

JOINT REVENUES AND BENEFITS EXECUTIVE MINUTES

Date: Monday 30 June 2014

Time: 6.00 p.m.

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Stevenage

- Present:** Stevenage Borough Councillors: Mrs J Lloyd, J Thomas and A Webb.
East Herts Councillors: L Haysey, and J Thornton.
- 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: 6.55 p.m.

1. APPOINTMENT OF A CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN

The Committee Clerk opened the meeting and nominations were requested for the appointment of the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Joint Revenues and Benefits Committee for the 2014 / 2015 Municipal Year.

It was duly proposed and seconded that Councillor M Tindale be appointed as Chairman for the 2014 / 2015 Municipal Year.

There being no other nominations a vote was taken and it was **RESOLVED** that Councillor M Tindale be appointed as Chairman of the Joint Revenues and Benefits Committee for the 2014 / 2015 Municipal Year.

As Councillor Tindale had given his apologies for the meeting it was proposed, seconded and **RESOLVED** that Councillor L Haysey be appointed as Chairman for the meeting.

It was duly proposed and seconded that Councillor Mrs J Lloyd be appointed as Vice Chairman for the 2014 / 2015 Municipal Year.

There being no other nominations a vote was taken and it was **RESOLVED** that Councillor Mrs J Lloyd be appointed as Vice Chairman of the Joint Revenues and Benefits Committee for the Municipal Year 2014 / 2015.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

An apology for absence was received from Councillor M Tindale.

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES – 28 JANUARY 2014

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of held on 28 January 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. QUARTERLY UPDATE

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

1. Performance Monitoring
2. Budget Outturn 2013/2014
3. Other Challenges

The Committee was advised that the shared service was currently under review with Directors of both authorities involved.

The Committee was further advised that the performance of the service should be judged against a backdrop of an increasing number of claimant cases and an increasing workload within those cases as the service was operating at a level 54.7% higher than when originally scoped.

In reply to a number of questions relating to Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) the Committee was advised that as there were a high number of applicants reapplying for this benefit a decision had been taken to review the cases of those not reapplying to determine if they were missing out on potential benefits. Demand for DHP had increased in Stevenage and it was noted that there had been a proactive working arrangement between the Housing Service in Stevenage and the Revenues and Benefits Team to identify those most in need.

The Committee was reminded that DHP was not a 'proxy' for benefits payments and that many claims had been turned down because the claimant was already receiving the maximum allowance. A review of other refused claims had revealed no underlying trends in the reason for refusal. It was noted that the claimant had no right of appeal for a refused claim but that a second officer decision on the case could be provided should the claimant request it. To date very few had taken up that option.

The issues around the localisation of Business Rates and the changes to collection arrangements were discussed and the Committee was advised that both Councils had replied in strong terms to a Central Government consultation and had highlighted the issues that local authorities faced when dealing with businesses that were skilled in reducing their tax burdens. Appeals by businesses tied up Council resources and led to uncertainty about future income levels.

The Committee was further advised that the administrative burden for a raft

of discretionary business rate reliefs introduced by the Government was currently the responsibility of the Local Authority.

The Committee was advised of the intention of the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to introduce a Single Fraud Investigation Service into Stevenage and East Herts from 1 May 2015. Officers were currently considering their options and a report would be presented to the Executive at both Councils in late Autumn.

It was **RESOLVED** that the report be received and noted.

4. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

5. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Not required.

PART II

6. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.