

# Cabinet



*St Edmundsbury*  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>Report of the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee: 19 March 2015</b>	
<b>Report No:</b>	<b>CAB/SE/15/031</b>	
<b>Report to and date:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>	28 May 2015
<b>Portfolio holder:</b>	To be confirmed at the Annual Meeting of Council on 19 May 2015.	
<b>Lead officers:</b>	Liz Watts Director <b>Tel:</b> 01284 757252 <b>Email:</b> liz.watts@westsuffolk.gov.uk	
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<b>Purpose of report:</b>	<p>On 19 March 2015 the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership (ARP) Joint Committee considered the following substantive items of business:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>(1) Performance Report;</li><li>(2) SFIS and Counter Fraud;</li><li>(3) Enforcement Agency Update;</li><li>(4) Electronic Document Management System;</li><li>(5) Universal Credit;</li><li>(6) Forthcoming Issues;</li><li>(7) Strategic Review; and</li><li>(8) Risk Based Verification.</li></ol> <p>This report is for information only. No decisions are required by the Cabinet.</p>	
<b>Recommendation:</b>	<b>The Cabinet is requested to <u>NOTE</u> the content of Report No: CAB/SE/15/031, being the report of the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee.</b>	

<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"/>
<b>Consultation:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See reports of ARP Joint Committee at link provided under 'Background papers'</li> </ul>
<b>Alternative option(s):</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See reports of ARP Joint Committee at link provided under 'Background papers'</li> </ul>
<b>Implications:</b>	
<i>Are there any <b>financial</b> implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See reports of ARP Joint Committee at link provided under 'Background papers'</li> </ul>
<i>Are there any <b>staffing</b> implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See reports of ARP Joint Committee at link provided under 'Background papers'</li> </ul>
<i>Are there any <b>ICT</b> implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See reports of ARP Joint Committee at link provided under 'Background papers'</li> </ul>
<i>Are there any <b>legal and/or policy</b> implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See reports of ARP Joint Committee at link provided under 'Background papers'</li> </ul>
<i>Are there any <b>equality</b> implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See reports of ARP Joint Committee at link provided under 'Background papers'</li> </ul>
<b>Risk/opportunity assessment:</b>  See reports of ARP Joint Committee at link provided under 'Background papers'	<i>(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)</i>
<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	All Ward/s
<b>Background papers:</b> <i>(all background papers are to be published on the website and a link included)</i>	Breckland DC Website: <a href="#">Reports of the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee – 19 March 2015</a>
<b>Documents attached:</b>	None

## 1. Key issues

### 1.1 Performance Report (Agenda Item 5)

1.1.1 The Joint Committee had received and noted a Performance Report as at 31 January 2015. The report detailed ARP's key achievements in respect of Benefits News; Council Tax News; NDR news; HBOP News; Performance Targets; Projects; Learning and Support; and Customer Survey. This detailed report can be viewed on Breckland District Council's website at:

<http://democracy.breckland.gov.uk/documents/s34538/ARP%20Performance%20Report%20to%20Jan%2031%202015.pdf>

1.1.2 In respect of operational performance, a discussion was held on the performance targets for 2015/2016 and the level in which they had been recommended by officers to be set. Members had considered that in view of the current over-achievement that this should be reflected in the targets; however, officers had considered that with the introduction of Welfare Reform and other changes, it was important to acknowledge the challenging times ahead. Members subsequently agreed that the same targets for 2014/2015 should therefore be maintained but be reviewed mid-year.

1.1.3 Discussions were also held on the Customer Survey; Balanced Scorecard; and the existing ARP website.

1.1.4 The Joint Committee **RESOLVED that the performance targets for 2015/2016 be the same as for 2014/2015 and be brought back to the Committee mid-year for review.**

1.1.5 In respect of financial performance as at 31 January 2015, the Joint Committee noted that the total partnership costs were currently showing a £139,468 (1.43%) underspend against the approved 2014/2015 total budget of £9,724,807. The savings from the business cases for Fenland DC, and Suffolk Coastal and Waveney DCs joining a single officer core had been reflected in the budgets and outturn figures. The variances on individual budgets were explained.

1.1.6 In addition, a table was shown which provided an indication of the repayment to each authority if the Joint Committee wished to redistribute the forecast saving against budget. The alternative was to retain any surplus in reserves to fund future projects. St Edmundsbury's share from 2014/2015 amounted to £18,139. Members considered the total savings should be retained for the time being to potentially fund future projects. Some projects may however, require separate authority approval, and this would need to be determined depending on the spending requirements set by each authority.

1.1.7 The Joint Committee **RESOLVED that:**

- (1) the savings be retained in reserves for the time being; and**
- (2) each authority to check what their approval for spend requirements would be.**

## 1.2 **SFIS and Counter Fraud (Agenda Item 6)**

1.2.1 The Joint Committee had considered a report which provided background to the Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS), which was currently being set up by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and Her Majesty's Revenues and Customs (HMRC). Housing benefit fraud investigation and prosecution work would be transferred to this new service from 1 September 2015.

1.2.2 This provided ARP with an opportunity to use residual funding to establish a non-housing benefit fraud investigation service and the main preceptors (i.e. not Waveney or Suffolk Coastal District Councils) would be approached to contribute to that. Options were set out in the report and the aim was for the service to be cost neutral.

1.2.3 Authority to establish such a service would be required from each of the five partner authorities involved.

1.2.4 The Joint Committee **RESOLVED that:**

- (1) the report be noted;**
- (2) authority be delegated to the Operational Improvement Board (OIB) to negotiate a contribution from the major preceptors; and**
- (3) authority be delegated to the OIB to retain a permanent Counter Fraud Team subject to approval where necessary from the Partner Councils of the ARP.**

## 1.3 **Enforcement Agency Update (Agenda Item 7)**

1.3.1 The Joint Committee had received and noted a report which provided an update on the introduction of an Enforcement Agency.

1.3.2 Members noted that the tender process for the required computer system was almost complete and staff recruitment would be undertaken during April and May 2015, with a view to administrative staff being in post by the end of May 2015 and Enforcement Officers by the end of June.

1.3.3 Discussions had been held on the enforcement process; the statutory fees to be charged; and the features of the computer systems from suppliers that had submitted tenders.

## 1.4 **Electronic Document Management System (Agenda Item 8)**

1.3.1 The Joint Committee had considered a business case for a shared Electronic Document Management System for the Anglia Revenues Partnership.

1.3.2 Currently, two document management systems were used which meant that resilience for sharing information across authorities was restricted. A business case for a shared Electronic Document Management System, as attached at Appendix A to the report, had therefore been prepared. It was anticipated that the benefits of one centralised system would provide staff savings and bring financial return after three years.

1.3.3 Discussion was held on the initial set-up costs and whether a full procurement exercise would be required to purchase the system.

1.3.4 The Joint Committee **RESOLVED that:**

- (1) the report be noted;**
- (2) Option 1 in the business case, to move all Councils to one document imaging system, be approved; and**
- (3) authority be delegated to the Operational Improvement Board to procure a shared document management system in accordance with the business case.**

#### 1.4 **Universal Credit (Agenda Item 9)**

1.4.1 The Joint Committee had received and noted a verbal update on the current situation regarding Universal Credit.

1.4.2 Members noted that:

- (a) the aim of Universal Credit (UC) was to provide greater fairness and to replace the six existing benefits and credits with one monthly payment;
- (b) UC did not include the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme;
- (c) UC was being introduced in stages and from February 2015, that had been accelerated for delivery to new, single claimants only;
- (d) Councils were required to sign a Partnership Agreement with the DWP. Prior to 'going live', a Data Sharing Agreement would also need to be agreed;
- (e) DWP had estimated that it would take between two and six hours per person to process each claim, therefore negotiations had been held with third parties to provide personal budgeting support to try and alleviate this; and
- (f) pilot schemes operated in other parts of the country had reportedly stated that UC was working well.

#### 1.5 **Forthcoming Issues (Agenda Item 10)**

1.5.1 The Joint Committee had received and noted an outline plan for developing a brochure for ARP and how it could be used. A detailed proposal would be provided to a future meeting.

#### 1.6 **Strategic Review (Agenda Item 12)**

1.6.1 The Joint Committee had considered an update on the strategic review and considered a number of recommendations, as set out in the exempt report.

1.6.2 Work was progressing well and recommendations for the Partner Authorities to consider would be presented to a future meeting of the Joint Committee, in

respect of developing the existing trading arm, namely Anglia Revenues Partnership Trading (ARPT) as a limited company and how this could integrate with the existing Partnership.

1.6.3 The Joint Committee **RESOLVED to agree the recommendations in the exempt report at paragraphs 4.13 to 4.18.**

1.7 **Risk Based Verification (Agenda Item 14)**

1.7.1 The Joint Committee had considered the Housing Benefit Risk Based Verification Policy which was presented as an exempt report. The Policy would be reviewed annually.

1.7.2 The Joint Committee **RESOLVED that:**

**(1) the report be noted;**

**(2) the review of the Housing Benefit Risk Based Verification Policy for 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 for Breckland Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council, be approved.**

2. **Minutes**

2.1 For further information on the items detailed above, see the [minutes](#) (click on link) of the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee meeting held on 19 March 2015.