

**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**  
**FOREST HEATH DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the**

**ANGLIA REVENUES AND BENEFITS PARTNERSHIP**

**Held on Wednesday, 21 May 2008 at 4.00 pm in the**  
**Level 8, Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford**

**PRESENT**

Mr P.D. Claussen	Mr E. Stewart
Mr S. Edwards	Mr G. Wilson
Mr W.H.C. Smith	

**In Attendance**

Rachel Beswick	- Senior Accountant (Breckland)
Alex Colyer	- Executive Director of Finance (East Cambs)
Kate Dann	- Principal Benefits Officer (ARP)
Sharon Jones	- Operations Manager (ARP)
Steve Knights	- Strategic Manager (ARP)
Lynda Pope	- Head of Finance (Forest Heath)
Rod Urquhart	- Performance Manager (ARP)
Elaine Wilkes	- Senior Committee Officer (Breckland)

**14/08 CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN**

**RESOLVED** that

- (1) Mr. G. Wilson be elected Chairman for the ensuing year; and
- (2) Mr. E. Stewart be appointed Vice-Chairman for the ensuing year.

**15/08 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The following updates to the minutes were noted:

- (a) Statement of Accounts 2006-07 ARP Joint Committee: Unaudited Draft (Minute 5/08) – The Statement of Accounts was presently with the Auditor.
- (b) Management Service Level Agreement (Minute 6/08) – The resolution of certain pension details was still in progress but it was anticipated this would be concluded shortly.

**16/08 APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor John Humphreys, new Joint Committee Member for East Cambridgeshire District Council, who had been appointed to replace Councillor Peter Cresswell.

**Action By**

**Action By**

**17/08 PERFORMANCE REPORTS (AGENDA ITEM 6)**

(a) Operational Performance as at 31 March 2008 & 30 April 2008

The Performance Manager presented the reports covering the months of March and April 2008.

Successes during the period included attendance at two job fairs to provide benefits advice to workers made redundant by the closure of two companies and the nomination of the Partnership as an example of best practice by the Pension Service for its bereavement officer service. The Partnership had also received a second Municipal Journal commendation for its benefits services and was also bidding for IRRV Benefits Team of the Year award.

Three complaints had been received during March in respect of Council Tax. It was thought the reason for the rise in this number was as a result of the tougher stance being taken in enforcement of non-payers.

Progress of the discussions taking place with other authorities in regard to Partnership growth was noted. It was also noted that East Cambridgeshire District Council was positively looking to move forward with the proposal to join ARP Trading.

So far as the performance statistics for the period were concerned, it was noted that the figures for collection of council tax had been affected by the timing of the Easter holiday. Actual figures were requested to be circulated to members. Collection rates generally among local authorities also appeared to be being affected by the current economic climate, although the evidence for this was anecdotal only at this stage. This could mean that the overall year on year high performance levels might not be sustainable in the present climate. The Partnership would be focusing on council tax collection in the coming year to raise performance in this area.

Performance in the national ratings was expected to be maintained at the upper or top quartile level.

For 2008-09, the national BVPI's had changed and there were new Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE), including one on fraud. A report would be made to a future meeting on any implications of these on future performance requirements.

A recent drive towards promoting small business rate relief had significantly improved the uptake of this relief by small businesses. Changes in the regulations now meant that non-domestic rates were payable on empty properties (after three or six months dependent on the type of property), although there were exemptions for certain types of property (e.g. a listed building) or if the rateable value was below the threshold. Members were concerned that there had been little national publicity about these changes. The Performance Manager explained that a presentation had been produced to explain the changes and impact and this would be made available to members. More information would be made available when ready. Officers were also happy to attend meetings if required.

**Rod  
Urquhart**

**Rod  
Urquhart**

**Action By**

The report was noted.

(b) **Financial Performance as at 31 March 2008**

The Senior Accountant presented the report, the details of which were noted.

With regard to the Underspend figures, it was agreed more work was required to ensure that the ARP reserve in 2008-09 included provision for existing approved projects to be carried forward and the Joint Committee also needed to agree whether the overall Underspend and additional income should be retained by the ARP for forward projects or be returned to the Partner Authorities.

**RESOLVED** that the officers be asked to recommend the amount of Underspend and additional income to be carried forward to the ARP Reserve for 2008-09 or to be shared by the relevant Authorities and, subject to prior consultation with the members of the Joint Committee, to submit the necessary report to the three partner authorities for their approval.

Rachel  
Beswick,  
Alex Colyer,  
Lynda Pope

**18/08 FUNDING FOR INTRODUCTION OF EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT ALLOWANCE (ESA) (AGENDA ITEM 7)**

The Operations Manager presented the report which sought approval to the allocation of the funds awarded to each partner authority for the implementation of benefit changes consequent upon the introduction of the Employment Support Allowance (ESA). The respective amounts concerned were: Forest Heath District Council £15,000, Breckland Council £35,149 and East Cambridgeshire District Council £17,024. (DWP circular S2/2008 refers)

The new ESA was due to come into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2008 and would replace Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance and Income Support on the grounds of incapacity or disability for new customers. There would be two types of ESA – income-related or contributory. Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit regulations were to be amended to accommodate ESA and the new components, ensuring that the number of ‘losers’ compared to the existing system was kept to a minimum.

The funding awarded was provided by the DWP to implement these legislative changes and would enable the project to cover a period of consolidation to assist affected customers, stakeholders and officers during the transition and to consider ongoing procedural changes as the volume of cases increased.

It was pointed out that if the recommendation was approved, this would involve Breckland invoicing the two other partner authorities to draw the Grant income into the Partnership accounts held by Breckland.

**RECOMMEND** to the relevant Committees of Forest Heath District Council, Breckland Council and East Cambridgeshire District Council that

- (1) approval is given to the release of the respective funds provided by DWP to allow the project to commence as

follows:

- Forest Heath District Council - £15,000
  - Breckland Council - £35,149
  - East Cambridgeshire District Council - £17,024
- (2) the funding received by East Cambridgeshire and Forest Heath District Councils is paid into the Partnership budgets held by Breckland; and
- (3) The Partnership budgets held by Breckland are increased by £67,173 to allow for the necessary changes to be made for the introduction of ESA.

A copy of the financial report in respect of this item is appended to these minutes.

**19/08 LOCAL HOUSING ALLOWANCE & SAFEGUARD POLICY (AGENDA ITEM 8)**

(a) Local Housing Allowance - Update

The Operations Manager presented the report which updated the Joint Committee on progress with the introduction of the Local Housing Allowance, which came into force on 7 April 2008. The LHA introduced a new way of working out Housing Benefit for private tenants.

The number of claims to date appeared low compared to the advice given by the Rent Service on levels to be expected. A further meeting with the landlords' group would therefore be held to ensure there were no unforeseen problems and to assess the impact of the new system. Exact figures on the position to date would be circulated to members for information.

The position was noted.

(b) Safeguard Policy

This item was deferred to the next meeting due to the inadvertent omission of the Policy appendix from the report.

**20/08 ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 9)**

The following items were noted for the next meeting:

- Performance Report
- Financial Performance Report
- Local Housing Allowance Safeguard Policy

**Action By**

**Kate Dann**

**21/08 FUTURE MEETINGS TIMETABLE**

The following future meeting dates were agreed:

- Wednesday, 10 September 2008
- Thursday, 11 December 2008

The provisional date of 5 March 2009 remained to be confirmed nearer the time.

The meeting closed at 5.30 pm

**Action By**

CHAIRMAN

**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**PROFORMA FOR EXECUTIVE MEMBER APPROVAL OF THE RELEASE OF  
RESOURCES  
(CAPITAL AND REVENUE BUDGETS)

FROM: Alison Batley (Management Accountant)

THIS PROFORMA PROVIDES THE FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS  
IN RESPECT OF THE ATTACHEDREPORT: **Funding for Introduction of Employment Support Allowance  
(ESA).**REPORT DATE: **21<sup>st</sup> May 2008**

	£ Year 1 2008/09	£ Year 2 2009/10	£ Year 3 2010/11	£ Year 4 2011/12	£ Year 5 2012/13
404 0000 *** 4***	£67,173				
Breckland	(£35,149)				
East Cambs	(£17,024)				
Forest Heath	(£15,000)				
<b>Total Capital + Revenue</b>	<b>£0</b>				

<b>Funding required:</b>		<b>Considered by:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
Total capital cost	£	ARP Joint Committee	21 May 08
Revenue cost	£		

**Financial Services Comments**

Each partner authority will be in receipt of one off funds from DWP for the implementation of benefit changes caused by the introduction of ESA.

As detailed in paragraph 3.2 of the report, it is not fully known at this stage what these changes will require. However it is likely that the funds will be spent on project management, changes to IT & processes, new leaflets & claim forms and training.

If approval is given to this report, it is recommended that:

- Funding received by East Cambs & Forest Heath is paid into the partnership budgets held by Breckland
- The partnership budgets held by Breckland are increased by £67,173 to allow for the necessary changes to be made for the introduction of ESA

**Risk**

In addition to the risks detailed in the report, there is a financial risk that there may be additional ongoing costs (ie: software maintenance for new systems) which are not currently budgeted for. If any additional costs are identified, they will need to be absorbed within the partnership budgets in future years.

This PB is valid for 3 months from PB date	If this PB is not longer required please advise Finance	If there are changes to the original report it may invalidate this document, it must be reviewed by Finance.
29/05/2008	Page 1 of 2	D:\moderngov\Data\AgendaItemDocs\7\3\3\AI00004337\EmploymentSupport AllowanceAppendixproformab0.doc

**Procurement**

Any procurement (ie: new systems, software, staff, etc) will need to comply with Breckland's contract standing orders & procurement rules.

**Gershon Efficiencies**

This project is not forecast to identify any Gershon efficiencies, however if any efficiency is identified then this should be reported to Finance when quantified.

This PB is valid for 3 months from PB date	If this PB is not longer required please advise Finance	If there are changes to the original report it may invalidate this document, it must be reviewed by Finance.
29/05/2008	Page 2 of 2	D:\moderngov\Data\AgendaItemDocs\7\3\3\AI00004337\EmploymentSupport AllowanceAppendixproformab0.doc