

BRECKLAND COUNCIL
FOREST HEATH DISTRICT COUNCIL
EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

ANGLIA REVENUES AND BENEFITS PARTNERSHIP JOINT COMMITTEE

Held on Thursday, 3 December 2009 at 4.00 pm in the
Level 7, Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford

PRESENT

Mr S. Edwards	Mr E. Stewart (Chairman)
Mr. J. Humphreys	Mr G. Wilson
Mr W.H.C. Smith	

In Attendance

Andrew Claydon	- Strategic Director (Resources)
Kate Dann	- Principal Benefits Officer (ARP)
Mark Finch	- Finance Manager
Linda Grinnell	- Head of Finance
Sharon Jones	- Strategic Manager (ARP)
Kate Martin	- HR Adviser
Lynda Pope	- Head of Finance (Forest Heath)
Lesley Walker	- Principal Income Officer
Robert Walker	- Director of Community Services
Elaine Wilkes	- Senior Committee Officer

Action By

49/09 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2009 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

50/09 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mr. D. Burnip, Mr. P. Claussen, Mrs. R. Littlechild, Mr. T. Holden and Mr. R. Urquhart.

51/09 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

52/09 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

53/09 PERFORMANCE REPORTS (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 5)

(a) Operational Performance

The report was presented by the Strategic Manager.

Details of the progress being made with debtors and bankruptcy cases were noted. Monthly reviews were being made of cases where debtors were choosing not to pay. Publicity work was also under way.

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Work on the new website was nearing completion and copies of the test website pages showing how they would look were distributed to members.

The self-service project for East Cambridgeshire was also nearing completion and the end of year preparation work had commenced.

A campaign to increase the take-up of direct debit payments had commenced. In future, every bill and reminder would include a direct debit mandate form.

Council Tax collections were affected by an overall increase of more than 720 additional properties being added to the register, resulting in a decline in the collection rate but an increase in income. The uptake of direct debit payments on new properties was also not keeping pace and therefore more work was being done in this area.

There was a new line in the statistical reports to show the position on arrears and the NI 180 indicator had been removed.

Some questions of detail were answered, following which the report was noted.

(b) **Financial Performance**

The report was presented by the Chief Accountant, Breckland Council.

An amendment to the report was given by the Strategic Manager, who explained that, since the report had been produced, a further update had been made and the very latest budget forecast showed an under spend of £134,000.

There were a number of variances to note, the majority of which reflected extra case loads being dealt with and that were being offset by additional grant funding from the Department for Work and Pensions.

The report was noted.

54/09 BUDGET 2010-11 (AGENDA ITEM 6)

The draft budget for 2010-11 was presented by the Chief Accountant, Breckland Council.

It was noted that the budget working papers had been subject to joint scrutiny by management at Breckland and Forest Heath Councils, as a result of which some support service costs had reduced.

The draft budget would be subject to some minor changes but these were expected to be reductions in expenditure rather than increases.

It was also pointed out that the partner authorities had received additional grant from the DWP in 2009-10 to help offset costs of additional case load resulting from the economic downturn. It was not anticipated at this stage that a similar grant would be received in 2010-11 but if this position changed, a report would be made to seek approval

for the use of any additional grant.

The budget would be monitored by the Joint Committee but each partner authority would need to assimilate the relevant parts of the budget into their own authority's budget.

RESOLVED that the partnership budget be approved; and

RECOMMEND to each of the partner authorities to adopt the relevant parts of the partnership budget in their main authority budgets.

55/09 DWP ADMINISTRATION FUNDING UPDATE (AGENDA ITEM 7)

The Strategic Manager explained that there remained some DWP grant money which it was proposed should be re-allocated to enable some new computer equipment and software to be purchased (electronic forms system and a quality assurance module) which would further enhance the benefits administration and verification processes, as well as reducing the volume of paper forms by about a fifth of their current level. The verification process would be simplified by removing the need for scanning and double-entry recording and audit monitoring processes would also be speeded up and improved.

It was also proposed to hold funding in reserve to continue to employ agency staff for an Overpayments Officer and Clerical Officer Assistant post for 2011-12 to meet the expected continuing case load demand.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and approval is given to the creation of additional cost centre codes and re-allocation of funding as set out in the report.

56/09 NATIONAL NON DOMESTIC RATES (NNDR) DEFERRAL OF RATES SCHEME (AGENDA ITEM 8)

The Strategic Manager explained that grant funding from CLG (the Government department for Communities and Local Government) had been made to all authorities to implement changes under the National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR) Deferral of Rates Scheme.

The amount of CLG funding made to each of the partner authorities was as follows:

- Breckland - £15,561
- Forest Heath – £11,924
- East Cambridgeshire - £11,859

The total cost of the project, which had now been implemented, was £19,412, leaving a surplus of £19,932. It was proposed that this balance should be shared and retained by each of the partner authorities as follows:

- Breckland - £6,038
- Forest Heath - £7,036
- East Cambridgeshire - £6,858

Action By

Mark Finch,
Linda Grinnell,
Lynda Pope

Sharon Jones

Sharon Jones

Action By

RESOLVED that

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) the funding received by East Cambridgeshire and Forest Heath is paid into the partnership budget held by Breckland; and
- (3) the remaining surplus be retained by each partner authority as detailed in the report.

57/09 UPDATE ON EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENT (AGENDA ITEM 9)

The report was presented by the Strategic Director of Resources, Forest Heath District Council, and explained the possible bases by which East Cambridgeshire's terms within the Partnership might potentially be varied if so desired.

It was noted that the only variance in terms and conditions of the partners under the existing Partnership Agreement was in relation to the fixed fee for the provision of services.

Clause 11 of the Partnership Agreement provided that a review of the terms and conditions of the Partnership Agreement had to be formally requested by a signatory to the Agreement. No such request had been made to date.

If a review was requested, suggested issues for discussion might include the need to re-base the financial position to take account of changes since 2007, re-stating the basis for sharing risks and rewards, member input, forward planning of financial targets, agreeing a new membership term.

It was confirmed no further action would be taken until if and when a formal request for a review should be made.

RESOLVED that

- (1) the position be noted;
- (2) in the event that a formal request from one or more of the partner authorities is made, the officers will report back on possible options for review of the terms and conditions of membership.

58/09 DRAFT ARP SERVICE PLAN 2010-11 (AGENDA ITEM 10)

RESOLVED that, subject to more information being reported to the next meeting to enable improved targets to be given for CTax 1 and NDR 1 for Forest Health, the Service Plan for 2010-11 is approved.

59/09 ARP RISK MANAGEMENT (AGENDA ITEM 11)

The updated ARP Risk Register was received and noted.

Sharon Jones,
Rod Urquhart

Action By

60/09 ARP VALUE FOR MONEY REVIEW (AGENDA ITEM 12)

Paul Byrne, Value for Money Project Manager for Forest Heath District Council attended for this item and presented the report.

As part of a value for money review at Forest Health, it was suggested the opportunity be taken to extend the review to cover the Partnership. The review was due for completion by the end of January 2010. The costs of the review for ARP would be met by Forest Heath.

It was acknowledged and agreed that the Project Manager would require access to be afforded to him by each of the partner authorities.

RESOLVED that a collaborative value for money review of the Anglia Revenues Partnership be undertaken for completion by the end of January 2010 and the results reported to the next meeting of the Joint Committee.

61/09 FORTHCOMING ISSUES (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 13)

In addition to standing items, the following matter was noted for report to the next meeting:

- Annual Partnership Assessment – Audit Commission report

62/09 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 14)

Arrangements for the next meeting on 11 March 2010 were noted.

63/09 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

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 items of business on the grounds that they involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Act.

64/09 POSITION STATEMENT ON WORK WITH OTHER AUTHORITIES (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 16)

The Strategic Manager gave an update on the latest position regarding areas of partnership development.

Discussions were currently taking place with four authorities.

The position was noted.

65/09 ARP STRUCTURE REVIEW (AGENDA ITEM 17)

The Director for Community Services, Breckland Council, reported the findings of a review of ARP and ARPT carried out by consultants, KPMG.

Issues relating to ARPT would be dealt with separately but were noted.

The key issues for the Partnership were the challenge to maintain its high level of performance and to take advantage of opportunities for

shared services.

One of the recommended actions was to carry out a value for money review of ARP. This was separately considered and agreed under minute 60/09 above.

The report was noted and it was

RESOLVED that the proposed actions as detailed in the report be agreed, namely:

- (1) A performance benchmarking system be established for ARP;
- (2) The Joint Committee governance model be retained by ARP.
- (3) A review of shared service 'opportunities' is undertaken.
- (4) The ARP does not merge with ARPT.

Action By

Robert Walker

The meeting closed at 5.25 pm

CHAIRMAN