

BRECKLAND COUNCIL
EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
EAST SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL
FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL
WEST SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

ANGLIA REVENUES & BENEFITS PARTNERSHIP JOINT COMMITTEE

Held on Tuesday, 1 March 2022 at 11.00 am in the
Level 5 Meeting Room, Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford. IP24 1BT

PRESENT

Cllr David Ambrose-Smith (Chairman)	Cllr Sarah Broughton
Cllr Jan French (Vice- Chairman)	Cllr Philip Cowen
Cllr E. Back	

In Attendance

Sam Anthony	Head of HR & OD (Fenland)
Alison Chubbock	Section 151 Officer & Assistant Director Finance
Lorraine King	Head of Benefits & Council Tax Billing (ARP)
Rachael Mann	Director (Resources & Property) (West Suffolk)
Brian Mew	Chief Finance Officer & S151 Officer (East Suffolk)
Adrian Mills	Head of ARP
Matthew Waite-Wright	Head of NNDR Recovery & Enforcement (ARP)
Ian Smith	Finance Manager & S151 Officer (East Cambs)
Julie Britton	Democratic Services Officer

1/22 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

2/22 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 2)

None.

3/22 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 3)

None.

4/22 DECLARATIONS (AGENDA ITEM 4)

None declared.

5/22 PERFORMANCE REPORT (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 5)

Matthew Waite-Wright, Head of NNDR Recovery & Enforcement (ARP) presented the performance report.

Attention was drawn to page 8 of the agenda pack where the overall position of all Councils combined could be seen. All results were very reassuring, and fraud & compliance was continuing well.

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Rather than going through the performance for each of the individual Councils, the Chairman felt that as the whole package was very positive, he asked Members if they had any questions.

In respect of each target set and as all targets were being met, the Chairman asked if there was anything that could be 'tightened' up.

Members were informed that the collection targets were as anticipated in terms of individual budgets but as mentioned at the previous meeting, these targets could be reviewed, and any feedback would be welcomed.

The Head of ARP stated that there had already been a review of targets with the Operational Improvement Board.

The performance report was otherwise noted.

6/22 WELFARE REFORM UPDATE (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 6)

Lorraine King, the Head of Benefits & Council Tax Billing (ARP) presented the report.

Attention was drawn to section 2.1.13 and 2.1.14 of the report and an update was provided in terms Universal Credit and the migration process.

It had been announced at the end of January that the Help to Claim scheme had been renewed for a further year. Ministers confirmed that Citizens Advice would continue to deliver independent support for the 2022/23 year and that the support would be provided through telephony and digital channels. Individuals who were unable to access support via these channels would be supported by the local jobcentres.

This provision covered England, Scotland and Wales but there were no plans post April 2023.

Ministers announced in December that they would be resuming the managed migration process at some point during 2022, but it was felt that any movement this year would be very slow with rollout accelerating through 2023-24. Further announcements were awaited.

Another update provided was in respect of the Government's recent announced package of support in respect of the Council Tax rebate scheme to help households with their energy bills. The Government required billing authorities to provide a £150 one-off payment to every household that occupied a qualifying property in Council Tax Bands A to D and would not have to be repaid. The rebate was expected to be paid in April 2022 for those customers who paid by direct debit; this would then be followed by a rebate to those who paid by other means. The Government had also announced a discretionary scheme for households in Bands E to H.

A meeting had been arranged with the Operational Improvement Board to discuss the Scheme design and its implementation.

This Government support package also included a £200 reduction on energy bills for domestic electricity customers from October 2022, provided by the energy companies.

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The Vice-Chair, Councillor French asked if customers had the choice to opt out of receiving the £200 grant towards their energy bills.

Members were informed that this grant would be administered by the energy firms.

Referring to the Council Tax one-off payment, Councillor Cowen felt that the definition needed to be made very clear in any communication as it was not a rebate and could be confusing. He also felt that the challenge would be for non-direct debit paying customers and the scale of the task ahead for the Team.

Adrian Mills, the Head of ARP, reported that ARP had achieved tight Government deadlines by including statutory wording and an explanatory leaflet in all the new year Council Tax bills about the one-off payments.

The Welfare Reform report was otherwise noted.

7/22 ARP FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE 2021-22 (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 7)

Alison Chubbock, the Assistant Director & S151 Officer (BDC) presented the report.

This was the usual quarterly report, but Members were asked to note that there had been a slight change since the last quarter.

The forecast at this stage of the year showed a small underspend against budget of £51k due the slight change in enforcement income. Members' attention was then drawn to page 45, Appendix A of the agenda pack for further detail and the Table at section 1.4 of the report highlighted a small cost against East Cambridgeshire DC

Members agreed that it was a very positive report.

The report and appendix were otherwise noted.

8/22 VERIFICATION POLICY (AGENDA ITEM 8)

The Head of Benefits & Council Tax Billing (ARP) presented the report.

Members were being asked to approve the continued use of the current Verification Policy from April 2022 and remove the need for an annual review.

The reasons for the recommendations were highlighted.

The Chairman felt that this was a common-sense approach moving forward.

The Head of ARP explained that the Risk Based Verification Policy had served its purpose over the years and had become redundant as ARP continued to make the best use of DWP and HMRC secure data to minimise the customer burden especially for the Council Tax Support schemes.

RESOLVED that:

- the Anglia Revenues Partnership Joint Committee approve the

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revised Verification Policy for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support claims from April 2022 for Breckland Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, East Suffolk Council, Fenland District Council and West Suffolk Council.

- the Anglia Revenues Partnership Joint Committee approve this Verification Policy as a permanent policy without the requirement to review annually.

9/22 FORTHCOMING ISSUES (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 9)

The Head of ARP advised that following this meeting the OIB would be discussing arranging some informal ARP meetings and he asked Members for their views.

The Chairman said that he had found them very useful and would be beneficial for all.

Councillor Cowen mentioned Zoom meetings and felt that any opportunity to review how Joint Committee meetings should take place should be explored. He also asked if there was an opportunity to hold these meetings elsewhere in fairness for the other authorities.

The Chairman agreed with the above suggestions.

Councillor Broughton believed that these meetings should continue face to face in person post Covid but move them around to each authority's location.

It was agreed that such matters would be further discussed outside of this meeting and reported accordingly.

10/22 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 10)

The arrangements for the next meeting on Tuesday, 21 June 2022 at 11am were noted. Venue and whether face to face or virtual to be confirmed.

11/22 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC (AGENDA ITEM 11)

RESOLVED that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Act.

12/22 PARTNERSHIP WORKING THROUGH SECTION 113 AGREEMENT (AGENDA ITEM 12)

The Head of ARP presented the report that asked Members to consider and approve partnership working through a S113 Agreement.

Members were provided with a detailed overview of the report.

RESOLVED that the first recommendation as listed in the report be approved.

RECOMMEND to each Partner Authority's Cabinet that the second recommendation as listed in the report be approved.