



## **Service Plan 2010 - 2011**

**October / November 2009**

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## 1. REVISION HISTORY

Issue	Description	Date	Author(s)
1.0	Draft	Oct 2009	Rod Urquhart
1.1	Amends from ARP Mgt team	Nov 2009	Rod Urquhart

## 2. Foreword

This document presents the Annual Service Plan for the Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) for 2010 -2011. The ARP has continued to progress and improve during 2009 -2010 and this work programme provides a platform to continue to provide excellent services & value for money to the Councils that form the partnership.

Since the creation of the ARP service efficiencies, excellence and customer service levels have all increased dramatically. This has been recognised at both National & International levels via awards, visits from other authorities and central government. The ARP was the first 'True Partnership' and still continues to be the benchmark of all other Revenues & Benefits Partnerships.

Much of the success of the ARP is due to the team members, other officers and external organisations who deliver the services to each Partner's citizens, whether through assessing a benefit claim or setting up a payment agreement each team member has a direct impact on the ARP's customer base.

In bringing together this Service Plan we have taken ideas, suggestions & legislative changes from team members, other Local Authority Officers & Members and external organisations.

The document begins by providing a progress report for 2009 - 2010 and develops a plan for the forthcoming year. This plan is split into 5 component parts (Benefits, Council Tax, Non Domestic Rates, Overpayments and Support Services).

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### 3. **2009 – 2010 More Opportunities / More Challenges**

The past year has seen continued progress towards meeting the Anglia Revenues Partnership's original aims and targets. The building blocks for success and progress were put in place several years ago when the Anglia Revenues Partnership began. The partnership provided the opportunity to tear the rule book up and build an organisation to provide for the requirements of the modern day customer and the modern forward thinking local authority.

2009 -2010 has seen the UK Economy shrink; unemployment increase and consumer spending power diminish dramatically. This has had a major impact in our service delivery teams as it has for all authorities.

During 2009-10 the partnership has experienced a massive increase in the number of new claims for Housing & Council Tax Benefit & also individual change of circumstances for existing claimants. In addition to this collection of Local Taxes (Council Tax & Business Rates) has been affected by the economic downturn.

Performance has been maintained and is on course to either meet or surpass the targets set in the 2009 - 2010 work programmes. A very challenging but achievable range of new targets, as shown in Appendix A will ensure further improvement during 2010 – 2011. It is however the intention of the partnership to regularly achieve top quartile performance in all National & Local Performance measures and maintains performance at this high standard.

The core business of the partnership continues to be subject to legislative review over the period of the current government, with potential wholesale changes to Benefits schemes and to local taxation. Whilst the potential implementation of Local Government Re-organisation seems to have abated, the current loss of income to every Local Authority could dramatically impact on the shape & direction of the partnership during the next 12 – 24 months.

The partnership must prove its ability to adapt and survive in an uncertain future so that regardless of how Benefits is delivered and regardless of how local taxation is collected the partnership will be ready to adapt and grow. To develop this flexibility for the future the partnership has begun to explore the opportunities for the provision of additional services beyond the scope of the core services of Revenues and Benefits service provision. During 2009-10 the ARP has continued to sell its excess capacity, via secondments to the ARP trading company and has as a result reduced the costs of service delivery of the ARP

The whole ARP team has driven through real strategic and organisational change. We are recognised nationally as deliverers of change and excellence and regularly provide support and consultancy to other local authorities. This however also provides them with a wide range of knowledge of best practice that is often incorporated within their own service delivery.

The service provided is now completely seamless between the three authorities with all attempts being made to provide an equal service to each authority. This is a careful balancing act that is not always possible to achieve, due to external factors, but any variations are small and decreasing.

**4. Key Achievements 2009 - 2010**

Some of the Key Achievements for 2009 – 2010 are shown below. Whilst some items are still 'work in progress' it is anticipated all items will be completed by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010.

- Maintaining Performance Levels despite increasing Benefits caseload.
- Implementation of the new ARP Website
- Implementation of the Payments / Self Service System for East Cambs
- Implementation of the Business Rates Deferral Scheme
- Increase in Direct Debit levels through uptake drives
- Increase in Small Business Rate Relief take up through uptake drives
- Preparation for the 2010 Business Rates Revaluation
- Expansion of Homeworking
- Reducing costs by selling out extra capacity
- Pursuing further recovery action for Council Tax (Bankruptcy & Charging Orders).
- Providing customer / Landlord forums
- Service Reviews & improvements
- Meeting the Partners' corporate objectives
- Promoting Benefits take up via events, liaison meetings & targeting to assist all groups including vulnerable, elderly & hard to reach.

As can be seen from the list above this will be another impressive year for the Partnership, which continues to grow both in stature and maturity.

## 5. Objectives

### Partnership objectives

The objectives of the partnership to date have been concentrated on the delivery of service excellence to the partners, Forest Heath, Breckland Council and East Cambridgeshire. This excellence is now being achieved and is being widely recognised nationally. The award for beacon status and Municipal Journal confirmed the arrival of the partnership as a mature exemplar of partnership working and confirmed the success of the work to date.

The objectives for the forthcoming year occur in several parallel strands, these include:

- Service Delivery
- Service Efficiencies
- Partnership development

Currently the Service delivery structure is in place and will continue to seek improvement for Breckland, Forest Heath and East Cambridgeshire whilst leading on many new initiatives to drive up performance and exceed expectations.

### Service Delivery Objectives:

- To provide an excellence in service delivery achieving top 25% performance for all indicators in all disciplines for all partners and customers.
- To provide an excellent customer satisfaction with service delivery
- To provide an equality of access and service provision to all end service users
- To promote the provision of e-bills for Council Tax and NNDR

### Service Efficiencies Objectives

- To reduce service provision costs without impacting on service delivery.
- To introduce new and innovative working practices.
- To streamline processes and promote ideas for improvement.
- To continue to meet the Central Government's efficiency targets.

### Partnership Development

- To introduce additional partner(s) to work with the existing ARP authorities to realise additional savings for all parties.

In addition to these objectives the ARP commits to working with its partner authorities (and customers) to assist with the achievement of each authorities (or customers) corporate objective.

The current priorities for all three partners are shown below.

<b>Breckland Council</b>
Building Safer and Stronger Communities: Ensuring that communities are safe, secure, integrated with fairness and equality of opportunity for all.
Environment: Our Green Agenda
Prosperous Communities: Healthy, prosperous & sustainable communities
Your Council, Your Services: A Council that listens & delivers services based on the needs of its customers.
Delivering The Entrepreneurial Council: To recognise the full earning potential of the council & ensure value for money.
Your Council, Your Services: To tailor services to customer needs

<b>East Cambridgeshire District Council</b>
To champion accessible public services to protect and enhance a high quality of life for all residents and ensuring effective and efficient use of resources
To work with our partners to deliver continuous improvement through effective challenge and learning and achieve the development of an informed, involved and united community
As one of the fastest growing districts in the country, we aim to stimulate and properly manage the social, economic and environmental impact of growth to meet the needs and aspirations of the whole community



Forest Heath District Council
Affordable & accessible housing
Community engagement & communication
Community safety
Economic regeneration
Outreach projects for young people
Street scene and environment
Transport issues

This document will complement and feed into each authorities Annual Delivery Plans. The partnership provides performance data to each partner through the following routes to allow scrutiny and monitoring of the performance provided.

## 6. Service Aims

To complement and support the Authorities objectives outlined above. Each individual service function works to a series of aims that enable the partnership to achieve its overall purpose

### Benefits

- To administer an accurate and efficient Housing and Council Tax Benefit system, ensuring as far as possible, that those entitled to benefit receive it promptly, and that fraud is minimised.
- To promote the accessibility and take up of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, providing an equality of service to all, ensuring that those in need receive the assistance that they require and are able to live in decent and affordable housing.
- To consult and consider the needs of the users of the service to provide a relevant, efficient and high quality customer orientated service, embracing the principles of Best Value & Value for money.
- To maximise Government subsidies and minimise budget increases
- To review & implement the use of new technology to enhance the service.

**Revenue Collection (Council Tax, Non Domestic Rates and Overpayments)**

- To maximise the collection of taxation and other revenues due to the Council and to encourage prompt payment to minimise the level of arrears at any given time.
- To treat individuals fairly and equitably having regard to the ability of the individual to pay and to require others who operate on behalf of the Council to also recognise the rights of the individual at all times.
- To ensure that secure controls are in place to safeguard the funds collected.
- To consult and consider the needs of the users of the service to provide a relevant, efficient and high quality customer orientated service, embracing the principles of Best Value.
- To review & implement the use of new technology to enhance the service.

**Fraud Investigation**

- By reducing poverty and developing an active Benefits system, which supports work, savings and honesty. It is important that the administration of Housing Benefit and Council tax Benefit is secure, fair, and provides help where it is needed and is vigilant in tackling fraud and error to ensure value for taxpayers' money.
- Prevent the fraudulent claiming of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit by providing a clear and informative claim process that both encourages the honest claimant but discourages those who may wish to attempt to make a fraudulent claim.
- Prevent the payment of incorrect benefit by correctly validating all claims and ensuring that rigorous verification procedures are in place.
- Detect and stop the payment of any fraudulent claim, by providing a well-planned and proactive fraud detection service that uses a wide range of checks and intelligence gathering to discover any abuse of the benefits system.
- Attempt to recover any financial loss and apply the administrative penalty where appropriate.
- Administer cautions or prosecute any deliberate fraudulent action, within the remit of the approved prosecution policy.
- Seek publicity for actions taken against fraudsters to deter others from considering fraudulent action.

**Support Services**

- To maximise efficiencies, reduce costs and increase income levels to the partnership.
- To monitor and control all the partnership budgets and associated spending.
- To be responsible for reporting on all areas of performance, both internally and externally.
- To ensure all team members are fully trained and continually developed.
- To ensure all Systems are operational and delivering the ARP's expectations.
- To promote, through Business Process Improvements, new and more efficient working practices.
- To manage projects where required.
- To ensure all documents received are processed in a timely manner.
- To review & implement the use of new technology to enhance the service.

## 7. Direction for 2010 - 2011

### What we plan to achieve in 2010 – 2011

The Partnership believes in bringing the 'Best of Breed' ethos to all elements of the service, hence re-alignments in working practices will be undertaken to ensure maximum efficiency & performance levels to all partners.

Local Government reorganisation is still an issue for the partnership with two authorities Breckland (Norfolk) & Forest Heath (Suffolk) being affected. At this time it is uncertain as to the future of the partnership or its composition from 2011/12. The partnership will strive to be a leading player in shaping the needs of any government proposal and will hopefully grow as a result of reorganisation. Additionally each Partner Authority must either increase income or reduce costs in order to meet the medium term financial strategy. Thus the Partnership will have a part to play in achieving this goal.

Another potential change is the whole reorganisation of the Benefits System. Central Government have expressed a desire to simplify the current system to make it easier for both customers & Local Authorities to administer. These changes could be radical in their approach and could mean massive changes to how the system works.

It has also become evident with the economic climate that Authorities need to work together and share services to survive; we are fortunate in having an excellent Partnership & hope to build on our successes by increasing the number of Partners in the coming 12 – 24 months.

Thus the headline requirements for the coming year are

- **Maintenance of current performance levels**
- **Local Government Reorganisation & what it means for ARP**
- **Procurement savings through Joint working**
- **Consolidation of the 2010 Business Rates Revaluation**
- **Service improvements / Reducing Costs**
- **Direct Debit & Discounts uptake campaigns**
- **Small Business Rate Relief uptake campaigns**
- **Meeting the Partners' corporate objectives**
- **Benefits take up**
- **Providing customer / Landlord forums**
- **Rollout of E-Forms & Internet Self Service**
- **E-Billing / E-Notification take up**
- **ARP Restructure**
- **Benefits Reorganisation**
- **New Partner / Partners**
- **Quality Assurance (Maximising Subsidy income)**
- **Review of IT Support & Costs**
- **Promotion of Diversity & Equalities**

## **Service Targets & Key Indicators by Authority**

The ARP's targets & key indicators are shown in separate appendix 'Appendix A '(ARP Service Plan Targets 2010-11). The Partnership has aims to align these targets, where possible during the next couple of years so that all partners have the same levels of service.

## **8. Resourcing the Plan**

### **The Team**

The partnership believes that the key to excellent service delivery is a well-trained and highly motivated team. Training of team members will continue to be delivered by two full-time training officers in line with the partnership's training policy.

Individual training needs have continued to be addressed during 2009–2010 and new team members have been provided with a full and thorough induction course that has provided a solid foundation for the successful delivery of excellent services. In addition team members at all levels have taken advantage of the investment in excellence training and all new team members have undertaken equalities and diversity training during the year.

In 2010 -2011 training will build upon the training needs identified within each individual's performance appraisal and full refresher courses will be provided for current staff during the first half of the year, including the annual fraud awareness training. During the early part of the year team members will be also trained on the Legislative changes being implemented.

In addition to the internal training given to team members, a wide range of professional development is also encouraged, such as:

- CIPFA Revenues consortium
- CIPFA better governance forum
- IRRV training
- Microsoft Office Skills

### **IT**

During 2009 – 2010 and into 2011 the Partnership is reviewing its current IT provision with the Partner Authorities with a view to finding significant cost reductions from our current levels.

### **Accommodation**

The partnership currently occupies two floors and a couple of rooms in Breckland House, Thetford. However consideration is also being given to other sites as well to prepare for any larger expansion in the future. The development of office accommodation within the locality will potentially provide an option for expansion within the vicinity of the current accommodation. This is being monitored as the partnership changes and grows.

## 9. Diversity

The partnership is committed to following the Diversity Agenda. Each of our policies has either been screened or is in the process of screening, with each partner authority. A significant amount of work & training has already been undertaken to ensure our ongoing compliance with this initiative and to ensure any future policies, procedures and actions have been reviewed in line with the guidance.

## 10. Risks

The partnership has identified the following risks as shown in the summary table below, with the actions we are taking to mitigate these risks. A more detailed analysis is shown in Appendix B (Risks & Mitigation Plans).

## 11. Monitoring

### **Executive & Public monitoring**

A regular monthly report on progress will be provided to the partnership's Joint committee, whose members will report to the appropriate Cabinet or Committee meetings as required by each individual council. Reports on progress against the Performance Indicators will be published monthly on public notice boards in each customer office.

## 12. Relationship between ARP & ARP Trading

During 2006 the Partner Authorities created a Trading arm to compliment the Partnership. This enabled the trading company to pursue work outside the remit of the Partnership. This in turn may provide the Shareholders with a dividend payment from its income.

## 13. Comments

If you have any comments about the contents of this service plan please contact,

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Please state whether you are a member of the Revenues staff, a Breckland, East Cambridgeshire or Forest Heath employee, a Breckland, East Cambridgeshire or Forest Heath Councillor, or a user of the service.

Thank you for any comments that you make, we welcome any help to continue to improve the service provided by the Anglia Revenues Partnership.