

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
EAST HERTS COUNCIL AND STEVENAGE
BOROUGH COUNCIL JOINT REVENUES
AND BENEFITS COMMITTEE HELD IN THE
ROOM 27, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
MONDAY 21 OCTOBER 2013, AT 6.00 PM

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

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Scott Crudgington	- 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

5 MINUTES – 1 JULY 2013

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held
on 1 July 2013 be confirmed as a correct record
and signed by the Chairman.

6 QUARTERLY UPDATE

The Head of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service submitted a quarterly update in respect of performance reporting and future challenges facing the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service. Members were also invited to consider and approve the Customer Charter detailed on pages 25 – 26 of the report now submitted.

Members were advised that there had been significant changes since the July meeting and the workload of

Officers had continued to increase and was currently 13 % higher than the same period last year. In conjunction with the increased caseload, the number of transactions per claim had also increased. Officers attributed this particular increase to changes in tax credits.

Members were also advised that the demand for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) had also risen significantly and had proven to be a very resource intensive work stream.

The Head of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service stated that it was unlikely that either East Herts or Stevenage would know what the DHP budget would be for 2014/15 until the new year. Members were updated in respect of performance relating to N181, particularly the disparity between the workload of different local Authorities.

Members were advised that new claims for housing benefit had placed a much higher burden of proof on claimants, particularly in relation to employment and changes to housing.

Members were also advised that the shared service had also been affected by the impact of welfare reforms. It was not possible however, to adequately quantify the additional burden on resources relating to the introduction of Council Tax Support.

The Head of the Shared Service stated that both East Herts and Stevenage Councils were addressing the welfare reform issues corporately and significant joint working was being carried out. East Herts had funded three administrative posts to 31 March 2014, and had increased the transactions managed by the Council's corporate customer support team. Stevenage had also increased capacity in the customer support centre to assist with telephone Housing Benefit enquiries.

Members were advised that universal credit had had

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

Members were reminded that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) had been unable to provide any timescales for the transfer of claims, but had already identified areas of complex work that the DWP were unable to take on in the medium term.

Members were reminded that the service plan for the shared service had included an objective to devise a customer charter for approval by Members in October 2013.

Members were advised that there was likely to be a reduced level of funding for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) for the year ahead. The Stevenage Strategic Director (Resources) commented that DHPs were not a proxy payment for housing benefit.

The Committee received the report and approved the Customer Charter as detailed at Essential Reference Paper 'C' to the report now submitted.

RESOLVED – that (A) the report be received; and
(B) the Customer Charter for the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service be approved.

The meeting closed at 6.55 pm

Chairman
Date