

Cabinet



Forest Heath
District Council

Title of Report:	Report of the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee: 26 September 2017	
Report No:	CAB/FH/17/048	
Report to and date:	Cabinet	24 October 2017
Portfolio holder:	Councillor Stephen Edwards Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance Tel: 07904 389982 Email: stephen.edwards@forest-heath.gov.uk	
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Purpose of report:	On 26 September 2017 the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership (ARP) Joint Committee considered the following substantive items of business: (1) Highlight Report and Balance Scorecard; (2) Finance Report; (3) Joint Committee Quoracy; (4) ARP Strategic Priorities; and (5) Welfare Reform Update. This report is for information only. No decisions are required by the Cabinet.	
Recommendation:	The Cabinet is requested to <u>NOTE</u> the content of Report No: CAB/FH/17/048, 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Consultation:	• 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? If yes, please give details	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? If yes, please give details	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? If yes, please give details	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? If yes, please give details	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? If yes, please give details	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: 26 September 2017 Supplement Papers : 26 September 2017 (Balance Scorecards)
Documents attached:	None

1. Key Issues

1.1 Operational Highlight Report and Balance Scorecards (Agenda Item 7)

(a) Operational Highlight Report

1.1.1 The Joint Committee had received and noted the Operational Highlight Report as at 31 July 2017. The report details ARP's key achievements in respect of Benefits and Fraud Performance; Revenues Performance and Support Performance, including Digital Transformation and Self-Service; External Mailing and Anglia Revenues Website. This detailed report can be viewed on Breckland District Council's website at:

<http://democracy.breckland.gov.uk/documents/s44914/ARP%20Strategic%20Managers%20Highlight%20report%20September%202017%20draft.pdf>

1.1.2 Benefits performance continues to meet profiled targets and is on course to achieve year end targets. 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 In respect of revenues performance, this continues to meet targets in all areas with the exception of two collection areas (not West Suffolk), as summarised in the report.

1.1.4 The Enforcement Team continue to perform exceedingly well, having collected £6.6 million since the agency was established, of which £1.5 million has been collected in this financial year.

1.1.5 In addition to details on funding secured from Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire County Councils which has enabled further recovery work to continue this financial year, the Joint Committee had noted information on the handling of single discount applications; the undertaking of annual review of Empty Homes which was taking place in order to maximise the New Homes Bonus; the changes and consequences of the National Non Domestic Rates (NDR) revaluation, which came into effect from 1 April 2017 (with an antecedent date of 1 April 2015); and the review of correspondence undertaken as part of the digital transformation programme.

1.1.6 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 been introduced and customer sign-up numbers are increasing.

1.1.7 Details of changes to the external mailing company used by ARP, which was creating efficiency savings; and plans to refresh the new look website (which had been launched two years ago) had also been noted.

(b) Financial Performance

1.1.8 In respect of the financial performance report, the Joint Committee had noted

the position as at 31 August 2017, which showed a current underspend of £54,885 against budget. The reasons for the specific variances, together with other details, are contained in the report at:

<http://democracy.breckland.gov.uk/documents/s44919/ARP%20Management%20Accounts%20201718%20Q1.pdf>

- 1.1.9 An update had also been provided on committed expenditure for the Transformation Programme. The committed transformation funding is £151,469 as at 30 June 2017. It is expected that the budget will be spent by the end of the financial year. If all of the identified expenditure goes through in 2017/2018, there will be a £76,988 remaining for future projects; however it is likely this will be spent on projects this year.

In addition, Members had noted actual efficiencies identified to date against the original budget targets for 2017/2018 to 2019/2020.

(b) Balanced Scorecard

- 1.1.10 Members had noted that with the exception of two, targets had been met by all partner authorities with the majority of indicators annotated green as at 31 July 2017, as shown on the Balanced Scorecard at:

<http://democracy.breckland.gov.uk/documents/s45044/ARP%20Balanced%20Scorecard%20July%202017-18.pdf>

- 1.1.11 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

1.2 **Joint Committee Quoracy (Agenda Item 8)**

- 1.2.1 The Joint Committee had considered a report which had sought approval for the number of Members required for the Joint Committee to be quorate being reduced to five out of the seven Members.

- 1.2.2 The report provides background to the establishment of the Joint Committee, the membership of which had increased over the years as the Anglia Revenues Partnership expanded to the present seven authorities.

- 1.2.3 On 17 September 2015, the Joint Committee recommended to move to a single Member representing each Council on the Joint Committee with two substitutes appointed per authority. An option for one of the substitutes to attend and take part in the debate (but not vote) was also recommended. Each partner authority subsequently resolved this recommendation.

- 1.2.4 This arrangement had been working well, however, recently meetings have needed to be cancelled due to a nominated Member and substitutes have been unable to attend.

1.2.5 The Joint Committee had considered a number of options to ensure future meetings are quorate, which included enabling proxy Members to be appointed for specific meetings, and subsequently **RESOLVED that:**

The number of Members for the Joint Committee meetings to be quorate be reduced from seven to five; subject to a proxy arrangement being put in place in the absence of the appointed Member and their two substitutes.

1.3 **ARP Strategic Priorities (Agenda Item 9)**

1.3.1 The Joint Committee had considered a report, which sought approval for strategic priorities for 2017, as set out in Appendix 1 attached to that report at:

<http://democracy.breckland.gov.uk/documents/s44916/Strategic%20priorities%20Appendix%201.pdf>

1.3.2 In 2012, the Joint Committee commissioned a review of ARP. That review addressed a number of questions in regard to structure and support and agreed that following key success factors for the partnership moving forward:

- Reduced net cost
- Resilience and Stability
- Flexibility
- High Quality Service

1.3.3 Since then, the public sector landscape has seen significant change and the Operational Improvement Board (OIB) has progressed the action agreed under the Transformation Programme to review the Vision for ARP. The report and appendix sets out refreshed and expanded strategic priorities for the partnership, building on the work done in 2012/2013, and setting a clear framework for activity in the future, including the direction of ARP Trading Limited.

1.3.4 The Joint Committee had noted changes since the partnership was formed, and the significant number of new issues and challenges now faced, particularly acknowledging that the overall priority was to maximise council tax and business rates income streams.

1.3.5 Members had recognised that the priorities detailed in Appendix 1 provide a future strategic direction and focus of the ARP, which provides a platform for the delivery of services and efficiencies. Wider communication and engagement with others on the work of the ARP had been a key topic of discussion at the meeting. Members had been informed that a communications plan was being produced, which involved marketing the Partnership and identifying ways to access future funding, including exploiting lobbying opportunities with central government.

1.3.6 The Joint Committee **RESOLVED that:**

The strategic priorities of the Anglia Revenues Partnership, as

detailed in Appendix 1 of the report, be approved.

1.4 **Welfare Reform (Agenda Item 10)**

1.4.1 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 for new claimants and those where circumstances had changed were discussed. 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.

The programme to migrate existing Housing Benefit (and other DWP Benefit and Tax Credits) cases, has been delayed by twelve months and so will now commence in July 2019, with a corresponding delayed completion date of March 2022.

- (b) **Discretionary Housing Payment:** Spend continues to be within the grant provided by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), and is forecast to be closer to, but within the grant. This grant 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 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.

DWP has provided New Burdens funding to assist councils with extra administrative costs and have increased Discretionary Housing Payment grants to help customers with the reduction; however, it should be noted that the increase does not cover all reductions.

- (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.

1.5 **Forthcoming Issues (Agenda Item 11)**

1.5.1 No issues had been reported on this occasion.

2. Minutes

- 2.1 For further information on the discussions held at the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee meeting on 26 September 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/g4021/Printed%20minutes%2026th-Sep-2017%2010.00%20Anglia%20Revenues%20and%20Benefits%20Partnership%20Joint%20Committee.pdf?T=1>