

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

PRESENT

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

In Attendance

Jo Andrews	- Strategic Manager (Revenues)
Rob Bridge	- Corporate Director (Fenland)
Arthur Charvonias	- Strategic Director
Paul Corney	- Head of ARP
Jill Korwin	- Director
Julie Kennealy	- Executive Director (Commercialisation)(S151 Officer)
Adrian Mills	- Strategic Manager (Benefits)
Stuart Philpot	- Strategic Manager (Support Services) ARP
Andy Radford	- Director
Teresa Smith	- Democratic Services Officer

6/16 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2015 were confirmed as a correct record.

The minutes of the Additional meeting held on 12 January 2016 had been omitted from the agenda, and would therefore be added to the next meeting.

7/16 APOLOGIES

An apology had been received from Councillor Barnard. Cllr Sue Allen was present as his substitute.

8/16 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

9/16 DECLARATIONS

None.

Action By

10/16 PERFORMANCE REPORT (STANDING ITEM)

(a) Operational Performance

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

Benefits performance continued to meet profiled targets and was on course to achieve year end targets. The new system had embedded better than anticipated with minimal impact on performance.

The performance outturn for processing Housing Benefits and Council Tax Support for new claims and changes was between 11 and 7 days for 2015/16. The proposed target for 2016/17 had been set for 8 days for all Councils.

Members agreed to the proposed target of 8 days.

It was confirmed that ARP had received the maximum funding available for the Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme (FERIS) for 2016/17.

Councillor Dimoglou asked if it would be practicable for the system to automatically ask customers to review their records every six weeks. The Head of ARP said this formed part of the FERIS project and would feed the request into the process.

Councillor Houlder asked for data on the number of claims submitted via the online forms. The Head of ARP said there had been an increase in the number of customers using the online self-service. The survey form was also being re-vamped to evaluate and develop the online forms. Further information would be available for Members at the next meeting.

Members agreed to the proposed 2016/17 annual targets for Fraud.

(b) Financial Performance

The Executive Director Commercialisation (BDC) said that £332k had been forecasted as underspend for the end of the financial year which had been allocated to an Investment fund. Members were informed that due to the enforcement team surpassing expectations, there could be an additional £200k to add to the income by the end of the financial year.

(c) Balanced Scorecard

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

Councillor Edwards raised that the Forest Heath Collection rates showed a positive picture, however he felt information presented to his Cabinet showed the collection rate was behind. The Executive Director for West Suffolk agreed to look into the reporting of collection rates further.

11/16 WELFARE REFORM UPDATE (STANDING ITEM)

The Strategic Manager (Benefits) ARP presented the report.

The Chairman noted the significant reduction in the Benefit Cap from £26,000 to £20,000.

Action By

Members noted the report.

12/16 ENFORCEMENT AGENCY UPDATE

The Strategic Manager (Revenues) ARP presented the report to Members.

The Enforcement Agency had been operational since July 2015, and had collected in excess of £1.1m and a further £400k will be collected on payment arrangements.

The ARP Enforcement Agency would like to offer the service to other Local Authorities. However in order for the team to move forward, additional resource would be required. The Operational Improvement Board had made it clear that robust data would need to be provided to see why extra resource would be needed.

The Chairman asked when the Joint Committee could expect a report on the success of the service moving forward. The Head of ARP confirmed that information could be provided at the next meeting of the Joint Committee.

The Head of ARP went on to say that a design model was being prepared in order to provide the services of the Enforcement Agency to other Councils.

Councillor Edwards said he was pleased to see that only two complaints had been received and felt this was a testament to the team. The Head of ARP said that early indications showed that the Enforcement Agency was collecting a higher percentage of debt than their competitors.

Mr Radford asked that recommendation 2 be amended to reflect that robust data had been requested by the Operational Improvement Board and Members agreed to this.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- 1) The progress of the Enforcement Agency be noted;
- 2) That the Operational Improvement Board be given delegated authority to appoint up to eight additional members of staff where they are satisfied that the increase is justified by robust data;
- 3) That the Operational Improvement Board be given delegated authority to negotiate the terms of the ARP Enforcement Agency entering in to arrangements to collect debt for councils who are not members of the ARP 2015 Joint Committee.

13/16 FORTHCOMING ISSUES (STANDING ITEM)

Nothing to report.

14/16 NEXT MEETING

The arrangements for the next meeting scheduled for Tuesday 21 June at 10:00am in the Level 5 Meeting Room, Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford, IP24 1BT were noted.

Action By

15/16 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that under Section 100(A) 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 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

16/16 RISK BASED VERIFICATION

The Strategic Manager (Benefits) ARP asked the Joint Committee to approve the Risk Based Verification Policy. It would be reviewed annually.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the report be noted and the policy remained unchanged for 2015/16; and
- 2) the revised Housing Benefit Risk Based Verification Policy for 2016/17 for Breckland Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, Fenland District Council, Forest Heath District Council, St Edmundsbury Borough Council, Suffolk Coastal District Council and Waveney District Council be approved.

17/16 COMMERCIAL UPDATE

The Executive Director Commercialisation (BDC) provided Members with an update.

Members agreed that the Operational Improvement Board should negotiate on a basis of delivering services for other Councils in the first instance but that where appropriate they should consider alternative approaches, sharing risk and benefits with other Councils, where this would benefit the seven ARP partners.

18/16 SHAREHOLDERS AGREEMENT AND PRESENTATION

The Executive Director Commercialisation (BDC) informed Members that the Shareholders Agreement had been agreed between the seven Authorities.

A final copy would be circulated to the seven authorities to incorporate the changes agreed, and each Authority should progress this through their individual committee process.

The meeting closed at 11.45 am

CHAIRMAN