

BRECKLAND COUNCIL
FOREST HEATH DISTRICT COUNCIL
EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL
FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL
WAVENEY DISTRICT COUNCIL
SUFFOLK COASTAL DISTRICT COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

ANGLIA REVENUES AND BENEFITS PARTNERSHIP JOINT COMMITTEE

**Held on Tuesday, 20 September 2016 at 10.00 am in the
Level 5 Meeting Room, Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford IP24 1BT**

PRESENT

Mr D. Ambrose Smith	Mr S. Edwards
Mr C. Seaton (Chairman)	Mr I. Houlder
Mr M. Barnard (Vice-Chairman)	Mr R. Kerry
Mr P. M. M. Dimoglou	

In Attendance

Arthur Charvonia	- Strategic Director
Paul Corney	- Head of ARP
Suzanne Jones	- Interim Executive Director Commercialisation and s151 Officer
Jill Korwin	- Director (Forest Heath & St Edmundsbury)
Stuart Philpot	- Strategic Manager (Support Services) ARP
Julie Britton	- Senior Democratic Services Officer

31/16 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 June 2016 were agreed as a correct record.

32/16 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 2)

None.

33/16 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 3)

None.

34/16 DECLARATIONS (AGENDA ITEM 4)

None.

35/16 PERFORMANCE REPORT (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 5)

(a) Operational Performance

The Strategic Manager (Support Services) ARP presented the report.

Benefits performance was good for all partners, so good in fact, that in

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respect of new claims and change of circumstances, output was exceeding the national figures published by the DWP.

Referring to fraud and compliance performance, funding had been secured from Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils towards Single Person Discount.

Targets that had been agreed by the Joint Committee for 2016/17 back in March had continued to exceed expectations and following the excellent performance seen in the first three months of this year, the targets had been revised and had been agreed (see table on page 6 of the agenda).

As far as revenues were concerned, performance continued to meet targets in all areas with one exception in relation to Non-Domestic Rates for Suffolk Coastal District Council, this was due to a large refund on one back dated appeal. All performance records had been highlighted in the scorecards. Members were informed that this abnormal appeal had been added to the Central List but should recover. Referring to the Central List, the Strategic Manager (Support Services) ARP asked Members to respond to the business rates consultation by Monday, 26 September 2016. Suffolk and Norfolk County Councils were contributing to the recovery work for this year. The Chairman felt encouraged by this news.

Referring to support, the first stage of aligning daily incoming documents to one single set of document types on the Imaging System for all seven partners had been completed. This had made a huge amount of difference and now anyone could work on anyone's documents at any one time.

Personal thanks were conveyed to ICT West Suffolk for essential upgrades called 'Red Hat'; six sites were now sitting on an up-to-date platform; Fenland's database would follow.

(b) Financial Performance

The Head of ARP presented the figures that had been provided by Breckland Council which highlighted the fact that the Partnership was in a very good position. Under employee related costs, in relation to the under spend due to vacancies in the first quarter of the year; Members were informed that it was anticipated that most of the posts would be filled. The Enforcement Agency was exceeding expectations and was progressing very well. The Head of ARP highlighted the investment fund for the Transformation Programme which would be satisfactory for the Partnership's needs but would be continually reviewed.

(c) Balanced Scorecard

The Strategic Manager (Support Services) ARP reported that everything was 'green' except for the awaited refund for Suffolk Coastal. Members' attention was drawn to the new formats for the balance score cards which now made much more sense. The 'E' forms were starting to increase in numbers due to the electronic shift.

The Strategic Manager (Benefits) stated that he was seeking to flat-line performance across all seven partners. Councillor Edwards felt

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that the new format provided much more information as well as providing greater meaning.

36/16 WELFARE REFORM UPDATE (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 6)

The ARP Strategic Manager (Benefits) then provided Members with a detailed report on Universal Credit, Discretionary Housing Payments, Benefit Caps and Social Rented Sector Rent Restrictions. It was noted that a further delay of one year for the rollout of Universal Credit had recently been announced by the Government. Councillor Barnard pointed out that Waveney District Council was taking many more calls in relation to Universal Credit which was putting a great deal of strain on staff. A record of the extra time spent on these calls was being kept. The ARP Strategic Manager (Benefits) stated that the Partnership was not funded for that element but this matter had been flagged up and hopefully there would be improvements made in the pipeline.

As far as the Benefit Cap was concerned, DWP had announced that the reduced Benefit Cap would start to be implemented in the autumn of 2016. The maximum family income before the benefit cap applied was also being reduced; DWP had confirmed that these reductions would commence on 7 November 2016 with a rollout programme per local authority to be announced. Members were informed that letters would be sent to all affected customers informing them what the impact would be. The Corporate Director Resources (East Cambs) feared the negatives he had seen in the local press and asked how best this should be managed. The Head of ARP said he would ask the Comms Team to work on this and produce an idea for a response. It was noted that Fenland District Council had already put a brief together in advance of the dates in question. It was further noted that although each Council had different circumstances there must be some common themes included.

It was noted that the Discretionary Housing Payment Grant had been increased this year.

Referring to the Social Rented Sector Rent Restrictions, the Government had announced that supported accommodation would be exempt for a further year.

37/16 ARP HEALTH & SAFETY POLICY (AGENDA ITEM 7)

The ARP Strategic Manager (Support) presented the report. The current Health & Safety Policy had been based on an old ARP Policy and was in need of being updated to reflect the four sites. The Policy had been primarily aimed at the staff working at the Thetford office but also was a working generic document applicable to all staff sign posting to health & safety procedures of their own employing authority if based in March, Lowestoft and Woodbridge.

The recommendations were highlighted.

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Martin Hosker, West Suffolk Employee and Health & Safety Officer for ARP, was thanked for all his work on this document. It was noted that this Policy would be brought back to the Joint Committee every two years for a full review. The draft Policy was already on the public website and had been clearly referenced.

RESOLVED that:

1. delegated authority be given to the Health & Safety Officer to make minor amendments, including legislative updates that do not change the Policy materially; subject to the agreement of the Anglia Revenues Partnership Management; and
2. the revised Health & Safety Policy be approved; subject to it being reviewed by the Joint Committee at two year intervals.

38/16 ANGLIA REVENUES PARTNERSHIP (ARP) TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME (AGENDA ITEM 8)

The Head of ARP presented the Partnership's Transformation Programme. The Transformation Programme had taken the actions from the Service Delivery Plan and built them and additional actions into three strands; Reduction in Avoidable Contact/ Automation of Processes (digital), Commercial/Partnership and Trading Opportunities, and Organisational Vision and Development. All strands had to be pulled together as anyone of them could fail if not worked together. More efficient ways of working was required and the main aim of the Programme was to maximise income and efficiencies and was mainly about how Members envisaged ARP going forward.

RESOLVED that:

1. the progress in respect of the Transformation Programme be noted; and
2. the Transformation Programme at Appendix A be approved.

39/16 FORTHCOMING ISSUES (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 9)

Nothing to report.

40/16 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 10)

The arrangements for the next meeting on Tuesday, 6 December 2016 at 10.00am at Breckland House were noted.

41/16 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC (AGENDA ITEM 11)

RESOLVED that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the disclosure

of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Act.”

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42/16 COMMERCIAL & PARTNERSHIP UPDATE (AGENDA ITEM 11)

The Head of ARP brought good news. Another authority had delegated their enforcement service to the ARP Enforcement Agency Team starting mid October 2016. Another was looking to join too. Resources were in place as previously discussed.

Also, ARP had been formally approached by a further authority about delegation of the management of their service to the ARP under a partnership agreement. A paper would be brought to the Joint Committee in December 2016 for formal approval and a joint communication would be arranged when announced.

The legalities of this possible arrangement were agreed.

The proposals to develop a partnership agreement were unanimously agreed.

The meeting closed at 11.00 am

CHAIRMAN