

BRECKLAND COUNCIL
EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
EAST SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL
FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL
WEST SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

ANGLIA REVENUES AND BENEFITS PARTNERSHIP JOINT COMMITTEE

**Held on Tuesday, 21 September 2021 at 11.00 am in the
Level 5 Meeting Room, at Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford. IP24 1BT**

PRESENT

Cllr David Ambrose-Smith (Chairman)	Cllr Maurice Cook
Cllr Jan French (Vice-Chairman)	Cllr Paul Claussen (Substitute Member)
Cllr Sarah Broughton	

In Attendance

Paul Corney	- Head of ARP
Sam Anthony	- Head of HR & OD (Fenland)
Alison Chubbock	- Assistant Director Finance (Section 151 Officer) (BDC)
Lorraine King	- Operations Manager (Benefits & Billing) ARP
Rachael Mann	- Assistant Director (Resources & Performance) (West Suffolk)
Brian Mew	- Chief Finance Officer & S151 Officer (East Suffolk)
Adrian Mills	- Head of Benefits & Council Tax Billing (Revenues & Benefits) ARP
Matthew Waite-Wright	- Head of NNDR Recovery & Enforcement (ARP)
Ian Smith	- Finance Manager & S151 Officer (East Cambs)
Julie Britton	- Democratic Services Officer

Chairman's Opening Remarks

The Chairman welcomed Lorraine King and Matthew Waite-Wright to their very first ARP Joint Committee meeting.

26/21 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

27/21 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 2)

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Phil Cowen. Councillor Paul Claussen was in attendance as his substitute.

28/21 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 3)

None.

Action By

29/21 DECLARATIONS (AGENDA ITEM 4)

None declared.

30/21 PERFORMANCE REPORT (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 5)

Adrian Mills, the Head of Benefits & Council Tax Billing (ARP) presented the report.

He was pleased to announce that all target areas were green and was a great improvement since the last meeting.

Demand for Council Tax billing continued at very high levels due to the pandemic and in particular due to the high number of people moving taking advantage of the extended stamp duty holiday. Since April 2021 there had been a 60% increase in people moving home Compared to last year and higher than during 2019.

Further recovery of Council Tax arrears was £167,441 more than for the same point last year.

Parking cases for West Suffolk and East Suffolk were now coming through the enforcement process with positive results on collection. Overall, the Enforcement Team had collected £338,262 thus far compared to £227,543 at the same point last year.

The Head of Benefits & Council Tax Billing (ARP) felt that this was a very positive report in terms of performance.

Councillor French asked for an update on the discussions that were being had with Cambridgeshire County Council in respect of a business case for a County fraud hub.

Members were informed that there had been significant progress on this matter and a subsequent report had already been submitted. ARP had submitted a counter proposal to use National Fraud Initiative (NFI) data and was progressing well.

Paul Corney, the Head of ARP advised that this had been agreed in principle and it was hoped that all would in place by 1 April 2022.

Ian Smith, the Finance Manager & S151 Officer (East Cambs) pointed out that there had been a few meetings and progress had been made on this matter but there were a few more 'tweaks' to be made to the Business Case.

The report was otherwise noted.

31/21 WELFARE REFORM UPDATE (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 6)

Adrian Mills, the Head of Benefits & Council Tax Billing (ARP) presented the report.

He drew Members' attention to section 2.1.9 of the report and provided an update on this matter. He explained that DWP had announced a future support offer from April 2022 in terms of providing telephony and digital support to help people to claim and maintain their Universal Credit claim;

Action By

DWP intended to bring face-to-face support back in house from Citizen's Advice. Further discussions would be had with the Operational Improvement Board following this Joint Committee meeting.

In response to a question as to whether the contract awarded to Citizen's Advice Bureau by the DWP had been a failure, Members were informed that a DWP report on this matter was still awaited.

Councillor Cook believed that the CAB had been doing a sterling job and had not been told otherwise at the Cabinet meetings that he had attended.

The Chairman stated that East Cambridgeshire Council was not supporting the CAB.

The report was otherwise noted.

32/21 ARP FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE 2021-22 (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 7)

Alison Chubbock, Assistant Director of fiancé & S151 officer for Breckland Council presented the report.

The figures had been based on information as of 31 July 2021 and the forecast that this stage of the year showed a small underspend against budget of £55k for the whole of ARP; however, enforcement income remained a risk to the Partnership.

It was noted that local authorities would not be able to claim any further grant payments for income lost due to the pandemic in respect of sales fees and charges as the extension to the scheme had ended in July 2021.

The report was otherwise noted.

33/21 FORTHCOMING ISSUES (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 8)

Councillor French thanked the Head of Benefits & Council Tax Billing (ARP) for attending Fenland District Council's recent Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting and asked if any date had been set for the suggested Joint Leaders and Chief Executives meeting.

Members were informed that the next OIB meeting would be discussing the agenda and when this meeting should take place as it was proving difficult to find a date that was suitable for everyone including IOB members.

The meeting would be to discuss the future strategic direction of the ARP to inform a four-year business plan to commence April 2022.

34/21 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 9)

The arrangements for the next meeting on Tuesday, 7 December 2021 at 11am in Level 5 meeting room at Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford were noted.

The meeting closed at 11.25 am

CHAIRMAN