

ANGLIA REVENUES PARTNERSHIP

Report of Adrian Mills – Head of ARP

To: **Joint Committee**, 06 December 2022

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

Purpose: To note progress in respect of the December 2021 Service Delivery Plan (Appendix A) and to consider and approve the ARP Service Delivery Plan and Risk Register at Appendix B.

Recommendation(s):

- That progress in respect of the December 2021 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 for the new financial year should be agreed by the Joint Committee by the end of December of the previous year and the risk register is reviewed every 6 months.
- 1.1.2 A Service Delivery Plan was agreed in December 2021 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.
- 1.1.4 In December 2021 Members reviewed the strategic direction of the ARP, deciding to maintain objectives whilst implementing a four-year Business Plan, subsequently effective from April 2022. The annual Service Plan complements the Business Plan.

2. April 2022/23 plan objectives performance and update

- 2.1 The ARP has seen significant success in 2022/23 and we have achieved the following.
- Delivered the Council Tax Energy Rebates achieving 100% main scheme payments by the end of June 2022 – five of eleven Councils to do so nationally and the only Councils in the East of England. We continue to promote and make discretionary scheme payments up to the scheme closing on the 30th November.
 - Delivered the Covid Additional Relief Fund (CARF) scheme. In total over £17million was provided to local business in Rate Relief prior to the end of September, utilising the available funds.
 - Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support new claims and changes are meeting targets.
 - Council Tax collection target was met for all partners for the 2021/22 year.
 - Non-Domestic Rates achieved collection targets for the 2021/22 year for 3 partners, slightly missing the target for 2 partners due to CARF relief awards and backdated appeals.
 - We continue to see more customers using e-services The suite of forms and other functionality is available to all customer teams using Capita customer contact

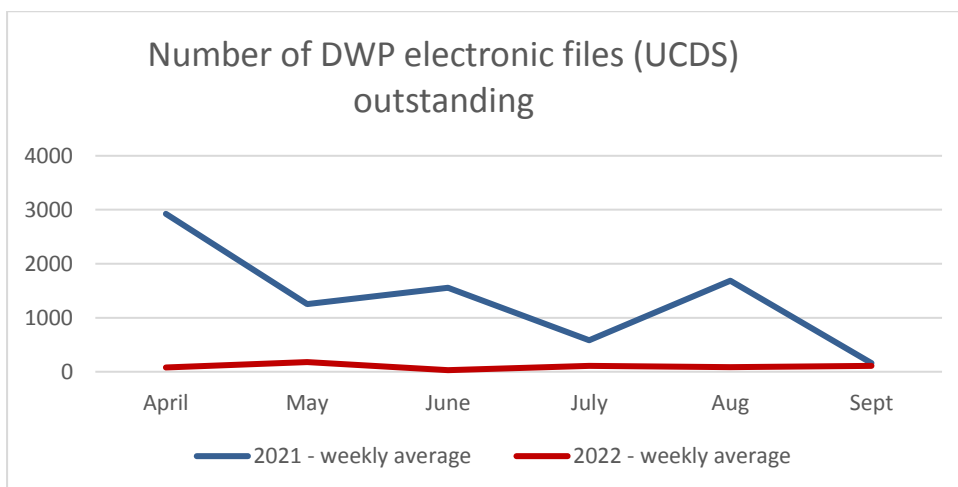
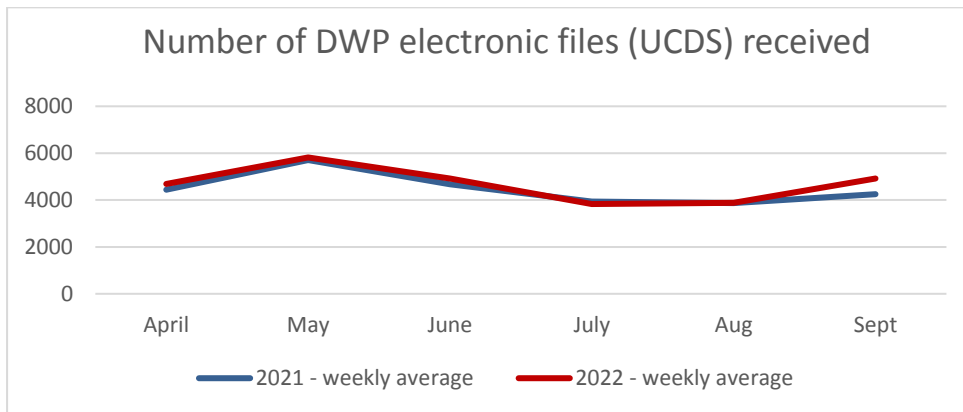
software to sign customers up to e-services and the number of those using e-services continues to rise.

- The further recovery work jointly funded by County Councils secured its best ever collection results of over £1,478,005 last year. This year, as at the end of September the further recovery officers have already secured £497,490 which is good progress considering current economic circumstances.
- The Fraud teams work, also jointly funded by the County Councils, identified nearly £2.5 Million in fraud and error last year, an increase on the previous year. The team are on target to achieve even higher values in 2022/23.
- We continue to see an overall increase across all work areas as detailed at para 2.6 below.
- In collaboration with each partner’s Housing teams, for this year we took a risk-based approach to target empty properties where data indicated occupation.

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

2.2 The automation of new claims and changes in circumstances is growing steadily, to such a degree that we have been able to administer the significant increase in Universal Credit Data Service reports of changes in circumstances through automating approximately 95%. This increased from 85% in the previous year following development work with our software supplier. This has resulted in less build up in work outstanding and therefore a quicker response for customers. We have also recently introduced automation of Universal Credit new claim files following functionality enhancements by our software supplier.

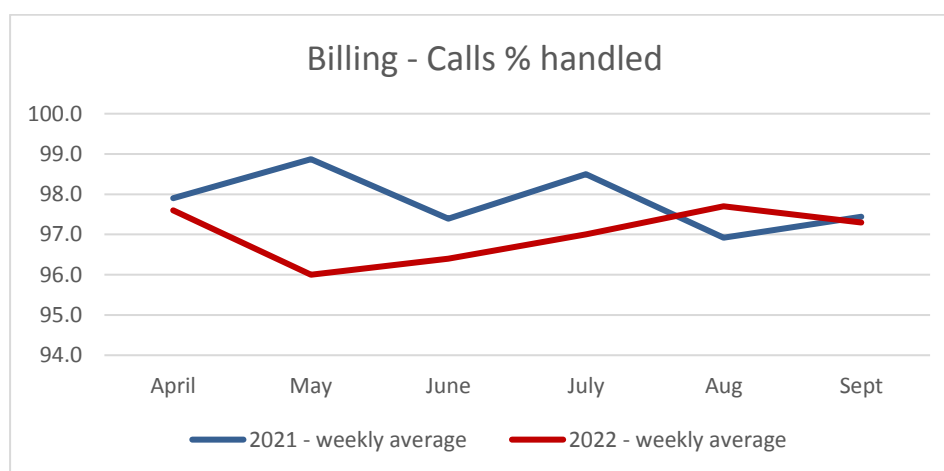
UCDS received and outstanding



2.3 Automation of Universal Credit records included the introduction of the “Tolerance Rule” into our Council Tax Support Schemes two years ago. 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. Following consultation

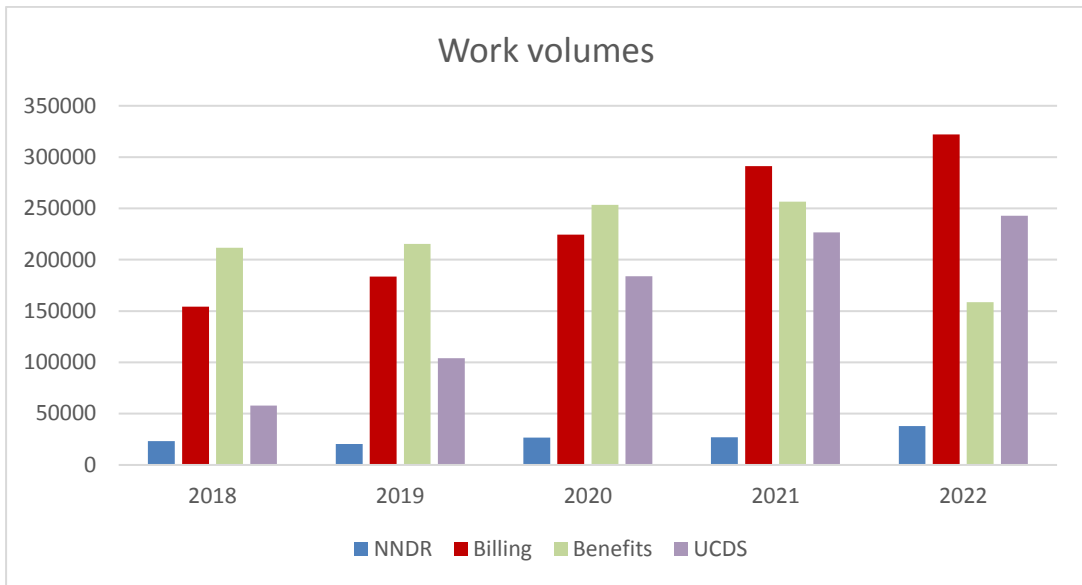
in 2021, we increased the tolerance level from £65 per month to £100 from April 2022, which has resulted in a further reduction in re-assessments and customer contact. At the same time, we introduced other scheme changes which have further streamlined the customer experience. At time of writing the review of the schemes for the 2023/24 year is on track with one partner consulting on the contribution rate.

- 2.4 We have introduced a new online change of address form which uploads data directly into our back-office system and have started to introduce automation of straightforward tasks as we work with our supplier to further develop the product.
- 2.5 It has continued to be the case that the phone technology (RAD messages) continues to allow us to achieve strong call handling response times. We have achieved this through allowing 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, thereby releasing experienced staff for more complex calls and to assess more difficult cases. The improvement in performance has continued throughout 2022/23, despite the additional call volumes experienced through the Energy Rebate customer helpline, as shown by the graph below.



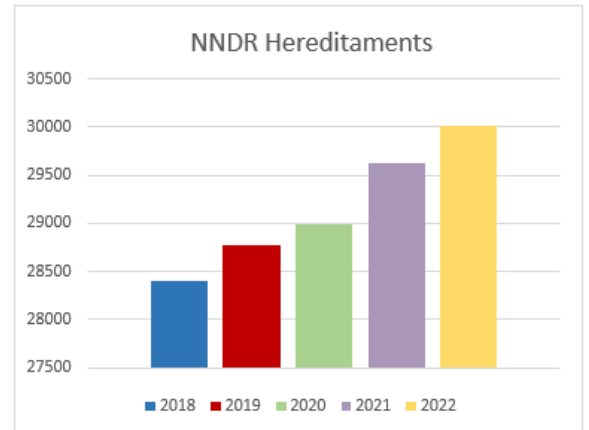
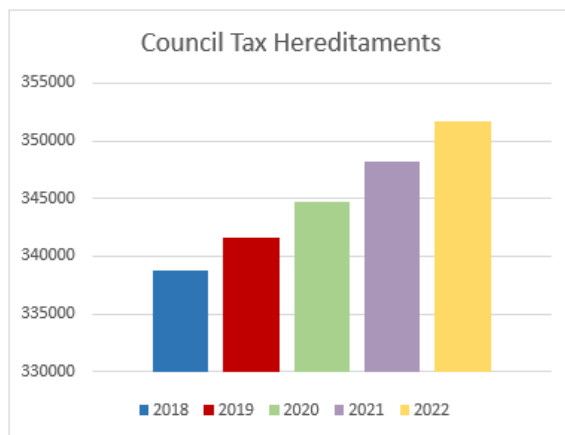
- 2.6 The introduction of a generic role, called a Council Tax Billing Officer, continues to be successful, providing flexibility and resilience whilst increasing the skills of staff. These posts process Council Tax changes and certain types of Council Tax Support (CTS) cases (where there is no Housing Benefit). This role means that resource is more flexible and can be moved from CTS to billing as the workload demands.
- 2.7 Overall workload across Council Tax, Benefits and NNDR has increased by 70% since 2018 with the largest increase seen during the Covid pandemic in 2020.

OVERALL WORK VOLUMES

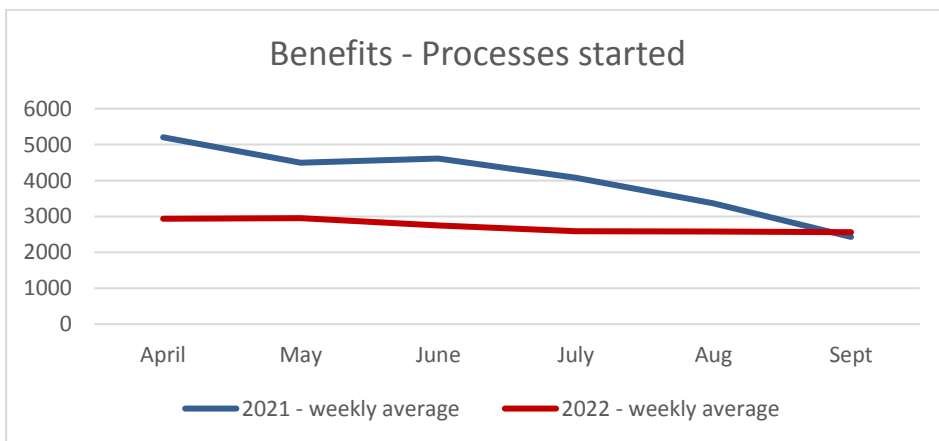


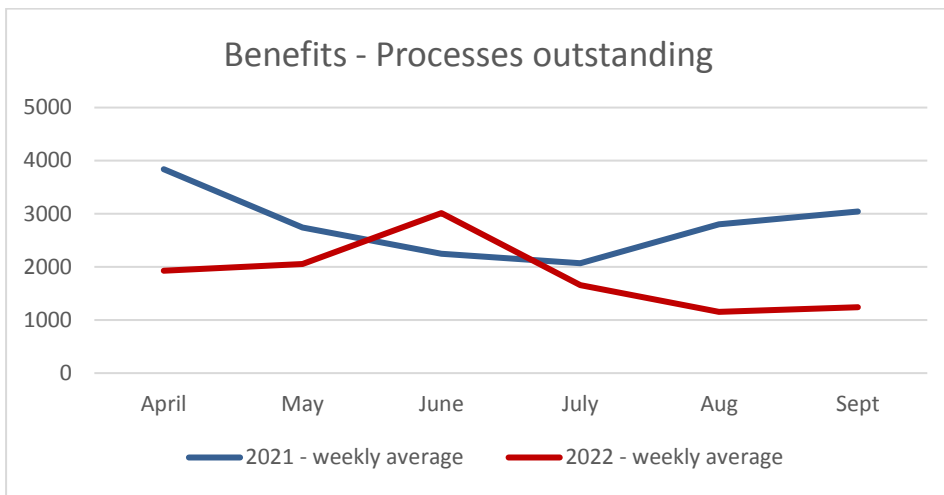
HEREDITAMENTS

Hereditaments (properties) have also steadily increased over the past 5 years with NDR seeing 5.67 % increase overall and Council Tax 3.85%.

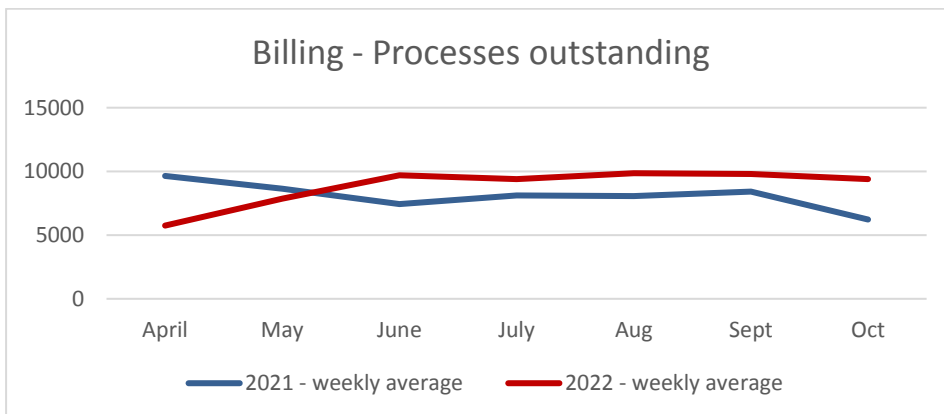
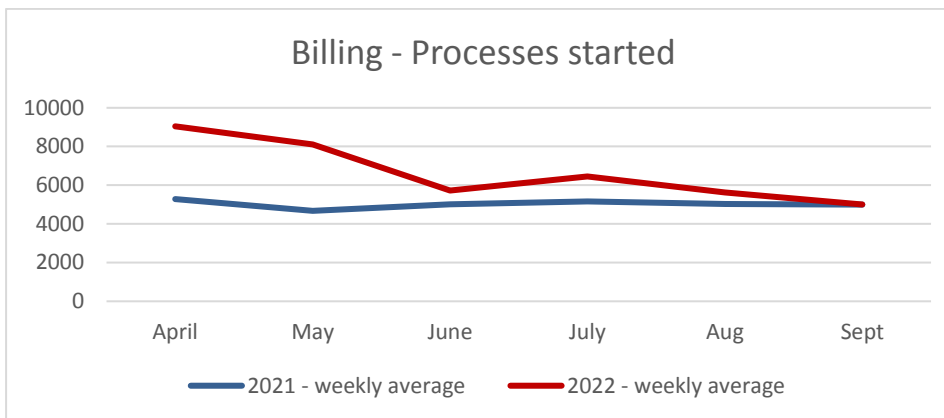


BENEFITS





BILLING



- 2.8 Norwich City Council delegated their enforcement services to Breckland Council from July 2019. Due to their approach to debt enforcement the volume of cases received has not been as expected. Meanwhile, a pilot sending non Enforcement debt cases has now ceased as they determine their approach to debt recovery.
- 2.9 Broadland Council agreed to delegate their enforcement services to Breckland Council from July 2022.
- 2.10 Following the retirements of two Strategic Managers and subsequent restructure this year, Joint Committee agreed to terminate the Norwich management agreement from April 2022.
- 2.11 Norwich agreed to continue with ARP providing fraud services from April 2022, and a consultancy review has been completed with Broadland & South Norfolk Councils who are keen for ARP to provide fraud services. A business case, approved at Operational Improvement Board, is being taken to Joint Committee.

- 2.12 Both the Energy Rebates and CARF schemes have placed pressure on the Service since February 2022, impacting outstanding work levels and projects.
- 2.13 Partnership working between teams across all Councils and the ARP teams continues to work well, remaining a priority to ensure that we continue to work as closely in the future.
- 2.14 Appendix A attached to the report shows the status of the priorities agreed in December 2021.
- 2.15 Income is forecast to fall short of the budget requirement for this year due to reduction in enforcement income. Following a system conversion and along with the impact of Energy Rebates reducing the number of cases passed for enforcement, income has reduced, but is expected to improve should the volume of cases passed through increase.
- 2.16 There is cost pressure on the budget for 2023/24 attributable to higher than anticipated pay awards for 2022 and next year, along with inflationary increases in supplier costs. An efficiency target has been set and we are working with our software supplier to implement further automation opportunities that will lead to future efficiencies, although investment through vacancy filling is required to make that happen. Vacancies will be kept under review throughout the year as we seek to achieve the budget whilst managing rising demand due to inflationary pressures on the economy.

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 Service Delivery Plan seeks to detail actions to achieve the visioning detailed in the Strategic Direction.

- 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 We continue to develop online facilities to enable customers to self-serve thereby releasing existing resource to help those unable to self-serve. The development of the online portal, forms and automation will continue to be a priority.

- 3.5 The Customer Strategic Team (the lead officer from each Councils customer services team and ARP officers) will focus on a new Contact Us form to replace e-mails and the

potential to move to e-PDF Council Tax bills. Such projects continue to improve access for our customers whilst reducing printing and postage costs.

- 3.6 In 2023/24 we will continue to invest time and resource into developing automated processes to deliver savings and to streamline the customer experience as we seek to maximise the use of secure data share to design our services.
- 3.7 We had positioned ourselves to be selected to participate in a Cabinet Office pilot to receive employer details held by DWP & HMRC for the purposes of Council Tax debt recovery. These provisions are contained in the Digital Economy Act. Due to fundamental shortcomings in HMRC data quality share this project is yet to deliver the expected debt recovery improvements. Discussions continue with the Cabinet Office.
- 3.8 The ARP strategic team will continue to influence national initiatives such as Universal Credit and Business Rates reform and to influence system design to improve performance. Enhancing data share is key to help inform service redesign.
- 3.9 We will also continue to maintain our flexible workforce. The Council Tax Billing role continues to work 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 have developed a planning framework to ensure continued service delivery. We continue to work closely with HR who have led on a programme to identify future leaders as well as leadership development, career pathways and use of coaching/mentoring, and professional training/qualifications in leadership.
- 3.11 DWP relaunched their 'Move to UC' programme in 2022 to migrate customers to Universal Credit. Currently there are five pilot sites, trialling different approaches in a variety of demographic areas. DWP aim to complete the programme by the end of 2024; at the time of writing there are no details of the roll out timetable.
- 3.12 The risk 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.
- 3.13 A four-year Business Plan, to complement the annual Service Plan, was developed with Members from December 2021, subsequently implemented with Joint Committee approval for April 2022. The Plan will be reviewed with Joint Committee in March 2023.

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 2021 progress

Appendix B – Service Delivery Plan December 2022