



ARP

ARPT Ltd

revenues and benefits service level agreement

'Partners in Excellence'

## Introduction

### Outline description of the service

The ARP trading co ltd (ARPT) is proposing to provide the continuing high quality of management services to the Anglia Revenues Partnership that it already receives through the exiting partnership arrangement.

The Anglia Revenues Partnership is a successful service delivery partnership that provides residents of Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire with an excellent, cost effective Revenues and Benefits service that meets the national agenda for radical and innovative solutions to improve the delivery of public services. It is understood that this excellence in service delivery is an absolute requirement for the Council for these services with the performance being clearly measurable through:

- ✚ High customer satisfaction
- ✚ Upper Quartile performance in all service areas
- ✚ Continual improvement in service delivery
- ✚ Four star CPA rating for the Housing Benefit service
- ✚ National recognition for the ARP and the host Council's successes

Examples of national recognition include, Beacon Status and national performance awards.

This document sets out a service level agreement between the ARPT and the ARP for the management of the following services:

- ✚ The administration of Housing and Council Tax Benefits
- ✚ Council Tax collection
- ✚ Non Domestic Rates collection
- ✚ And all ancillary and related work to ensure the successful delivery of these services.

### The Anglia Revenues Partnership

The Revenue and Benefits Services are essential customer facing services in any local authority. The ARP is a public sector organisation that is focussed solely on the provision of these services and is therefore in a unique position to provide efficiency through shared Revenues and Benefits services.

It is fully committed to:

- ✚ enhancing Revenues and Benefits service provision
- ✚ improving the customer experience and
- ✚ providing opportunity to realise cashable financial savings to support wider corporate priorities.

The Anglia Revenues Partnership was formed in August 2003 to deliver Revenues and Benefits services to Breckland Council and Forest Heath District Council. In April 2007 East Cambridgeshire District Council joined the partnership having monitored the success of their neighbouring Councils. The ARP now delivers excellent services to a joint population of approximately 260,000 residents.

The main drivers behind the creation of the ARP were to:

- ✦ Improve the quality of the services delivered directly to the citizen;
- ✦ Reduce the cost of providing services to each Council;
- ✦ To review business processes and to embrace new ways of delivering services.

The ARP is an example of the opportunities and benefits of public sector partnership working. It demonstrates the real progress that can be made towards meeting the aspirations of both the local government modernisation agenda, and the customer at a local level, by placing quality and high performance at the centre of the delivery of Council services.

Performance has improved to top quartile in all key Best Value Performance Indicators for the services provided, whilst saving the partners in the region of £1,000,000 per annum from the delivery costs of their Revenues and Benefits services.

High quality and high performance has been achieved through truly innovative thinking and innovative service delivery, built upon a strong quality culture that filters through the management, policies, governance and service delivery of the partnership. The public – public partnership methodology offers real opportunities to drive down cost of service delivery between like minded local authorities. It provides the best of the public sector but also learns from the private sector to encourage a new performance culture that has succeeded in providing the desired continuous service improvement.

## Objectives and Required Outcomes

It will be a requirement of the future managerial arrangements that this balance between reducing cost and improving performance is continued. The ARPT will operate to and provide the outcomes required by the agreed service delivery plan for the ARP that is set by the ARP joint committee annually.

## **Service Level Agreement**

### **Council Tax**

#### **Overview**

Council Tax is a major source of the revenue the Councils require for the delivery of their services. The ARP continues to seek improvement in the collection rates for each of the partnering authorities. To achieve that the ARP will expect strong leadership of the council Tax team from ARPT, an innovative approach to the collection of Tax and a rigorous and resilient process to protect the handling of public money.

#### **Billing**

The ARPT will manage the billing operation and will ensure that:

- ✚ Annual bills are issued in accordance with legislation and Council resolutions, maximising cash flow at all times in line with the agreed timetable
- ✚ New and amended bills are issued in a timely fashion where the liable person details of liability or the amount of liability has changed
- ✚ Determine and review discounts, exemptions, reliefs and reductions and producing a review timetable for approval by the Council.
- ✚ Ensuring that bills are sent out net of Discounts, Exemptions and Reductions and
- ✚ Ensuring that bills are sent out net of Council Tax Benefit.

#### **Collection**

The ARPT will manage the billing operation and will ensure that:

- ✚ The most cost effective, efficient, secure and timely methods of collection are used
- ✚ Direct debit take up is maximised
- ✚ Overpaid accounts are identified, verified and refunded.

#### **Maintenance of Valuation lists**

The ARPT will manage the billing operation and will work with the Valuation Office Agency to ensure that the valuation list is maintained.

#### **Property Inspections and Appeals**

The ARPT will ensure that appropriate visits, inspections and follow up action is undertaken.

## Recovery and Enforcement

The ARPT will ensure that a programme of recovery and enforcement of debts is followed this programme will include:

- ✚ The production of an annual recovery timetable
- ✚ Issuing notices in accordance with the timetable
- ✚ Monitoring all debts and payment arrangements
- ✚ Selecting the appropriate enforcement actions available to the Councils
- ✚ Arranging court dates and ensuring a proper representation at hearings

## Statutory returns

The ARPT will ensure that all Government returns and grant claims relating to the service are completed and returned at the appropriate time and are signed by the appropriate officer in each authority.

## Non Domestic Rates

### Billing

The ARPT will manage the billing operation and will ensure that:

- ✚ Annual bills are issued in accordance with legislation and Council resolutions, maximising cash flow at all times in line with the agreed timetable
- ✚ New and amended bills are issued in a timely fashion where the liable person details of liability or the amount of liability has changed
- ✚ Determine and review discretionary and mandatory exemptions and reliefs, including transitional relief.
- ✚ Ensuring that bills are sent out net of discretionary and mandatory exemptions and reliefs
- ✚ Interest payments are calculated and notified correctly.

### Collection

The ARPT will manage the billing operation and will ensure that:

- ✚ The most cost effective, efficient, secure and timely methods of collection are used
- ✚ Direct debit take up is maximised
- ✚ Overpaid accounts are identified, verified and refunded

## Maintenance of Valuation List

The ARPT will manage the billing operation and will work with the Valuation Office Agency to ensure that the valuation list is maintained.

## Property inspections and Appeals

The ARPT will ensure that appropriate visits, inspections and follow up action is undertaken.

## Discretions

The ARPT will ensure that all discretionary schemes relating to Non Domestic rates as adopted from time to time by the Councils are correctly administered.

## Recovery and Enforcement

The ARPT will ensure that a programme of recovery and enforcement of debts is followed this programme will include:

- ✚ The production of an annual recovery timetable
- ✚ Issuing notices in accordance with the timetable
- ✚ Monitoring all debts and payment arrangements
- ✚ Selecting the appropriate enforcement actions available to the Councils
- ✚ Arranging court dates and ensuring a proper representation at hearings

## Statutory and Non Statutory returns.

The ARPT will ensure that all Government returns and grant claims relating to the service are completed and returned at the appropriate time and are signed by the appropriate officer in each authority.

## Housing and Council Tax Benefits

### Introduction

The Housing Benefits Service affects some of the most vulnerable members of the community, it offers a means of ensuring that claimants can find and retain accommodation for themselves and their families. The ARP has an exceptional record of performance in this particular service that needs to be retained and increased.

### Administration, assessment and Decision

The ARPT will ensure that all the administration, assessment and decision making associated with Housing Benefit is completed, this will include:

- ✚ Deciding Housing Benefit, Local Housing Allowance and Council Tax Benefit entitlement according to all statutory legislative requirements and all Council policies.
- ✚ Making all revisions and supersessions as required

- ✚ Reviewing all entitlement decisions where benefit entitlement may decrease or increase due to a change of circumstances or on receipt of new or revised information
- ✚ Making payments on account as required
- ✚ Administering the Housing Benefit Matching Service data
- ✚ Administering the National Fraud initiative
- ✚ Determining and notifying back dated awards
- ✚ Identifying and assessing claims for Discretionary Housing Allowance
- ✚ Preparing Submissions to the Appeals Service and attending the appropriate hearings
- ✚ Investigate suspected fraudulent claims as appropriate

### **Payment of Benefit**

The ARPT will ensure that all payments of benefit are processed and controlled in accordance with the appropriate Councils' procedures. This will include:

- ✚ Providing a range of payment methods as required by the Councils from time to time
- ✚ Making payments within the time limits required by both statute and council policy
- ✚ Making payments on account when required

### **Overpayment of Benefits – Administration**

The ARPT will ensure that Overpayments of benefits are minimised through the appropriate application of the appropriate, legislation, Council Policy and recognised Good practice.

Recovery of Overpayments will be undertaken in accordance with statute, national guidance and Council Policy.

### **Visiting**

The ARPT will ensure that an effective visiting service is provided in accordance with the Councils' Policy and in accordance with the requirements of national policy and legislation.

The visiting team will both encourage the take up of benefit and the security of the benefit system from fraudulent activity.

### **Verification Framework**

The ARPT will ensure the full compliance with the Verification Framework to assist with the security of the Benefits scheme from fraudulent activity and to ensure that individual claimants receive the appropriate benefit entitlement relevant to their circumstances.

## Claim Form and Correspondence

The ARPT will ensure that:

- ✚ All forms comply with the relevant legislation, Governmental guidance and Council Policy
- ✚ As legislation permits electronic forms are promoted
- ✚ All notification letters are prepared, printed and despatched in a timely manner, in line with Government policy and Council policy
- ✚ All correspondence will be on the relevant Council headed paper

## Statutory returns

The ARPT will ensure that all Government returns and grant claims relating to the service are completed and returned at the appropriate time and are signed by the appropriate officer in each authority.

## Benefit Fraud Service

The ARPT will ensure that an effective anti fraud policy is administered to ensure that fraudulent activity is minimised. This will be administered through the fraud manager and fraud team acting in accordance with National statute, guidance and council policy.

## General Matters

### Advice and Guidance

The ARPT will provide advice and guidance to the Councils on current legislation and the implementation of relevant legislation as it affects the operation of the services. Advice will be provided in the form of a report with recommendations, risks and cost implications.

The appropriate representative of the ARPT will attend meetings as reasonably required by the Councils' authorised representatives to provide advice and guidance on matters relating to or connected with the services.

### Service Level Agreements

The ARPT will ensure the maintenance of all Service Level Agreements that are required with key stakeholders of the services, (CAB, Housing Associations, DWP, Valuation office).

### Training

The ARPT will ensure that all the staff employed upon the delivery of the services supplied by the ARP receive suitable and appropriate training to enable the successful delivery of their roles. In addition new staff will undertake the relevant induction programme as well as sufficient service based training and induction to fully prepare them for their roles.

Such training will include specialised service based training as well as specific training required by each host authority as part of its corporate training programme.

The ARPT will ensure that an annual training needs analysis is undertaken and that all training gaps are recognised and met.

## Complaints

The ARPT will adhere to the relevant Council policy on the management of complaints in relation to the Revenues and Benefits services

## Systems

The ARPT will administer the Revenues and Benefits services on the IT systems that the Councils utilise, for the current partnership authorities this will be upon:

- ✚ The Academy revenues suite of software
- ✚ Civica EDMS and
- ✚ the appropriate Financial software used by each individual authority

## Quality Assurance and Monitoring

The ARPT will ensure that the ARP's current high standards of quality are maintained and will continue to provide a monthly report of performance to the ARP joint committee in accordance with the partnership agreement in place between the three partner authorities.

## Pricing

The ARPT will provide the management of the Revenues and Benefits services to the Anglia Revenues Partnership as outlined in this document for an annual fee of: