

ANGLIA REVENUES PARTNERSHIP

Report of Paul Corney - Head of ARP

To: ARP Joint Committee, 11 December 2020

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

Purpose: To recommend the Service Delivery Plan and Risk Register at Appendix B are approved and to report on the progress in respect of the December 2019 Service Delivery Plan (Appendix A).

Recommendation(s):

- That the progress in respect of the December 2019 Service Delivery Plan is noted.
- That the ARP Joint Committee approve the revised Service Delivery Plan and risk register at Appendix B

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 2019 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.

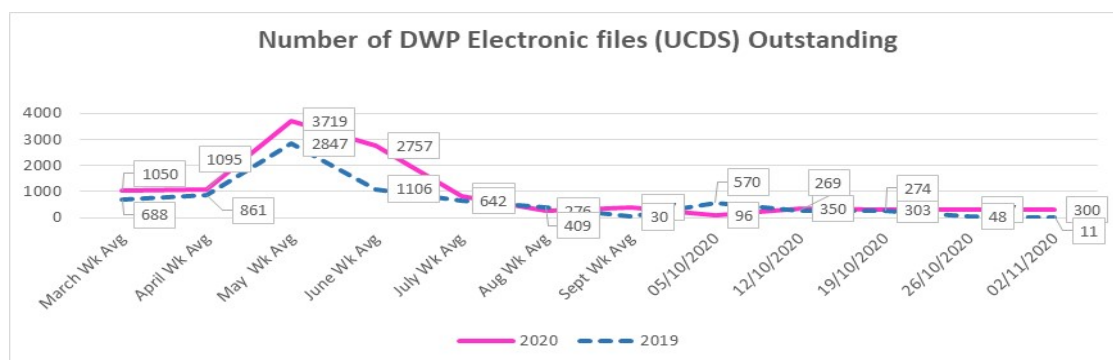
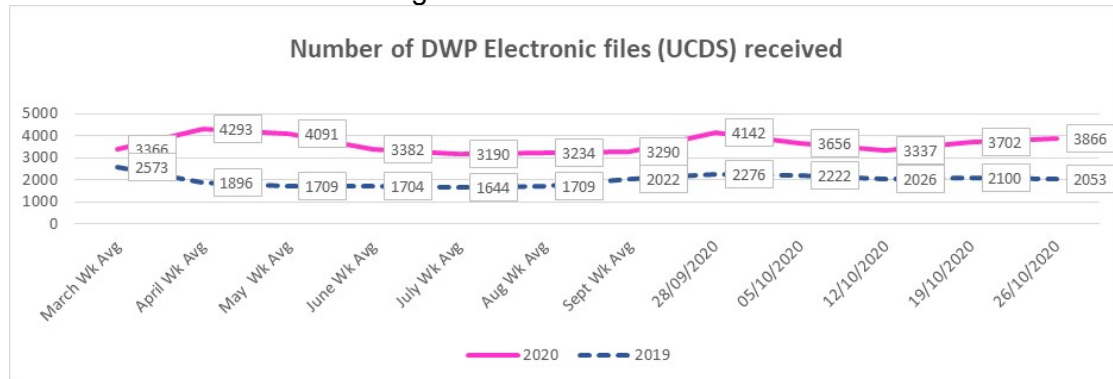
2. December 2019/20 plan update and the impact of Covid

- 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 in 20/21 even though Covid has affected level of work and enquiries
 - The suite of forms and other functionality is available to all customer teams using Capita customer contact software to sign customers up to e-services and the number of those using e-services continues to rise.
 - The further recovery work jointly funded by County Councils secured recovery of over £1.36 Million last year but covid leading to suspension of courts has reduced the recovery in 2020/21 although, as at the end of October the further recovery officers have already secured over £340k which is commendable considering the circumstances.
 - The Fraud teams work, also jointly funded by the County Councils, identified over £2.4 Million in fraud and error last year. Even with the restrictions caused by Covid the team are on target to achieve similar values in 20/21.
 - The East and West Suffolk merged databases were in place from April 2019 and the project to merge them was a great success meaning that performance was still maintained within target in all areas
 - The success of the Enforcement Team continues, from the end of 2020/21 East and West Suffolk parking debts will be passed to the ARP Enforcement Team and so the fee income shared by the partners will increase in 2021/22

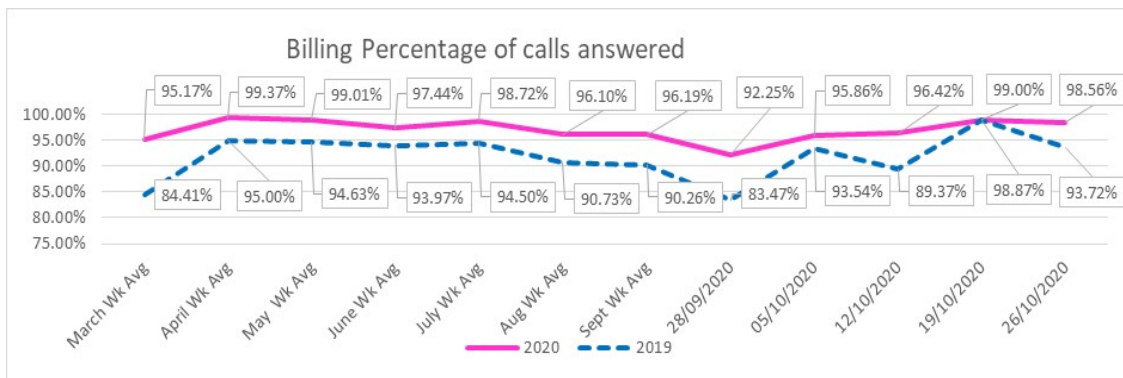
Some other achievements relating to the Transformation Programme are detailed below:

- 2.2 The Digital work stream has progressed with the automation of new claims and changes in circumstances growing steadily, to such a degree that when we saw the significant increase in Universal Credit Data Service reports of changes in circumstances we were able to automate approximately 50% resulting in less build up in work outstanding and therefore a quicker response for customers.

UCDS received and outstanding



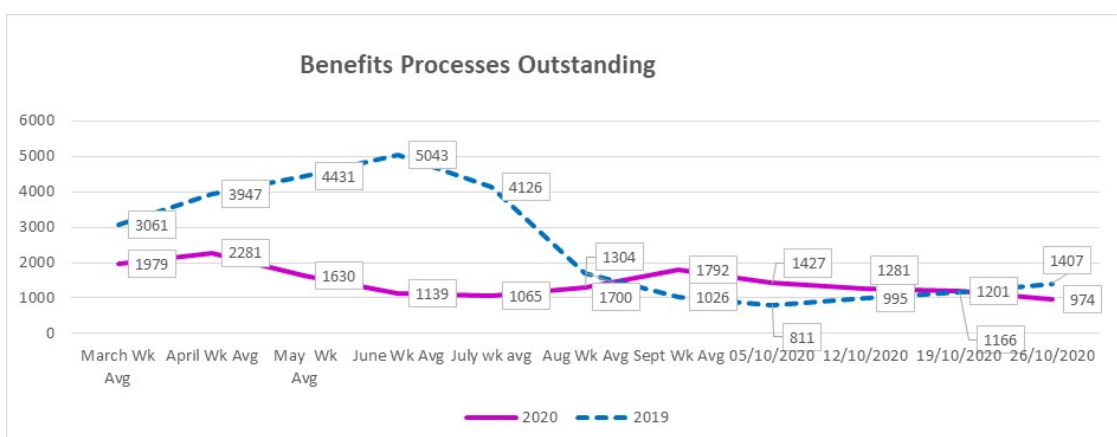
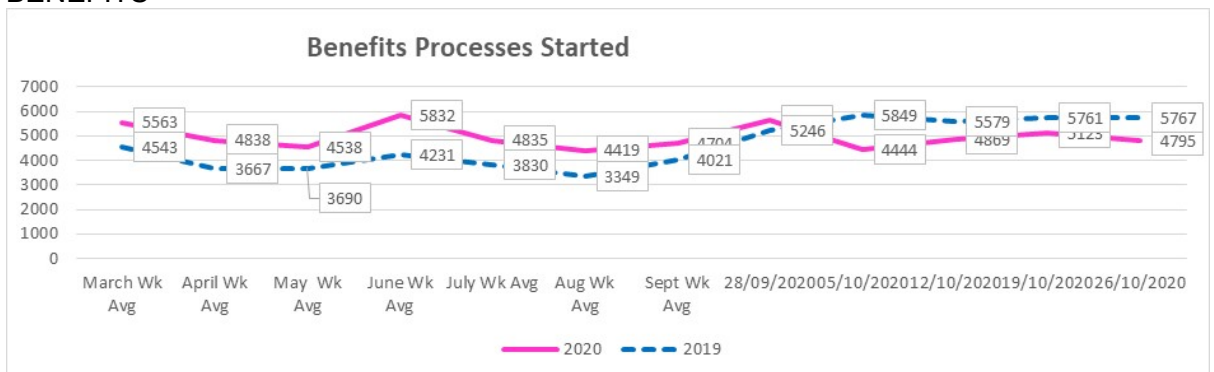
- 2.3 Automation of Universal Credit records also includes the introduction of the “Tolerance Rule” into our Council Tax Support Schemes last year, this has meant that approximately one 3rd of the changes in income received did not result in a revised bill and payment profile for our customers leading to a clearer picture of what they have to pay. We did not have any cases where we need to reassess due to the tolerance rule causing hardship in cases where income reduced.
- 2.4 In December 2019 it was 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. The improvement in performance has continued in 19/20 and 20/21 as shown by the graphs below



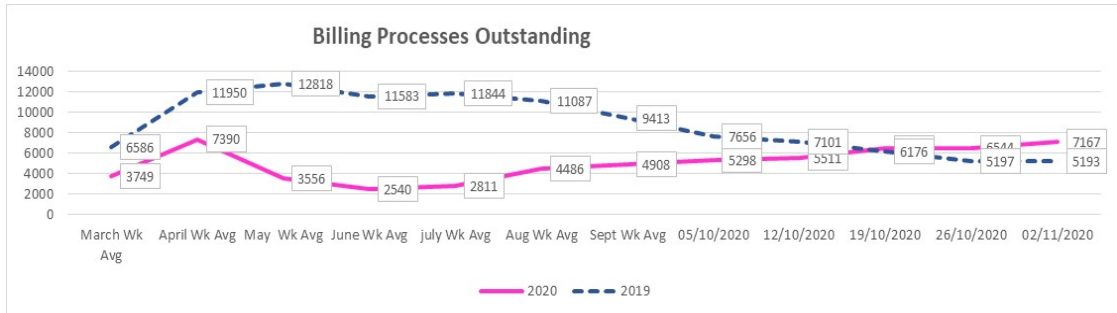
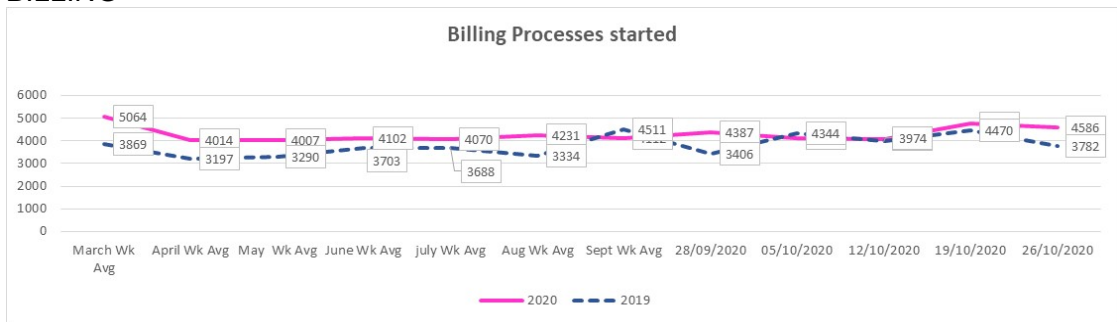
2.7 A number of temporary posts were made permanent and appointments made. These staff have since been trained and we have seen the outstanding work reduce so that now all Council Tax Billing enquiries are being responded to much more quickly and the work in progress at peak times was less than half of the amount we had at the same time in 19/20. The impact of the Self-Isolation Payments and other covid related fluctuations in the workload has led to an increase in the amount currently outstanding but measures are in place to monitor and manage the situation.

2.8 The generic role called a Council Tax Billing Officer was introduced last year and is a great success. These posts process Council Tax changes and certain types of Council Tax Support (CTS) cases (where there is no Housing Benefit). This role means that resource is more flexible and can be moved from CTS to billing as the workload demands.

BENEFITS



BILLING

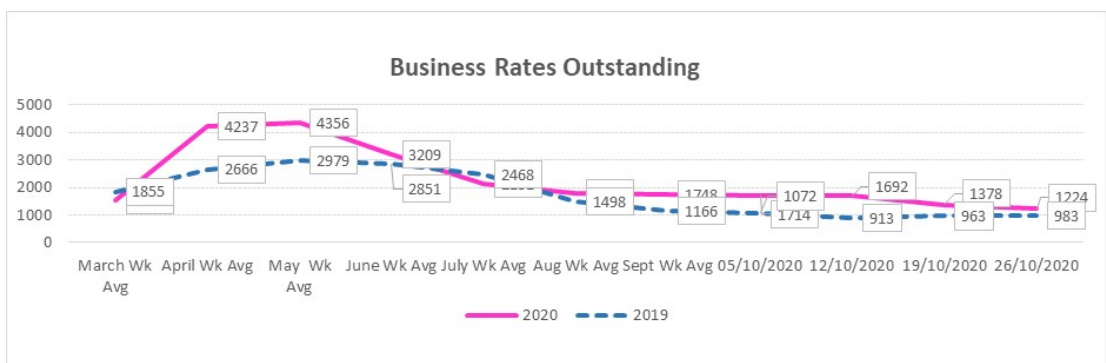
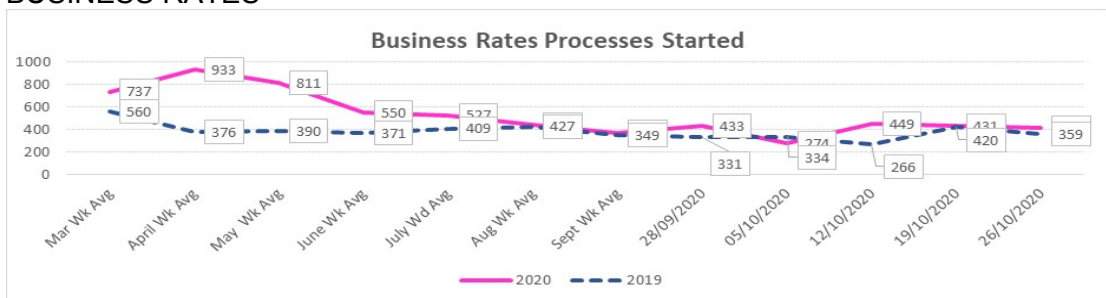


2.9 On the 1st April 2017 the shared management arrangement with Norwich City commenced and has been very successful to date. Partnership arrangements have been extended to include the provision of fraud services for Norwich (jointly funded by Norfolk County Council)

2.10 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.

2.11 Covid has of course had a significant impact on services as discussed in the report at the Joint Committee in September 2020 and the graphs show the volumes of work for Business Rates and the amounts outstanding at each point since March 2020

BUSINESS RATES



- 2.12 With Self-isolation Payments introduced and business grants being offered in the second lockdown in place in November we will see more pressure on the teams. However, the partnership working between teams across all councils and the ARP Teams has worked fantastically and it should be a priority, when the current crisis ends, to ensure that we continue to work as closely in future.
- 2.13 Appendix A attached to the report shows the status of the priorities agreed in December 2019 and as can be seen those actions that have not progressed, as we would have anticipated, have been delayed by Covid requirements.
- 2.14 Even though we have seen an increase in workload in 2019/20 and into 2020/21, we have introduced automation and other efficiencies that have led to a reduction in complement of 9 posts (net 7 posts as 2 bailiff posts have been added to process parking work) saving £288k.
- 2.15 The draft budget for 2021/22 is lower than it was in 20/21 even after the 2.75% increase in salaries; due to the savings in salaries and in the increased income from bailiff work now that the enforcement team will collect parking debts for East and West Suffolk.

3. Revised Service Delivery Plan and Risk Register

- 3.1 The service Delivery Plan (Appendix B) 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
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 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.
- 3.5 The offer of online facilities to customers able to self-serve also frees existing resource to help those unable to self-serve. The development of the online portal, forms and automation will continue to be a priority.

- 3.6 The Customer Strategic Team (the lead officer from each Councils customer services team and ARP officers) will continue to improve the access customers have to services and will continue to improve the interface between front and back office functions.
- 3.7 In 2021/22 we will continue to invest time and resource into developing automated processes which have already delivered savings of over £120k. In addition, a further £220k efficiency target is included in the budget from 2022/23 onwards.
- 3.8 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.
- 3.9 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.
- 3.10 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.
- 3.11 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.
- 3.12 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)
- 3.13 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 at Appendix B.

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 2019 progress

Appendix B – Service Delivery Plan December 2020