

BRECKLAND COUNCIL
FOREST HEATH DISTRICT COUNCIL
EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

ANGLIA REVENUES AND BENEFITS PARTNERSHIP JOINT COMMITTEE

Held on Thursday, 1 July 2010 at 4.30 pm in the
Level 7, Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford IP24 1BT

PRESENT

Mr F. Brown (Vice-Chairman)	Mr. J. Humphreys
Mr P.D. Claussen (Chairman)	Mr W.H.C. Smith
Mr S. Edwards	Mr E. Stewart

In Attendance

David Burnip	- Chief Executive
Andrew Claydon	- Strategic Director (Resources)
Mark Finch	- Head of Finance
Linda Grinnell	- Head of Finance
Sharon Jones	- Strategic Manager (ARP)
Mark Stokes	- Interim Chief Executive
Rod Urquhart	- Support Services Manager
Helen McAleer	- Senior Committee Officer

35/10 MINUTES

Vice-Chairman in the Chair

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2010 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Vice-Chairman.

36/10 APOLOGIES

There were none.

37/10 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

38/10 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

Mr Claussen and Mr Burnip joined the meeting.

Mr Claussen in the Chair

39/10 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Support Services Manager (ARP) presented the report.

All indicators for the three authorities were green. This included NI181 for which the target had been amended at the previous meeting. Currently all three authorities were performing above the required standard (nine days) and were processing new Benefit claims and

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changes within five days which was exceptional performance.

The Chairman and Members congratulated the team.

The report was noted.

40/10 EFFECTS OF THE BUDGET ON REVENUES AND BENEFITS

The Chairman had asked the Strategic Manager (ARP) to update Members on the effects that changes announced in the budget would have on the Partnership.

The Strategic Manager (ARP) said that there was not a lot of detail available at present. She gave them a list of 'factual' changes but advised that the information was changing daily.

Budget points

- 1) LGA have offered to work with the government to help and advise about the radical reforms needed to achieve the required savings
- 2) Proposals that affect Revenues and Benefits include
 - a. Time-limited council tax freeze
 - i. Government would offer help towards this assuming a loss of revenues of 2.9%
 - ii. No detail as to how this might work
 - b. Changes to Business Rates (non-domestic rates)
 - i. Temporary increase in the threshold for small business rate relief with a Rateable Value of up to £6,000 and tapering relief up to £12,000 with effect from 1st October.
 - ii. Amount of relief doubling – from 50% to 100% qualifying conditions not yet known
 - iii. Small businesses employing up to 10 will be exempt from NI contributions – except if they are in London, South East or East of England.
 - c. Housing Benefit reform
 - i. Details not known but saving £1.8bn across the country by 2014/15
 - ii. Reforms will be around considerations of fairness and work incentives.
 - iii. The Department for Works and Pensions LA improvement team contacted the Strategic Manager about failing authorities experiencing difficulty in Revs and Bens and asked if arp/arpt would be able/willing to offer support and/or management. They are to contact the Strategic Manager week commencing 5th July.
 - iv. From April 2011 the £15 excess that can be paid above the rent charged will be removed
 - v. From October 2011 Local Housing Allowance rates will no longer be based on the median of rents paid but instead on the 30% of rents in a

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- given market
- vi. Medium term (2013/14) rents LHA rates will be uprated on consumer price index rather than local rent as provided by the rent service.
 - vii. Non dependant deductions taken from Benefits as a result of an adult (other than partner) living in a property will be increased from April 2011. These will be staged so the deductions will increase in steps from April
 - viii. Additional help through benefits for disabled (benefits will allow for an extra room for non residential carers) from April 2011
 - ix. People who live in social housing will have benefits assessed on Size criteria as happens currently in the privately rented sector (from April 2013). This means that a single person or a couple will be paid as if renting a one bedroomed property etc.
 - x. There will be a 10% reduction in Housing Benefits for JSA customers after 1 year of being unemployed (date this will be introduced has not been confirmed yet). This 10% reduction will not be removed until the customer returns to work.
 - xi. The announced limits to the amount of Housing Benefits paid to those renting expensive properties will not affect any of the partner authorities.
- 3) Staff wages – 2 year public sector pay freeze on staff earning £21,000. Those earning less will get £250 for each of the two years.
- 4) Review of public pensions to be implemented, ahead of the autumn spending review.

Sharon Jones

(The above is the full report given by the Strategic Manager.)

There was concern that if public rents did not fall, more people would be made homeless, creating pressure on all housing departments.

Members discussed the potential opportunity to market the Partnership's expertise to poorly performing authorities.

The Chairman urged all Members to lobby their MPs to make it clear to the Government that 'one size did not fit all'. Models that were being used to determine costs were based on urban areas and did not take into account the additional expenses incurred in rural areas.

The Strategic Manager was asked to circulate any further information as she received it. The Chairman suggested that in the current changing times it might be necessary to arrange more meetings of the Joint Committee and this was agreed.

41/10 NEXT MEETING

Subject to the possibility of arranging other meetings as necessary (See Minute 40/10 above) it was noted that the next meeting of the Joint Committee would be held on 9 September 2010 at 4.00pm, venue to be

confirmed.

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42/10 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

43/10 PROPOSAL TO ADMIT ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL AS A PARTNER WITHIN THE ARP

The Strategic Manager (ARP) presented the report.

She asked Members to support the proposal to include St Edmundsbury Borough Council as a partner in the Anglia Revenues Partnership. The figures in the Business Case were conservative and showed that savings could be made by extending the partnership.

It was proposed that St Edmundsbury would have two voting Members and a full financial share in the partnership. Other set-up details were also discussed.

A Member sought clarification of certain figures and these were explained to his satisfaction.

The Strategic Manager was asked to provide a final financial case and agreement as soon as possible.

RESOLVED to agree the principle of St Edmundsbury becoming a partner, with effect from 1 April 2011.

The meeting closed at 5.25 pm

CHAIRMAN