

BRECKLAND COUNCIL
EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
EAST SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL
FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL
WEST SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

ANGLIA REVENUES & BENEFITS PARTNERSHIP JOINT COMMITTEE

Held on Tuesday, 21 June 2022 at 10.00 am in the
Level 5 Meeting Room, Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford. IP24 1BT

PRESENT

Cllr David Ambrose-Smith
Cllr E. Back (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Sarah Broughton
Cllr Jan French (Chairperson)

In Attendance

Sam Anthony
Alison Chubbock

Lorraine King

Rachael Mann

Brian Mew

Adrian Mills
Matthew Waite-Wright

Ian Smith

Jill Keeler

- Head of HR & OD (Fenland)
- Section 151 Officer & Assistant Director Finance
- Head of Benefits & Council Tax Billing (ARP)
- Director (Resources & Property) (West Suffolk)
- Chief Finance Officer & S151 Officer (East Suffolk)
- Head of ARP
- Head of NNDR Recovery & Enforcement (ARP)
- Finance Manager & S151 Officer (East Cambs)
- ARP Management Team Administrative Officer

13/22 CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR (AGENDA ITEM 1)

The outgoing Chairman, Councillor David Ambrose-Smith, welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the procedure in relation to the respective appointments.

After being duly proposed and seconded and with no other nominations being made it was:

RESOLVED that Councillor Jan French (Fenland DC) be appointed as Chairman for the ensuing year.

After being duly proposed and seconded and with no other nominations being made it was:

RESOLVED that Councillor Ed Black (East Suffolk DC) be appointed as Vice-Chair for the ensuing year.

Councillor Jan French in the Chair.

Action By

Action By

14/22 TREASURER (AGENDA ITEM 2)

After being duly proposed and seconded and with no other nominations being made it was **RESOLVED** that:

Breckland Council be appointed as Treasurer for the ensuing year.

15/22 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 3)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

16/22 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 4)

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Cowen. No substitutes were in attendance, but the meeting was still quorate with four Members present.

17/22 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 5)

None.

18/22 DECLARATIONS (AGENDA ITEM 6)

None.

19/22 ARP SERVICE PLAN AND RISK REGISTER (AGENDA ITEM 7)

Adrian Mills, the Head of ARP presented the report and introduced the six-month review of the current year service plan and risk register, highlighting strong processing and collection performance, expansion of online services and debt recovery. Additionally, the team had embedded senior management changes and delivered Energy Rebate payments. The Council Tax Support Schemes for next year were being reviewed, with proposals to assist customers in the current economic climate.

RESOLVED that the progress in respect of the December 2021 Service Delivery Plan and the Risk Register be noted.

20/22 ARP 4 YEAR BUSINESS PLAN (AGENDA ITEM 8)

The Head of ARP introduced the report.

Following the Strategic review in December 2021, the ARP together with the Operational Improvement Board (OIB) had developed a four-year business plan. The Customer Strategy Team had been consulted, comprising of the partner Heads of Customer Services and Communications teams who all supported the plan. The Head of ARP advised that a detailed plan identifying the necessary actions had been agreed with the OIB.

RESOLVED that the ARP four-year Business Plan for 2022-2026 be endorsed.

21/22 PERFORMANCE REPORT (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 9)

Matthew Waite-Wright, Head of NNDR Recovery & Enforcement (ARP)

Action By

introduced the two Performance reports.

It was explained that for the 2021/2022 outturn, whilst the overall financial targets had been met, as highlighted on the front sheet for West Suffolk and East Cambridgeshire, Non-Domestic Rates, whilst on track throughout the year, had dipped below target in March due to the award of Covid Additional Relief Fund (CARF). For the first month of this year, all indicators were being met apart from Council Tax for all five partners, where collection rates were currently down by £1million across the whole partnership, out of £500 million annually. This was due to the short-term impact of Energy Rebate payments and reminders not being sent for low balances, as well as the current economic position. The situation was being monitored, and the end of June figures were due shortly, although a more accurate position would not be available until July. This formed part of a bigger picture, Council Tax collection was a barometer of the general economic situation.

The Chairman understood the position and thanked the Team for all their hard work.

The Head of ARP highlighted the fact that the take up of Direct Debits had increased as a consequence of the recent campaigns with Customer Services and the Energy rebate.

The Performance reports were otherwise noted.

22/22 WELFARE REFORM UPDATE (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 10)

Lorraine King, the Head of Benefits & Council Tax Billing & Systems (ARP) presented the report.

Referring to section 2.1.4 of the report, Members were provided with an update in relation to migration of Universal Credit (UC). Bolton and Medway were the first two sites under the new 'move to UC' trial. Initially 500 customers had been written to as part of the Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) forced migration process. Further details were awaited on any further roll out plans.

There had been a 27% reduction in DWP Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) funding allocations this year and ARP continued to work closely with Housing teams to manage this going forward.

Under section 4 of the report, Homes for Ukraine's scheme, there would be no impact on Housing Benefit or Council Tax Rebate scheme for anyone entering the scheme as a host.

Cllr Broughton asked if the UC migration would create more fraud going forward?

The Head of ARP explained that the data received would come from DWP and there were various data matching processes in place to reduce fraud and error, but the position would continue to be monitored.

The Chairperson, Councillor French enquired how many were coming through the Homes for Ukraine scheme – the £200 welcome, and asked for a list for September

The Head of Benefits & Council Tax Billing & Systems advised that ARP were

Action By

not administering this, it was the County Councils

It was felt that it would be good to understand the amounts involved and it would be useful to monitor per district. In response, it was noted that this was not data that ARP could access or provide.

It was asked if ARP could provide a breakdown of UC claims per year by district.

The Head of ARP advised that the DWP had cut Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) funding in last year's spending review and given economic pressures ARP were lobbying DWP with the Local Government Association (LGA) for more funding to help customers with rent shortfalls.

CLr Ambrose asked if there was an update under section 2.1.8 of the report, in respect of future of Help to Claim.

Members were informed that DWP appeared reluctant to publish a review.

It was noted that section 2.1.8 of the report had been superseded by section 2.1.13 and Help to Claim had been awarded to Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) for 2022/23 year, an announcement and tender exercise was expected in the Autumn, which would be included in the update in September.

The report was otherwise noted.

23/22 ARP FINANCIAL OUT-TURN 2021-22 (AGENDA ITEM 11)

Alison Chubbock, the Assistant Director of Finance & S151 Officer (BDC) presented the report and highlighted the small surplus outturn against budget as well as the fees and sales income from Government to offset Covid related losses. It was also highlighted that the partner share was different for this year.

The data cleanse work agreed by OIB with any associated costs added to the 2022/23 Joint Committee budget was also highlighted.

The report and appendix were otherwise noted.

24/22 NEW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY PARTNER (AGENDA ITEM 12)

The Head of ARP introduced the report.

Members were informed that ARP had been approached by Broadland Council to place their enforcement cases into the ARP Enforcement Agency now that they were working closely with South Norfolk Council, who had already passed their enforcement cases to ARP.

Broadland had conducted a review of their existing provision with an external enforcement agent company. They had considered placing enforcement work with ARP, creating their own Agency with South Norfolk or placing both Council's enforcement work with external enforcement agent companies. It had been concluded that passing their enforcement work to ARP was their preferred option.

It was highlighted that the arrangement would cover the costs of providing the

Action By

service.

The Head of NNDR Recovery & Enforcement confirmed that ARP would not need to increase complement within the team due to the anticipated volumes and the location of existing Agents to the Broadland area.

The options were as follows:

- Do not accept Broadland passing their enforcement cases to ARP; that may risk jeopardising the position with South Norfolk, or
- approve Broadland joining the Agency.

The recommendation that Members were being asked to approve was to agree that Broadland passed their enforcement cases to ARP.

Cllr Broughton asked about the Broadland area.

Members were informed that Broadland had a similar economical area to the other partners and that ARP was familiar with the area.

Cllr Broughton also asked if the arrangement was for a set period. The Head of ARP advised that it would be on a rolling basis, and upon checking, had a minimum two-month notice period.

Cllr Ambrose-Smith asked if such an arrangement should go through a section S113 agreement.

The Head of ARP advised that following legal advice ARP could continue with the existing process whereby a non-ARP Council could delegate their enforcement work to Breckland, given that all the enforcement staff were employed by Breckland Council, who in turn passed the cases to ARP.

If the Joint Committee was to approve Broadland joining the Enforcement Agency, the Breckland Cabinet Member would be asked to approve the delegation. A section 113 agreement was only required by employing authorities when they shared their staff, which was not the case.

The Head of NNDR Recovery & Enforcement reassured Members that the arrangement would be delivered with no extra staff.

RESOLVED that the further expansion of the Enforcement Agency be agreed with Broadland Council joining the Agency.

25/22 FORTHCOMING ISSUES (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 13)

None.

26/22 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 14)

The arrangements for the next meeting on Tuesday, 20 September 2022 at 10am, Level 5 Meeting Room, Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford were noted.

It was also noted that a pre-meeting would take place at 9.30am.

27/22 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC (AGENDA ITEM 15)

The exclusion of press and public was not required as none were present.

28/22 PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES: 1 MARCH 2022 (AGENDA ITEM 16)

The private & confidential Minutes from the meeting held on 1 March 2022 were noted.

Action By

The meeting closed at 10.35 am

CHAIRMAN