support scheme the Committee was advised that there was a requirement for each Council to introduce and agree a new scheme for 2014/15 and each following year. A consultation exercise would be required should the Councils make substantive changes to their existing schemes. SBC indicated that, at the current time, it did not intend to change its scheme for the year 2014/2015.

The Committee was advised of a delay to the proposed roll-out of the Benefit Cap and it was estimated that approximately 120 claimants across the two Councils would be affected. The possible effects of the switch to Universal Credits were unknown as was the timescale for implementation. The Committee was reminded that pensioners would not be affected by the introduction of Universal Credits but that a new Pension Credit Scheme could be introduced from 2016 onwards.

The Committee was further advised that the focus of the Service Plan would be on the introduction of the Council Tax Support scheme, the provisions of the Welfare Reform Act and the new business rates scheme.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. The report be noted.
2. The identification of a potential growth item of £19k, as detailed in paragraph 2.3.3 in the report, be supported.
3. The request for maternity leave cover, as detailed in paragraph 2.3.4 in the report, be supported.
4. The request to re-grade a post up to grade 7, as detailed in paragraph 2.3.5 in the report, be supported.
5. The service plan be accepted.

4. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

5. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Not required.

PART II

6. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.