

**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 Thursday, 12 December 2013 at 2.00 pm in the**  
**Level 5 Meeting Room, Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford IP24**  
**1BT**

**PRESENT**

Mr P.D. Claussen (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)	Mr P Moakes
Mr R. Everitt	Mr W.H.C. Smith
Mr D Ambrose Smith	Mr J Griffiths (Substitute Member)
Mr R Millar	Mr N Roman (Substitute Member)

**In Attendance**

Lucy Burt	- Fraud & Visits Team Manager
Paul Corney	- Head of ARP
Mark Finch	- Assistant Director of Finance
Liz Watts	- Director
Helen McAleer	- Senior Committee Officer

**45/13 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**46/13 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 2)**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Edwards and Ray. Councillor Griffiths (St Eds) and Councillor Roman (Forest Heath) were present as Substitutes.

**47/13 FRAUD (AGENDA ITEM 5)**

The Fraud & Visits Team Manager was in attendance for this item.

Work on Business Rates cases was ongoing and the Team were focussing on those that 'would not pay' rather than those that 'could not pay'. Three cases had been passed to the West Suffolk Central Management Team to decide if more action was warranted.

With regard to the Single Fraud Investigation Service, there had been mention in the Autumn Statement and at a conference the previous week that funding in excess of £16m would be provided to Local Authorities for counter-fraud work.

Efforts were being made to engage with Havebury and Flagship Housing Associations. Councillor Everitt commended that approach

**Action By**

**Action By**

and said it was the sensible way forward. Councillor Griffiths said he would be attending Havebury's next Board Meeting and he would be willing to speak to them about it. The Fraud & Visits Team Manager suggested she should give Councillor Griffiths a separate update.

Finally she advised Members that the Team had won the IRRV Excellence in Anti Fraud award.

The Chairman had been present at the adjudication for the award. He had been impressed by the number of staff involved and he said that the effort by the whole team had won the award. He asked the Fraud & Visits Team Manager to pass on the Committee's congratulations.

Councillor Griffiths asked about the costs of prosecution and was advised that usually costs were covered. An average case cost about £450/500.

**48/13 PERFORMANCE REPORT (AGENDA ITEM 6)**

(a) Operational Performance

The Head of ARP presented the report and said that the performance figures were looking good. With regard to Council Tax Collection Rates, some attachments to Benefits were being returned due to other attachments already being in place, such as rent or utility bills.

Currently there seemed to be about a .6 to .8 reduction in collection rates, which was likely to be partly because of the Council Tax reduction scheme. It would be interesting to see how that developed as the year progressed. There was likely to be 'arrears creep', which took a while to show.

Councillor Everitt asked what the Datatank referred to on page 17 meant and was advised that it was a review to ensure eligibility for single person discount. It was carried out every couple of years, but the cost of running continuous checks was being investigated.

The report was noted.

(b) Financial Performance

The Assistant Director of Finance (BDC) presented the paper which showed a 3% saving in the first half of the year against the set budget. That saving was mainly through staff vacancies. There had been an overspend on legal fees and software maintenance costs, but that had been off-set by the extra income from the Waveney & Suffolk Coastal work.

The report was noted.

**Action By**

**49/13 PENSION UPDATE (AGENDA ITEM 7)**

The Assistant Director of Finance (BDC) said that at a meeting to discuss the risks involved in moving towards a Teckal Company it had been identified that there could be destabilisation of the Breckland Pension scheme by the large number of staff transferring out. A request had been made for some modelling to be done to show the effects and the report was expected in the next month.

Councillor Everitt asked whether the same issue might affect the proposed further expansion of the Partnership and he was advised that that would be looked at during the usual due diligence work that would be carried out if the expansion was agreed.

The Director (FH&SE) explained that it would only be an issue if a Teckal Company was formed.

Councillor Griffiths asked if it was only an issue for Breckland and it was confirmed that it was, due to the large number of ARP staff employed by them.

Councillor Moakes suggested that there must be other ways of tackling pension provision and it was agreed that there might be. However, the Director (FH&SE) said that the scale of the problem needed to be understood before matters moved forward.

**50/13 PARTNERSHIP BUDGET 2014-15 (AGENDA ITEM 8)**

The Assistant Director of Finance (BDC) presented the Partnership budget which had been prepared by Service Management and reviewed by the S151 Officers.

The cost of the Management restructure had been factored in, but not the cost of the proposed expansion. If that was approved those costs would need to be factored in at a future stage.

The shares set out for each authority were not an exact percentage representation due to the baseline figure set when St Edmundsbury had joined the Partnership.

Councillor Everitt noted the large reduction in the cost of supplies and services and in transport.

It was explained that there had been a number of administrative grants which had been included in previous years. None were anticipated for 2014/15 so that had affected the supplies and services figures. The drop in transport costs was due to the App E element for St Edmundsbury staff having to travel decreasing. It had only applied for a set number of years and ceased completely by 2014/15.

**RESOLVED** that the partnership budget for 2014/15 be approved.

**51/13 BALANCED SCORECARD (AGENDA ITEM 9)**

The Head of ARP apologised that due to the amount of work preparing the business case for the proposed expansion, the Balanced Scorecard had not been populated. It would be ready to bring to the next meeting.

**52/13 WELFARE REFORM (AGENDA ITEM 10)**

The Head of ARP advised that recent information received implied that Universal Credit would not be implemented before 2016/17. There had been conflicting advice on whether it was 2015 or 2016 and that needed to be verified, but he thought it unlikely that it would be implemented before 2016.

On the Pensioner Credit side, the migration of Housing Benefit cases had been put back. Pension Plus was unlikely to start before 2018.

The ARP had fully implemented most of the changes that they had been advised of and were still assessing the impact.

Discussions would take place with Housing Associations offering to progress the change to Direct Payments before Universal Credit was implemented.

**53/13 FORTHCOMING ISSUES (AGENDA ITEM 11)**

The extension of the Welfare Benefits cap, which would impact on Housing Benefit, had been announced in the Autumn Statement. It was still not known what that would mean in real terms.

**54/13 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 12)**

The arrangements for the next meeting on 13 March 2014 were noted.

**55/13 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC (AGENDA ITEM 13)**

**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.

**56/13 NEW PARTNER BUSINESS CASE (AGENDA ITEM 14)**

The Head of ARP presented the report (which had been inadvertently omitted from the agenda) and business case to support Fenland District Council becoming full members of the Partnership.

He was confident that the expansion would not add much additional

**Action By**

risk whilst providing substantial savings. It was also a good opportunity to do now as the work could be amalgamated with the next phase of the Waveney & Suffolk Coastal (W&SC) project.

In response to concerns raised it was noted that staff of Fenland and W&SC would remain in their existing locations. The main savings would be in system administration. Much of the strategic management could be done remotely and video conferencing would be used where possible.

Members discussed the issues of further growth. The Head of ARP advised that the private sector were using electronic access to work remotely.

Councillor Ambrose-Smith thought that the future shape of the ARP should be determined before any further expansion.

Councillor Millar was open-minded but thought that expanding the Partnership might reduce future options.

Councillor Smith thought that the Partnership had the necessary structure in place to make strategic decisions. It had grown to meet the challenges. The Chairman agreed.

Councillor Moakes said that the review had clarified that the Partnership did want to expand if the structure was in place and it made economic sense to do so.

Councillor Griffiths was in favour of the expansion. It was the right time to do it. ARP offered a better service and better value for money. As long as it would continue to do so, Fenland should be admitted. Strategic issues should be looked at separately.

**RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND TO EACH PARTNER AUTHORITY** that subject to due diligence, Fenland District Council be admitted as a full member of the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership with effect from 1 April 2014.

**57/13 WAVENEY AND COASTAL PARTNERSHIP (AGENDA ITEM 15)**

This matter had been discussed under Agenda Item 14.

The meeting closed at 3.30 pm

CHAIRMAN