

BRECKLAND COUNCIL
FOREST HEATH DISTRICT COUNCIL
EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

ANGLIA REVENUES AND BENEFITS PARTNERSHIP JOINT COMMITTEE

Held on Wednesday, 25 January 2012 at 2.00 pm in the
Level 5 Meeting Room, Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford IP24 1BT

PRESENT

Mr D Ambrose Smith
Mr P.D. Claussen
Mr S. Edwards
Mr R. Everitt

Mr P Moakes (Chairman)
Mr W.H.C. Smith
Mr E. Stewart

In Attendance

David Burnip	- Chief Executive
Paul Corney	- Waveney & Suffolk Coastal Councils
Mark Finch	- Assistant Director of Finance
Linda Grinnell	- Head of Finance
Sharon Jones	- Head of Shared Service (ARP)
Lynda Pope	- Head of Finance
Rod Urquhart	- Operations Manager (Support and Fraud)
Robert Walker	- Assistant Director of Commissioning
Liz Watts	- Chief Finance Officer
Helen McAleer	- Senior Committee Officer

1/12 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Anne Gower, Andrew Claydon and Geoff Rivers.

2/12 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 2)

None.

3/12 DECLARATION OF INTEREST (AGENDA ITEM 3)

No declarations were made.

4/12 VICE-CHAIRMAN (AGENDA ITEM 4)

After being duly proposed and seconded it was **RESOLVED** that Mr Robert Everitt should replace Mrs Anne Gower as Vice-Chairman.

Change to Agenda Order

With the agreement of the Chairman and Members Agenda Items 8 and 9 were moved up the agenda so that Mr Corney could sit in on the discussions to answer questions if required.

Action By

Action By

5/12 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC (AGENDA ITEM 8)

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 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

6/12 FIRST PHASE OF PARTNERSHIP EXPANSION (AGENDA ITEM 9)

The Head of Shared Services (ARP) presented the report and introduced Paul Corney, an officer of Waveney & Suffolk Coastal councils, who was present to answer questions if needed.

The Head of Shared Services (ARP) recapped that the Partnership was looking for ways to future-proof itself, especially in view of the fact that Local Authorities did not yet know what their role would be under the Government's new Welfare Reforms.

The report detailed Phase One of a proposed expansion of the Partnership. Phase One would involve the joining of the IT systems only. If it was later determined that the expansion should not progress nothing would be lost. The other Authorities would continue to use the same IT system which would in itself provide all Partners with a saving year-on-year through reduced software costs.

Some amendments to the Risk Register were explained. It was pointed out that if Phase One was agreed it would significantly reduce risk to the Partnership by increasing resilience.

Mr Corney was asked for his comments and in particular his attitude to performance. He supported the phased approach and said that with all the changes that Local Authorities were facing shared IT would provide capacity sharing capability as well as significant savings.

With regard to performance he noted that all Councils were under pressure to make savings and that extra resilience would support that. The Partnership authorities and Suffolk Coastal and Waveney were all performing well and provided a good blend. Joined up systems would support that, whereas failure to expand would cause risk.

RESOLVED

- (1) to agree to extend the existing agreement with Capita Services for the use of the Academy Revenues and Benefits ICT application to include Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils, as the first phase of extending the partnership for the provision of Revenues and Benefits services; and
- (2) to issue a letter of intent to Suffolk Coastal & Waveney District Councils, from the Chairman on behalf of the Joint Committee, that it is intended to expand the ARP to include Suffolk Coastal & Waveney District Councils and that the Academy system should be implemented for those two Councils at Breckland House.

Mr Corney left the meeting.

Action By

The Chairman then informed the Officers that at their pre-meeting Members had discussed Governance and also how the Partnership could prepare strategic plans in readiness for potential future work from the DWP.

He suggested that an external view was needed to help the Partnership to prepare and it was agreed in principle to seek advice from two separate sources.

7/12 BUDGET (AGENDA ITEM 5)

The Meeting moved back into Open Session.

The Assistant Director of Finance (Breckland) presented the report.

After having had a number of meetings the S151 Officers had agreed all the figures except the salary and pension contributions. He asked the Committee to accept the budget but acknowledged that further discussion about pensions would be needed. The proposal was to include all the pension costs, including deficits, which would be different for each authority. Pension costs were a considerable risk and needed to be resolved shortly.

The Head of Finance (Forest Heath) said that they had worked hard to resolve differences and pensions was the only issue still under discussion. Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury paid interest only on their pension deficit, whereas the Breckland contribution was part capital and part interest. To be directly comparable it would be necessary to add in a capital contribution for Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury.

Previously only future decisions had affected the Partnership but moving forward it would be necessary to include all employment costs in the ARP budget which would bring pension deficits into the consideration.

Pension deficit was a lump sum, not a percentage. If the organisation reduced in size the lump sum would stay the same. This presented a risk for the future and the potential for the ARP to pick up costs. More details were needed.

The Chief Executive (Forest Heath) said that it was in the interest of all Partner authorities that the potential ramifications were worked through robustly and as soon as possible. He suggested that the budget be deferred and the S151 Officers, together with the Chief Executives, be tasked with working out the issues and coming back to the Committee with all the details explained.

It was agreed that an additional meeting would be arranged in the near future, to meet the timetable set by budget requirements.

A Member asked what the implications were of not setting the budget and was advised that it would mean that the Councils would move forward with setting their budgets without knowing what the ARP contribution would be.

Action By

The Vice-Chairman suggested that if Officers could not agree the details in the timescale available the Committee should accept the budget as presented and agree to sort out the details for the following year.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) the budget be deferred and the S151 Officers together with the Chief Executives be tasked with working out the details and bringing them back to the Committee; and
- (2) if the Officers could not reach agreement, the budget as presented would be agreed by Members and the details would be worked out during the next year.

The date of the Special meeting was set as Friday 3 February 2012 at 2.00pm in Breckland House, Thetford.

8/12 LETTER TO MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT (AGENDA ITEM 6)

The Head of Shared Services (ARP) had prepared a draft letter to MPs for Members to approve. She sought guidance on which MPs to invite.

The Chairman asked if Members thought that MEPs should be included in the invitation, but it was felt that it was more relevant to invite local MPs. The Breckland Members advised that they had already invited Elizabeth Truss MP as she had expressed an interest when attending a recent Group meeting.

RESOLVED that the invitation be sent to MPs of the Partnership's constituencies together with their relevant Ministers and to the Leaders of the Partnership Councils.

9/12 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 7)

The arrangements for the additional Special meeting on Friday 3 February 2012 were confirmed.

Members also noted the dates of future meetings.

The meeting closed at 3.05 pm

CHAIRMAN