



## Report of the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee: 26 March 2019

<b>Report No:</b>	<b>CAB/WS/19/001</b>	
<b>Report to and date:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>	<b>28 May 2019</b>
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Portfolio Holder with the responsibility for Resources and Performance  <i>(Appointment of the above Portfolio Holder to be confirmed at Annual Council on 22 May 2019)</i>	
<b>Lead officer:</b>	Jill Korwin Director <b>Tel:</b> 01284 757252 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:jill.korwin@westsuffolk.gov.uk">jill.korwin@westsuffolk.gov.uk</a>	
<b>Key Decision:</b>  <i>(Check the appropriate box and delete all those that <b>do not</b> 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"/>  For noting only	

**Wards impacted:**      **All Wards**

**Recommendation:**      **The Cabinet is requested to note the content of Report No: CAB/WS/19/001, being the report of the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee.**



## **1. Purpose of the report**

1.1 On 26 March 2019, the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership (ARP) Joint Committee considered the following substantive items of business:

1. Performance Report: Balance Scorecards and Highlight Report, and ARP Financial Performance Report;
2. Welfare Reform Update;
3. Forthcoming Issues; and
4. Exempt Item: Risk Based Verification.

This report is for information only. No decisions are required by the Cabinet.

## **2. Key Issues**

### **2.1 Performance Report: Balance Scorecards and Highlight Report, and ARP Financial Performance Report (Agenda Items 5, 5a and 5b)**

#### **2.1.1 a. Performance Report**

The Joint Committee has as a matter of course previously been presented with ARP performance measures by way of the Balanced Scorecards and Highlight Report. This report had been presented in the same format for a number of years, and Members had recently requested a review of its style, content and format. A draft had previously been presented to the Joint Committee in December 2018, which had been welcomed in general, with a request that the new design be submitted to the March Joint Committee meeting alongside the existing Balance Scorecards and Highlight Report to enable comparisons to be made with a view to implementing from April 2019. The new design provides relevant information relating to the performance of ARP as a whole and that of the individual partners. If approved, it was proposed that it be implemented from April 2019. This detailed report can be viewed on Breckland District Council's website at the following links:

<http://democracy.breckland.gov.uk/documents/s52376/Performance%20Report.pdf>

Appendix A:

<http://democracy.breckland.gov.uk/documents/s52377/Appendix%20A%20-%20ARP%20Presentation%20of%20Data%20January%202019.pdf>

#### **2.1.2 The content of the new style of ARP Performance Report includes:**

- The collection performance of the Anglia Revenues Partnership for both business rates and council tax, reporting the quarterly targets and latest verified month collection figures along with the quarterly outturn from the previous financial year.
- Council tax and business rates combined reporting, highlighting the size of the ARP operation, with total year collection targets of the whole partnership.



- Council tax and business rates collection performance for each individual partner.
- Red Amber Green (RAG) indicators highlighting quarterly performance.
- ARP fraud and compliance performance at partnership level for each individual partner.
- Monthly performance of the time taken to process housing benefit claims and the local council tax reduction scheme claims.
- Narratives providing details of specific variances in targets.
- Details of service updates within the report rather than being shown on a separate highlight report.

2.1.3 The Joint Committee considered the new style of reporting in detail and compared it to the existing Balance Scorecards and Highlight Report. The new style was generally preferred; however it was requested that performance information for customer services be added. This was confirmed by officers as the relevant data could be extracted relatively easily.

2.1.4 Attention was drawn to the service updates as at 31 January 2019, which had previously been included in the Highlight Report. Updates were provided on:

- i. Business Rates. This included information on a new rate relief scheme applicable from April 2019, and the 2019/2020 position regarding rate relief allocations to businesses who faced the steepest increases in rates following the Government's revaluation in 2017.
- ii. Council Tax – Care Leavers. This included information on the Government's encouragement of Billing Authorities to introduce a discretionary scheme to help Care Leavers with their council tax bills (*note: West Suffolk Council adopted such a scheme for implementation from 1 April 2019*).
- iii. Council Tax – Further Recovery. The Further Recovery team had collected £988k as at 31 January 2019 which exceeded the amount collected by 31 January 2018 by £221k.
- iv. Council Tax – Empty Properties. In order to encourage owners of empty properties to bring them back into use, the Government has amended council tax regulations to allow billing authorities the ability to increase the long term empty premium charged in respect of a property which has been vacant for more than two years.
- v. Council Tax Discounts. This update referred to the scheme outlined in (ii) above.
- vi. Benefits. Benefits performance continued to meet profiled targets and was on course to achieve year end targets.
- vii. Fraud and Compliance. Whilst Suffolk and Norfolk County Councils currently continue to support the review of Single Persons Discounts, Cambridgeshire CC (CCC) had ceased providing further funding from April 2019. ARP had provided a briefing note to East Cambs and Fenland District Councils to aid discussions with CCC regarding the implications of this.
- viii. Annual Billing. Ahead of the 2019/2020 annual billing process, the sign-up to online self-service accounts for council tax payers and housing benefit recipients exceeded 18,000 account holders and is continuing to rise each month. This, amongst other benefits, has



- helped to reduce paper use and postal costs to the partnership as more and more customers were now opting to receive their bills and notifications electronically.
- ix. ARP Website. The website has been enhanced to try and make it as straight forward as possible for customer use. Analysis has demonstrated that this has been particularly effective for customers utilising the self-serve facilities.
  - x. Changes in Data Protection. This update provided information on how the partners each complied with the changes required under the Data Protection Act 2018.
- 2.1.5 b. Balanced Scorecard (Appendix B) and Highlight Report (Appendix C) as at end January 2019

Members had **noted** that targets had largely been met by all partner authorities with the majority of indicators annotated green as at 31 January 2019, as shown on the Balanced Scorecard at:

<http://democracy.breckland.gov.uk/documents/s52379/Appendix%20B%20-%20ARP%20Balanced%20scorecard%20January%202019.pdf>

- 2.1.6 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

The former Forest Heath District and St Edmundsbury Borough Councils were both on target for all indicators as at 31 January 2019.

The Joint Committee **RESOLVED that:**

- (1) the performance report at Appendix B and C be noted; and**
- (2) the new format for ARP Performance Reporting (Appendix A) to the Joint Committee be adopted for use from the new financial year 2019-20, subject to customer services performance data being included when required.**

- 2.1.7 c. Financial Performance

In respect of the financial performance report, the Joint Committee **noted** the position as at 31 January 2019, which showed an underspend of £72,375 against budget. Appendix A attached to that report provided further details, together with details and reasons for the specific variances.

The efficiency target for 2018/2019 had now been fully achieved.

An update had also been provided on committed expenditure for the Transformation Programme. The committed transformation funding was £200,409 as at 31 January 2019. £100,409 is expected to be spent by the



end of 2019/2020. A balance of £100,000 includes the top up from other reserves for unallocated projects yet to be determined.

Details of the funding held in the ARP ICT reserve, which had been approved as part of the budget setting process, was also contained in Appendix A. This reserve (which will amount to a total of £266,428 by 2020/2021) has been established to cover costs of ICT replacement in future years.

The reasons for other specific variances, together with other details, are contained in the report at:

<http://democracy.breckland.gov.uk/documents/s52372/ARP%20Financial%20Performance.pdf>

Appendix A:

<http://democracy.breckland.gov.uk/documents/s52373/Appendix%20A%20for%20ARP%20Financial%20Performance.pdf>

#### 2.1.8 **Welfare Reform Update (Agenda Item 6)**

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

- a. **Universal Credit (UC):** The Government had recently announced that Harrogate will be the first to trail the natural migration of 10,000 cases from the old style benefits system to UC. The pilot scheme is expected to start in July 2019. In addition, the completion date of moving existing claimants to UC has been extended from 2023 to 2024.

From 1 April 2019, Universal Support funding to help new UC customers to make a claim (Assisted Digital Support) and help to budget monthly payments (Personal Budgeting Support) will be granted by the DWP to Citizens' Advice and not local authorities. ARP has previously raised concerns that this may impact on residents of rural communities that often contact their council. In addition, given that the DWP's processing figures indicate that 80% of claims are paid on time (at five weeks) and given that the housing element (for rent) is typically the cause of any prospective delay, concern has been expressed by ARP officers that vulnerable people may be affected and at risk of falling into rent arrears which may lead to other subsequent consequences. The position is being monitored via contact with the local branches of Citizens' Advice, who have stated that they will continue to help such customers, drawing on their usual funding streams.

The summary of the latest position on the expansion of UC and concerns raised by officers regarding specific issues in respect of the expansion on a national level were contained in sections 2.1.8 and 2.1.9 of the report, and which were duly noted by the Joint Committee.



This matter was discussed at length during the meeting, with the Joint Committee expressing its concern regarding Universal Support funding being granted directly to Citizens' Advice and not local authorities, and the potential impact this will have. Members were informed that in order to mitigate any potential impact, ARP and the partners' customer services teams, needed to build relationships with local Citizens' Advice services and work together to ensure positive outcomes for the claimant, where possible. The Joint Committee also acknowledged the lobbying role of ARP to ensure concerns are directed through the appropriate channels.

- b. **Discretionary Housing Payment:** Spend continues to be within the grant provided by the 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. Generally the allocations for 2018/2019 have been reduced with further reductions expected in 2019/2020.
- 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. **Social Rented Sector Rent Restrictions:** The Government has responded to consultation on funding for supported housing and it has indicated it will not implement Local Housing Allowance rates in social housing. Supported accommodation, including hostel tenancies will remain in Housing Benefit and will not therefore move to Universal Credit.

## 2.2 **Forthcoming Issues (Agenda Item 7)**

- 2.2.1 A discussion was held on the possibility of introducing a 'one stop shop' for all claims and the appropriateness of sharing of information with Citizens' Advice. The Joint Committee was informed that improvements to the service were being made year-on-year and customers will be required to give consent before their personal data is shared.

## 2.3 **Exempt Item (para 3): Risk Based Verification (Agenda Item 10)**

- 2.3.1 The Joint Committee considered this item in private session, therefore the information contained in this report is limited and based on the content of the public minutes.



The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) requires councils to review their Risk Based Verification Policies annually and requires Members to approve the continuance or revision of their policy.

2.3.2 The Joint Committee **RESOLVED:**

**That the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support Risk Based Verification (RBV) Policy for 2019/2020 for Breckland Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, Fenland District Council, West Suffolk Council and East Suffolk Council, be approved.**

**3. Minutes**

- 3.1 For further information on the discussions held at the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee meeting on 26 March 2019, 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/g4235/Printed%20minutes%2026th-Mar-2019%2010.30%20Anglia%20Revenues%20and%20Benefits%20Partnership%20Joint%20Committee.pdf?T=1>

**4. Background papers**

Breckland DC Website:

[26 March 2019](#)

