

Cabinet



Forest Heath
District Council

Title of Report:	Report of the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee: 10 June 2015	
Report No:	CAB/FH/15/042	
Report to and date:	Cabinet	15 September 2015
Portfolio holder:	Stephen Edwards Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance Tel: 01638 660518 Email: stephen.edwards@forest-heath.gov.uk	
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Purpose of report:	<p>On 10 June 2015 the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership (ARP) Joint Committee considered the following substantive items of business:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">(1) Fraud;(2) 2014-15 Year End Out-turn and Approval of the Small Bodies Return;(3) Performance Report;(4) ARP Website;(5) ARP Risk Register;(6) Bailiff Update;(7) Arp Trading Company Restructure;(8) Welfare Reform; and(9) Forthcoming Issues. <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/SE/15/042, 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:	<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:	
<i>Are there any financial implications? 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'
<i>Are there any staffing implications? 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'
<i>Are there any ICT implications? 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'
<i>Are there any legal and/or policy implications? 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'
<i>Are there any equality implications? 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: See reports of ARP Joint Committee at link provided under 'Background papers'	<i>(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)</i>
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: Reports of the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership Joint Committee – 10 June 2015 Report No: COU/FH/15/022 – FHDC Council: 15 July 2015
Documents attached:	None

1. Key issues

1.1 Fraud (Agenda Item 6)

- 1.1.1 The Joint Committee had received and noted an update on the Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS) and how, apart from Waveney and Suffolk Coastal District Councils who would be affected in May 2016, all existing fraud staff in scope would TUPE transfer to the Department for Work and Pensions from 1 September 2015.
- 1.1.2 Discussions had been ongoing with the County Councils regarding the retention of a fraud team to investigate non-Benefit fraud and whether they would be willing to contribute a funding allocation.

1.2 2014-15 Year End Out-turn and Approval of the Small Bodies Return (Agenda Item 7)

- 1.2.1 The Joint Committee had considered a report which sought approval for the accounts by the end of June 2015. This was the final year that the small bodies return would need to be completed, for the reasons set out in the report.
- 1.2.2 Appendix A provided details of the Partnership's budget out-turn and variances in 2014/2015. There had been a surplus of £110,274 and the Joint Committee had previously approved the retention of this to enable the development of the proposed trading company. In addition, the Partnership had received grants during 2014/2015, £631,145 of which had remained unspent at year end. It was agreed that this should also be retained in reserve, a proportion of which would be allocated to the development of the new ARP website.
- 1.2.3 Together with the Annual Governance Statement, the Annual Return attached as Appendix B was considered and approved.
- 1.2.4 The Joint Committee **RESOLVED that:**
- (1) the accounting statement for the year ended 31 March 2015 be approved;**
 - (2) the annual governance statement be approved;**
 - (3) the 2014-15 out-turn position be noted; and**
 - (4) the internal audit report and review of governance arrangements be noted.**

1.3 Performance Report (Agenda Item 8)

- 1.3.1 The Joint Committee had received and noted the Performance Report as at 30 April 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/s35267/ARP%20Performance%20Report%20to%20April%2030%202015.pdf>

and

- 1.3.2 Members had noted that targets had been met by all partner authorities with all indicators annotated green. This raised a question in respect of whether the targets were sufficiently challenging and a discussion was held on obtaining benchmarking information from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) to enable comparisons to be undertaken with the performance of other authorities; however it had initially indicated that all seven partner authorities would be charged for this information. Negotiations were continuing to mitigate this as well as looking at other means of obtaining benchmarks.
- 1.3.3 Discussion had also been held on the results of the customer survey, which had indicated customers' desire to move towards utilising more electronic methods of communication; however online services perhaps needed to be more user-friendly.

1.4 **ARP Website (Agenda Item 9)**

- 1.4.1 The Joint Committee had considered a report which sought approval to redesign and update the ARP website.
- 1.4.2 It had been recommended that the new website should be based upon the website model launched by the two West Suffolk councils (St Edmundsbury Borough Council and Forest Heath District Council). This icon-based model of website would provide direct access for users to the correct payment engine.
- 1.4.3 Discussion was held on the expected operational costs for the new website, and whilst encouraging greater use of the online facilities, there remained a need to maintain face-to-face customer contact. Fast track access to the ARP website should also be provided from each Councils' own websites.
- 1.4.4 An additional recommendation was considered and approved in connection with the overall cost of the website refurbishment.
- 1.4.5 The Joint Committee **RESOLVED that:**
- (1) the engagement of an external design agency, at a cost in the order of £4,800 to design the style and layout of the new Anglia Revenues Partnership website with an ARP Intranet and Bailiff website, be approved;**
 - (2) the full re-write of all existing content be conducted by an external, well-qualified resource at a cost of £8,000 in order to provide a consistent, modern and easy-to-read interface with the public and an intranet for staff information;**
 - (3) Commonspot, in use by West Suffolk, be adopted as the content management system for the new Anglia Revenues Partnership website; and**
 - (4) the £40,300 overall cost of the refurbishment be approved.**

1.5 **ARP Risk Register (Agenda Item 10)**

1.5.1 The Joint Committee had received and noted the Anglia Revenues Partnership Risk Register, which was attached as Appendix A and would be presented to Members on a bi-annual basis. Appendix B provided the criteria used to apply a risk score to the ARP.

1.5.2 Discussion was held on a number of issues which might affect the risks identified by the Partnership including:

- (a) the implementation of Universal Credit and the effect on the work of the Partnership;
- (b) the relationship between Housing Benefit working age claimants and the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme;
- (c) the introduction of new initiatives such as the bailiff service and fraud work;
- (d) whether ARP activities could be operated differently and that these should be considered by the Operational Improvement Board and options reported to the Joint Committee for discussion.

1.6 **Bailiff Update (Agenda Item 11)**

1.6.1 The Joint Committee had received and noted an update on the introduction of an Enforcement Agency.

1.6.2 The procurement of the computer software system had been successful with Whyte and Co's 'Enforcer' system being utilised by the ARP's Enforcement Agency for a one year contract with the option to extend for a further year. Work was underway to create the interfaces with the Partnership's other software.

1.6.3 An ARP Enforcement Agency website was being created and administrative staff had been recruited. The status at the time of the meeting was that the advertisement to recruit Enforcement Agents had been issued. Appropriate training for staff had been implemented.

1.6.4 The new Enforcement Agency service was expected to be delivered before the first courts for Council Tax and Business Rates in respect of the 2015/2016 annual bills. A timetable of implementation was provided in the report, with the first cases being handled in mid-July 2015.

1.7 **ARP Trading Company Restructure (Agenda Item 12)**

1.7.1 The Joint Committee had considered a report which sought to restructure the ARP trading company to open up shareholdings to the seven partner authorities of the ARP Joint Committee

1.7.2 East Cambridgeshire District Council had decided not to commit to the proposal at the present time and the recommendations were amended accordingly to reflect this decision.

1.7.3 The recommendations emanating from this report, as amended, were required to be considered by the partner authorities and these were presented and approved by Forest Heath District Council's (FHDC) full Council on 15 July 2015 ([Report No: COU/FH/15/022](#) refers). A summary of the report to the Joint Committee was also contained in the report to FHDC's Council and is therefore not duplicated again here.

1.8 **Welfare Reform (Agenda Item 13)**

1.8.1 The Joint Committee had received and noted an update on welfare reform.

1.8.2 The update included information on:

- (a) ARP being live with single, working age claimants for Universal Credit, except for East Cambridgeshire DC and Fenland DC which would go live later in the year;
- (b) the Government's pledge to reduce benefits and introduce a new cap;
- (c) that in 2014/2015, the benefit cap and spare room subsidy had affected between 19 and 45 customers which amounted to a reduction of benefit payment of between £50 and £215 per week;
- (d) support offered to those in need that were affected by the reduction in single room subsidy;
- (e) the allocation of Discretionary Housing Grants in 2014/2015; and
- (f) the allocation of hardship payments, which were still being handled by ARP and not the DWP.

1.9 **Forthcoming Issues (Agenda Item 14)**

1.8.1 The Joint Committee had suggested that further work should now be undertaken to move towards the Joint Committee being represented by one Member from each partner authority instead of two, with each Member being given one vote.

1.8.2 In order to progress this, Members had requested a historical perspective on how the current arrangements had been adopted and asked the Operational Improvement Board to explore the possibility of seeking representation of one Member from each authority on the Joint Committee, with two Substitutes.

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 10 June 2015.