

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
24 JUNE 2019, AT 6.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs J Lloyd (Chairman)
Councillors M Stevenson, J Thomas and
G Williamson.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Clare Fletcher	- Assistant Director of Finance
Sandra Huntingford	- Assistant Revenue Manager
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Officer
Theresa Mortimer	- Benefits Manager
Graeme Reid	- Revenues Manager
Su Tarran	- Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service

1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN

It was proposed by Councillor G Williamson and seconded by Councillor M Stevenson that Councillor J Lloyd be appointed Chairman of the East Herts Council and Stevenage Borough Council Joint Revenues and Benefits Committee for the 2019/20 civic year.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, this

motion was declared CARRIED.

It was proposed by Councillor J Lloyd and seconded by Councillor M Stevenson that Councillor G Williamson be appointed Vice-Chairman of the East Herts Council and Stevenage Borough Council Joint Revenues and Benefits Committee for the 2019/20 civic year.

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

RESOLVED – that Councillors J Lloyd and G Williamson be appointed Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively of the East Herts Council and Stevenage Borough Council Joint Revenues and Benefits Committee for the 2019/20 civic year.

2 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Boylan and L Briscoe.

3 MINUTES - 25 JUNE 2018

It was proposed by Councillor G Williamson and seconded by Councillor J Lloyd that the minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2018 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting

held on 25 June 2018 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4 ANNUAL UPDATE

The Head of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service submitted an annual update report in relation to the following areas:

- Performance reporting
- Other challenges
- Budget outturn

The Head of the Shared Service advised that there had been a 1% reduction in workload. The peak times were January to March and Officers had received 120,000 individual items of correspondence in 2018/19. Members were advised that the level of Housing Benefit claimed in subsidy had reached £63.7m in 2018/19.

The Head of the Shared Service detailed a number of overpayment scenarios and detailed the level of debt in each local Authority area. She stated that debt recovery took place over a long period of time and was a very resource intensive operation. Members were advised that Stevenage Borough Council was recovering more debt than was being created and East Herts Council was nearly there in that respect.

The Head of the Shared Service emphasised that the amount of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) grants received each year changed based on the priorities that the DWP considered needed supporting.

There is no restriction on how much of the total grant was spent on each of these priorities.

The Shared Service Manager (Benefits) referred to the increase in cases from October 2018 to March 2019. She stressed that each case was considered on its merits taking into account matters such as children or complex disabilities.

The Head of the Shared Service commented that demand always outweighed the available DHP grants. She also advised Members that the housing benefit caseload was reducing and the caseload for Council Tax support had also reduced subject to a number of variations.

Members were advised of the difficulties surrounding the collection of arrears in that agreed sustainable payment plans often did not prove to have longevity in many cases. The Head of the Shared Service commented on the abbreviations in respect of data matching as detailed in paragraph 2.3.2 of the report submitted. She stated that Officers had a good working relationship with the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB).

The Head of the Shared Service referred in detail to a number of tables of performance data in the report and stated that it had been a fantastic year for the business rates team. She referred in particular to business rates liabilities and reliefs, mandatory reliefs granted and reductions in prior year areas.

The Head of the Shared Service commented on the

Business Improvement District (BID) for Bishop’s Stortford as being an intensive activity that had proved to be a steep learning curve which would assist with future BIDS. Members were advised on progress in respect of digital solutions and also in respect of the time consuming impact on the service of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.

The Head of the Shared Service referred to the very satisfying results of the internal and external Audits. The Stevenage Borough Council Assistant Director of Finance thanked the team for what had been a very productive and good year.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the report be received.

The meeting closed at 7.10 pm

Chairman
Date