

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, 26 September 2017 at 10.00 am in the
Level 5 Meeting Room, Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford IP24 1BT**

PRESENT

Mr R. Kerry	Mr S. Edwards
Mr B. Provan	Mr I. Houlder
Mr D. Ambrose Smith	Mr C. Seaton
Mr P.D. Claussen	

In Attendance

Jo Andrews	- Strategic Manager (Revenues)
Brendan Arnold	- Chief Finance Officer and Corporate Director
Paul Corney	- Head of ARP
Emma Grima	- Director of Corporate & Commercial Services
Homira Javadi	- Chief Finance Officer S151 (Suffolk Coastal District Council)
Christine Marshall	- Executive Director Commercialisation (S151 Officer)
Adrian Mills	- Strategic Manager (Benefits)
Stuart Philpot	- Strategic Manager (Support Services) ARP
Julie Britton	- Democratic Services Officer

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20/17 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN (AGENDA ITEM 1)

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

21/17 APPOINTMENT OF TREASURER (AGENDA ITEM 2)

After being duly proposed and seconded and with no other nominations being made it was **RESOLVED** that Breckland District Council be appointed as Treasurer for the ensuing year.

22/17 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 3)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 March 2017 were agreed.

23/17 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 4)

An apology for absence was received from Jill Korwin.

24/17 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 5)

None.

25/17 DECLARATIONS (AGENDA ITEM 6)

None.

26/17 ANGLIA REVENUES PARTNERSHIP PERFORMANCE (AGENDA ITEM 7)

(a) Highlight Report and Balance Scorecard

Balance Scorecard

It was noted that the 'amber' on the Corporate Balanced Scorecard Dashboard for Breckland Council was in relation to the collection rate for Council Tax as at the end of July 2017; since August, collection rates had increased.

The amber for Waveney District Council was in relation to the £1.2m appeals for NNDR.

Councillor Seaton pointed out that the collection amounts showing red on the scorecard for Fenland DC was for 2016/17.

Councillor Edwards mentioned the NNDR collection rates for Forest Heath DC which were exceeding the target but if correct, was excellent news.

In response to a concern, the days taken to process Housing Benefit new claims and changes had increased due to staffing vacancies and the funding delay from DWP.

Councillor Holder asked if Universal Credit had caused any issues. Members were informed that St Edmundsbury DC would 'go live' next month.

Highlight Report

The Strategic Manager (Benefits) provided Members with a detailed overview of the highlight report.

Benefit funding had been secured from Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils to support the review of single person's discount.

The new Enforcement system, known as One-Step solutions, had been implemented.

The annual review of Empty Homes was now taking place in order to maximise the New Homes Bonus, and the NNDR revaluation came into effect from 1 April 2017.

Under the digital transformation project, the ARP had successfully rolled out

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a new customer self-service facility via the ARP website meaning less paper and postage creating further savings. A reporting mechanism measuring this paperless take up had been developed and was being reported to Customer Services across all 7 Councils on a monthly basis.

The ARP was now using an external mailing company, Critiqom Ltd, for the printing, packaging and despatch of 93% of the outgoing mail, for both daily and annual billing.

The website, being 2 years old, was now going through a refresh and a new set of pages for Business Rates was currently being worked on, using the findings from the University City of London – all was in test mode at the moment and was going to be fully tested by 15 staff using 3 scenarios: effectiveness, efficiency and spend.

Members were pleased to note that the new Capita Claim form had received its first compliment.

Councillor Claussen wanted assurance that with all this new technology, ARP would not become a victim of ‘hacking’. Members were assured that strict firewalls were in place.

Councillor Ambrose-Smith asked if the value of empty homes was known. Members were informed that all empty properties were visited particularly in the month of September prior to the Council Tax Base form being completed. The number of empty properties for each authority would be clarified.

In response to a concern, the date format would be corrected.

The report was otherwise noted.

(b) Finance Report

The Head of ARP provided Members with a detailed overview of the Finance report.

An error had been made to the total partnership costs this would be corrected to show an under-spend rather than an over-spend.

Cambridge County Council would continue to provide funding support in relation to the recovery work.

The figure for the enforcement agency work would be brought to the next meeting.

The grant funding under the heading Robotics was explained. This was in relation to a Project Team being set up in October 2017 to look at further automated work to generate efficiency savings.

The report was otherwise noted.

27/17 BALANCE SCORECARD (SEPARATE DOCUMENT)

This matter had been discussed under Minutes no. 26(a) above.

28/17 JOINT COMMITTEE QUORACY (AGENDA ITEM 8)

The Chief Finance Officer and Corporate Director for Fenland District Council presented the report.

The matter of quoracy had been discussed at the ARP meeting in September 2015 where it had been agreed to move to a single member and two named substitutes from each authority. This had worked well until recently where a meeting had to be cancelled due to it being inquorate as a member and their named substitutes had been unable to attend. The Operational Improvement Board felt that this could disrupt future business and had come up with a proposal to reduce the number of Members needed for a Joint Committee to be quorate to five. This set up could be used as a 'back-up' only, to manage this quite small risk.

The Chairman agreed and welcomed the suggestion particularly with any urgent business.

Councillor Holder suggested increasing the amount of substitutes.

Councillor Edwards was quite happy with the proposal to reduce the quoracy to five.

Councillor Ambrose-Smith disagreed and suggested a proxy Member in extreme circumstances.

This suggestion was proposed and seconded and accordingly it was:

RESOLVED that the number of Members for the Joint Committee meetings to be quorate be reduced from seven to five; subject to a proxy arrangement being put in place in the absence of the appointed Member and their two substitutes.

29/17 ARP STRATEGIC PRIORITIES (AGENDA ITEM 9)

The Chief Finance Officer and Corporate Director for Fenland District Council presented the report.

The Operational Improvement Board (OIB), under the Transformation Programme, had felt it timely to review the strategic priorities and the vision of the Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) due to the many changes to the public sector landscape over the past few years.

The OIB and the ARP was in no doubt that the overall priority was to maximise council tax and business rates income streams. The OIB members believed that the statements attached at Appendix 1 captured the key issues and opportunities for ARP moving forward and provided a clear framework for activity in the future. Further to this, the statements also created a clear direction for the activities of ARP Trading Ltd.

Councillor Ambrose-Smith felt that it would have been helpful to have seen the core purpose of the OIB set out in the statements too. The Chief Finance Officer and Corporate Director felt that this was a good idea and agreed to provide the Joint Committee Members with the Terms of Reference and the membership of it.

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The Chairman welcomed this idea.

Councillor Ambrose-Smith asked if the Joint Committee had the powers/authority to make any changes. The Head of ARP said that this would be a matter of understanding where the gaps were and thus what changes were needed.

Councillor Claussen was content with the report but felt that there should be more engagement with others so that more were aware of, and had a better understanding of, what ARP were doing. The Chief Finance Officer and Corporate Director agreed, this matter had already been discussed at the OIB and it was felt that it would be necessary to be more outward looking as the ARP did not market itself presently as it should.

The Head of ARP pointed out that ARP was pulling together a Communications Plan; this was a piece of work which would involve marketing the Partnership and also looking to find a way onto national groups – both the Chief Finance Officer and Corporate Director of Fenland District Council and the Strategic Manager (Benefits) were pushing the point around future funding by making the most of lobbying opportunities with central government.

One good news story that the Head of ARP mentioned, that was hot of the press, was that Norwich City Council was joining the Enforcement Group.

It was agreed that the Terms of Reference of the Operational Improvement Board be brought to the next Joint Committee meeting.

RESOLVED that the strategic priorities of the Anglia Revenues Partnership as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report be approved.

30/17 WELFARE REFORM UPDATE (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 10)

The Strategic Manager (Benefits) presented the report.

Welfare Reform had been introduced by the previous Government as part of wider fiscal measures to reduce deficits, intended to encourage work whilst reducing increasing welfare expenditure.

No changes had been made and there was nothing further to report except for (1) the Department of Working Pensions announcing the roll out schedule for all Job Centres and Councils for the period April 2017 to September 2018 in relation to Universal Credit and (2) the migration of existing Housing Benefit (and other DWP Benefit and Tax Credits) cases of which the programme had been delayed for twelve months and would not now commence until July 2019, with a corresponding delayed completion date of March 2022.

As far as the roll out was concerned for Universal Credit, the current planning assumptions for ARP Councils was that Breckland Council would 'go live' next year in March 2018 followed by the remaining Councils in May and June 2018 with Forest Heath being the final authority to 'go live' in September 2018. It was noted that St Edmundsbury and Waveney District Councils 'go' live date was planned for October 2017.

The report was otherwise noted.

31/17 FORTHCOMING ISSUES (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 11)

None.

32/17 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 12)

Members were asked to consider future meeting arrangements and whether to continue to hold meetings on a Tuesday or a Thursday in future.

Following a discussion, it was agreed that future meetings would take place on a Tuesday as currently held.

The Democratic Services Officer would email Members with 2018/19 dates accordingly.

The arrangements for the next meeting on Tuesday, 5 December 2017 at 10.00am in Thetford were noted.

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The meeting closed at 11.00 am

CHAIRMAN