

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, 20 December 2007 at 4.40 pm in the
Level 8, Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford

PRESENT

Mr P.D. Claussen (Breckland)(Chairman)	Mr W.H.C. Smith (Breckland)
Mr. P. Cresswell (East Cambridgeshire)	Mr E. Stewart (Forest Heath)
Mr S. Edwards (Forest Heath)	Mr G. Wilson (East Cambridgeshire)

In Attendance

Rachel Beswick	- Senior Accountant (Breckland)
Andrew Claydon	- Strategic Director (Resources) (Forest Heath)
Mr Alex Colyer	- Executive Director of Finance (East Cambridgeshire)
Mark Finch	- Chief Accountant (Breckland)
Sharon Jones	- Revenues Benefits Manager (ARP/Breckland)
Steve Knights	- Revenues Strategic Manager (ARP/Breckland)
Ruth Littlechild	- Human Resources Manager (Forest Heath)
Rod Urquhart	- Revenues Performance Manager (ARP/Forest Heath)
Elaine Wilkes	- Senior Committee Officer (Breckland)

62/07 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2007 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

63/07 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Miss L. Pope, Mr. D. Burnip and Mr. T. Holden.

64/07 STRUCTURE REVIEW (AGENDA ITEM 5)

The Revenues Strategic Manager presented the report and explained the background to and options for a revised management structure for the Anglia Revenues Partnership, which had been prompted by the departure of the Revenues Income Manager and to take account of the current and anticipated growth of the partnership. It was therefore felt prudent to develop a more resilient management structure at this time to ensure that the excellent service delivery continued into the future.

With the close relationship between the Partnership and ARP Trading Limited, the opportunity had also been taken to recommend solutions that promoted the successful delivery of both entities.

It had to be appreciated, however, as with any situation where growth was being anticipated, that this would not be the final structure. Positive action was being taken to promote a fourth and possibly a fifth partner for which, if successful, additional management resources would be required. It would therefore be crucial for the delivery of the excellent performance and continual improvement required by the existing Partners that structures were kept under regular review as an integral

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part of any future Partnership expansion.

The recommended Option was Option 4.2.b – an expanded management structure comprising the posts of a Strategic Manager, Operations Manager and Performance & Support Manager, together with the posts of a Principal Benefits Officer and Principal Revenues Officer, and involving the employment of the Strategic Manager and the Operations Manager within ARP Trading Ltd. with the purchase of their management services back to the Partnership through a contractual arrangement.

The reasons for the recommendation were:

1. It provided the most efficient and resilient solution for the future development of the ARP. It ensured that the skills developed within the past five years were retained for both the ARP and ARPT Ltd.
2. The solution strengthened the management of the ARP to ensure that the maintenance of its high performance would continue during the immediate future when further growth and change were anticipated. It was, however, recognised that the future growth of the partnership would require further review of this structure and it was proposed that a commitment to review is made when further partners were introduced.
3. The contractual relationship to deliver a managerial service to the ARP from the ARPT Ltd also strengthened the future consistency of management for the Partnership and protected the ARP from potential staff changes in the future. It was hoped that the current management team that had brought the ARP such success would continue to deliver the same excellent services for many years to come. However, a contractual arrangement that clearly defined the expectations for service delivery would ensure greater protection to the ARP into the future.

The Members for East Cambridgeshire District Council indicated their interest in taking up their option within the Partnership Agreement to join ARP Trading Ltd. Given the progress that had been made in developing the trading role since East Cambridgeshire had joined the Partnership, it was felt to be an optimal time to take up this option. Other Members agreed that this was in line with the original objectives of the Partnership and should be given favourable consideration.

Following the presentation of the report, the Strategic Partnership Manager, Benefits Manager and Performance Manager left the meeting whilst the Joint Committee considered the matter.

It was felt desirable that it should be written into the recommendation that the proposed structure should be subject to contracts and agreements for service provision, these to be agreed by all parties. This would cover the identified risk set out in relation to option 4.2.b that targets and contract must be correct with clear objectives and performance targets.

A further amendment was proposed that the contract should be

'outcome based' (rather than 'output based' as stated in the report).

Subject to these amendments, the recommendations in the report were supported for the reasons given and it was accordingly

RESOLVED that

- (1) the management structure contained in option 4.2.b of the report be introduced, subject to contracts and agreements for service provision, these to be agreed by all parties;
- (2) the new structure be achieved by transferring the employment of the Revenues Strategic Manager and Revenues Benefits Manager to ARP Trading Limited and the recruitment of a Principal Revenues Officer and a Principal Benefits Officer for the Anglia Revenues Partnership;
- (3) the date of transfer to be agreed in due course once all personnel issues are resolved to the satisfaction of the individuals involved and Breckland Council, being the host authority of the individuals involved. Until such time, the current secondment arrangement be extended beyond the agreed eight weeks term on existing terms and conditions;
- (4) a formal review of the management structure be instigated on an annual basis from the date of this review or upon the introduction of a further partner if sooner;
- (5) the Partnership establishment be reduced by one Revenues Officer six months after the decision to proceed is agreed, to allow a smooth recruitment and implementation process to be completed;
- (6) a clear outcomes based contract be agreed between the Partnership and ARP Trading Ltd. to ensure that clarity of purpose and expectation is provided and the Revenues Strategic Manager be authorised to draw up a draft Service Level Agreement for consideration in due course; and
- (7) discussions take place with East Cambridgeshire District Council in regard to the option to take up membership of ARP Trading Ltd.

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Steve Knights

65/07 PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR THE PERIOD ENDING OCTOBER 2007 (AGENDA ITEM 6)

Updated performance statistics for the period ended 30 November 2007 were tabled at the meeting.

The Performance Manager presented the report and explained that the targets for BVPI 76c (Number of fraud investigations per 1000 cases) (currently status 'red' for Breckland and East Cambridgeshire) were to be revised. Following further advice from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on the issue of measurement for this target, it had been established that the current targets were set unrealistically high and a report would therefore be brought to the next meeting to revise

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the targets for each of the Partner Authorities.

However, it was also noted that new national BVPIs were being introduced to replace the existing and these would be included in the new Service Plan. Details of the new national targets were still awaited.

So far as performance in regard to the two 'amber' status targets were concerned (BVPI 78a – Average time for processing new claims (Forest Heath)) and 76d – Number of prosecutions and sanctions per 1000 caseload (East Cambridgeshire)), it was anticipated that these would have reached the target by the end of the financial year.

In noting the report, members felt it would be helpful to them if future reports could incorporate additional information on direction of travel and graphical performance illustrations. In this respect, it was noted that each Partner Authority employed different performance management systems and, in order to avoid duplication of effort, it was suggested that the feasibility of using one of these systems to produce ARP performance reports be investigated.

The Executive Director for Finance for East Cambridgeshire District Council stated that it was encouraging to note the rapid performance in his Council's performance and recorded his pleasure with the results.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and the Revenues Strategic Manager be asked to investigate the feasibility of using one of the existing performance management systems employed by the Partner Authorities to produce ARP performance reports, including the additional information requested.

Rod Urquhart

66/07 ARP JOINT COMMITTEE STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2006-07 (AGENDA ITEM 7)

The Chief Accountant explained that it had not been possible to produce the Statement of Accounts in time for this meeting due to technical problems. The problems had now been resolved and it was proposed that the accounts should proceed to audit stage to meet that deadline and reported to the next meeting of the Joint Committee.

RESOLVED that, in the circumstances, the Statement of Accounts proceed for audit and be reported to the next meeting of the Joint Committee.

67/07 BUDGET 2008-09 (AGENDA ITEM 8)

The 2008-09 Budget papers were tabled at the meeting.

The Chief Accountant reported that as discussed at the last meeting (Minute 52/07) and following consultation and agreement with the Heads of Finance of Forest Heath and East Cambridgeshire District Councils, a 'vacancy factor' for preparing the establishment budget had been introduced, resulting in a small net reduction in the overall budget.

The Performance Manager drew attention to a previous decision for the provision of a staff room, subject to confirmation that revenue funding to cover any additional rent/service charge for this was available. It was

now confirmed that there was sufficient budget available to meet additional revenue costs. It was confirmed that any capital cost would fall to Breckland Council and was subject to that Council's approval.

RESOLVED that

- (1) the Budget for 2008-09 be approved;
- (2) a Budget Summary be circulated to the Members of the Joint Committee for information.

68/07 SERVICE PLAN 2008-09 (AGENDA ITEM 9)

The Performance Manager presented the report which updated Members on the progress made since the last meeting and sought approval of the Service Plan and performance measures for 2008-09.

The targets had been simplified to make them more meaningful, certain of the existing national BVPI targets that were to be replaced would be retained as local performance indicators and annual projects had been included.

The proposed new national BVPI targets remained to be clarified within the Service Plan and the review of the section on Risks remained to be finalised pending further feedback.

With regard to the section on Partnership Development, it was noted that Forest Heath District Council's priorities had been amended and the report needed to be updated accordingly.

It was suggested that a reference to the management arrangements should be included.

So far as risk management of the Partnership was concerned, it was felt that this should be integrated across the three partner authorities to avoid duplication.

RESOLVED that

- (1) the draft Service Plan and performance measures for 2008-09 be approved, subject to final amendments in respect of Risk Management, inclusion of a reference to the management arrangements and to updates on national BVPI targets and the priorities relating to Forest Heath District Council; and
- (2) the officers be asked to pursue the integration of risk management across the three partner authorities.

69/07 LOCAL HOUSING ALLOWANCE - UPDATE (AGENDA ITEM 10)

The Benefits Manager gave a verbal update on progress regarding the introduction of the new Local Housing Allowance scheme (LHA) under the Welfare Reform Act 2007 (previous minute 58/07).

Publicity on the LHA was being prepared and the computer system was

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Rod Urquhart

Mark Finch

Rod Urquhart

in place. A project sponsor was also in place and recruitment of a Project Manager was under way. The necessary infrastructure to implement the new scheme was also in the process of being set up.

There remained a number of key issues to be resolved relating to the types of payments that would apply under the new scheme.

This was a fundamental change to the housing benefits system and a considerable amount of work was required to incorporate the changes into existing policies.

The position was noted and Members asked the Benefits Manager to provide them with explanatory information on the new scheme in advance of the publicity leaflets.

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Sharon Jones

70/07 ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING

The following items were noted for the next meeting:

- Local Housing Allowance – update
- Performance Update
- Statement of Accounts
- Changes to Performance Measurement
- East Cambridgeshire District Council – Update on option to join ARP Trading Ltd.

71/07 NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED that the next meeting be held on 28 February 2008.

The meeting closed at 6.05 pm

CHAIRMAN