

**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**  
**FOREST HEATH DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the**

**ANGLIA REVENUES AND BENEFITS PARTNERSHIP JOINT COMMITTEE**

**Held on Thursday, 13 June 2013 at 1.30 pm in the**  
**Level 5 Meeting Room, Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford IP24**  
**1BT**

**PRESENT**

Mr R. Everitt	Mr R Millar
Mr S. Edwards	Mr P Moakes
Mr D Ambrose Smith	Mr D A Ray
Mr P.D. Claussen	Mr W.H.C. Smith

**In Attendance**

Lucy Burt	- Fraud & Visits Team Manager
Alison Chubbock	- Accountancy Manager
Sharon Jones	- Head of Shared Service (ARP)
Andrew Killington	- Deputy Chief Executive, East Cambs District Council
Rod Urquhart	- Operations Manager (Support and Fraud)
Robert Walker	- Assistant Director of Commissioning
Liz Watts	- Director
Helen McAleer	- Senior Committee Officer

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**Outgoing Chairman's Comments**

The outgoing Chairman thanked Members for their support during what had been an interesting year for the Joint Committee. Members had worked as a team for the good of the ARP with excellent guidance from Officers. They were now on the cusp of a new era.

**18/13 CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN (AGENDA ITEM 1)**

**RESOLVED** that:

- (1) Mr Stephen Edwards be elected Chairman for the ensuing year; and
- (2) Mr Paul Claussen be elected Vice-Chairman for the ensuing year.

**Mr Stephen Edwards in the Chair**

**19/13 ARP MONITORING OFFICER (AGENDA ITEM 2)**

The Deputy Chief Executive, ECDC advised Members that when the new Partnership Agreement had been re-drafted it had included

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the requirement for the appointment of a Monitoring Officer for the ARP.

It was the Operational Improvement Board's opinion that that requirement should be struck from the agreement and the in-house Monitoring Officer arrangements for each authority should remain.

It was felt that it would be more appropriate to consider the appointment of an ARP Monitoring Officer when the strategic review had been concluded and the future options for the Partnership had been decided.

**RESOLVED** not to appoint an ARP Monitoring Officer and to **RECOMMEND TO EACH PARTNER AUTHORITY** that the Partnership Agreement dated 23 November 2012, be amended to delete paragraph 3.24.

**20/13 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 3)**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**21/13 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 4)**

Apologies were received from Ian Gallin, Joint Chief Executive, FHDC&SEBC.

**22/13 FRAUD (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 7)**

The Fraud & Visits Team Manager was in attendance for this item. She updated Members on additional work being undertaken, included liaison with the Breckland Council Housing Team and discussions with Cambridge Authorities about the creation of a data hub.

There was no significant change in sanction performance although some cases were more labour intensive than others. The final page of the report gave details of some recent cases which had resulted in successful prosecutions and two custodial sentences.

Councillor Ray asked how the data hub would work and what it would cost. The Fraud & Visits Team Manager advised that it would be done at Authority level. Cambridgeshire authorities were looking to extend the facility across the County. Government funding had been provided for the software and some funding might be available for other Authorities.

Councillor Moakes explained that the hub would reduce the duplication of information which would be a significant saving to the public purse. He then asked whether the prosecutions had been publicised as they might act as a deterrent.

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The press team of the relevant authority was always notified of court action before the hearing so that they could attend if they wished and efforts were made to get the matters reported in the local papers.

Councillor Ray asked whether other East Anglia Authorities were being consulted about the hub and the Fraud & Visits Team Manager advised that the Suffolk Authorities were keen but were waiting for some initial IT problems to be ironed out. No meetings had been held with Norfolk Authorities yet.

Councillor Smith asked whether there was any correlation between the high number of Council Tax reminders for Breckland and the number of sanctions. It was explained that the caseload for Breckland was higher than for the other authorities so more fraud would be found. However, the Head of Shared Service said that would be investigated and Councillor Smith would be informed.

Councillor Millar cautioned that governance had to be in place to ensure that data was used properly.

The report was noted.

**23/13 PERFORMANCE REPORT (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 8)**

The May performance figures were tabled. Members congratulated the Officers on two consecutive 'all green' reports.

The Operations Manager asked Members to particularly note the Benefit processing figures and the volumes of work there. He was pleased to present 'all green' reports. The format had been amended following comments at the last meeting to improve the clarity of reporting.

He pointed out that although East Cambs Business Rates collection percentage was down that was due to an increased rateable value, which was good news.

He drew attention to the amount of work that had been done liaising with stakeholders to make them aware of the changes brought about by welfare reform. Analysis was being carried out to determine how the changes were impacting on workloads, etc. 235 Discretionary Housing application forms had been received so far this year, compared to 112 the previous year. Each form had to be individually assessed creating a lot of officer work.

There had also been an increase in the number of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests received. Most inquiries were related to the changes and the effect they were having. There were also a lot of questions about non-domestic rates from Companies.

Councillor Moakes was concerned that the cost of servicing the

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requests was about £40,000 per year. He thought that the amount of time being taken on FOIs should be monitored.

The Head of Shared Service said that could easily be done as all requests for all four authorities were channelled through one officer.

Councillor Everitt asked whether the Government were aware that so many of the FOI requests were from commercial Companies. He asked whether small businesses were advised that the information was provided free and it was confirmed that everyone thought to be eligible was written to, but they still preferred to pay Companies to act on their behalf.

Councillor Millar pointed out that with the changes in legislation more FOIs should be expected. However, commercial information had a value and it was important to find out what other authorities were doing and get legal advice.

The Director, SEBC advised that there was clear legislation and ARP could not have a separate policy as it was not a separate entity. Each individual authority was responsible for how it chose to respond to FOIs, in accordance with the legislation. She explained that the reason for the significant increase in requests to ARP was that the press were interested in the impact the Welfare Reform changes were having.

The Chairman suggested that the Operational Improvement Board should look into the matter.

The Operations Manager went on with his report and advised that there were some areas of good news and other areas that needed to be monitored. The Council Tax team were dealing with in excess of 2000 processes, a lot of which were people changing to payment over 12 months. In May they had also dealt with over 1000 more telephone calls regarding Council Tax.

The Head of Shared Service advised that a fully automated system that allowed claims to be completed from verbal recordings of applications would be in place by the end of the month. The system would be tested over the next few months and should lead to a reduced requirement for assessment officers in future.

The report was noted.

**24/13 FINAL ACCOUNTS 2012/13 (AGENDA ITEM 9)**

The Accountancy Manager BDC presented the report and advised that the £102,000 under-spend would be explained under Agenda Item 10.

The Outturn had been presented in the usual format. The Partnership still fell below the Small Bodies Return. The Internal

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Audit information was included at Appendix C to the report and contained a letter of explanation. If approved, the Chairman would need to sign the accounts which would then be passed for external audit.

Councillor Everitt noted that the external auditors were the same as those used by Havebury Housing Association. He wondered whether there was any opportunity to negotiate a deal. The Accountancy Manager thought not, as the external auditors were appointed nationally and the fees were set nationally.

Councillor Ray pointed out that on Page 29 at point 5 it was ticked to say that risks had been assessed, but on Page 31 at point C it said that risks had not been assessed – which seemed contradictory.

The Accountancy Manager advised that risk assessments were carried out but that Internal Audit did not believe that the risks were assessed in enough detail.

It was clarified that if the External Auditors made any changes to the accounts they would come back to the Committee for approval.

Councillor Smith raised the following queries:

- Notes 4 and 5 on Page 26 seemed to cover the same costs. *It was explained that 4 referred to Direct Mail costs and 5 to Franking costs.*
- Was Clause J on Page 32 necessary to have? *Management Accounts were looked at quarterly, but not in the same format*
- He wondered whether ARP had sufficient resources to implement the Action Plan and if the work be carried out within the appropriate time?

The Director SEBC advised Members not to worry about the report. She said that the Partnership was undertaking a significant strategic review which had thoroughly assessed all of the current risks to the ARP and partners. She said that it was not unusual for the judgement of the internal and external auditors to differ, and that in light of the robust strategic review there should be no cause for concern around this apparent contradiction.

**RESOLVED** that:

- (1) the accounting statement for the year ended 31 March 2013 be approved;
- (2) the annual governance statement be approved;
- (3) the 2012-13 out-turn position be noted; and
- (4) the internal audit report and review of governance arrangements be noted.

**25/13 BUDGET SURPLUS 2012/13 (AGENDA ITEM 10)**

The Operations Manager updated Members on the budget surplus which had been achieved through a number of different areas including salary savings, procurement and rationalisation of accommodation costs.

On the downside, the hub savings and Trading Company income were reduced.

The Finance team had worked out the proportionate split which was set out on page 55 of the agenda.

**RESOLVED** that:

- (1) the report be noted; and
- (2) the re-distribution of the surplus to the partner authorities in accordance with the Proforma B be approved.

**26/13 ARP PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT (AGENDA ITEM 11)**

The Deputy Chief Executive, ECDC updated Members on the progress of improvements to the Performance Management Framework supported by the introduction of a Balanced Scorecard methodology.

The Operational Improvement Board proposed two strategic outcomes at point 5.1 of the report.

Councillor Millar said that the Partnership needed to move beyond just handling Benefits and work on improving the lives of its residents by helping them back to work, etc.

The Deputy Chief Executive, ECDC noted that there was still a great deal of uncertainty around Welfare Reform changes, but that when things became clearer there may well be a case for a third strategic outcome along the lines indicated by Councillor Millar. He explained that this report was just an interim report and that Officers were seeking assurance from Members that they were on the right track.

Councillor Ray asked whether 'maximising income' was the right terminology. He thought that a distinction was needed between collecting revenue and ARP Performance in its own right.

The Director, SEBC suggested that the Strategy Map at Appendix 2 was very helpful and the Deputy Chief Executive, ECDC said that the wider points could be reviewed later.

Councillor Millar asked what the first heading under paragraph 6.1

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added. He noted that it would not traditionally sit on a Kaplan balanced scorecard, but agreed that it was useful to give market context.

**RESOLVED** that:

- (1) progress was noted and the direction of travel was endorsed;
- (2) a further update would be received at the next meeting which would include the population of the Balanced Scorecard.

**27/13 WELFARE REFORM (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 12)**

The Head of Shared Service notified Members that the ARP was now live with Personal Independent Payments (PIPs).

There was worrying news from the pilot being undertaken at Ashton-under-Lyme which was live with Universal Credit. They were having to do the work manually as the ICT systems were not in place. However, the government's current deadline remained the same (October). The ARP was going live on 14 July. With regards to the benefit cap there were only about 50 affected families in the area covered by the four Authorities. They were all large families or people living in properties adapted for disability.

There were currently appeals to the High Court regarding the number of bedrooms needed by disabled adults and the Head of Shared Service thought that the DWP might lose those cases.

The Local Council Tax Support scheme would need to be reviewed before the next year's Council Tax was set. It was not clear whether there would need to be a new consultation if the review produced no changes. The Head of Shared Service was having a meeting with the IRRV to seek advice and clarification on what was necessary. Funding was still not known.

**28/13 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 14)**

The arrangements for the next meeting on 12 September 2013 at 1.30pm were noted.

**29/13 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC (AGENDA ITEM 14)**

**RESOLVED** that under Section 100(A) 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 involved the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

**30/13 ARP IMPLEMENTATION PLAN (AGENDA ITEM 15)**

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The Assistant Director for Commissioning, BDC updated Members on the progress of the Strategic Review. He advised that the development of the outline business cases had commenced and would be reported to the next meeting.

With regard to the recruitment to the Head of ARP he gave Members a full explanation of the proceedings of the selection process which had taken place earlier in the week. Five candidates had shortlisted and required to give a presentation in the morning (which Members attended) and undertake a written test and complete psychometric testing. From those exercises two candidates had been invited for a formal interview in the afternoon.

Authority had been delegated to the Operational Improvement Board (OIB) to appoint to the post and they had been unanimous in their choice of candidate. They believed he would fit into the organisation and work well with staff, managers and Members. He had ideas for driving performance, benchmarking and establishing opportunities for growth. He knew the market and had a strong national network of contacts. The OIB were confident that he was the right person and asked Members for their endorsement.

Members were unanimous in supporting the Officers' decision.

The meeting closed at 3.30 pm

CHAIRMAN