

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, 26 June 2018 at 10.00 am in the
Level 5 Meeting Room, Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford IP24 1BT

PRESENT

Mr D Ambrose Smith	Mr I Houlder
Mr P.D. Claussen	Mr R Kerry (Chairman)
Mr S. Edwards	Mr B. Provan (Vice-Chairman)
Mrs A. Hay	

In Attendance

Jo Andrews	- Strategic Manager (Revenues)
Sam Anthony	- Head of HR & OD (Fenland District Council)
Alison Chubbock	- Chief Accountant (Deputy Section 151 Officer) (BDC)
Paul Corney	- Head of ARP
Emma Grima	- Director of Commercial Services (East Cambs District Council)
Homira Javadi	- Chief Finance Officer S151 (Waveney & Suffolk Coastal)
Jill Korwin	- Director (Forest Heath & St Edmundsbury)
Teresa Smith	- Democratic Services Team Leader

15/18 CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN

After being duly proposed and seconded and with no other nominations being made it was **RESOLVED** that Councillor Bruce Provan be appointed as Chairman for the ensuing year.

After being duly proposed and seconded and with no other nominations being made it was **RESOLVED** that Councillor Ian Houlder be appointed as Vice-Chairman for the ensuing year.

16/18 APPOINTMENT OF TREASURER

After being duly proposed and seconded and with no other nominations being made it was **RESOLVED** that Breckland District Council be appointed as Treasurer for the ensuing year.

17/18 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2018 were agreed as a correct record.

Action By

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18/18 APOLOGIES

None.

19/18 URGENT BUSINESS (IF ANY)

None.

20/18 DECLARATIONS

None.

21/18 PERFORMANCE REPORT (STANDING ITEM)

(a) Highlight report

The Strategic Manager (Revenues) presented the report and highlighted that Benefits performance was meeting the profiled targets and was on course to achieve the year end targets.

Discussions had taken place with Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils to support the review of single person discounts but Members were informed that Cambridgeshire County Council had decided not to provide further funding.

Revenues collections continued to meet target expectations with the exception of non-domestic rates collection for Waveney District Council. The reason was due to a refund relating to backdated mandatory charity relief which had already been allocated by Finance team.

Further recovery work was continuing with the team who had already exceeded the amount collected by £50,000 based on the same time the previous year.

The enforcement team had recently appointed a sixth enforcement agent which would provide resilience within the team.

A review had been carried out of the resource required to deal with the levels of correspondence and calls received throughout the year. As a result, the Operational Improvement Board had agreed to increase staffing by 2.5fte on a temporary basis, subject to review.

Members were informed that as part of the digitalisation and transformation project 15,000 Council Tax Payers had opted to receive their bills and notifications electronically rather than the traditional letter.

Councillor Edwards asked why Cambridgeshire County Council had decided to no longer contribute and if it could be identified as to what the savings had been for Cambridgeshire versus their contribution. Members were informed that a briefing note would be prepared to explain the generation of extra income.

Councillor Ambrose-Smith said as a County Councillor he was not aware that Cambridgeshire County Council were no longer contributing, and asked for further information to enable him to challenge the decision. Councillor Hay also asked for the same information.

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Members asked to be kept informed of the discussions.

Councillor Hay asked for additional information to be captured within the report to include the report author, and also liked to see the currency symbols added to any table of figures produced. She also asked if the performance figures could be shown per council, rather than a collective figure. In addition, it was queried as to the number of debts the recovery collection referred to. The information would be supplied by the Strategic Manager (Revenues).

(b) Operational Performance - Balanced Scorecard March 2017/2018

Members were informed that in total, four authorities were slightly over the 8-day target for processing Council Tax Support cases, these authorities average processing time was below 9-days in all cases.

Councillor Hay asked why fraud had been identified as a higher amount compared to previous years. It was noted that it was a higher amount due to the team finding smarter ways of identifying fraud and some one-off wins in respect of business rates.

Where a business rates appeal was upheld it could lead to a refund dated back to 2010 which had an impact on the target figures. However, Finance Teams calculated a provision allocated within the accounts should it be required. Members felt that ARP were appearing to fail in their performance when in fact they had no influence over the Valuation Office decision.

The Head of ARP confirmed the Operational Improvement Board were considering how the performance data was reported to make it clearer and easier to understand for each authority involved.

Councillor Houlder asked at what point the clock started to tick with processing a claim as he was aware of claimants who were finding it difficult to contact the office during working hours. The Head of ARP said the clock started to tick at the point the claimant made contact and customers were asked to provide the information as quickly as possible. Officers continued to improve the website to make it easier for the customer make to contact.

(c) Operational Performance - Balanced Scorecard as at end of May 2018

The current performance reporting to the end of May 2018 was 'good'. There was an issue with the Waveney Business rates due to backdating the mandatory charitable relief but it was hoped it would be recovered by the end of the financial year.

Councillor Kerry noted that half the target for fraud had been achieved within the first two months of the year. Members were informed it had been an exceptional two months but also the target had not been reviewed within the last two years but it was thought the target would be exceeded for the coming year.

(d) Financial Performance

The Breckland Chief Accountant presented the financial performance as at

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31 March 2018. The committed transformation funding was at £180,529 at 31 March 2018 and it was expected the budget would be spent by the end of 2018/19. If all of the identified expenditure was achieved by end of 2018/19 and there would be £47,928 remaining for future projects.

The efficiency target of £531,000 was fully achieved.

22/18 WELFARE REFORM UPDATE (STANDING ITEM)

The Strategic Manager (Benefits) presented the report highlighting that the Universal Credit had been rolled out at the Dereham Job Centre and would be in Thetford during September 2018. Universal Credit for all new claims would be rolled out to all DWPs within the ARP Councils by the end of the year.

The Government had made an announcement that in order to manage migration the deadline, for cases currently receiving Housing Benefit, to move to Universal Credit had been extended by 12 months to March 2023.

The Chairman asked if the 5-week wait was still an issue. It was emphasised that this would always be the case, due to the length of time it took to gather information and process the claim. If the claim involved rental payments, it could often be delayed for 8 – 13 weeks, which was causing issues.

23/18 JOINT COMMITTEE UPDATE - NEW COUNCILS' STATUS

The Chief Finance Officer for East Suffolk, Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils updated Members that approval had been given by Government in late May to abolish Forest Heath District, St Edmundsbury Borough, Suffolk Coastal District and Waveney District and replace them with two non-metropolitan districts – West Suffolk and East Suffolk. The new councils would be created on 1 April 2019 ahead of the elections on 2 May 2019.

She gave Members of the ARP Partnership assurance that measures were in place and operational work would not be affected.

One aspect of change would be the governance of the Anglia Revenues Partnership in that the existing governance of seven partners would reduce to five to reflect the new partnership therefore a new partnership agreement would be framed and signed accordingly.

The Head of ARP added that he was content with the way in which the project was progressing and satisfied that everything was in place to make it successful, and that Members would be kept informed of the progress.

24/18 SUMMARY OF 2017/18 INTERNAL AUDIT REVIEWS OF ANGLIA REVENUES PARTNERSHIP (ARP) FOR JOINT COMMITTEE

Michelle Emmens from East Suffolk and Kathy Woodward from Fenland presented to Members the report adding that it was the first year of a joint internal audit approach to review the ARP revenues and benefits systems by East Suffolk, Fenland District Council and West Suffolk Internal Audit Teams on behalf of the seven ARP authorities.

Out of the five areas of audit undertaken all were given the audit opinion of

adequate / reasonable assurance with a number of recommendations; progress had already been made on delivering the recommendations. The Internal Audit team would continue to monitor the recommendations and report back to the Operational Improvement Board and each of the authorities Audit Committees. They both thanked ARP for their assistance in approaching the audit which had been very successful.

The Head of ARP thanked the Audit teams for their work and added it displayed the true spirit of working in partnership.

25/18 FORTHCOMING ISSUES (STANDING ITEM)

Councillor Ambrose-Smith asked when the Joint Committee could expect to see the new style performance reporting. It was confirmed that the new format was being discussed by the Operational Improvement Board, and more information would be reported back to the Joint Committee as soon as possible.

26/18 NEXT MEETING

The arrangements for the next meeting on Tuesday 25 September 2018 at 10.00am, Level 5, Thetford were noted.

Action By

The meeting closed at 11.00 am

CHAIRMAN