

# ARP PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS REPORT

Report of the Head of ARP.

## Benefits & Fraud

### Benefits performance

Benefits performance continues to meet profiled targets and is on course to achieve year end targets.

It is noted performance differs for all Councils; Waveney in particular, Suffolk Coastal to a lesser extent, have not performed as well, having been affected by staff losses and issues with remote access to their dip & workflow system. This has prevented us utilising the resilience of wider teams within the partnership; the EDMS project will resolve this issue.

### DWP ARP fraud funding

In November 2014 the DWP set targets for LAs to reduce claimant error in the Benefits system.

The ARP identified the software Councils used to assess and review claims did not have the functionality to enable the identification of suitable cases.

The ARP worked with the software company to lead on and develop a bid on behalf of 139 LAs to a DWP fund established to assist LAs with this new task.

This process involved ARP in extensive discussions with the software company, DWP and through LA user groups the other LA sites, resulting in a successful bid for substantial funding awarded to the ARP to develop, test and implement a solution for the 139 LAs.

The software is now live and available for all the LAs to use. The ARP have been involved in further site meetings with the DWP, who are running a case study to share nationally the best practice identified by the ARP.

Furthermore, the ARP intend to place the article in the IRRV and local Government publications.

### Fraud targets

Following the transfer of Housing Benefit fraud to the DWP on the 1 September 2015, the team have been tasked, in accordance with the Business Case approved by Joint Committee, to identify and prevent fraud leading to an increase in Council income in the following areas:

- Local Council Tax Support
- Single Person Discount
- Council Tax & Non Domestic Rates
- Tenancy fraud

Furthermore, the team are working with Housing Teams and Housing Associations to tackle Right to Buy and subletting abuse.

The team are on track to exceed the Business Case savings approved by Joint Committee for 2015/16; as work continues throughout the year we will develop a better understanding of the opportunities and the savings the team can achieve. With regard to target setting for 2016/17, it is proposed we present targets for Joint Committee to consider at their March 2016 meeting.

## Revenues

A review of all the empty properties has been completed, in some cases in conjunction with the Housing Teams, in order to maximise the New Homes Bonus paid to each authority. The New Homes Bonus is paid based on the increase in the number of homes available; this being the number of new properties built plus/minus the change in the number of empty properties. All authorities should receive this payment.

The further recovery team have collected £248,479.92 in this financial year which includes 13.17% (£67,783.00) of the cases raised in this financial year. Norfolk County Council has agreed to fund their share of the cost of these officers and discussions continue with the other two County Councils.

All single discount applications are now being checked by the compliance team in order to prevent discounts being granted incorrectly and avoiding the issue of trying to collect amounts of Council Tax retrospectively.

## Support

### **Imaging System (EDMS)**

A bid process, assisted by the Waveney DC Procurement Team, was undertaken during 2015 resulting in the amendment of the existing contract to CIVICA UK Ltd to provide the imaging system for all seven partners with one single access. Operational staff were actively involved in the selection process with representatives from all sites evaluating the software from a user perspective. CIVICA – W2 was clearly the favoured option from the users' evaluation returns.

The ability for full partnership working has been hampered with the three newest partners, Fenland DC, Waveney DC and Suffolk Coastal DC using a different imaging system (Information @ Work) to the other four partners (CIVICA – W2). The imaging system is essential for the efficient processing and storing records of incoming and outgoing documents electronically.

A conversion project is now underway to transfer all images from Information@work to CIVICA-W2 for Fenland DC, Waveney DC and Suffolk Coastal DC and a common shared working image system for all seven partners prior to the Annual Billing process beginning in February 2016.

### **Channel Shift and Website**

Listening to customer feedback, including the survey on the current Anglia Revenues Website, it has become clear the site has grown to become difficult and confusing to navigate. With the success of the updated West Suffolk website, a new Test Anglia Revenues Website is currently being developed using the same approach.

The design of the new website is primarily transactional, to capture the majority of needs of the customer as soon as they reach the site, for example pay online council tax or make a claim for Benefit.

When using the website, the customer will be encouraged to self-serve through the use of a suite of Electronic Forms supplying information to Revenues and Benefits teams instantly.

An option to open an online account, through a CAPITA product (CONNECT) is also available to customers from the website, enabling access to their correspondence from Council Tax, Business Rates, Landlord information and Benefits electronically, eliminating the need for letters to be

physically sent out. This has the potential to reduce the cost of postage further and CONNECT will be promoted as part of the year end project.

### **Bacs Bureau**

The Finance team operating from Breckland House is now operating the BACS Bureau for all seven partners of the ARP. From the perspective of the customer, this has been a seamless transfer with no interruptions to dates or frequency of payments out or Direct Debit payments in.

The Finance team now have a process embedded to Pay and Balance payments of BACS for Housing Benefit, Refunds for overpaid Council Tax, Refunds for overpaid Business Rates and the transmission of all Direct Debit files for automated payment in for Council Tax, Business Rates and Benefit Overpayments.

This has involved working with each of the Banks used by The Anglia Revenues Partnership, maintaining compliance with the strict rules of the operation of the BACS Bureau.

### **Technical Projects**

All partners of the Anglia Revenues Partnership deal with a high volume of Housing Association Tenants who receive Housing Benefit. The input of rents and service charges into the core calculation system (CAPITA) has traditionally been input manually.

The System Administration team has now successfully established an automated process for input of rent changes and tenancy changes for the major social housing providers, Havebury Housing and Flagship Housing. This is particularly of benefit at Annual Billing enabling the new rents to be input automatically. This eliminates the need to manually input in excess of 5,000 individual rent records and is now available to other social housing providers to set up and use.

### **External Mailing**

A procurement process, assisted by the East of England local Government Association, for the seven partner authorities of the Anglia Revenues Partnership was completed at the beginning of 2014. The contract was for an external printing and mailing company to maximise automation and minimise the cost of outgoing batch mail for Benefits, Council Tax and Business, including the annual billing output. In May 2014, a 3 year contract with an option to extend to 5 years was awarded CRITIQQOM.

The migration of the outgoing mail produced by all seven began in June 2014 and by March 2015 over 90% of outgoing letters and bills had been automated. The use of CRITIQQOM as a supplier provides a complete service up to hand over to Royal Mail for the last mile delivery, attracting the maximum discount available with Primepost, achieving a net saving of over £75,000 in postage costs across the partnership in 2014 – 15 year, compared to 2013 -14 year. Projections are a further £25,000 saving in 2015-16 and the budget for 2016-17 remains at the same level as 2013-14 despite Royal Mail postage increases over the past two financial years.

Further savings have been made by achieving a match of Council Tax Notices to Benefits Notifications enabling both to be delivered in one envelope to a single address.

Work is continuing with the transfer of the remaining outgoing individually produced documents to CRITIQQOM.

The Anglia Revenues Partnership retains the ability to process all outgoing documents in house to provide service resilience in the extreme case of interruption of Business at CRITIQQM.

Using existing software, the design and production of all the Batch output is carried out internally, by the systems admin team, who retain complete control of the content of documents sent to CRITIQQM for printing and mailing.