

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, 21 June 2016 at 10.00 am in the
Level 5 Meeting Room, Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford IP24 1BT

PRESENT

Mr C Seaton (Chairman)	Mr I Houlder
Mr M Barnard (Vice-Chairman)	Mr R Kerry
Mr P M M Dimoglou	Ms L Every (Substitute Member)
Mr S. Edwards	

In Attendance

Rob Bridge	- Corporate Director (Fenland)
Alison Chubbock	- Chief Accountant (Deputy Section 151 Officer) (BDC)
Paul Corney	- Head of ARP
Jill Korwin	- Director (Forest Heath & St Edmundsbury)
Julie Kennealy	- Executive Director (Commercialisation)(S151 Officer)
Andy Radford	- Corporate Director (East Cambs)
Julie Britton	- Senior Democratic Services Officer

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19/16 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN (AGENDA ITEM 1)

In the absence of the Chairman the Vice-Chairman took the Chair.

After being duly proposed and seconded and with no other nominations being made it was **RESOLVED** that Councillor Seaton (the Vice Chairman) be appointed Chairman for the ensuing year.

After being duly proposed and seconded and with no other nominations being made it was **RESOLVED** that Councillor Barnard be appointed Vice-Chairman for the ensuing year.

20/16 APPOINTMENT OF TREASURER (AGENDA ITEM 2)

RESOLVED that Breckland Council be appointed as Treasurer for the ensuing year.

21/16 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 3)

12 January 2016

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2016 were agreed as a correct record.

22 March 2016

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2016 were agreed as a correct record.

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22/16 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 4)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ambrose-Smith and Officer Jo Russell.

23/16 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 5)

None.

24/16 DECLARATIONS (AGENDA ITEM 6)

None.

25/16 PERFORMANCE REPORT (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 7)

(a) Operational Performance

The Head of ARP presented the annual report which highlighted the activities and performance of the Partnership from 1 April 2015.

In 2015/16 the major initiatives and issues related to the following:

- understanding and reacting to Welfare reform changes;
- the transfer of Housing Benefit Fraud to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and determination of what fraud services should be retained;
- the introduction of an in-house Enforcement Agency (Bailiff service);
- Phase 2 of the integration of all 7 partners to bring out equalisation of service provision;
- development of a commercial strategy and trading arm for future growth and efficiencies.

The Head of ARP informed Members that the transfer of the retention of an ARP Fraud Team, following the transfer of Housing Benefit fraud services to the DWP had been a great success; targets for 2016/17 year had already been reached and therefore would be reviewed very soon. He commented that the performance of the Team was to be admired for the way they had transformed the way that they worked.

The in-house Enforcement Agency had generated a surplus of £277k which had far exceeded expectations. A number of Councils had shown interest in having their service delivered by the ARP Enforcement Agency Team. The end of June results would be brought to the next meeting.

The Business case to create a single officer core bringing Fenland, Waveney and Suffolk Coastal into the ARP and to bring processes and procedures together on one Document Imaging System had almost reached completion whilst maintaining excellent performance. The implementation of the second phase was already underway.

As far as commercial trading was concerned, negotiations had commenced with customers in relation to the ARP Enforcement Agency work. Quotes for this work were in progress.

Finally, 2015/16 had been a very good year in terms of performance and

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the year ahead was looking the same.

The Chairman felt that this was a very encouraging report.

Councillor Every asked when the development of the Business Plan was going to appear on the agenda. Members were informed that this was being worked on at the moment. There were actually 3 strands to it, the first, the bailiff service, had already been implemented, the Housing Benefit fraud transfer to the DWP had also been agreed and the third strand, the wider, bigger areas would be coming back to the Joint Committee in the near future.

The Corporate Director for Fenland District Council stated that the Operational Improvement Board was doing a great deal of work at the moment putting some clear milestones in place was very important. He pointed out that the presentation that the Committee would see sight of later in the meeting would expand on this.

The Executive Director for Commercialisation (BDC) informed Members that an overarching strategy would be brought back to a future meeting along with business cases and saw no reason why the said Strategy could not be signed off in September.

It was agreed that new targets in relation to fraud would be circulated via email to the Joint Committee Members.

The report was otherwise noted.

(b) ARP Joint Committee Financial Report 2015-16

The Executive Director for Commercialisation (BDC) presented the report and updated the Joint Committee on the out-turn position for 2015-16. Approval to distribute the remaining 2015-16 surplus was requested.

Members were informed that enforcement service was well above the expected performance and had exceeded all expectations. After the contributions listed at section 1.5 of the report a surplus of £371k had been generated and the table on page 55 of the agenda highlighted how this surplus had been distributed to each partner in accordance with the agreed percentages.

The Chairman said that these figures highlighted how well this operation was working.

RESOLVED that:

1. the report and appendix be noted; and
2. the remaining surplus of £370,821 be distributed to partners based on the 2015-16 gain share percentages.

26/16 ARP RISK REGISTER (AGENDA ITEM 8)

Any high level risks facing the Anglia Revenues Partnership were presented to the Joint Committee every six months.

The risks relating to Fraud and Error and the Local Council Tax Reduction

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Scheme remained on the risk matrix; however, target scores had been reached due to mitigating actions being put in place. All risks were being managed as well as could be expected but some were out of the Partnership's control, for example, Universal Credit; therefore, a pessimistic view had to be taken.

It was noted that what was being built into the Transformation Programme would help in relation to all these risks.

It was noted that the external auditors had tried their hardest to claim back a great deal of money from the Partnership but with all 7 authorities battling vigorously against this claim this did not happen.

Members agreed that no further risks should be added to the matrix or any amendments should be made.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted and the Risk Register be agreed.

27/16 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (AGENDA ITEM 9)

A detailed presentation was provided.

Overall the ARP's annual turnover was equivalent to £852.3m; it provided services to 454,664 account holders, handled 5.5m transactions and showed the complexity, size and scale of the partnership which covered 3 counties incorporating nearly 2,000 square miles. This was not about how big the Partnership was it was about the quality of what the Partnership did and according to the CIPFA score, which in the opinion of ARP was enviable, its benchmarking across all services highlighted that ARP Housing Benefit new claim averaged 16.4 days compared to UK average of 20 days, change of circumstances averaged 5 days compared to UK average of 10 days and subsidy claims local authority error rate retained to date at 99.52% accuracy (minimum).

There were three themes to the Transformation Programme including organisational design, digitalisation and commercialisation. It was explained that organisational design was about getting the right skills set to concentrate on business rates. Commercialisation was in relation to market opportunities which the Partnership already had. The budget target chosen for the whole ARP for 2017/18 was agreed at £1m.

Two questions were being asked of the Partnership as to what it wanted to achieve:

1. To cover ARP costs when current sources of income were eroded; and/or
2. To be a source of sustainable revenue for the wider general funds of the partners.

The £501k from efficiencies in 2015/16 carried forward would suffice but did the Partnership want to become a source of sustainable revenue for the wider general fund of the partners. What was the Partnership prepared to consider?

- to trade existing services to new customers?
- investigate new services shared between existing partners? and/or

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- trading new services to new customers?

In the absence of Jo Andrews, the Strategic Revenues Manager for the Partnership, Jill Korwin, a Director for Forest Heath & St Edmundsbury Councils was in attendance to present the next item on the agenda which would provide more detail to these questions.

The Medium Term Financial Plan was otherwise noted.

28/16 OPPORTUNITIES FOR ARP (AGENDA ITEM 10)

A presentation was provided which highlighted a number of exciting opportunities if the Partnership decided to trade new services to new customers.

Andy Radford, the Corporate Director for East Cambridgeshire District Council hoped that the Partnership would continue to engage Jo Russell to carry out more detailed work in future.

Devolution would open many doors but in the interim more research was needed and a steer of how to move forward on these matters was a decision that had to be considered by all 7 partner authorities. Rob Bridge, Corporate Director for Fenland District Council felt that a strategic approach was required as the ARP brand was vitally important and the Revenues and Benefits service for all partners should not be affected. He felt that wider engagement and a better understanding of these proposals were required and suggested the Chief Executive meetings at County which were held once a month.

It was agreed that a report would be produced by the Head of ARP together with the OIB.

The Chairman asked about timelines. The Corporate Director for Fenland District Council pointed out that the next OIB meeting was in July and at that meeting Officers could map out and plan the approach to the new customers and the wider engagement.

It was agreed to follow the suggested procedure followed by a report/presentation to each of the partner authorities.

29/16 FORTHCOMING ISSUES (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 11)

The Corporate Director for Fenland District Council informed Members that Julie Kennealy, the Executive Director (Breckland Council) would be leaving the organisation. Members thanked her for her support and wished her well for the future.

30/16 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 12)

The arrangements for the next meeting on Tuesday, 20 September at 10.00am in Thetford were noted.

The meeting closed at 11.05 am

CHAIRMAN