

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 Thursday, 17 September 2015 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
Cllr M Barnard	Mr R Kerry
Mr J Clark	Mrs S J Mildmay-White
Mr S. Edwards	Mr C Seaton (Vice-Chairman)
Ms L Every	Mr M. A. Wassell

In Attendance

Jo Andrews	- Strategic Manager (Revenues)
Rob Bridge	- Corporate Director (Fenland)
Arthur Charvonja	- Strategic Director
Paul Corney	- Head of ARP
Julie Kennealy	- Executive Director (Commercialisation)(S151 Officer)
Adrian Mills	- Strategic Manager (Benefits)
Stuart Philpot	- Strategic Manager (Support Services) ARP
Richard Quayle	- Director (Support Services)
Liz Watts	- Director
Helen McAleer	- Senior Democratic Services Officer
Teresa Smith	- Democratic Services Officer

30/15 MINUTES

The Executive Director Commercialisation (BDC) asked with increasing pressure for Councils to join together where did ARP stand with a decision on new partners joining the partnership.

The Chairman suggested that it required some preparation from each Authority, and therefore suggested it should be added as a future agenda item.

a) ARP Trading Company restructure (Minute Ref: 26/15)

The Democratic Services Officer informed Members that with regard to recommendation two, a letter had been received from East Cambridgeshire requesting to join the Trading Company.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Action By

Action By

31/15 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Allen, Holdcroft and Jolly.

32/15 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

33/15 DECLARATIONS

No declarations were made.

34/15 PERFORMANCE REPORT (STANDING ITEM)

(a) Operational Performance

The Strategic Manager (Support Services) ARP presented the Performance Report up to 31 July 2015.

The ARP had continued with regular liaison meetings with service providers, including Housing Associations, Universal Credit Social landlords, Jobcentre Plus and the Citizen Advice Bureau.

It was highlighted that the ARP Fraud Team had successfully investigated and prosecuted a claimant for non-commercial tenancy fraud.

Universal Credit was now live for new claims from single working age customers living in five out of the seven partnerships. East Cambridgeshire and Fenland Council would go live early next year.

On-line claims continued to rise and 1634 new benefit claim forms had been received on-line in the current financial year.

Benefits performance continued to meet profiled targets and was on course to achieve end of year targets.

The Council Tax Team continued to work together so that one process could be achieved across the whole partnership.

Work on the redesign of letters and Council tax bills continued to provide a consistent shared look and feel across all seven partners in readiness for the annual billing 2016-17.

Six members of staff were continuing to study towards the Level 3 IRRV professional qualification. Examinations for some of the Group were undertaken in July 2015.

Work was underway on the creation of a new ARP website, which would be easier to navigate for the customer and primarily transaction based. A test website would be available for staff and customer focus groups to test the functionality and usability of the site.

Councillor Barnard referred to Internal Process Dimension Fraud (Page 16 of the agenda) and asked if the Logo for Waveney District Council should be included as Fraud was dealt with internally.

Action By

AM

The Head of ARP agreed it should be removed. He mentioned that DWP would be monitoring fraud going forward. He went on to say that with the implementation of a new system, there might be a shift in the performance patterns. Work was underway with CIVICA to benchmark performance and resource data with other authorities and information would be provided to the Committee at a later date.

Councillor Mildmay-White asked if the Committee would still receive fraud data from DWP.

The Head of ARP confirmed that DWP would produce statistics, but they might need to be broken down to Local level. Adrian Mills was asked to pick this up.

The Chairman asked for the pass rate of those that had taken the exams and it was confirmed that one member of staff had passed the exam.

The Head of ARP also mentioned that they were looking at the possibility of an NVQ route to training.

(b) Balanced Scorecard

The Chairman asked if anyone had any comments to make about the Balanced Scorecard.

The Executive Director Commercialisation (BDC) expressed her thanks to the team.

(c) Financial Performance

The Executive Director Commercialisation (BDC) asked for Members' comment's on the Financial performance report.

Councillor Every noted an increase in the transport related costs and asked if this was a trend or a one-off.

The Head of ARP said it was linked to the Fraud Team and travelling across Districts. However, it was thought these expenses should reduce as the use of video conferencing was introduced.

35/15 MOVING TO A SINGLE MEMBER JOINT COMMITTEE

The Director (West Suffolk) said that as the operational model for ARPT had been decided, it was a good time to consider moving the Joint Committee to a One Member, One Vote model. However, consideration needed to be given to the Shared Authorities and whether there should be One Member representing two Councils with two votes.

Councillor Barnard preferred one Member for each of the two Councils as they were still two separate Authorities.

Councillor Wassell said that Breckland's shared arrangement with South Holland did not conflict with the ARP arrangements. However, with the topics of devolution, combining authorities, and allowing the new arrangements of ARPT to bed-in, he suggested the idea should be put on hold.

Action By

Councillor Edwards said that the topic of One Member per Authority had been talked about for long enough and he felt it was right for one vote per person going forward.

The Chairman suggested it was up to the individual Authorities to decide.

Councillor Holder said that Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury should have separate votes, even though they had joint informal Cabinets, and were unlikely to disagree.

The Director said the Report kept the doors open for the variety of options.

Councillor Sara Mildmay-White said that she had discussed the recommendations with the Cabinet at St Edmundsbury who were happy with the proposals.

RESOLVED to:

RECOMMEND to the seven Councils * that the Joint Committee moved to a single Member and Two Substitutes per authority, with the option for one of the substitutes to attend and take part in debate (but not vote).

36/15 WELFARE REFORM UPDATE (STANDING ITEM)

The Strategic Manager (Benefits) ARP said that five partners were now live with Universal Credit.

The impact on service levels had been less than first thought as the public were using the self-service.

The Pensioner Housing Benefit migration date had not been confirmed and further details were expected.

The Budget announcement in July saw the working age benefit scheme frozen for four years and tax credits threshold changes.

The Chairman asked if a report could be made available prior to the meeting rather than a verbal report in future.

AM

37/15 ENFORCEMENT AGENCY UPDATE

The Strategic Manager (Revenues) ARP informed Members that the Enforcement team had been up and running since June 2015 with a Manager and Compliance Team.

The Compliance staff had received intensive training in June and two Enforcement Agents were working towards certification. Another enforcement agent had been appointed who was already certified.

Since the first letters issued in July £125,000 had been collected.

The next stage would be to produce performance statistics and compare data against the private companies that used to be responsible for debt collection.

Action By

Councillor Mildmay-White asked what percentage had been collected against the total outstanding debt.

The Strategic Manager (Revenues) ARP said it was too early to tell but it would be included in the performance statistics.

The Head of ARP said that the collection of the £125,000 also resulted in arrangements being made in collecting further outstanding debt.

Councillor Wassell congratulated the team, and said it proved that the concept could work.

The Director (West Suffolk) asked for Members to be ambassadors for the scheme at both Member and Officer level as there would be a possibility of selling the service to other providers during 2016.

Councillor Mildmay-White asked for an information sheet to help with the promotion of the service, and it was agreed this would be provided.

JA

38/15 FORTHCOMING ISSUES (STANDING ITEM)

The Head of ARP informed Members that the Service Delivery Plan, and the Risk management report would be available for Members at the next meeting.

The Chairman informed Members that Liz Watts, the Director (West Suffolk) would be leaving the organisation, and thanked her for her support and wished her well for the future.

39/15 NEXT MEETING

Members from Fenland District Council were unable to attend the meeting of the 17 December 2015. It would be re-scheduled and Members would be informed of the new arrangement.

The Chairman requested that future meetings should commence at 10:00am.

The meeting closed at 10.50 am

CHAIRMAN