

# SHARED REVENUES PARTNERSHIP JOINT COMMITTEE

## MINUTES

WEDNESDAY 20TH MARCH 2019  
GIPPING ROOM, GRAFTON HOUSE  
4.30 PM

**Present:** Councillors S Meudec, B Rudkin, D Haley (Chair), J Whitehead, J Osborne and S Ayres (Substitute)

### 51. Apologies for Absence

- 51.1 The Chair explained that this would be his last meeting of the Shared Revenues Partnership Joint Committee, explaining that he would be standing down as a Councillor at the elections in May. Councillor Haley added that he had been Chair of the Committee since the beginning of the shared service and was grateful for the work of all of the Councillors and Officers who had made it such a success.
- 51.2 Councillor Osborne, on behalf of Councillors, thanked Councillor Haley for his work as Chair of the committee.
- 51.3 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Patrick for whom Councillor Ayres was acting as substitute.

### 52. Unconfirmed Minutes of Meeting held on 16 January 2019

**RESOLVED:**

that the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2019 be signed as a true record.

### 53. To Confirm or Vary the Order of Business

**RESOLVED:**

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

#### **54. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **55. SRP/18/15 Shared Revenues Partnership - Service Report**

- 55.1 The Benefits Manager, Tina Williams, explained that updated figures to the end of February had now been produced and would be circulated to Councillors by email.
- 55.2 Mrs Williams reported that the number of changes of circumstances continued to increase, despite the reduction in caseload. The high level of accuracy had been maintained with very low Local Authority Error rates.
- 55.3 Mrs Williams noted that the Department for Work and Pensions had estimated that the number of Housing Benefit claims would drop by around 15% as a result of Universal Credit and commented that this would have implications for officers working in housing. Pilot schemes to trial managed migration from legacy benefits to Universal Credit were planned, however, these were not expected to affect Ipswich for some time.
- 55.4 Mrs Williams explained that the vast majority of benefits claims were now completed online, with very few paper applications. In February all of the applications in Mid-Suffolk had been completed online.
- 55.5 Mrs Williams explained that in Babergh and Ipswich the additional funding allocations made for Discretionary Housing Payments had started to be used, whilst the Mid-Suffolk fund was 90% spent. Councillor Meudec said that it was regrettable that the Government had chosen to reduce their funding for these payments and asked whether there had been any progress on the scheme to lend residents money to pay deposits. Mrs Williams explained that the Operations Manager for Benefits and Business Support had been working on this scheme with colleagues in housing but that there was not yet any update which could be reported to the Committee.
- 55.6 Councillor Meudec commented on the excellent performance of the Shared Revenues Partnership, especially the very low Local Authority Error rate.
- 55.7 The Operations Manager – Revenues, Andrew Wilcock, explained that the collection position was recovering, although Ipswich Council Tax, Ipswich Business Rates and Mid Suffolk Business Rates were still behind the target. Mr Wilcock explained that additional work to collect this money would be done over the coming few weeks.
- 55.8 Councillor Whitehead queried the increase in the number of '12-monthly' Council Tax payers. Mr Wilcock apologised that there was an error in the report and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018 ought to read 31<sup>st</sup> January 2018. Mr Wilcock explained that the number of 12 month payers was likely to continue to increase year on year, with lots of people switching when bills were issued.

- 55.9 Mr Wilcock explained that analysis showed that those people who now had to pay some Council Tax for the first time were likely to go into arrears, whilst those who already paid some Council Tax were likely to be able to pay more without going into arrears. Mr Wilcock explained that residents were regularly reminded with letters and texts and that where appropriate additional costs could be waived to try to get people to pay. Officers were also investigating whether any changes could be made to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme to mitigate the impact of changes of circumstances.
- 55.10 Mr Wilcock explained that the review of Single Person Discounts continued, with Suffolk County Council paying the bulk of the cost of this scheme. Mr Wilcock added that the contract with the provider of this service was due to be reviewed in the near future. Councillor Meudec asked whether discounts which were removed were backdated. Mr Wilcock confirmed that where appropriate discount removals were backdated.
- 55.11 Councillor Osborne asked whether the Council had any discretion to maintain a single person discount if a resident were, for example, to take in a homeless person. Mr Wilcock explained that in practice this would depend on the length of time an additional person lived at the property, with short stays up to 6 weeks unlikely to cause the removal of the discount, but that in theory the discount should end immediately.
- 55.12 Mr Wilcock explained that the number of 2010 Ratings Appeals outstanding had increased as a result of a number of new appeals. The Valuation Office Agency still had 90,000 such appeals ongoing and so it was likely that a high appeals provision would continue to be needed.
- 55.13 Councillor Whitehead asked whether business were still supposed to pay rates whilst appeals were ongoing. Mr Wilcock confirmed that they were, but that arrangements were made with some debtors to reduce payments where the higher rate would damage the business significantly.
- 55.14 Councillor Ayres asked how the Rural Rate Relief scheme worked. Mr Wilcock explained that this was available for businesses serving communities of less than 3,000 inhabitants. Councillor Rudkin asked how the boundaries of the communities had been drawn. Mr Wilcock explained that this had been done prior to his joining the Council but that he understood that these had been drawn to maximise the availability of rural rate relief.
- 55.15 Mr Wilcock explained that increasing proportions of people now notified the Shared Revenues Partnership of house moves online. There were also now 2,500 people signed up to e-billing, and communications work was to be done to try to increase this number.
- 55.16 Councillor Whitehead reported that he had signed up for e-billing but had still received a paper bill. Mr Wilcock explained that all ratepayers at a property needed to sign up for e-billing in order for a paper bill not to be sent.

55.17 Councillor Rudkin commented that signing up for e-billing needed to be made as easy as possible for residents, noting that people needed to be told everything they would need before starting to sign up to avoid frustration. Councillor Whitehead commented that it was important that all bill payers in a household were encouraged to sign up as otherwise there was the potential for the scheme to cost the Councils money rather than save it.

55.18 The Head of Finance and Revenues, John Chance, reported that an underspend of between £150,000-180,000 was forecast, with significant savings having been achieved through transitional vacancies. This money would be added to the SRP reserve although Mr Chance noted that it might be possible to reduce the amount held in the reserve in the future. Mr Chance also highlighted the Operational Plans which had been appended to the report.

**RESOLVED:**

**that the report be noted.**

Reason: to keep the Joint Committee informed of performance, finance, budget and progress against the business plan.

**56. SRP/18/16 Forward Plan**

**RESOLVED:**

**that the Forward Plan be noted.**

**57. 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 it 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**

- 58. Unconfirmed Exempt Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 January 2019**
- 59. SRP/18/17 Revenues Update**

The meeting closed at 5.20 pm

**Chair**