

BRECKLAND COUNCIL
FOREST HEATH DISTRICT COUNCIL
EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

ANGLIA REVENUES AND BENEFITS PARTNERSHIP JOINT COMMITTEE

Held on Thursday, 8 October 2009 at 4.00 pm in the
The Innovations Centre, Croxton Road, Thetford IP24 1JD

PRESENT

Mr P.D. Claussen (Vice-Chairman)	Mr E. Stewart (Chairman)
Mr S. Edwards	Mr G. Wilson
Mr W.H.C. Smith	

In Attendance

David Burnip	- Chief Executive (Forest Heath)
Kate Dann	- Principal Benefits Officer (ARP)
Linda Grinnell	- Head of Finance (East Cambridgeshire)
Trevor Holden	- Chief Executive (Breckland)
Sharon Jones	- Operations Manager, Anglia Revenues Partnership
Steve Knights	- Anglia Revenues Partnership Manager
Ruth Littlechild	- Human Resources Manager (Forest Heath)
Lynda Pope	- Head of Finance (Forest Heath)
Rod Urquhart	- Performance Manager (ARP)
Lesley Walker	- Principal Income Officer (ARP)
Robert Walker	- Director of Community Services (Breckland)
Elaine Wilkes	- Senior Member Services Officer (Breckland)

37/09 MINUTES

A correction to part (1) of the resolution in minute 27/09: Pay Policy: was made by the insertion of the word shown in italics so as to read as follows “(1) the ARP *could* adopt a performance related pay scheme”

The minutes, as corrected, were then confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

38/09 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mr. J. Humphreys (East Cambridgeshire) and Mr. A. Claydon (Forest Heath).

39/09 URGENT BUSINESS

The following items of business were taken to enable a timely decision to be made in the interests of the service:

(a) **Exclusion of Press and Public**

RESOLVED that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the Press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it contains exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Act.

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(b) **ARP Senior Management**

ARP Officers left the meeting whilst this item was considered.

A report by the Strategic Director (Resources) for Forest Heath District Council was tabled at the meeting asking the Committee to consider changing the employing authority for the post of Strategic Manager for the Partnership and, on the basis of the recommendation of one of the Partners, to make an appointment to that role.

The proposals followed on from the recent resignations of the current ARP Strategic and Operations Managers and consideration by Members of options for temporary and permanent recruitment.

Details of the terms and conditions that would apply under the proposal were given. It was noted that the managerial arrangements within ARP Trading would be separately reviewed.

For the reasons set out in the report, the Joint Committee

RESOLVED that

- (1) Forest Heath District Council becomes the employing Authority in relation to the Partnership Strategic Manager role, and
- (2) An offer of employment to the post of ARP Strategic Manager is made as recommended in the report.

(The meeting here returned to open session)

40/09 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

41/09 PERFORMANCE REPORT

(a) **Operational Performance**

The Performance Manager presented the report and in answer to Members' questions, explained the reasons for certain of the differences in the figures between the Partner authorities, which in the main reflected the differences in the timing and system processes employed by the authorities, as well as types and numbers of cases being dealt with under the various performance indicator headings.

A Member drew attention to an article in that day's Eastern Daily Press regarding performance by the local authorities in the region on uncollected non-Domestic Rates and Council Tax.

It was explained that the figures in the report were presented on the basis of a monetary amount rather than as a percentage of the debt figure; the latter method would reflect performance results more accurately. It was important to note that there were differences in the size of the NDR and Council Tax bases of authorities which were not reflected in the performance results as presented in the press report.

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For example, Breckland had a much higher base than Broadland. Hence the press report gave a somewhat misleading picture.

Details of current collection figures set against the considerable increases in the NDR and Council Tax bases taking place, particularly within the Forest Heath and Breckland areas, were given. It was also noted that the level of Benefits claimants and change applications had similarly increased.

It was generally agreed that it was desirable that the Partnership's position on collection rates should be reported clearly in the press.

Relevant to this was the level of historic debt compared to the value of pursuing that debt and how much had been written off over, say, the last three years.

It was confirmed that some explanatory cumulative data could be given.

It was also reported that greater publicity to encourage the take-up of Benefits was under way. If successful, this was likely to impact on the Benefits statistics but was also likely to lead to an overall improvement in Council Tax collection rates.

The promotion of small business rate relief was also continuing in an attempt to improve take-up and claimant numbers were up. It was expected that by year end, performance will have reached 95% against the aspirational target of 98%.

The difference in take up of Direct Debit payments for NDR between Breckland and Forest Heath areas was noted. There appeared to be no specific reason why this should be. The processes and promotion of Direct Debit payment facilities in the two areas was exactly the same but the take up from businesses in Forest Heath did not match that in Breckland.

However, it was suggested that one area of difference might be the use of information packs and promotion through the contact centre at Breckland, which was not something that was currently available at either Forest Heath or East Cambridgeshire offices. However, as much collaborative working as possible was done.

The report was noted.

(b) Financial Performance

It was explained that the figures shown in the report were based on original budget figures rather than current revised figures.

The over spends cited in the report were offset by under spends in other areas and no over spend was expected to show in the actual figures by year end.

While the above point was noted, it was agreed that future reports should give more details of income and expenditure throughout the year to assist monitoring by the Joint Committee.

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The report was noted and it was

RESOLVED that future reports on financial performance shall include more detail on income and expenditure for monitoring purposes.

42/09 ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE IN AND OUT OF WORK PROCEDURES

This report sought approval to claim and use additional Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) funding to provide resource for the preparation of new procedures and relevant IT changes to allow for a smooth introduction of the Government's amendment to the provision of Housing Benefits.

The amount of funding provided by the DWP for the project is as follows:

Breckland - £4,863
East Cambridgeshire - £4,000
Forest Heath - £4,000

It was anticipated that the funding would be fully utilised and therefore that there would be no residual balances left.

RESOLVED that

- (1) the report be noted and approval be given to the additional available funding being used for training, leaflets and IT enhancements that will enable the introduction of these changes to the scheme;
- (2) funding received by East Cambridgeshire and Forest Heath to be paid into the partnership budgets held by Breckland; and
- (3) any residual balances from the funding be retained by the partner authorities.

Sharon Jones

43/09 COUNCIL TAX RECOVERY

The Operations Manager presented the report which provided Members with the information they had requested at the last meeting on the top ten cases where Council Tax was owed and where it appeared the customers were choosing not to pay.

It was proposed to monitor the position through monthly reporting and that there should be some publicity by the ARP on behalf of each of its Partner authorities.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and progress be reported to the next meeting.

44/09 COUNCIL TAX NFI (NATIONAL FRAUD INITIATIVE)

Further to Minute 34/09 of the last meeting, the Operations Manager updated the Joint Committee on the results of the investigation to date

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into the cost/benefits of using an external firm to data match and confirm claimants in receipt of Council Tax discounts.

Further information was still awaited and it was

RESOLVED that the report be noted and once the costs and any funding available from each relevant County Council was known, each authority be asked to decide on the way forward and whether or not to use an external organisation to carry out and manage the data matching required under the NFI.

45/09 UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

The Strategic Manager reported on the latest position regarding the proposals for Uttlesford District Council to join the ARP as a fourth partner.

It was noted that Uttlesford was due to consider three options for a shared service and their decision was expected to be known by 22 October 2009.

The position was noted.

46/09 ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING

The following items were agreed to come forward to the next meeting, in addition to standing items:

- KPMG report on ARP structure options
- ARP front office optimisation
- Summary update on Partnership Risk Assessment
- Update on East Cambridgeshire's Partnership arrangements

47/09 NEXT MEETING

The arrangements for the next meeting on 3 December 2009 were noted.

48/09 STRATEGIC MANAGER

As this was the last meeting before leaving the ARP, on behalf of all members and officers of the Joint Committee, the Chairman conveyed their thanks and appreciation to Steve Knights for his work over the years towards the success of the Partnership and expressed their best wishes to him for the future.

The meeting closed at 5.35 pm

CHAIRMAN