

# SHARED REVENUES PARTNERSHIP JOINT COMMITTEE

## MINUTES

WEDNESDAY 7TH NOVEMBER 2018

GIPPING ROOM, GRAFTON HOUSE

4.00 PM

**Present:** Councillors S Meudec, J Whitehead, P Patrick, D Ellesmere (Substitute) and K Guthrie (Substitute)

**23. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors D Haley, J Osborne and B Rudkin.

**24. Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 September 2018**

**RESOLVED:**

that the Minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2018 be signed as a true record.

**25. To Confirm or Vary the Order of Business**

**RESOLVED:**

that the Order of Business be confirmed as printed on the Agenda.

**26. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**27. To Confirm an Additional Meeting of the Shared Revenues Partnership Joint Committee on Tuesday 11 December 2018 at 4pm in the Gipping Room**

27.1 There was a debate on whether the January meeting of the Committee would be required if the additional meeting in December was held. The need to discuss Quarter 3 figures at the January meeting was noted.

**RESOLVED:**

- a) that the additional meeting to be held on Tuesday 11 December 2018 at 4pm be confirmed.
- b) that the dates and times of the January and March meetings be noted.

**28. SRP/18/07 Shared Revenues Partnership - Service Report**

- 28.1 The Operations Manager – Benefits and Business Support, Amy Mayes, reported that there had been some delays as a result of customers awaiting a Universal Credit decision. The number of pieces of work processed had risen by 6,000 compared to the same point in 2017/18, this increase was mostly as a result of national fraud initiatives.
- 28.2 Ms Mayes explained that the level of Local Authority Error remained significantly below the threshold at which full subsidy may be lost. The live caseload had reduced since the introduction of Universal Credit. Ms Mayes reported that the Government had announced that the roll-out of Universal Credit was to be slowed, with changes of circumstances no longer causing claimants to be moved away from legacy benefits. A managed migration was planned, but the timetable for this suggested that the soonest it would happen would be Autumn 2020.
- 28.3 Ms Mayes reported that the level of spending on Discretionary Housing Payments continued to be on course to exceed the reduced grant allocated by the Government. Ipswich Borough Council had agreed to allocate additional funding to Discretionary Housing Payments for 2018/19. A revised Discretionary Housing Payments Policy had been prepared for the Committee's approval, which sought to reduce reliance on Discretionary Housing Payments.
- 28.4 Councillor Patrick asked whether the uncertainty around the migration to Universal Credit was affecting the Shared Revenues Partnerships ability to plan. Ms Mayes explained that the reduction in the number of triggers to move a claimant to Universal Credit meant that there would continue to be higher numbers of people claiming legacy benefits through the partnership. There had however always been a level of uncertainty about the transfer to Universal Credit and business planning had reflected this.
- 28.5 Councillor Ellesmere asked whether the continuation of legacy benefits would mean that the partnership would have to continue to process high volumes of change of circumstances work. Ms Mayes confirmed that this was the case, although she explained that the biggest challenge was the impact of Universal Credit decisions on Council Tax Reduction claims.
- 28.6 Councillor Whitehead asked for more information regarding the changes to the Verify Earnings and Pensions initiative. Ms Mayes explained that at present

pieces of work were fed into a portal, where they were ordered by the potential for overpayments. The changes to the system would mean that tasks would be fed directly into processing systems, which might increase the volume of work and would remove officers control over what was processed.

- 28.7 Councillor Guthrie asked whether there were sufficient jobs to allow people to go into work. Ms Mayes explained that the local labour market had quite a large number of seasonal workers but that the level of employment had been reasonably steady over the past few years. There was an issue with people moving to Ipswich to try to find work and failing to secure employment.
- 28.8 Councillor Meudec noted that Zero Hours Contracts would lead to more changes of circumstances than traditional employment.
- 28.9 Councillor Patrick asked whether officers felt the delays to the roll out of Universal Credit were justified. Ms Mayes explained that the Department for Work and Pensions had always said that it would take an approach of testing and learning and that they obviously felt that there was a need to learn. Ms Mayes was yet to hear of anyone who had benefited from moving to Universal Credit.
- 28.10 The Head of Finance and Revenues, Ipswich Borough Council, John Chance explained that the Chancellor had recently announced additional support for those moving to Universal Credit. Councillor Whitehead said that Universal Credit appeared to have got 1 million more people into work. Councillor Ellesmere commented that if Universal Credit was working Members of Parliament would not have persuaded Government to delay the roll out.
- 28.11 The Operations Manager – Revenues, Andrew Wilcock, explained that the proportion of Council Tax collected in September had been slightly down in September against the previous year's figures, however, the gap had narrowed in October. Frequent changes to Council Tax Reduction entitlements were altering the debt profile, moving much of it towards the end of the Financial Year. The volume of paper reminders had been reduced significantly, although the value of the debt those reminders represented was broadly similar to 2017/18.
- 28.12 Mr Wilcock explained that the removal of Single Person Discounts continued at a very similar level to 2017/18, which showed the importance of this exercise.
- 28.13 Mr Wilcock reported that collection of Business Rates was quite volatile, with collection levels in Babergh having been behind the previous year in September, whereas in October they had moved ahead of 2017. Mr Wilcock explained that there were still a high number of rating appeals from the 2010 rating list, meaning that provision continued to have to be made for these in the budget.
- 28.14 Councillor Patrick noted that Babergh District Council had a £4.5m provision in the budget for Business Rate Appeals and asked what would happen to that money if it were not needed to cover the costs of successful appeals. The

Assistant Director – Corporate Resources, Babergh and Mid-Suffolk District Councils, explained that the money formed part of the collection fund, and that any surplus would be returned to Babergh District Council, Suffolk County Council, and Central Government, in the relevant proportions. Mr Wilcock noted that nationally there were 90,000 appeals outstanding.

- 28.15 Councillor Whitehead noted that 34 appeals in Mid-Suffolk had been resolved since the previous report and asked whether an adjustment to the relevant financial provision had been made. Mr Wilcock explained that the list was passed to independent assessors annually, and that they would determine the level of provision needed. Mr Wilcock noted that there were no trends to be learned from previous cases as the Valuation Office Agency's decisions were made on a case-by-case basis.
- 28.16 Councillor Whitehead asked whether Council Tax debts could be paid off as part of Discretionary Housing Payments. Mr Wilcock explained that it was likely that those receiving Discretionary Housing Payments were likely to be eligible for Council Tax Reductions which could not take Discretionary Housing Payments into account.
- 28.17 Mr Chance updated the committee on the Shared Revenues Partnership's financial position, explaining that the transitional vacancy target had been exceeded by c. £25,000 so far. An underspend of c. £71,000 was predicted at year end and this would be added to the partnership's reserve, bringing the level of reserves to c. £583,000. Councillor Guthrie asked whether it was necessary to add this money to the reserves. Mr Chance explained that it was considered prudent to add the money to the reserve, as they were currently only slightly above the minimum acceptable level.

**RESOLVED:**

**that the revised Discretionary Housing Payment Policy be approved for use by the Shared Revenues Partnership.**

**29. SRP/18/08 Forward Plan**

**RESOLVED:**

**that the report be noted.**

**30. Exclusion of Public**

**RESOLVED:**

**that the public (including the Press) be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the remaining items of business under Regulation 21 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulation 2000 as was likely that if members of the public were present during these items there would be disclosure to them of exempt information falling**

**within paragraphs 1, 4 and 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).**

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION**

31. **Unconfirmed Exempt Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 September 2018**
32. **SRP/18/09 Revenues Update**

The meeting closed at 5.00 pm

**Chair**