

Cabinet



Forest Heath

District Council

Title of Report:	Report of the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee: 28 March 2017	
Report No:	CAB/FH/17/021	
Report to and date:	Cabinet	16 May 2017
Portfolio holder:	Councillor Stephen Edwards Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance Tel: 07904 389982 Email: stephen.edwards@forest-heath.gov.uk	
Lead officer:	Jill Korwin Director Tel: 01284 757252 Email: jill.korwin@westsuffolk.gov.uk	
Purpose of report:	<p>On 28 March 2017 the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership (ARP) Joint Committee considered the following substantive items of business:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">(1) Performance Report;(2) Welfare Reform Update;(3) Transformation Programme Update;(4) Forthcoming Issues;(5) Exempt Item: Risk Based Verification Policy Review Report – March 2017; and(6) Partnership Working through Section 101 Agreement. <p>This report is for information only. No decisions are required by the Cabinet.</p>	
Recommendation:	The Cabinet is requested to <u>NOTE</u> the content of Report No: CAB/FH/17/021 being the report of the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee.	
Key Decision: <i>(Check the appropriate box and delete all those that do not apply.)</i>	<i>Is this a Key Decision and, if so, under which definition?</i> Yes, it is a Key Decision - <input type="checkbox"/> No, it is not a Key Decision - <input type="checkbox"/>	

Consultation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See reports of ARP Joint Committee at link provided under 'Background papers'
Alternative option(s):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See reports of ARP Joint Committee at link provided under 'Background papers'
Implications:	
Are there any financial implications? <i>If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See reports of ARP Joint Committee at link provided under 'Background papers'
Are there any staffing implications? <i>If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See reports of ARP Joint Committee at link provided under 'Background papers'
Are there any ICT implications? <i>If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See reports of ARP Joint Committee at link provided under 'Background papers'
Are there any legal and/or policy implications? <i>If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See reports of ARP Joint Committee at link provided under 'Background papers'
Are there any equality implications? <i>If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See reports of ARP Joint Committee at link provided under 'Background papers'
Risk/opportunity assessment:	<i>(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)</i>
See reports of ARP Joint Committee at link provided under 'Background papers'	
Ward(s) affected:	All Ward/s
Background papers: <i>(all background papers are to be published on the website and a link included)</i>	Breckland DC Website: 28 March 2017
Documents attached:	None

1. Key Issues

1.1 Performance Report (Agenda Item 5)

(a) Operational Performance

- 1.1.1 The Joint Committee had received and noted the Operational Performance Report as at 31 December 2016. The report details ARP's key achievements in respect of Benefits and Fraud Performance; Revenues Performance and Support Performance, including Automation of Outgoing Post; ICT upgrade and E-billing and Landlord Online Account. This detailed report can be viewed on Breckland District Council's website at:

<http://democracy.breckland.gov.uk/documents/s42779/ARP%20Strategic%20Managers%20Highlight%20report%20February%202017.pdf>

- 1.1.2 Benefits performance continues to meet profiled targets and is on course to achieve the majority of year end targets. Exceptions related to the operation of the full Universal Credit service by Waveney District Council; however its performance is improving considerably with new processes already in place to address its present difficulties. In respect of identifying and preventing fraud in four specific areas (as outlined in the report), year end targets were on track to be exceeded, which in turn leads to an increase in Council Tax income.

- 1.1.3 The Joint Committee had also noted the proposed changes to the way in which customers will be able to view their Council Tax, Business Rates, benefits payments and E-billing on the ARP website. E-billing and online accounts have already been introduced and customer sign-up numbers are increasing.

1.1.4 (b) Balanced Scorecard

Members had noted that with the exception of four, targets had been met by all partner authorities with the majority of indicators annotated green as at 31 December 2016, as shown on the Balanced Scorecard at:

<http://democracy.breckland.gov.uk/documents/s42778/ARP%20Balanced%20Scorecard%202016-17%20-%20Dec%202016.pdf>

- 1.1.5 The above report provides further information on indicators relevant to each partner authority, which are grouped under the following headings:

- (a) **Financial:** Collection, Budget Management
- (b) **Customer:** Customer Satisfaction, Channel Shift
- (c) **Internal Process:** Collection, Fraud
- (d) **Learning and Growth:** Performance Management

- 1.1.6 The targets for 2017/18 have been agreed by the Joint Committee.

1.1.7 (c) Financial Performance

In respect of the financial performance report, the Joint Committee had noted the position as at 31 January 2017, which showed a current underspend of £580,113 against budget. The reasons for the specific variances, which are largely due to employee underspends due to vacancies, postage and stationery efficiency savings, and higher than expected income from the Enforcement Agency, are contained in the report at:

<http://democracy.breckland.gov.uk/documents/s42748/ARP%20Management%20Accounts%20201617%20to%20JC.pdf>

1.1.8 The Enforcement Agency is continuing to exceed expectations with income presently achieving £319,000 higher than budget. This is reflected in the budget for future years.

1.1.9 An update had also been provided on committed expenditure for the Transformation Programme. If all identified expenditure goes through in 2016/2017, there will be £217,313 remaining of the original £501,026 in the Transformation Fund, with £98,196 unallocated.

1.1.10 In addition, Members had noted revised efficiency targets for 2017/2018 to 2019/2020.

1.2 Welfare Reform (Agenda Item 6)

1.2.1 The Joint Committee had received and noted an update on welfare reform, which included:

- (a) **Universal Credit:** The current position regarding the timeline to move to the live operation of the full service. Waveney District Council, who was already operating the full service (apart from Beccles) has been experiencing difficulties, particularly with processing Council Tax Support claims; however they were not alone in this. Measures and controls have been put in place to address the issues and mitigate the risk of performance against target. St Edmundsbury was expected to roll out the full service in October 2017, with Forest Heath following in September 2018.
- (b) **Discretionary Housing Payment:** Spend continues to be within the grant provided by the DWP, which is designed to help customers remain in their homes or to move to affordable and sustainable accommodation. The main area of expenditure continues to be to assist customers with rent shortfalls, in particular due to restrictions on Housing Benefit rent levels.
- (c) **Benefit Cap:** In November 2016, the maximum family income before the Benefit Cap applies reduced from £26,000 to £20,000 (£13,400 for single adults with no children). The number of ARP customers now affected ranges from 46 to 105 per partner council. The Benefit Service continues to work with colleagues in Customer Service and Housing Options teams to seek to avoid homelessness and the cost of temporary housing.

- (d) **Two Child Limit:** From April 2017, the DWP introduced legislation to restrict benefits to families having a third child from April 2017 to the two child rate. There are exceptions, such as multiple births. New claims for Universal Credit where an applicant has more than two children will be redirected to legacy benefits, i.e. housing benefit.
- (e) **Social Rented Sector Rent Restrictions:** The implementation of a cap on housing benefit and Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates in the social rented sector has been delayed by a year, to April 2019.

1.3 **Transformation Programme (Agenda Item 7)**

- 1.3.1 The Joint Committee had received and noted an update on the Transformation Programme and its progress against the plan attached as Appendix 1 to that report.
- 1.3.2 The overarching purpose of the programme is to secure continued and improved delivery of excellent services to customers whilst creating efficiencies and savings at least equivalent to the estimated loss of government grant funding.
- 1.3.3 A part of the overall strategy also relates to achieving efficiencies in levels of staff required to process the work received which can then be used where trading opportunities are identified through the ARP trading company and where Members agree to business cases that may be brought from the commercial strand.
- 1.3.4 The transformation programme has three strands: Reduction in Avoidable Contact and Automation of Processes (Digital); Commercial, Partnership and Trading Opportunities; and Organisational Vision and Development.
- 1.3.5 Members had noted progress for each of the above and that it would be challenging to deliver all of the elements of the programme; however early indications have been extremely positive. It is expected that the investment fund will meet the requirements of the actions identified; however, if additional funds are needed then burdens funding received in 2016/17 and 2017/18 could be used upon the Operational Improvement Board authorising the expenditure.
- 1.3.6 Discussion had particularly been held on:
 - (a) the tremendous success of the Enforcement Agency, as reflected in the income generated; and
 - (b) progress in respect of ARP developing its trading arm.
- 1.3.7 A copy of the full report can be found on Breckland DC's website at:

<http://democracy.breckland.gov.uk/documents/s42780/Joint%20Committee%20Transformation%20Programme%20update%20Report.pdf>

Appendix 1

<http://democracy.breckland.gov.uk/documents/s42781/Ready%20%20Business%20Plan%20updated%2006.03.2017.pdf>

1.4 **Forthcoming Issues (Agenda Item 8)**

1.4.1 No issues had been reported on this occasion.

1.5 **Exempt Report (para 3): Risk Based Verification Policy Review – March 2017 (Agenda Item 11)**

1.5.1 Approval had been sought from the Joint Committee to the continuance of its Risk Based Verification Policy. It is required by the Department for Work and Pensions to be reviewed on an annual basis.

1.5.2 The policy is provided to ensure that the Local Authorities within ARP fulfil their statutory requirements and operate a strict regime of preventing fraud and error entering the system whilst continuing with live caseload intervention.

1.5.3 The Joint Committee **RESOLVED that the recommendations, as listed in the exempt report, be approved.**

1.6 **Exempt Report (para 3): Partnership Working through Section 101 Agreement (Agenda Item 12)**

1.6.1 Approval had been sought from the Joint Committee in respect of whether ARP should proceed with a proposal to deliver revenues and benefits services for another district council through a Section 101 Agreement. The district council in question had previously approached ARP regarding this matter.

1.6.2 Having considered the implications as set out in the exempt report, the Joint Committee **RESOLVED not to proceed with the proposal.**

2. Minutes

2.1 For further information on the discussions held at the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee meeting on 28 March 2017, the draft minutes of the meeting may be viewed on Breckland District Council's website at the following link:

<http://democracy.breckland.gov.uk/documents/q4019/Printed%20minutes%2028th-Mar-2017%2010.00%20Anglia%20Revenues%20and%20Benefits%20Partnership%20Joint%20Committee.pdf?T=1>