

BRECKLAND COUNCIL
FOREST HEATH DISTRICT COUNCIL
EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL
FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

ANGLIA REVENUES AND BENEFITS PARTNERSHIP JOINT COMMITTEE

Held on Monday, 30 June 2014 at 10.00 am in the
Level 5 Meeting Room, Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford IP24 1BT

PRESENT

Mr D Ambrose Smith	Mr S. Edwards
Mr TR Butcher	Ms L Every
Mr J Clark	Mr D A Ray
Mr PD Claussen	Mr WHC Smith

In Attendance

Jo Andrews	- ARP
Rob Bridge	- Corporate Director (Fenland)
Lucy Burt	- Fraud & Visits Team Manager ARP
Paul Corney	- Head of ARP
Mark Finch	- Assistant Director of Finance (BDC)
Julie Kennealy	- Executive Director (BDC)
Helen McAleer	- Senior Committee Officer (BDC)
Stuart Mills	- ARP
Stuart Philpot	- ARP
Liz Watts	- Director (FHDC&SEBC)

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13/14 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN (AGENDA ITEM 1)

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

Councillor Claussen in the Chair

After being duly proposed and seconded and with no other nominations being received it was **RESOLVED** that Councillor David Ambrose-Smith be appointed as Vice-Chairman for the ensuing year.

14/14 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 2)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2014 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

15/14 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 3)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Roman and Seaton. Councillor Butcher was present as Substitute for Councillor Seaton.

Apologies were also received from John Hill, Chief Executive, East Cambs District Council.

16/14 FRAUD (AGENDA ITEM 6)

The Fraud and Visits Team Leader presented the report which showed no

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significant changes since the last meeting. A separate report on the Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS) had been included on the agenda as some additional information had been received.

It was noted that Fenland information would be included in future reports.

The figure quoted in Appendix C paragraph 5.1 should read £57,499.61 and it was clarified that the court had not awarded any costs but the Recovery Team could seek recovery of the overpayments over a number of years if necessary.

That case had not received any publicity but the case at paragraph 5.2 had received good coverage by the press. The local press were always notified of cases and advised of court dates to try to get publicity for the work being done.

The report was noted.

17/14 FUTURE OF COUNTER FRAUD WORK OF ARP (AGENDA ITEM 7)

Councillor Ray pointed out that the Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS) would only be looking at Benefits fraud. He was concerned that the ARP would be left with a gap and asked what would happen to other types of fraud if staff were transferred to the DWP.

The Head of ARP explained that there would be a more detailed report provided to the next meeting which would consider the impact of the SFIS and give options for continuing with investigations into other types of fraud. More information was needed from the DWP.

Councillor Smith agreed with that proposal. The ARP was an exceedingly well run and successful service and he was concerned that the SFIS would affect that. He asked what information was coming out of the early pilots.

The Fraud and Visits Team Leader advised that there were ongoing ICT issues. The Local Authority Investigating Officers Group had done extensive work and raised a number of concerns with the DWP but they had received no answers and been told that the scheme would be reviewed between Phases One and Two.

Councillor Smith asked whether any of the pilots had been run in rural authorities as they had very different issues to urban authorities. As the ARP was a large group with lots of local knowledge he suggested that it might be worth applying to become an agency for the DWP.

The Head of ARP thought it was unlikely that the DWP would be willing to relinquish any control. They preferred to centralise services. He also had concerns about the new service as there were still no details of the benefits administration funding that would be reduced as a result of SFIS and Universal Credit, even though SFIS was starting in some areas in October.

Officers confirmed that they were unlikely to have the answers before the next meeting but the report would set out the resource implications and highlight areas of concern and try to detail the areas of fraud investigation still to be covered.

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The Chairman suggested that Councillors could lobby their MPs to use their influence to try to stop things going wrong.

The Officers explained that they had provided feedback to the DWP during the consultation.

The Executive Director (Breckland) agreed that there was an opportunity for the ARP to have a retained fraud service which she thought could focus on a range of activities including POOCR (Proceeds of Crime Recovery). The SFIS was focussed on Universal Credit.

The Director (West Suffolk) noted that as fraud teams were dismantled there might be opportunities for the ARP to get additional work helping small authorities who could no longer sustain their own fraud team for council tax.

The Head of ARP advised that the pilot for Universal Credit was scheduled to start in April 2016 with new claims. There would then be a managed migration of existing claims. The migration of pensions had been delayed until April 2018.

It was agreed that the Head of ARP and the Fraud & Visits Team Leader should send a letter to all local MPs making them aware of the Joint Committee's concerns.

Paul
Corney
/ Lucy
Burt

RESOLVED that a further review of the service provided by the ARP Counter Fraud resource be authorised.

18/14 RISK REGISTER (AGENDA ITEM 8)

The Head of ARP presented the report which would be a regular, twice yearly item on the agenda. Risks would be reported by exception and the main concern was those risks that were out of the control of the ARP. They would continue to be monitored and work with the DWP would be on-going to understand what would affect rateable value.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) the Risk Register be agreed and the contents of the report be noted; and
- (2) ARP risk be reviewed every six months by the Joint Committee in June and December each year.

19/14 PERFORMANCE REPORT (AGENDA ITEM 9)

The Head of ARP presented the report and said that despite the upheaval of a new partner joining ARP, the staff had maintained an extremely high performance and he thanked them for that.

Some elements of the scorecard had not yet been populated but information on appraisals and one-to-ones should be available for the next meeting.

Councillor Ray raised the following questions which were answered by the Head of ARP:

- Page 25 – What did VIC stand for?
Victoria Forms which were a specific type of on-line form which

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<p><i>collected information and input it into the ARP system. Other electronic forms were also used for self-service and they were included in the measure. The title would be changed.</i></p>	Paul Corney
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Page 31 – It would be useful to know how many new claims were being made and the performance. <i>This information would be included in the comments box in future.</i>	Paul Corney
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Page 44 – Why did St Edmundsbury have such a poor start to the year in 2013? <i>It was possible that one large, late payment had skewed the figures.</i>	
<p>The Chairman asked that the official thanks of the Joint Committee be passed to all staff for their performance.</p>	Paul Corney
<p>The report was otherwise noted.</p>	
<p>20/14 FINAL ACCOUNTS 2013/14 (AGENDA ITEM 10)</p>	
<p>The Assistant Director of Finance (Breckland) presented the report which included the Accounts Outturn. At the previous meeting it had been agreed to move the small underspend of £50,000 into the reserves for projects in 2014/15. That money had been released and there was therefore no variance against the budget.</p>	
<p>2013/14 would be the last year that the Small Bodies Return had to be completed as with the expansion of the Partnership the threshold would be exceeded.</p>	
<p><u>RESOLVED</u> that:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">(1) the accounting statement for the year ended 31 March 2014 be approved;(2) the annual governance statement be approved;(3) the 2013-14 out-turn position be noted; and(4) the internal audit report and review of governance arrangements be noted.	
<p>The Chairman signed the required forms on behalf of the Joint Committee.</p>	
<p>21/14 MOVING TO A SINGLE MEMBER JOINT COMMITTEE (AGENDA ITEM 11)</p>	
<p>The Operational Improvement Board had been tasked with looking at options for the future of the Joint Committee in light of its expansion. There was concern that as more Members joined it would become unwieldy.</p>	
<p>The position of Waveney and Suffolk Coastal was questioned and it was explained that they were already effectively fully embedded in the Partnership through the single management team and a number of other shared areas of work, and were keen to become full members.</p>	
<p>Councillor Ambrose-Smith felt that there should be no change to the representation until the future of the ARP had been determined. He also pointed out that point 7 of the report was not correct as East Cambs did not have Executive Members.</p>	
<p>That point was acknowledged and would be changed.</p>	Liz Watts

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Other Members suggested that the right time to change to one Member representation would be when Waveney and Suffolk Coastal joined.

The Chairman was concerned at the amount of time it was taking to determine the future course of the ARP.

It was explained that the business cases were ready apart from agreement about the pension scheme. That had caused the delay and had been the subject of much discussion. A brief had been drafted and would be presented to the three Actuaries (Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk) and it was hoped that the issue could be resolved allowing the review to proceed. It was expected that the work would be done by the end of July and a report would then be presented to the next meeting.

Councillor Smith was loathe to change to one Member representation before that decision was taken, although it was pointed out that any decision on the business cases would require approval by the Partner Authorities anyway.

It was suggested that Waveney and Suffolk Coastal might be concerned at the change to one Member just as they were joining. The Corporate Director (Fenland) said that the same could be said for Fenland, and he suggested that the proposal could be mentioned to Waveney and Suffolk Coastal during discussions.

An amendment to Option 2 was proposed and seconded, that the move to one Member should be reviewed when the Waveney and Suffolk Coastal decision was made. That amendment was not supported.

RESOLVED that option 3 be approved.

The Joint Committee would continue with two members per authority until the decision on the review had been made.

22/14 WELFARE REFORM (AGENDA ITEM 12)

The Head of ARP advised that there was little to report that had not already been discussed. The ARP was part of the group which was continuing to work on cost modelling around the removal of Housing Benefit. There was a DWP support framework to help customers when Universal Credit was introduced but access to terminals was required. At the outset the DWP had talked about the system being 100% digital but following lobbying they now understood that they would not get close to that. They now had rural Local Government representation on the Task Groups which had not been there at the start and they had accepted that an on-going need would exist.

A pot of money was available to address the problems but it was not known yet how much money and the best way to use it. The ARP was talking to Housing Associations encouraging them to talk to their customers about direct payment so that the change could be gradually managed.

The Executive Director (Breckland) suggested that there was an opportunity to be pro-active given the strong caseload experience in rural areas, for the Partnership to put up a proposal based on experience saying what the cost of the service model would be.

The Head of ARP advised that a Draft Service Plan would be presented to the next meeting and he would ensure that that proposal was included as well as consideration of all customer interfaces.

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23/14 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 13)

The arrangements for the next meeting on 11 September 2014 were noted.

The suggested dates for meetings in 2015 were agreed in principle.

The meeting closed at 11.30 am

CHAIRMAN