

## ANGLIA REVENUES PARTNERSHIP

**Report of** Paul Corney - Head of ARP

**To:** ARP Joint Committee, 17 December 2019

**Subject:** The Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) Service Delivery Plan.

**Purpose:** To recommend the Service Delivery Plan and Risk Register at Appendix A are approved and to report on the progress in respect of the December 2018 Service Delivery Plan.

### Recommendation(s):

- That the progress in respect of the December 2018 Service Delivery Plan is noted.
- That the ARP Joint Committee approve the revised Service Delivery Plan and risk register at Appendix A

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

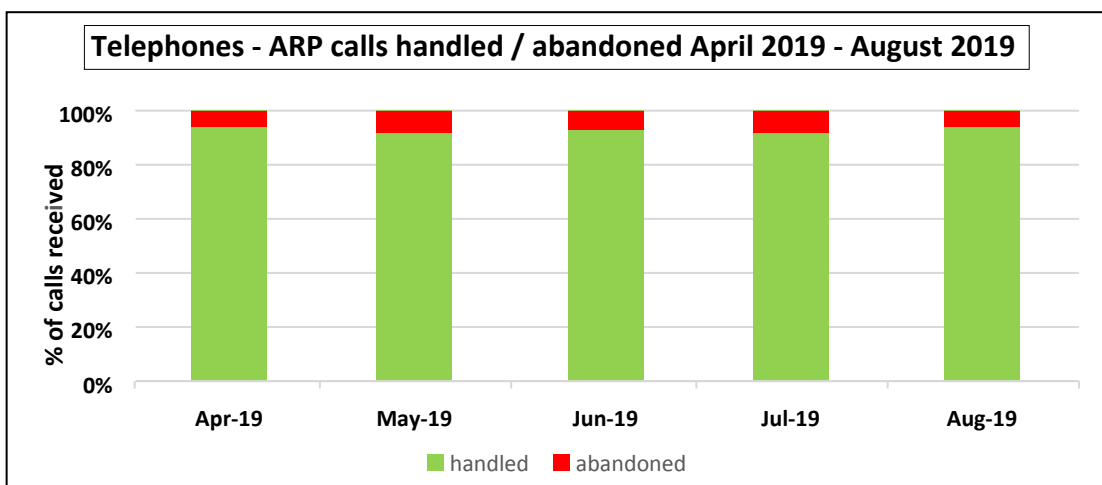
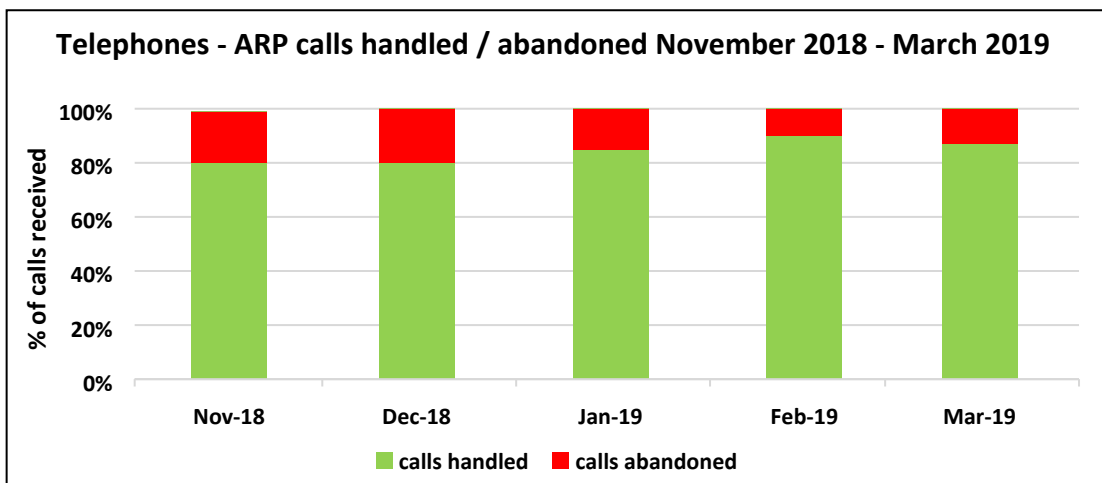
- 1.1.1 In accordance with the ARP agreement a revised Service Delivery Plan should be agreed by the Joint Committee by the end of December each year and the risk register is reviewed every 6 months.
- 1.1.2 A Service Delivery Plan was agreed in December 2018 and there is an update below which details progress against this plan.
- 1.1.3 In addition to service aims and objectives the plan includes a risk assessment that ARP will implement in the next year.

## 2. December 2018 plan update

- 2.1 The ARP has seen significant success in 2019/20 and we have achieved the following;
- Housing Benefit new claims and changes are meeting targets even though the merger effected early performance
  - The ongoing design of processes on our document management system continues to automate the harmonisation of work distribution for all partners. The EDMS drip feed has been rolled out to Business Rates too now.
  - All customer teams are able to use customer contact software to sign customers up to e-services upon contact and the number of those using e-services continues to rise.
  - The further recovery work jointly funded by County Councils secured recovery of over £1.1 Million last year and is already on target to secure similar/higher recovery in 2019/20
  - The Fraud teams work also jointly funded by the County Councils identified £3.2 Million in fraud and error (£600k more than last year).
  - The East and West Suffolk merged databases were in place from April 2019 and the project to merge them has been a great success

Some other achievements relating to the Transformation Programme are detailed below:

- 2.2 The Digital work stream has progressed with the procurement of a forms designer and some bespoke forms that integrate with the Capita system. Robotics/automation software has also been purchased to provide full automation of the assessment process in selected cases.
- 2.3 Automation of Universal Credit records has been progressing well and Capita's most recent upgrades to software should significantly increase the amount of data shared by DWP that can be automated.
- 2.4 By December 2018 it had become clear that too many calls to the ARP were unanswered and that the time customers were waiting to get through was too long. Processing times for some Council Tax changes was also taking 8 weeks or more to deal with.
- 2.5 High staff turnover (partly due to the number of temporary appointments funded by DWP and others) meant that the number of new staff with less experience and knowledge were being trained and so the experienced staff were taking calls and we were unable to clear some Council tax work within acceptable timescales.
- 2.6 In March 2019, before new year bills were issued, new phone technology was introduced (RAD messages) that allows the ARP to manage calls so that the simpler calls go to our less experienced staff and customers are offered online services as an alternative to needing to speak to an officer. This year improvement in performance has been excellent as shown by the graphs below



- 2.7 A number of temporary posts were made permanent and appointments made. These staff have since been trained and we have seen the outstanding work reduce so that now all Council Tax Billing enquiries are being responded to in less than 2 weeks (the situation continues to improve) and the work in progress is less than half of the amount we had at the same time last year.

- 2.8 We have introduced a generic role called a Council Tax Billing Officer. These posts process Council Tax changes and will also be able to process some Council Tax Support (CTS) cases (where there is no Housing Benefit). This role will mean that resource is more flexible and can be moved from CTS to billing as the workload demands.
- 2.9 The Service Delivery Plan sought to deliver efficiencies to the partner councils of more than £1 Million by the end of 2018/19 which was achieved. The target was set on the basis of assessed loss of grants from the DWP. As you can see from the table below, the cost of the Revenues and Benefits service is still less than it was when each partner joined the partnership.

<b>ARP Partner Budgeted Contributions from 2010 to 2018</b>									
<b>By Partner</b>	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>2011/12</b>	<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>
Breckland	1,954,095	1,816,017	1,900,178	1,940,644	1,960,573	1,909,805	1,930,732	1,864,022	1,822,280
Fenland	-	-	-	-	1,306,332	1,172,954	1,203,425	1,171,988	1,120,962
Forest Heath	1,006,656	906,446	943,778	966,096	976,114	940,232	946,413	922,356	880,015
St Edmundsbury	-	1,334,141	1,388,177	1,421,240	1,436,939	1,375,651	1,393,371	1,360,342	1,329,877
East Cambs	1,175,903	1,057,434	1,100,715	1,131,980	1,143,817	1,113,589	1,129,429	1,062,654	1,043,406
Suffolk Coastal	-	-	-	-	1,258,713	1,213,337	1,284,836	1,220,306	1,189,228
Waveney	-	-	-	-	1,716,820	1,671,263	1,686,058	1,608,994	1,501,729
	<b>4,136,654</b>	<b>5,114,038</b>	<b>5,332,848</b>	<b>5,459,960</b>	<b>9,799,308</b>	<b>9,396,831</b>	<b>9,574,263</b>	<b>9,210,662</b>	<b>8,887,497</b>

- 2.10 On the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017 the shared management arrangement with Norwich City commenced and has been very successful to date. Partnership arrangements have been extended to include the provision of fraud services for Norwich (jointly funded by Norfolk County Council)
- 2.11 Norwich have delegated their enforcement services (previously known as Bailiff) to Breckland Council from July 2019 who pass this work to the ARP team. This increases the teams resilience and ability to collect debt in a fair manner taking account of people's ability to pay and vulnerability.
- 2.12 Waveney and Suffolk Coastal have merged to become East Suffolk Council and St. Edmundsbury and Forest Heath have merged to become West Suffolk. This meant that data in the Capita Revenues and Benefits System and the data in the Civica EDMS System had to be merged too.
- 2.13 The teams effecting the merger managed the project superbly with the Councils involved and Capita and Civica. The annual bills and letters were unaffected by the project and customers received a seamless service with the exception of the 3 week period of the actual final conversion.
- 2.14 The systems had to be taken down for conversion to the merged databases but we were still able to work on the other 3 Councils databases and so when the databases became available again we were then able to concentrate resource on the West and East Suffolk backlog that had arisen due to the downtime a clear benefit of partnership working.
- 2.15 The merger work for East and West Suffolk was resourced and funded by the 4 Councils and was managed so that it had little or no impact on the 3 other partner Councils not merging.

### **3. Revised Service Delivery Plan and Risk Register**

- 3.1.1 The service Delivery Plan (Appendix A) details the high level actions that the service must implement to ensure that the varied demands on the service are met. The plan has 2 areas:
- Service plan – business as usual and innovative activities
  - Risk matrix

- 3.1.2 The Joint Committee has reconsidered the strategic direction of the ARP going forward and the Service Delivery Plan seeks to detail actions to achieve the visioning detailed in the report to members.
- 3.1.3 The priorities of the Revenues and Benefits service are:
- “Colleagues”**: Our operations rely on the people who make up our team, both directly within the partnership and in partner service areas. We will develop our people professionally and pursue a comprehensive organisational development plan.
- “Customers”**: We focus all of our work on supporting the families, communities, individuals and businesses located in our partnership area. We will continue to make our services as convenient and as accessible as possible.
- “Digital”**: We will aim to increase our ‘digital by default’ service including full self-service. We will use automation to speed processing and release our teams to focus on vulnerable and complex cases.
- “Relationships”**: We are a partnership of five district councils, pooling resources to share the provision of revenues and benefits services, offering greater returns on investment in change and innovation projects.
- “Sustainability”**: We are organisationally designed to improve the financial sustainability and self-sufficiency of our partners, through the collection of council tax and business rates and the ethical recovery and enforcement of related debts.
- 3.1.4 All partner Councils strategies include the development of digital online solutions. Self-service offers customers accessible services inside and outside of opening hours, it also means that the customer service teams are available to provide more help to those who cannot self-serve or need to speak to a specialist.
- 3.1.5 Customers completing online forms and submitting them to us also means that we will be able to automate a number of transactions in Council Tax and Benefits which will lead to quicker response times and future efficiencies. The data received from the DWP Universal Credit Data Services will also lead to increased ability to automate assessment of cases.
- 3.1.6 The infrastructure to be able to increase on-line transactions has been put in place and software to enable automation of assessment processes has been installed. In 2019/20 and 2020/21 the digital transformation team (the customer service lead officers from each Council and the ARP strategic team) will continue to drive cultural change to enable officers to assist customers to learn to use the on-line services to reduce future footfall and telephone calls.
- 3.1.7 In 2020/21 we will continue to invest time and resource into developing automated processes so that by the end of the year we will be able to better estimate future savings and efficiencies in subsequent years. In the meantime a conservative efficiency target is included in the budget from 2021/22 onwards.
- 3.1.8 The ARP strategic team will continue to influence national initiatives such as Universal Credit and to influence system design to improve performance and generate efficiencies where possible.
- 3.1.9 We will also continue to maintain our flexible workforce. We have seen great success in the new Council Tax Billing role which works generically across Council Tax and Council Tax Support cases and we will continue to recruit vacancies to this new role as we see Universal Credit and Automation changing the way in which we receive and process our work.
- 3.1.10 We need to ensure that we have resilience in key roles and so we will develop a planning framework to ensure continued service delivery. We will have a programme of; identifying future leaders, leadership development, career pathways and use of coaching/mentoring, professional training/qualifications and external experiences in leadership.

- 3.1.11 Welfare reform is still high on the Governments agenda which may lead to fundamental changes in our service provision and so the plan includes actions to understand the impact on the partner councils of the changes, as information becomes available, there are also actions concerning the monitoring of the financial impact of the changes we have already seen.
- 3.1.12 The risk surrounding income from Business Rates remains red at this time because there is a risk in relation to subsequent appeals that may be received and reduce rates payable and in particular an appeal outstanding from Hospitals asking for Charitable relief which would have a significant impact on the partners affected (Finance teams and Section 151 officers are aware)
- 3.1.13 The register also continues to highlight the need to monitor the impact of Universal Credit on customers and grant income. We continue to influence changes in delivery through representation on DWP steering groups.

#### **4 Options**

1. To suggest changes and additions to the Service Delivery Plan and Risk Register.
2. To approve the Service Delivery Plan and Risk Register.

#### **5 Reasons for recommendations**

A Service Delivery Plan and Risk Register are requirements of the ARP agreement and are needed to agree the short to medium term priorities of the ARP in delivering services as effectively, efficiently and economically as possible and to identify the risks associated with the services.

### **6 IMPLICATIONS**

#### **6.1 Risk**

If a Service Delivery Plan is not agreed then the direction and priorities of service delivery can lose focus. The Plan allows members to monitor and direct service provision. The identification and mitigation of risk is necessary to ensure that Councils minimise the impact of risk on customers and the partner councils.

#### **6.2 Financial**

The Service Delivery plan requires the ARP officers to monitor and report on financial matters of relevance to the Section 151 officers of the ARP.

#### **6.3 Legal**

The ARP agreement requires a Service Delivery Plan to be agreed before the end of December each year.

#### **6.4 Equality and Diversity**

Not applicable.

Background papers:- None

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#### **Appendices attached to this report:**

**Appendix A – Service Delivery Plan December 2018**