

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 23 JULY 2009

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

(Author: Mark Broughton, Member Development & Scrutiny Officer)

JOINT SCRUTINY

1. Summary

1.1 The report asks members to consider taking a joint approach to future scrutiny of the Anglia Revenues Partnership.

2. Recommendation

2.1 Members are recommended to endorse joint scrutiny arrangements in the future examination of the Anglia Revenues Partnership through the establishment of a joint panel and to make formal representations in this respect to Forest Heath DC (Option 3.9).

Note: In preparing this report, due regard has been had to equality of opportunity, human rights, prevention of crime and disorder, environmental and risk management considerations as appropriate. Relevant officers have been consulted in relation to any legal, financial or human resources implications and comments received are reflected in the report.

3. Information, Issues and Options

Background

3.1 The Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) was established in 2003 and provides a partnership-based approach to delivering housing benefits and revenues service to Breckland and Forest Heath District Council areas. Since then, the ARP has expanded and gained the contract to supply a similar service for East Cambridgeshire District Council (in 2007) and, in recent months, also to Welwyn Hatfield Council in Hertfordshire. It seems likely that the ARP will continue to expand its shared services platform.

3.2 From a scrutiny perspective, a panel was established previously to oversee the development of the partnership but this subsequently dissolved approximately two years ago.

Issues

3.3 The governance arrangements for the ARP were provided as background papers for the OSC meeting on 30 April 2009. In brief, a joint committee consisting of two elected member representatives from Breckland, Forest Heath and East Cambridgeshire meet approximately on a quarterly basis. Officer support to the “New Joint Committee” is principally provided by Breckland.

3.4 The ARP is not an employing body in its own right. Staff from Breckland and Forest Heath work side by side at the offices in St Nicholas Street, Thetford. East Cambs employees (formerly Capita employees) transferred into the partnership in 2007 and are employed on Breckland terms and conditions.

3.5 On 30 April 2009 the Strategic Manager of ARP and a Breckland member of the Joint Committee attended the Commission meeting to brief the OSC on performance and future plans. A partnership questionnaire provided background information. On 18 June 2009 the relevant Portfolio holder and Breckland member of the Joint Committee attended the Commission to further highlight the work of the Partnership.

3.6 Given that Breckland and Forest Heath are the two principal partners behind the ARP it is eminently logical to consider the validity of a joint scrutiny approach. Discussions at officer level have been held with Forest Heath DC and it is understood that in principle there is a willingness from that Council to undertake joint scrutiny of the ARP in future together with Breckland. If Breckland members feel that such an approach would be worthwhile there is then the matter of how best such scrutiny could be undertaken.

3.7 There are two clear options as to how joint scrutiny could be undertaken. One approach would be to form a small panel consisting of perhaps three members from each council meeting twice a year. Meetings venues would rotate between Breckland and Forest Heath and the appropriate portfolio member (i.e. from the Joint Committee) from each council would attend to be held to account for the Partnership's performance against the relevant targets and indicators and to describe future plans. A second way forward would be for each Council's Scrutiny committee to consider the ARP's performance annually and either co-opt or invite a member (s) from the other council's scrutiny committee for the purposes only of that specific item.

Options

3.8 To not adopt joint scrutiny and continue to consider future scrutiny of the ARP on an ad hoc basis by the OSC

3.9 To adopt a joint scrutiny approach using a dedicated panel with representatives from each council meeting at least twice a year and using a rota basis for venues

3.10 To adopt a joint scrutiny approach through a co-option/invitation process to the relevant scrutiny committee

Reasons for Recommendations

3.11 As was explained at the OSC meeting on 18 June 2009 the ARP is expected to continue to grow and there is presently no non-executive oversight of its activities. The establishment of a joint scrutiny panel would provide democratic accountability for the ARP.

4. Risk and Financial Implications

4.1 None

5. Legal Implications

5.1 None

6. Other Implications

6.1 Equalities, S17 Crime and Disorder Act, S40 Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006, Human Rights, Other: None

7. Alignment to Council Priorities

7.1 The matters raised in this report falls within the following Council priorities:

- Building Safer and stronger Communities
- Your Council, Your Services

8. Ward/Community Affected

8.1 All

Background Papers:

Minutes of OSC meetings: 41/09 (30 April 2009) and 52/09 (18 June 2009)
ARP Partnership Agreement

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Appendices attached to this report:

None